@UNICEFColombia/2025/La Guajira/González

UNICEF provides children and adolescents in La Guajira Department with access to safe drinking water through newly installed purification systems, enhancing their health, well-being, and overall development. (July 2025)

unicef for every child

Humanitarian Action for Children

Colombia

HIGHLIGHTS

- Colombia faces multiple, overlapping crises.[1] Armed conflict, disasters and challenges posed by migration flows[2] all exacerbate protection risks, food insecurity and the spread of disease. Additionally, restricted humanitarian access[3] continues to block aid for the most vulnerable communities, with Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations the most affected. Overall, an estimated 10.3 million people, including approximately 3.7 million children and 3.3 million refugees and migrants, will require humanitarian assistance in 2026.[4]
- UNICEF will deliver multisectoral interventions in health and nutrition, education, child protection and WASH, with an emphasis on localized and scalable approaches, promoting peacebuilding and community engagement and supporting partners and institutions to sustain impact in remote areas.
- UNICEF requires $27.1 million in 2026 to reach 254,800 people, including 180,240 children, with life-saving services and supplies in priority territories identified through inter-agency planning, in line with the Humanitarian Reset.

KEY PLANNED TARGETS

31,800
children and women accessing primary health care

58,200
children/caregivers accessing community-based mental health and psychosocial support

144,700
children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning

38,800
people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water

IN NEED

10.3 million people[5] | **3.7 million children**[6]

2025 2026

TO BE REACHED

254,800 people[7] | **180,240 children**[8]

2025 2026

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

US$27.1 million

2025 2026

Figures are provisional and subject to change upon finalization of the inter-agency planning documents.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND NEEDS

Colombia's humanitarian situation has sharply deteriorated in 2025. The country's decades-long armed conflict intensified, and armed non-state actors now operate in 71 per cent of municipalities.[9] Colombia has the highest level of conflict-related displacement in the Americas and the third highest globally.[10] Nearly 96,000 people have been displaced in 2025, exceeding 2024 levels. In Catatumbo, in Norte de Santander Department, fighting among armed non-state actors has displaced 65,200 people and confined[11] 27,800 people this year.[12] Conditions there continue to deteriorate.

Forcible confinements and movement restrictions are increasingly used by armed non-state actors to assert control. Between January and August 2025, more than 122,000 individuals faced movement restrictions and 137,600 were confined, nearly matching the total reported for all of 2024.[13] Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities make up 61 per cent of those affected by this.[14] Prolonged violence and loss of access to essential services have disrupted education, leaving more than 900,000 children out of school nationwide.[15] More than 1 million people have been denied humanitarian assistance in 2025. Fourteen departments reported bans on humanitarian entry, and there are 154 documented incidents against aid workers.[16]

In 2025, at least 11,000 children were victims of mass displacement, confinement and movement restrictions, though estimates suggest the actual figure exceeds 291,000.[17] Recruitment and exploitation disproportionately affect Indigenous children;[18] in 2024, 578 cases of child recruitment were documented, including 277 involving Indigenous children.[19] Incidents involving anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance soared, with 524 people affected in the first half of 2025, a 145 per cent increase compared with 2024.[20] Civilians accounted for 70 per cent of deaths, among them 56 children.[21]

Stricter migration controls reduced crossings across the Darién Gap by 97 per cent but triggered reverse migration. In the first half of 2025, 2,937 migrants crossed the Darién Gap from Colombia to Panama, compared with 302,000 in 2024. In terms of reverse migration, 15,000 migrants crossed from Panamá between January and August 2025, expressing their intent to return to their country of origin.[22] Nearly 20 per cent of returnees are children, many unaccompanied.[23] Migrant children continue to experience family separation; limited access to education, health and nutrition services; and high exposure to violence, including gender-based violence.

Disasters have deeply affected vulnerable communities. In the first half of 2025, 303 emergencies (floods, droughts and landslides) affected 400,357 people, often in conflict zones,[24] increasing their exposure to diseases and malnutrition.

If current trends from 2025 continue, 2026 could mark Colombia's worst humanitarian conditions in a decade, with children experiencing the worst effects of the country's overlapping crises.

SECTOR NEEDS

8.7 million
people in need of health and nutrition assistance[25]

8.6 million
people in need of protection services[26]

3.7 million
children in need of access to school[27]

7.3 million
people need of access to safe WASH services.[28]

STORY FROM THE FIELD

@UNICEFColombia/2025/Norte de Santander/Farelo

Alejandro, a teacher, leads mine risk education, promoting safe behaviours in Catatumbo, Colombia. In rural areas of Colombia, the journey to school can be deadly due to the presence of landmines.

Incidents involving anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance have soared in Colombia, putting thousands of children at risk. In 2024, the number of child and adolescent victims rose by 187 per cent compared with 2023, with more than half the victims from Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. UNICEF works with teachers and local partners to strengthen mine and explosive ordnance risk education in schools and communities, reaching more than 24,000 children and 15,000 adults in 2024 with life-saving knowledge. These actions help prevent accidents, build resilience and promote safer learning environments. On International Mine Awareness Day 2025, UNICEF calls for an end to the use of explosive devices and for the protection of every child.

Read more about this story here

HUMANITARIAN STRATEGY

In alignment with the Humanitarian Reset and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Flagship Initiative,[29] UNICEF will deliver timely, life-saving, multisectoral interventions through a people-centred, area-based approach. UNICEF will prioritize crisis-affected, predominantly rural communities with limited State presence, identified in coordination with humanitarian partners. To advance localization, UNICEF will strengthen local capacities and partnerships to accelerate preparedness and response in line with community needs. Partnerships with local governments, community-based organizations and ethnic groups will ensure rapid, culturally appropriate and sustainable humanitarian action. While grounded in immediate needs, UNICEF's response will also help restore and sustain essential services, consistent with the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. Under its people-centred approach, UNICEF will operationalize the inter-agency strategy on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and accountability to affected populations.

In health and nutrition, UNICEF will prioritize crisis-affected and remote communities with limited access to healthcare, delivering life-saving interventions for women and children. These include immunization, prenatal care, treatment of wasting and management of childhood illnesses. Support will also include emergency mental health and psychosocial support, referrals and promotion of healthy practices to prevent disease and malnutrition.

The education response will ensure learning continuity and learning environments through temporary learning spaces, early childhood services and mental health and psychosocial support for students and teachers. Recovery efforts will support the reopening of schools and strengthen learning strategies tailored to migrants, refugees and displaced children.

WASH interventions will ensure rapid access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene for people affected by displacement, confinement and disasters. The response will focus on vulnerable communities, schools and health facilities in remote areas. In coordination with local emergency committees and partners, WASH actions will restore essential services and build community capacity for timely and life-saving response in high-risk contexts.

UNICEF will prevent and respond to child recruitment, family separation and violence, including gender-based violence. The response will promote community-based risk plans, protection pathways and explosive ordnance risk education, while supporting safe spaces offering mental health and psychosocial support and gender- and age-responsive services for conflict-affected children. Efforts addressing violence (including gender-based violence) will combine prevention and risk mitigation with survivor-centred services, community mobilization and training for teachers, health staff and protection officers.

Cross-cutting priorities will strengthen humanitarian response and contribute to long-term resilience. Climate, environmental and disaster risk reduction actions will help protect children by reducing risks and building community resilience. Gender-responsive action will promote equality and empower adolescents as agents of change. UNICEF will support the transition strategy under the Humanitarian Reset, strengthening coordination and localization and preparing clusters for a gradual shift to government leadership.

2026 PROGRAMME TARGETS

Health (including public health emergencies)

- 31,800 children and women accessing primary health care in UNICEF-supported facilities
- 8,580 children 0-11 months receiving pentavalent 3 vaccine

Nutrition

- 12,500 children 6-59 months screened for wasting
- 132 children 6-59 months with severe wasting admitted for treatment
- 7,500 primary caregivers of children 0-23 months receiving infant and young child feeding counselling
- 9,200 children 6-59 months receiving micronutrient powder
- 5,100 pregnant women receiving preventative iron supplementation

Child protection and GBViE

- 58,200 children, adolescents and caregivers accessing community-based mental health and psychosocial support
- 13,490 women, girls and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention and/or response interventions
- 1,768 children who have experienced violence reached by health, social work or justice services
- 46,500 children provided with landmine or other explosive weapons prevention and/or survivor assistance interventions

Education

- 144,700 children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning
- 27,000 children receiving individual learning materials
- 6,880 teachers and facilitators trained in basic pedagogy and/or mental health and psychosocial support

Water, sanitation and hygiene

- 38,800 people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water for drinking and domestic needs
- 38,700 people accessing appropriate sanitation services
- 46,000 people reached with critical WASH supplies

Cross-sectoral (AAP, SBC, and PSEA)

- 110,500 people with safe and accessible channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel who provide assistance to affected populations
- 108,000 people sharing their concerns and asking questions through established feedback mechanisms
- 6,000 people engaged in reflective dialogue through community platforms

This appeal is aligned with the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, which are based on global standards and norms for humanitarian action.

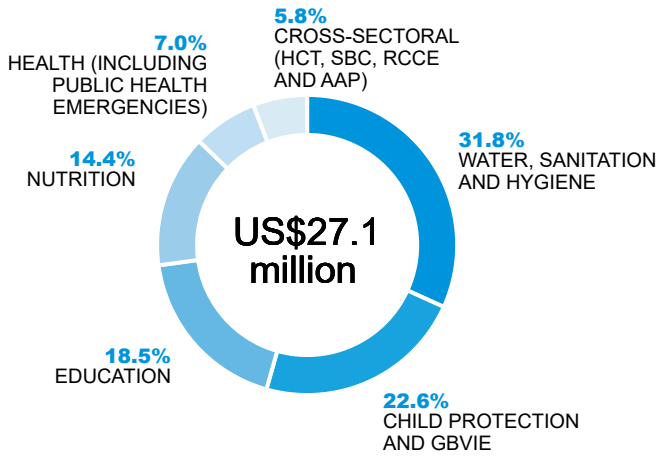
Programme targets are provisional and subject to change upon finalization of the inter-agency planning documents.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS IN 2026

For 2026, UNICEF is appealing for $27.1 million to save lives and meet other critical humanitarian needs of 254,800 people in Colombia, including 180,240 children. Humanitarian needs remain alarmingly high due to the combined impacts of conflict, displacement and climate shocks. However, this appeal represents a 70 per cent reduction compared with the 2025 appeal: it reflects a shift towards prioritizing life-saving interventions and strengthening local systems in hard-to-reach areas with limited State presence, in line with the Humanitarian Reset and inter-agency planning for 2026.

Reaching affected populations in high-severity areas, which are often remote, requires substantial financial and operational effort. Humanitarian access is often restricted by insecurity, difficult geography and weak infrastructure, driving up implementation costs. For example, building protective spaces, rehabilitating classrooms and establishing climate-resilient WASH facilities demand complex logistics, local procurement and community engagement. UNICEF's localized approach strengthens ownership, ensures service continuity and mitigates access constraints through partnerships with national and community-based organizations.

A portion of the funding requirement will support cross-cutting preparedness and anticipatory actions that complement life-saving interventions. This shows UNICEF's commitment to early response and risk reduction. Flexible and predictable humanitarian funding remains essential not only to address immediate life-saving priorities but also to reinforce local resilience and sustain the national response. Urgent action is critical. Without sufficient, timely resources, UNICEF will be unable to support the national response to the country's ongoing crisis. There is a real risk that the situation in Colombia could further deteriorate, as weakening coordination mechanisms and diminishing field capacities erode the ability to deliver principled, life-saving assistance.



Sector	2026 requirements (US$)
Health (including public health emergencies)	**1,890,000**
Nutrition	**3,890,000**
Child protection and GBViE	**6,126,200**[30]
Education	**5,000,000**
Water, sanitation and hygiene	**8,610,000**
Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP)	**1,583,800**[31]
Total	**27,100,000**

Figures are provisional and subject to change upon finalization of the inter-agency planning documents.

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ENDNOTES

1. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Colombia Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025, OCHA, 2025, available at https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1208/article/colombia-hnrp-2025.

2. Government of Colombia, Migración en Tránsito Irregular septiembre 2025, available at https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/publicaciones-migracion-colombia/migracion-en-transito-irregular-septiembre-de-2025. According to the Migration Phenomena Monitoring System of Migración Colombia (September 2025), irregular transit flows declined by 61 per cent compared with 2024 –119,581 detections versus 304,512 the previous year. This reduction reflects stricter border controls and a sharp rise in forced returns, with more than 16,000 people returning under precarious conditions, alongside a continued concentration of movements through the Darién corridor and persistent pendular dynamics along the Venezuelan and Ecuadorian borders. Despite the apparent reduction in mobility, humanitarian needs have deepened as institutional and humanitarian response capacities have diminished, leaving people on the move, returnees and host communities increasingly exposed to protection risks and unmet basic needs.

3. OCHA, Colombia: Informe de Situación Humanitaria 2025 – entre enero y agosto de 2025, OCHA, 19 September 2025, available at www.unocha.org/publications/report/colombia/informe-de-situacion-humanitaria-2025-datos-acumulados-entre-enero-y-agosto-de-2025-fecha-de-publicacion-19-de-septiembre-de-2025. The estimated number of people left without aid is drawn from official reports by humanitarian partners documenting access restrictions. These reports are consolidated, validated and analysed at the national level by the Humanitarian Access Group. The figures reflect only data reported by humanitarian actors, excluding government interventions, and are based on the total number of people identified in each event as unable to receive planned or expected humanitarian assistance.

4. Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) 2026 and the Humanitarian Response Plan for Community Priorities (PRPC) 2026, both developed under the 2026 inter-agency planning cycle. The RMRP identifies 3.3 million refugees and migrants in need of assistance, while the PRPC estimates 7,048,537 people affected by conflict, disasters and other humanitarian crises. For this calculation, RMRP data were refined to include only people on the move – specifically those in destination, pendular and in-transit situations, as well as other non-national populations – while excluding host communities and returnees to avoid duplication with the PRPC estimate.

5. Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) 2026 and the Humanitarian Response Plan for Community Priorities (PRPC) 2026, both developed under the 2026 inter-agency planning cycle. The RMRP identifies 3.3 million refugees and migrants in need of assistance, while the PRPC estimates 7,048,537 people affected by conflict, disasters and other humanitarian crises. For this calculation, RMRP data were refined to include only people on the move – specifically those in destination, pendular, and in-transit situations, as well as other non-national populations – while excluding host communities and returnees to avoid duplication with the PRPC estimate. As of now, there is no consolidated people in need figure for the PRPC 2026. Therefore, the overall people in need is 10,348,537, based on the combined estimates of both plans and preliminary inputs from the Protection Cluster, which covers the largest number of municipalities with critical severity and aligns with the inter-agency prioritization process for the 2026 Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal.

6. The number of children in need is based on the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) 2026 and the Humanitarian Response Plan for Community Priorities (PRPC) 2026, both developed under the 2026 inter-agency planning cycle. RMRP data only included people on the move – specifically those in destination, pendular and in-transit situations, as well as other non-national populations – excluding host communities and returnees to avoid double counting with the PRPC estimate. For the RMRP 2026, children on the move are estimated at 968,074 (496,196 girls and 471,878 boys), while the PRPC 2026 reports 2.3 million children in need (according to the officially consolidated inter-agency publication). Adding them up results in 3,268,074 children in need. The Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF 2.0) methodology used in the PRPC combines People in Need (PIN) data with specific, sectoral sub-national severity levels, which can result in adjusted sectoral figures that are not addable or cumulative. A cluster such as Education, for example, reports higher child-specific needs than those reflected in the aggregate inter-agency total (i.e., 3.747 million children versus 3.268 million overall). For this reason, UNICEF Colombia has adopted 3.747 million as the children in need figure for the 2026 Humanitarian Action for Children appeal, because it represents the most comprehensive approximation based on the sectoral JIAF 2.0 analysis and the latest validated inter-agency data.

7. The number of people to be reached is based on the key indicators selected for each programmatic area: the number of children in areas affected by landmines and other explosive weapons who received prevention services and/or survivor assistance (excluding 35 per cent of overlap coverage); the number of children, adolescents and caregivers with access to mental health and psychosocial support under child protection; the number of children accessing formal and non-formal education, including early learning, and teachers trained in education in emergencies, including psychosocial support, preparedness and educational response under education; the number of children and women receiving primary healthcare in UNICEF-supported facilities under health; the number of children aged 6–59 months screened for wasting and the number of health and community workers trained to provide quality nutrition services for children under age 5, adolescents and/or pregnant and breastfeeding women under nutrition; and the number of people provided with essential water, sanitation and hygiene supplies under WASH. UNICEF applied the highest targets established for each sector and conducted an intersectoral analysis to ensure consistency across areas and to prevent double counting. Estimates for women and girls were calculated using official government projections (July 2025) based on the 2018 National Census. According to these projections, women represent 50.8 per cent of the total population and girls account for 27 per cent of the female population, meaning women and girls together represent about 64 per cent of the total population. This proportion is consistent with HAC 2025 monitoring data, confirming alignment with national demographics. Persons with disabilities make up 1.5 per cent of the total population to be reached, in line with previous appeals.

8. Ibid.

9. Defensoría del Pueblo (Office of the Ombudsman of Colombia), “Defensoría del Pueblo alerta porque el 71% de los municipios colombianos está amenazado por grupos armados”, 12 December 2024, available at www.defensoria.gov.co/-/defensor%C3%ADa-del-pueblo-alerta-porque-el-71-de-los-municipios-colombianos-est%C3%A1-amenazado-por-grupos-armados.

10. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2025 Global Report on Internal Displacement, IDMC, Geneva, 2025.

11. In this context, confinement refers to the forced restriction of movement of entire communities, imposed by armed non-state actors.

12. Global Protection Cluster, Colombia: Análisis de protección: Norte de Santander – Análisis de los riesgos de protección en la subregión del Catatumbo, April 2025, available at https://globalprotectioncluster.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/pau25_protection_analysis_update_colombia_catatumbo_espa.pdf.

13. OCHA, Colombia: Informe de Situación Humanitaria 2025, 19 September 2025.

14. According to OCHA, approximately 55 per cent of those affected remain under confinement, with some events lasting up to 60 days. The scale and duration of these restrictions have severely worsened health, food security and recovery conditions, particularly among Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, who make up 61 per cent of those impacted. Confinement has become more frequent in Cauca, Chocó and Valle del Cauca, while new emergencies were reported in Norte de Santander and Guaviare after more than a year without incidents. Source: OCHA, Colombia: Informe de Situación Humanitaria 2025, 19 September 2025.

15. Sistema de Matrícula (SIMAT) of the Ministry of National Education, cited in the article by Mateo Chacón Orduz, “Las enfermedades de un sistema educativo con más de 900.000 niños fuera del colegio en Colombia”, El Tiempo, 15 February 2025, available at www.eltiempo.com/vida/educacion/las-enfermedades-de-un-sistema-educativo-con-mas-de-900-000-ninos-fuera-del-colegio-en-colombia-3427225. Note: SIMAT (Sistema de Matrícula) is Colombia’s national education enrollment system, managed by the Ministry of Education, which records student enrollment and attendance data across formal education levels.

16. OCHA, Colombia: Informe de Situación Humanitaria 2025, 19 September 2025. The estimated number of people left without humanitarian assistance is drawn from official reports by humanitarian partners documenting access restrictions, consolidated and validated at the national level by the Humanitarian Access Group. The figures reflect only data reported by humanitarian actors, excluding government interventions, and are based on the total number of people identified in each event as unable to receive planned or expected assistance.

17. Ibid.

18. Defensoría del Pueblo, “Reclutamiento en Colombia durante el primer semestre de 2025”, infographic, 9 July 2025, available at www.defensoria.gov.co/web/guest/-/reclutamiento-en-colombia-durante-el-primer-semestre-de-2025. Defensoría del Pueblo reports that in 2024, 578 recruitment cases were registered, 277 involving Indigenous children.

19. UNICEF Colombia, “Las graves violaciones contra la niñez en el conflicto armado colombiano siguen en aumento”, UNICEF, available at www.unicef.org/colombia/documents/las-graves-violaciones-contra-la-ninez-siguen-en-aumento.

20. International Committee of the Red Cross, "Colombia: 2025, camino a ser el peor año de la última década en cuanto a consecuencias humanitarias", 30 July 2025, available at www.icrc.org/es/articulo/colombia-2025-camino-ser-el-peor-ano-de-la-ultima-decada-en-cuanto-consecuencias.

21. Ibid.

22. Government of Colombia, Migración en Tránsito Irregular agosto 2025.

23. Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) 2025–2026, December 2024, available at www.r4v.info/es/rmrp2025-2026. The report highlights that a significant share of returnees are children, many unaccompanied or separated, facing heightened risks of family separation, limited access to basic services and exposure to violence, including gender-based violence.

24. OCHA, Colombia: Humanitarian Monitor, online dashboard, available at https://monitor.unocha.org/colombia/.

25. The health and nutrition people in need figures are based on the 2026 inter-agency planning cycle, combining data from the Humanitarian Response Plan for Community Priorities (PRPC) and the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP). To ensure consistency and avoid duplication, UNICEF consolidated both frameworks, resulting in a total 8,678,781 people people in need – combining 6,205,649 people identified under the PRPC and 2,473,132 under the RMRP. This figure reflects populations in need of access to essential health and nutrition services, particularly those affected by conflict, migration and recurrent natural disasters, ensuring methodological coherence with inter-agency planning processes. In the absence of cluster data disaggregated by age, the number of children in need was estimated as one third of the consolidated total of people in need of health and nutrition services, resulting in approximately 2.86 million children requiring access to essential health and nutrition services, particularly those affected by conflict, migration and disasters.

26. The child protection people in need figure is derived from the 2026 inter-agency planning cycle, combining data from the Humanitarian Response Plan for Community Priorities (PRPC) and the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP). Based on these frameworks, 6,045,000 people are identified under the PRPC and 2,566,000 under the RMRP, resulting in a consolidated total of 8,601,000 people in need of protection assistance. This calculation ensures alignment with inter-agency protection analysis and avoids duplication between conflict-affected and mixed-migration populations, focusing specifically on children, adolescents and caregivers requiring protection services. In the absence of cluster data disaggregated by age, the number of children in need was estimated by applying the inter-agency child proportion to the consolidated total of people in need of protection assistance, resulting in approximately 2.8 million children requiring access to protection services. This estimate provides a consistent child-focused reference aligned with inter-agency methodologies and reflects the protection risks faced by children and adolescents in contexts of conflict, migration and disasters.

27. The education people in need figure is based on the PRPC 2026 sectoral estimate of 3,205,321 people, as calculated by the Education Cluster, and the RMRP 2026 education sector figure of 541,707 people. Together, they account for a total of 3,747,028 people in need of education assistance, including host communities, displaced populations and refugees and migrants. This consolidated figure represents the estimated number of children and adolescents requiring access to safe, inclusive and continuous learning opportunities in contexts affected by conflict, displacement and humanitarian crises.

28. The WASH people in need figure is derived from the 2026 inter-agency planning cycle, combining data from the Humanitarian Response Plan for Community Priorities (PRPC) and the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP). According to these frameworks, 4,517,644 people are identified under the PRPC and 2,814,869 under the RMRP, resulting in a consolidated total of 7,332,513 people in need of WASH assistance. This total represents populations affected by conflict, displacement, disasters and migration-related vulnerabilities, ensuring coherence with inter-agency analysis and avoiding duplication across humanitarian frameworks. In the absence of cluster data disaggregated by age, the number of children in need was estimated by applying the inter-agency child proportion to the consolidated total of people in need of WASH assistance, resulting in approximately 2.42 million children requiring access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene services.

29. OCHA's Flagship Initiative was launched in 2023 to redesign humanitarian action from the ground up. The four pilot countries are Colombia, the Niger, the Philippines and South Sudan.

30. The child protection budget line includes allocations for activities addressing gender-based violence in emergencies. A total of $565,400 is allocated to these activities, encompassing prevention, risk mitigation and survivor-centred responses.

31. The cross-sectoral budget includes $503,800 allocated from protection from sexual exploitation and abuse actions. While these interventions are integrated across all programmatic areas, they are reflected under the cross-sectoral component to ensure coherence and accountability and to avoid duplication with sectoral reporting.