Democratic Republic of the Congo

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Democratic Republic of the Congo is home to the highest number of United Nations-verified grave violations globally, and one of the highest numbers of internally displaced people. An escalation of armed conflict in the country is severely impacting 14.9 million children, who are harmed by recurrent disease outbreaks, endemic sexual violence and growing access constraints – all exacerbating vulnerability and heightening child mortality. Increased military operations in 2024, along with hostilities expected after withdrawal of the United Nations peacekeeping mission, will add to children's risks.

- UNICEF has prioritized life-saving interventions. Along with other cluster partners, it plans to cover at least 75 per cent of the cluster-specific populations in need for critical activities, subject to available resources. To enable a holistic humanitarian response, UNICEF will strive to provide integrated life-saving assistance while enhancing community resilience and social cohesion to pave the way for recovery. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, gender considerations and prevention and response to gender-based violence will be integrated into all interventions.

- UNICEF requires $804.3 million to address the acute needs of children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Timely, flexible and multi-year funding will be essential for UNICEF to reach the most vulnerable crisis-affected and forgotten children.

KEY PLANNED TARGETS

- 2 million children vaccinated against measles
- 933,574 children with severe wasting admitted for treatment
- 1.2 million children/caregivers accessing community-based mental health and psychosocial support
- 2.4 million people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water

Needs figures are aligned with the 2024 inter-agency planning documents (Humanitarian Needs Overview) as endorsed by the Humanitarian Country Team.
HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND NEEDS

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the world’s most complex crises, and one of its most forgotten. The upsurge in armed conflict and intercommunal clashes in the country has resulted in huge levels of displacement and further aggravated chronic poverty, systemic weaknesses and people’s vulnerability. A total of 6.04 million people are displaced, including 3.5 million children, making this the worst displacement crisis in Africa. Instability and difficult conditions are challenging children’s mental health and psychosocial well-being: In 2023, 14.9 million children experienced the worst effects of violent conflict, because they were exposed to extreme violence and put at heightened risk of abuse in often precarious living conditions.

The country accounts for the highest number of verified grave violations against children in the world, with close to 3,400 grave violations verified in 2022. In the first half of 2023, these violations increased by 41 per cent. The prevalence of sexual violence against girls rose sharply, with a 40 per cent increase in the number of verified cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Two out of five survivors assisted in 2023 across the country were children under 18. Moreover, with 900,000 children out of school, and more than 1,000 schools closed, the country is not only facing a lost generation of children without an education but is also home to children who are at a high risk for violence and child marriage.

Child survival remains fragile due to major epidemic outbreaks and persistent levels of wasting, and this will worsen as conflict and the reduced capacity of the health system persist. Measles outbreaks are wreaking havoc on children, with the number of suspected cases reaching 282,323, with 5,330 deaths reported, largely exceeding the total reported cases in 2022. Children are also facing the worst cholera outbreak in six years, with 42,672 suspected cholera cases and 357 deaths reported. In 2023, North Kivu was the province hardest hit by cholera, with more than 65 per cent of all cases in the country – 41 per cent among children under age 18 and more than 25 per cent in children under age 5. The cholera outbreak is expected to persist into 2024. Needs are further compounded by such extreme weather phenomena as flooding and landslides, which led to the death of 3,000 people in May 2023 in Kalehe, South Kivu Province. Such natural disasters are expected to intensify in 2024.

The nutrition situation in the country remains critical, with 15 per cent of health zones on nutrition alerts. The number of emergency nutrition alerts is 6 per cent higher than the same period in 2022. Throughout the country, more than 1.2 million under 5 years of age require treatment for severe wasting; 4 million women/children need protection services; 6.6 million children require emergency water and sanitation; and 1.6 million children require emergency education.

STORY FROM THE FIELD

Justin (not his real name) agreed to tell his story from a UNICEF-supported centre for children previously associated with armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Justin’s recruitment into an armed group began on a day just like any other. Everything changed when a man from his village approached Justin and his friends and asked them to join up. “We can make a lot of money,” said the man, who was highly respected in the village.

Read more about this story here

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“My life was in danger,” says Justin, who fled from an armed group that had trapped him into joining.
While committed to prioritization, UNICEF will ensure that no child is left behind for all life-saving activities. In 2024, UNICEF will maintain its pivotal role as a front-line responder, prepared to deliver rapid, comprehensive, life-saving assistance and address the immediate and critical needs of vulnerable children, to ensure their multifaceted needs are effectively met. Gender sensitivity will be systematically integrated into the response.

To enable holistic humanitarian assistance, UNICEF will provide immediate access to essential services while placing the protection of children and their communities at the centre. Localization through community engagement and the empowerment of local organizations and existing structures remains the backbone of UNICEF’s strategy. This allows for improved effectiveness, acceptance and enhanced access to hard-to-reach areas while increasing overall efficiency and value for money. This approach also sets the stage for longer-term interventions. Linking humanitarian efforts with development interventions, so critical for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is a major priority of UNICEF’s.

As crises occur, UNICEF and partners deliver vital, life-saving assistance to mitigate urgent needs and alleviate immediate impact. UNICEF’s localized Rapid Response Mechanism addresses dynamic vulnerabilities resulting from population movements and natural disasters, while the targeted rapid response to suspected cholera cases immediately breaks the chain of transmission. Vulnerable children, including those associated with armed groups, unaccompanied or separated children and those affected by gender-based violence receive tailored care and services.

UNICEF strengthens links between health, nutrition, WASH, education, child protection, mental health and psychosocial support and gender-based violence programming to safeguard children’s lives and improve access to quality, inclusive assistance within protective, child-friendly environments. UNICEF focuses on improving access to basic WASH services, primary health care, immunization, prevention and early detection of severe wasting and referrals and treatment within communities and health facilities. To support responses to public health emergencies, UNICEF, with the Government and partners, contributes to the coordination and response of several outbreak response pillars. Community needs, including essential social services for children, adolescents and women, will be addressed while strengthening community resilience mechanisms. The use of humanitarian cash transfers will help to meet urgent needs, with impact maximized through multipurpose transfers.

UNICEF prioritizes protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and will continue to enforce a holistic and systematic approach to scaling up related interventions, as well as gender-based violence prevention measures, within all interventions through an innovative mechanism.

UNICEF leads the WASH, Nutrition and Education Clusters, the Child Protection Area of Responsibility and the non-food items working group and co-leads the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in the country.

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**2024 PROGRAMME TARGETS**

**Health (including public health emergencies)**
- 1,984,002 children vaccinated against measles, supplemental dose
- 749,700 children and women accessing primary health care in UNICEF-supported facilities
- 8,500 individuals receiving treatment for cholera/acute watery diarrhoea in UNICEF-supported facilities

**Nutrition**
- 3,008,172 children 6-59 months screened for wasting
- 933,574 children 6-59 months with severe wasting admitted for treatment
- 1,418,116 primary caregivers of children 0-23 months receiving infant and young child feeding counselling
- 7,222,520 children 6-59 months receiving vitamin A supplementation
- 399,321 children 6-59 months receiving SQ-LNS

**Child protection, GBVIE and PSEA**
- 1,210,476 children, adolescents and caregivers accessing community-based mental health and psychosocial support
- 1,145,238 women, girls and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention and/or response interventions
- 1,719,043 people with safe and accessible channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel who provide assistance to affected populations
- 33,806 children who have received individual case management

**Education**
- 393,500 children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning
- 236,100 children receiving individual learning materials
- 7,154 teachers and facilitators trained in basic pedagogy and/or mental health and psychosocial support

**Water, sanitation and hygiene**
- 2,392,347 people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water for drinking and domestic needs
- 1,288,187 people accessing appropriate sanitation services
- 717,704 people reached with critical WASH supplies

**Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP)**
- 110,000 households reached with UNICEF-funded humanitarian cash transfers (including for social protection and other sectors)
- 6,600,000 affected people (children, caregivers, community members) reached with timely and life-saving information on how and where to access available services
- 150,000 people engaged in reflective dialogue through community platforms
- 350,000 people sharing their concerns and asking questions through established feedback mechanisms

**Rapid response mechanism**
- 1,242,000 people receiving essential household items and WASH kits with seven days of assessment
- 1,584,000 people around suspected cholera cases receiving targeted assistance in less than 48h

Progress against the latest programme targets is available in the humanitarian situation reports: [https://www.unicef.org/appeals/drc/situation-reports](https://www.unicef.org/appeals/drc/situation-reports)

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.

Target figures are aligned with the 2024 inter-agency planning document (the Democratic Republic of the Congo Humanitarian Response Plan) as endorsed by the Humanitarian Country Team. UNICEF has increased its targets versus the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, to ensure that our response plans, along with other cluster partners, will cover at least 75 per cent of the cluster-specific populations in need for all critical life-saving activities to align as much as possible with UNICEF’s Core Commitment for Children.
UNICEF urgently seeks $804.3 million to address the escalating humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and uphold children’s rights in emergencies throughout 2024. While there has been a 7 per cent budget decrease compared with the 2023 appeal, this is not indicative of an improving humanitarian situation. On the contrary, conditions – especially in the eastern part of the country – have significantly deteriorated, and more than ever UNICEF is committed to ensuring no child is left behind. In this context, the changing funding requirements reflect a heightened prioritization of the most critical life-saving interventions in 2024. UNICEF’s target for the number of children to be reached has even increased by 7 per cent compared with 2023.

The funds requested are indispensable for UNICEF to deliver critical, life-saving services for the most vulnerable children, foster an integrated humanitarian response and employ community-based approaches to provide swift, effective and efficient support to 8.7 million children and their families. Without prompt and adequate funding, the multifaceted needs of these children will not be met. Nearly 2 million children under the age of 5 will go unvaccinated against measles, and more than 933,000 will be deprived of access to treatment for severe wasting and put at risk of dying. Additionally, nearly 2.4 million people will lack access to safe water; more than 1.2 million will go without rapid assistance for their most immediate needs; and more than 1.2 million children and caregivers will be denied essential mental health and psychosocial support. And 393,500 children will be unable to access formal education, a lifeline to their future.

Now more than ever, flexible resources are paramount for an efficient, swift and agile response to protect Congolese children and alleviate their suffering, safeguard their rights and make a meaningful improvement to their lives, well-being and prospects for the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>2024 requirements (US$)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health (including public health emergencies)</td>
<td>81,124,574</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>345,294,058</td>
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<td>Child protection, GBViE and PSEA</td>
<td>105,020,256</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>70,830,000</td>
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<td>Water, sanitation and hygiene</td>
<td>71,991,250</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP)</td>
<td>49,852,790</td>
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<td>Rapid response mechanism</td>
<td>76,432,566</td>
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<td>Cluster coordination</td>
<td>3,750,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>804,295,490</td>
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*This includes costs from other sectors/interventions: Education (8.8%), Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP) (6.2%), Cluster coordination (<1%).

Who to contact for further information:

Grant Leaity
Representative, Democratic Republic of the Congo
T +243831286343
gleaity@unicef.org

Lana Wreikat
Director, Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS), a.i.
T +1 212 326 7150
lwreikat@unicef.org

June Kunugi
Director, Public Partnerships Division (PPD)
T +1 212 326 7118
jkunugi@unicef.org
1. UNICEF activated its Corporate Emergency Level 3 Scale-up Procedure for the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the following period: 5 June – 14 December 2023. The status will be reviewed on that date. UNICEF Emergency Procedures are activated to ensure a timely and effective response to crises. The emergency procedures provide a tailored package of mandatory actions and simplifications required for all offices responding to Level 3, Level 2 and Level 1 humanitarian situations.

2. The overall number of people in need for food security activities is the highest number of people in need in the 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan. The people in need figure for UNICEF’s mandate is 18.9 million. This includes 7,602,653 children aged 0–59 months in need of vitamin A supplementation, 4,481,448 primary caregivers of children aged 0–23 months in need of infant and young child feeding counseling, 8,687,071 people in need of WASH services, including early learning, and 33,119 children in need of individual casemanagement.

3. UNICEF is committed to need-based targeting, which means covering the unmet needs of children; and will serve as the provider of last resort where it has cluster coordination responsibilities.


5. Many of the clusters’ programs, along with other cluster partners, will cover 75 per cent of the cluster-specific people in need in all life-saving activities. UNICEF will serve as the provider of last resort where it has cluster coordination responsibilities. The total number of people to be reached is disaggregated as follows: 5,464,188 boys; 5,641,710 women/girls; and a total of 1,011,609 people with disabilities (disability estimates are based on the assumptions that 10% of the population is living with disabilities, and that the proportion of people with disabilities among children is 19% for boys and 21% for girls; the proportion of people with disabilities among adults is 10%). This includes 3,199,251 children accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water for drinking and domestic needs; 36,928 survivors of gender-based violence receiving medical, psychosocial and legal care and socio-educational and/or educational reintegation in emergency situations; and 33,806 children receiving individual case management (ICM).

6. UNICEF’s Rapid Response Mechanism, or UniRR, is one of the main Rapid Response programmes operating in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika Provinces. With an average of six days between the evaluation and the start of the assistance, UniRR is the fastest in-kind response mechanism in the country.

7. The deployment of strategic tools, systems (HOPE) and operational capacity has enabled UNICEF to implement pilots and humanitarian cash and social safety nets interventions in 2022 and 2023. In addition to the cash for nutrition approach, UNICEF has developed and piloted an operational and programmatic tool called the Gender, GBV, PSEA mechanism (GSP). The tool addresses challenges highlighted through contextual issues, particularly faced by women and girls, such as gender-based violence as a weapon of conflict, and the increased risks associated with large humanitarian presence during emergency response.

8. As of epidemiological week 42, 185 health zones were reporting a measles outbreak, of which 51 per cent were at very high risk. Only 42 per cent of these health zones have organized a VAR response. In comparison, 58,771 suspected cases were reported in 2021. Source: Ministry of Public Health.

9. In addition to being the country with the largest number of grave violations overall, the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains the country with the largest number of children recruited into armed groups globally and with the largest number of conflict-related sexual violence cases. Between 40 per cent to 60 per cent of cases of sexual violence in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri Provinces are children, mostly adolescent girls. Source: United Nations, Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2023 (for 2022 stats).


11. Ibid.


14. As of epidemiological week 42, 185 health zones were reporting a measles outbreak, of which 51 per cent were at very high risk. Only 42 per cent of these health zones have organized a VAR response. In comparison, 58,771 suspected cases were reported in 2021. Source: Ministry of Public Health.


16. UNICEF will target 62 per cent of the Education Cluster target, with a focus on children aged 6–11 years.

17. UNICEF will target 75 per cent of the cluster's total in high-priority health zones.

18. UNICEF will target 30 per cent of the children under age 5 in high-priority health zones.

19. UNICEF will target 75 per cent of the cluster’s people in need in high-priority health zones.

20. UNICEF will target 100 per cent of suspected cases in South Kivu and Tanganyika Provinces (7,500 cases) and 10 per cent of suspected cases in North Kivu (1,000 cases).

21. UNICEF will target 100 per cent of the Wash Cluster target.

22. UNICEF will target 50 per cent of the cluster's target.

23. UNICEF will target 50 per cent of the cluster's target.

24. Basic WASH services include improved water access, improved sanitation, health promotion with particular attention to infrastructure maintenance and community resilience for a more sustainable future, health promotion to increase awareness and promote accessible, feasible, affordable and effective risk- and harm-reduction practices and proper waste management practices.

25. Proportional figures.

26. Beyond the UNICEF targets for these interventions, other humanitarian partners are expected to reach the remaining children/families in need.

27. The deployment of strategic tools, systems (HOPE) and operational capacity has enabled UNICEF to implement pilots and humanitarian cash and social safety nets interventions in 2022 and 2023. In addition to the cash for nutrition approach, UNICEF has developed and piloted an operational and programmatic tool called the Gender, GBV, PSEA mechanism (GSP). The tool addresses challenges highlighted through contextual issues, particularly faced by women and girls, such as gender-based violence as a weapon of conflict, and the increased risks associated with large humanitarian presence during emergency response.

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29. Includes $46,417,075 for child protection interventions; $35,083,155 for gender-based violence in emergencies interventions; and $6,016,652 for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse interventions; and operational costs (20 per cent).

30. Includes $40,760,000 for humanitarian cash transfers; $3,093,790 for social and behaviour change activities and risk communication and community engagement; and $1,000,000 for the Integrated Activity Cell cells.