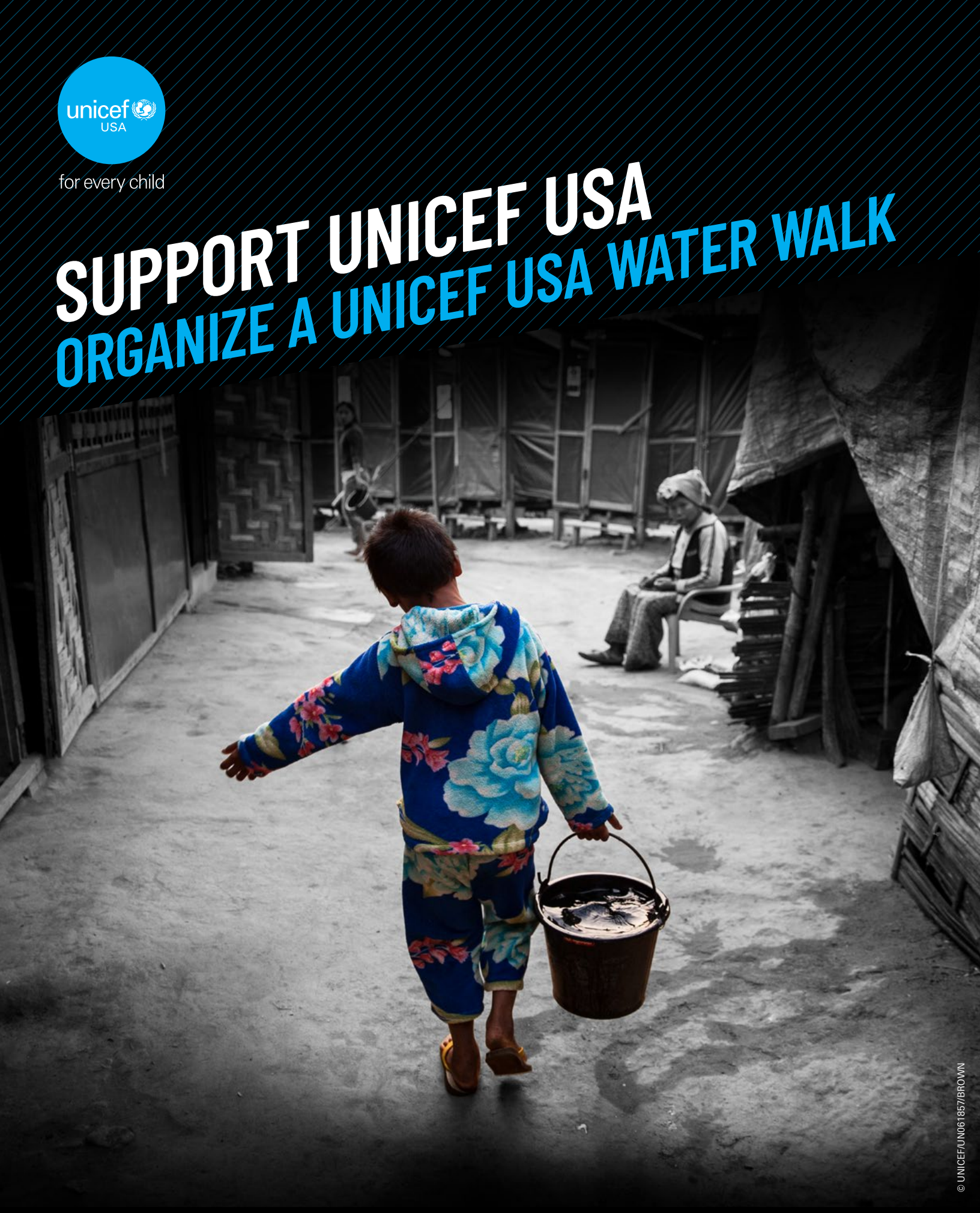
unicef USA

for every child

SUPPORT UNICEF USA
ORGANIZE A UNICEF USA WATER WALK



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WHAT IS A WATER WALK?

UNICEF USA supporters can host a Water Walk in their community to raise awareness about the impact of the global water crisis, specifically on children. A Water Walk is a great activity for all ages that creates an environment of learning around global water-related issues, and what UNICEF is doing in the area of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

To plan a Water Walk, volunteers pick a visible spot in their community to walk with heavy buckets of water to experience what millions of mothers and children do each day in walking miles to gather water for their families.

Volunteers can host a Water Walk at any point throughout the year, but can consider hosting one during World Water Month (March), or on World Water Day (March 22) and World Toilet Day (November 19).

KEEP IN MIND

Use the Volunteer Resources on our website to help further guide your conversations.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Water Walk story script
- Clear plastic bottle filled with dirty-looking water
- Buckets or jugs (1 per participant, or per group)
- Some type of weight to reflect weight of water. Examples include weights, rocks or sand.
- Megaphone (optional)
- Hula hoops or cones for obstacles
- Name tags stating girl or boy
- UNICEF WASH handout (optional)

ENVIRONMENT NEEDED

An open space (grass and/or a hard surface) for about 10–20 people to move about comfortably.

AGE REQUIREMENT

Elementary school to adult

ESTIMATED TIME

10 minutes prep, 45 minutes activity



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BEFORE YOU WALK

Before starting the Water Walk, separate participants into groups of 5–6 people. You may have fewer people in each group if you would like; or you can do it all together. Distribute the girl and boy name tags randomly to all participants.

There will be four stops throughout the Water Walk. Either station someone at each stop, or pick a leader in each group to be the narrator of the Water Walk story.

To make sure that everyone has enough space and time to complete each stop, consider staggering the groups. Let the first group complete two stations before letting the next group begin.

When planning your Water Walk, be conscious of participants with disabilities. Be prepared to state additional ways to take action if the ones described below are not inclusive to all participants.



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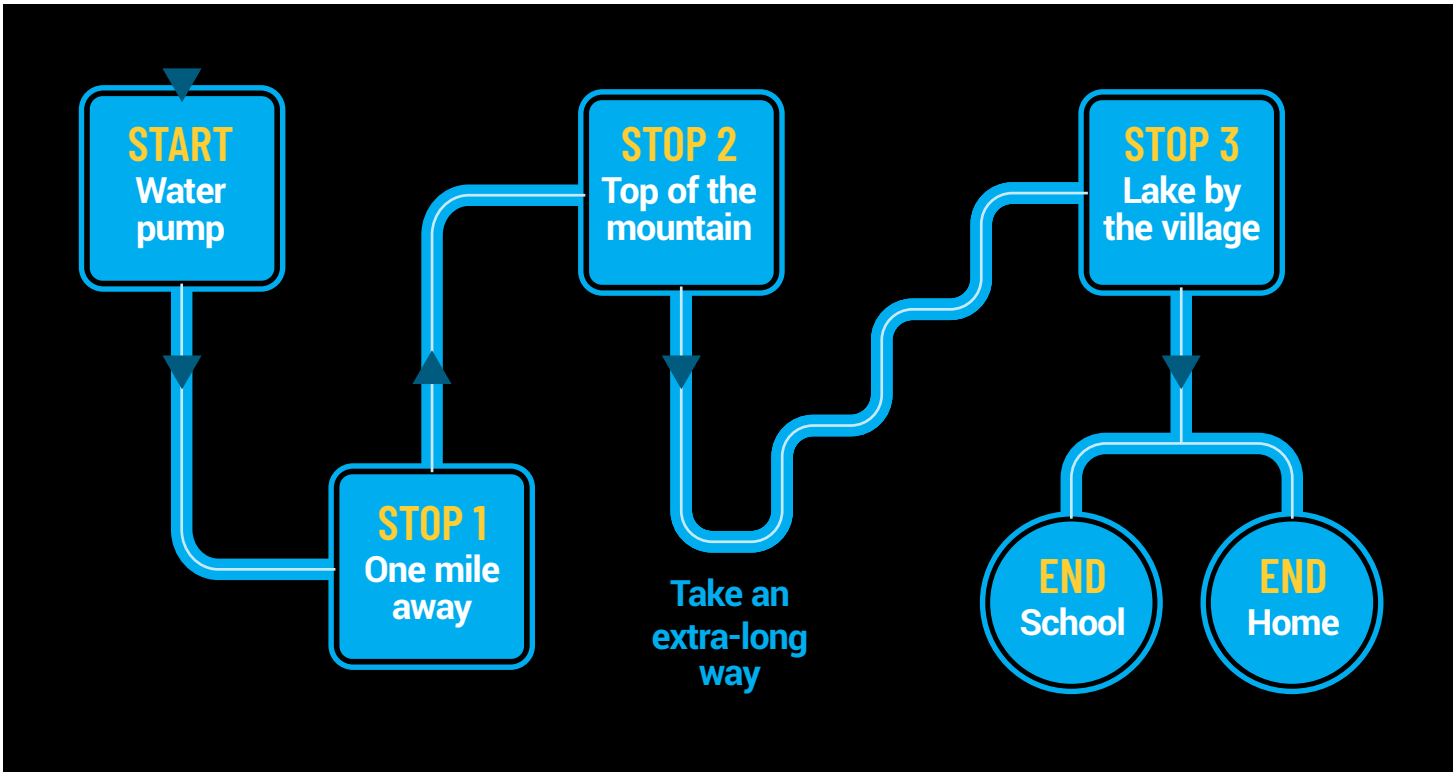
WATER WALK MAP



More than 800 children under 5 die every day — about 1 every 2 minutes — due to diseases linked to unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation or poor hygiene.

WATER WALK STORY

Beginning

Starting near a water source, have everyone fill their jug of water. Congratulations! You have just made it to the nearest water pump and filtration system to your village. You are all children who live in a small village in Nicaragua, where almost one-third of the population in remote areas does not have access to safe water. About 3–4 times a week, you wake up super early in the morning (before the sun comes up!) and walk two and a half miles to this location.

You are already tired and you can feel the sun growing hotter, but you've got to carry the water back to your home in time to make it to school! You've got a long journey ahead of you with lots of obstacles, so you better get going – but be careful! Try not to spill any of the water you collected as you and your family need all of it.

Stop 1

Good job! You've made it a whole mile carrying the water you collected. But the hardest part is ahead of you! You have reached the mountain that separates your village from the water source.

Set your water down and do 20 mountain climbers.

You and your friends are going to have to work together to make it over and back down the other side. Be careful not to step on any sharp rocks, and be sure to take a rest when you get to the top! To make sure you don't scrape your feet, you will need to run with high knees all the way to the next stop!

(Set up obstacles along the way so that students cannot take a straight path)

Stop 2

Welcome to the top of the mountain. Are you getting tired yet? Unfortunately, you and your friends are running behind. The school warning bells are ringing, which means you have 15 minutes until school starts, but you still have a mile left to go! You want to hurry home so that you don't miss any school, but before you start heading down the mountain, you notice the path you typically take is flooded. Because you want to be extra careful, you and your friends take the long way down to avoid any dangers. Make sure that you don't leave anyone behind!

(Make the group take an extra-long, out-of-the-way path to their next stop)

Stop 3

Good teamwork — it looks like you all have your water still in your buckets, and you are so close to home. This stop is at the lake that is right by your village. It would have been a lot easier to just get water from this lake instead of walking all the way to the water pump.

But why do you think it's not safe to drink from this lake? **(Hold up a water bottle full of dirty-looking water)**

You're right — it's dirty! And what might happen if you drink dirty water?

Yes, you would get sick! And without safe water, it's very hard to get healthy again.

Unfortunately, the school bell rings again indicating it's starting. Because it is seen as more important that boys go to school, all of the boys must now leave their buckets of water for the girls to take back so that they can hurry to class.

(Boys continue to walk alongside while girls carry the water the rest of the way)

You still have half a mile to go until you get home. Keep going, though; you're almost there!

End

Welcome home! You made the long journey back with your safe water. Now look at how much water you were able to bring back.

This water is going to have to last you and your family until your next trip to the water pump: what all do you use water for?

Drinking, cleaning, cooking, washing hands, etc. This is all the water you have — use it wisely and don't waste any of it!

Sadly, the girls did not make it back in time to go to school — maybe tomorrow. But you and your family will be able to eat a hot meal of healthy oatmeal tonight with the water you collected. Good job! Now go get some rest!



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WATER WALK DEBRIEF

- Look at how much water you have now, would that be enough for everything you need?
- How heavy is the bucket or jug?
- How can we help people who need water?
- What if you collected the water from the dirty lake; would that be safe to use? Why?
- Why did the boys get to go back to school? Was that fair? How does this impact girls?
- What are some ways that UNICEF is helping children in the area of water?

WHAT IS UNICEF DOING?

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has a presence in 190 countries and territories. **UNICEF reaches more children and young people than any other international organization** by providing health care and immunizations, safe water and sanitation, nutrition, education, emergency relief and more.

Worldwide, 2 billion people still lack access to safe drinking water at home.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by a lack of access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation. Scaling up woman- and girl-friendly facilities in communities and expanding menstrual health and hygiene programming also supports efforts to promote gender equality. Ensuring access to water and sanitation in schools can also help reduce the number of children who miss out on their education — especially girls.

For more information, see our Water, Sanitation and Hygiene information sheet on the following page, which can be printed out and distributed (optional).



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WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)

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2.2 billion people live without the benefits of safe water at home.

Globally, about 1.5 billion people lack access to basic sanitation services, and 2 billion people lack basic hygiene services. The absence of these necessities is not only inconvenient — it is lethal. Every day, 1,000 children under 5 die from diseases that are due to a lack of appropriate WASH services. And in protracted conflicts, children under 5 are more than 20 times more likely to die from diarrheal disease linked to unsafe WASH practices than violence in conflict.

WASH-related deaths from diseases such as cholera and diarrhea can be prevented by improved hygiene practices, increased access to safe water and sanitation facilities, and strengthened WASH programming in schools and health centers.

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In Musa Jasser, 12-year-old Farzana would walk 7 kilometers up to three times a day for clean water, missing four years of school, until a hand pump provided safe water locally.

UNICEF efforts focus on moving people up the ladder of WASH services while also ensuring nobody is left behind. UNICEF's WASH program continues to shift to be climate resilient, including through advocacy with governments and other partners. Improving WASH in schools and health care facilities continues to be part of UNICEF's priorities.

2024 WASH SNAPSHOT

- **33.3 MILLION PEOPLE** gained access to safe water that's available when needed, including more than 1 million people with disabilities
- **18 MILLION PEOPLE** gained access to basic sanitation services, over 90 percent of whom were in fragile contexts
- UNICEF reached more than **41 MILLION PEOPLE** with safe drinking water in humanitarian settings across 77 countries
- **8,677 SCHOOLS** and **3,827 HEALTH CARE FACILITIES** gained access to basic WASH services
- **11.9 MILLION WOMEN AND GIRLS** were reached with direct menstrual health and hygiene support in 63 countries
- **2,118 SOLAR-POWERED WATER SYSTEMS** were installed in 69 countries

OCTOBER 2025

UNICEF WASH PROGRAMS

In 2024, UNICEF had active WASH programming in more than 100 countries. UNICEF continued to strengthen sectoral systems in program countries, support the elimination of open defecation and shift programming toward greater climate resilience. In 2024, UNICEF reached 6.7 million people with climate-resilient water services and 3 million people with climate-resilient sanitation services.

UNICEF works directly with governments, community-based organizations and families to ensure access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation and hygiene services in homes, health centers and schools. Through development programs, in 2024, 33.3 million people gained access to safe water, 18 million people gained access to basic sanitation, and 19 million people gained access to basic hygiene services. In addition, UNICEF reached 2.6 million women and girls with menstrual health and hygiene services.

UNICEF is the lead agency for WASH during emergencies. In humanitarian contexts throughout 2024, UNICEF reached more than 41 million people with WASH services across 75 countries.

Access to WASH facilities by persons with disabilities provides direct benefits to health, education, social inclusion and dignity, and is fundamental to achieving human rights and development goals. Disability-inclusive WASH programming is mainstreamed in UNICEF's WASH strategy, plans and approaches. For example, in Syria, UNICEF provided disability-inclusive WASH facilities while rehabilitating 341 classrooms. These disability- and gender-sensitive washrooms facilitated the retention and enrollment of more girls and children with disabilities, reducing absenteeism.



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Asha, a displaced mother, helps her son wash his hands with water and soap after using the latrine at home in Saboune village in Gedaref state, Sudan.