



© UNICEF/UN0764380/Franco

## UNICEF WASH Programme

---

In 2020, 2 billion people still lacked safely managed drinking water, including 771 million people who lacked even a basic drinking water service; 3.6 billion people lacked safely managed sanitation, including 1.7 billion people who lacked even a basic sanitation service and 2.3 billion people lacked even a basic hygiene service, including 670 million who had no handwashing facilities at all.

Every child has the right to grow up in a clean and safe environment. Access to clean water, sanitation and good hygiene practices not only keeps children healthy and thriving, but also keeps them in school, affords their families dignity, and supports their route out of poverty. Despite COVID-19 highlighting the importance of hand hygiene to prevent the spread of disease, billions, including hundreds of millions of school-going children, do not have access to handwashing facilities with soap and water. People living in rural areas, urban slums, disaster-prone areas, and low-income countries are the most vulnerable and the most affected.

The consequences of unsafe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) on children are deadly. More than 1,000 children under 5 years of age die every day of diseases linked to unsafe WASH services. In areas of conflict, children under 5 years of age are nearly 20 times more likely to die from diarrhoeal disease than from the conflict itself. WASH systems are increasingly threatened by the destructive impacts of climate change, increasing disparities in access. Climate change impacts are largely felt through water, including from flooding, drought and rising sea levels. Vulnerable groups – isolated communities, poor households, people with disabilities, and particularly women and girls – bear the brunt of inadequate WASH services and increasingly so in the current climate crisis.



## Key Facts on Water, Sanitation, Hygiene (WASH) and Climate Change:

Inadequate WASH services and behaviours result in diarrhoea, cholera, respiratory infections, malnutrition and stunting with cognitive development impacts. It remains a top cause of mortality for children and adolescents. In 2019 alone, unsafe WASH was estimated to have caused 1.5 million deaths and 68 million disability-adjusted life years<sup>1</sup>. New challenges such as climate change, humanitarian crises, emerging and zoonotic diseases, and antimicrobial resistance further threaten progress towards achieving safe and universal WASH services.

- It is estimated that over 1,000 children under 5 die every day from WASH-related diseases<sup>2</sup>
- Lack of access to clean water and sanitation facilities in schools hinders children and young people's ability to attend school and work, especially girls<sup>3</sup>.
- About 60% of the world's youth population (ages 15-24) live in water-stressed areas<sup>4</sup>.
- Approximately 500 million young people (ages 15-24) globally lack access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene<sup>5</sup>.
- Climate change could increase the number of people affected by water stress in sub-Saharan Africa from 325 million in 2000 to over 700 million in 2050<sup>6</sup>.
- Insufficient access to water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities increases vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, particularly for girls and women<sup>7</sup>.
- Climate change is predicted to increase the incidence of waterborne diseases, which will have a disproportionate impact on women and girls who manage household water<sup>8</sup>.
- Hunger among women and girls could rise by up to 30% by 2050 as a result of climate change<sup>9</sup> and there is no food security without water security.

## UNICEF WASH Programmes:

UNICEF's Strategic Plan Goal Area 4 is that: "Every child, including adolescents, has access to safe and equitable water, sanitation and hygiene services and supplies, and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment."

Goal Area 4 has three Result Areas:

- Result Area 1: Sustained access to and use of safe water, sanitation and hygiene services and practices for all children and adolescents, particularly the most disadvantaged and those living in humanitarian and fragile contexts.
- Result Area 2: Strengthened and resourced WASH systems and empowered communities for gender-equal, inclusive, affordable, and sustainable services to meet the rights of all children and adolescents, particularly the most disadvantaged and those living in humanitarian and fragile contexts.
- Result Area 3: Increased and enhanced child-sensitive programmes to address climate change, disaster risks and environmental degradation that meet the rights of all children and adolescents, particularly the most disadvantaged and those affected by humanitarian and fragile contexts.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. (2019). Water sanitation hygiene. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/water-sanitation-hygiene>

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF and World Health Organization. (2019). Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000-2017: Special focus on inequalities. [https://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/publications/jmp-report-2019/en/](https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/jmp-report-2019/en/)

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF. (2018). WASH in schools. <https://www.unicef.org/wash/schools>

<sup>4</sup> Water-stressed areas are regions or locations where water availability is insufficient to meet the needs of the population, economic activities, and ecosystem functions, due to natural or human factors leading to reduced water availability and/or deterioration of water quality.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF and World Health Organization. (2019). Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000-2017: Special focus on inequalities. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/progress-on-drinking-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-2019>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (2019). Climate change and human development. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/climate-change-and-human-development>

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2019). <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/children-living-protracted-conflicts-are-three-times-more-likely-die-water-related>

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (2019). Climate change and human development. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/climate-change-and-human-development>

<sup>9</sup> ibid

- UNICEF works in 130 countries on WASH interventions, including both emergency responses and development programmes. UNICEF plays a sector coordination role in 86 of these countries.
- UNICEF’s WASH programme has over 700 technical staff, 80% of whom work in fragile settings.
- The UNICEF WASH programme is global and decentralized, with 98% of resources and staff at country or at regional level, with the largest programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia.
- UNICEF WASH expenditure over 2020-2022 averages around \$1 billion per year, half of which is spent on humanitarian programming.
- UNICEF and WHO are designated as the custodian agencies for monitoring and reporting on the global achievement towards SDG 6.1 and 6.2, while also supporting and tracking WASH access in schools and healthcare facilities.

## Examples of UNICEF Support in WASH and Climate Related Issues:

### Example of UNICEF Support



This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

## UNICEF WASH Programme’s Goals, Reach and Achievements in 2022:

- The on-going shift to integrating climate resilience into the WASH programme continues with the engagement of over 80 countries, technical support for solar-powered water systems and the installation of over 6,000 solar-powered systems since 2020.
- In 2022 UNICEF supported WASH facilities in over 32,000 schools and over 10,000 health-care facilities.
- UNICEF has responded to the unprecedented scale and scope of humanitarian crises through direct relief, and by strengthening sector humanitarian response capacity and coordinating the overall response as lead agency of the global WASH cluster. In 2022, 39.4 million people gained or regained access to water services for drinking and hygiene through UNICEF direct humanitarian relief programmes and 9.2 million to sanitation services.
- UNICEF made progress in improving gender inclusivity in WASH with the release of a Gender-Responsive Programming course in 2021, reaching 17.5 million women schools with menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) support.
- UNICEF has published comprehensive guidance on disability-inclusive WASH data collection and reporting, leading to inclusion in national policies, strategies, and standards.

- 15 countries were supported by UNICEF to increase annual sector expenditures from different funding and financing sources resulting while 9 prepared and implemented a costed and inclusive national WASH financing strategy, with UNICEF support.
- 16 countries integrated a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach on WASH programming through the participation of affected populations, with UNICEF support, in 2022.

## UNICEF's Current WASH Priorities

The strategic shifts on WASH in the current Strategic Plan (2022-2025) include:

- Making WASH programming climate-resilient and addressing water scarcity via the Water Security for All initiative.
- Supporting governments to achieve universal access to safely managed water, sanitation and hygiene services via the Sanitation Game Plan.
- Linking life-saving WASH needs with sustainable development and peacebuilding, and involving young people in driving change.
- Focusing on strengthening systems at all levels (country, regional and global).

## Prioritizing WASH Systems Strengthening: Urgent Needs and Key Considerations:

- In order to achieve universal and sustainable access to WASH services, there is a need to invest in systems that are resilient to shocks and support long-term sustainability.
- The ambitious SDG 6.1 and 6.2 targets require increased funding and improved regulatory mechanisms to achieve universal coverage, address water quality, and ensure safe sanitation management.
- Scaling up successful WASH programming approaches at the sub-national level requires strengthening WASH systems, including financing.
- Stronger monitoring systems and regulations are crucial for tracking the utilization of domestic capital commitments and the recovery of operations and maintenance costs.
- The sanitation sub-sector has been largely neglected due to a lack of policies, political will, and institutional accountabilities, resulting in poor health, economic, and social outcomes for the most vulnerable populations.

Urgent action is needed to increase political commitment, strengthen governance and institutions, and significantly increase financial resources to deliver drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene services. According to the 2022 GLAAS report, 75% of countries reported insufficient WASH funding across all streams of financing, highlighting the need for increased investment. Setting realistic national targets for universal WASH access is crucial for reaching underserved populations and fulfilling their human rights. Donors must prioritize and continue funding for WASH services, given the 5.6% decrease in aid for water supply and sanitation between 2017 and 2020. Countries must make WASH services climate-resilient, yet most policies and plans fail to do so, and the situation is set to worsen as the climate crisis deepens.

UNICEF believes immediate and concerted efforts are needed to achieve universal access to safe and sustainable water supply. This requires collaboration between public and private sectors to prioritize the most vulnerable communities, build capacity, strengthen systems and governance, rapidly scale up investments on WASH, and improve data quality and access to emerging technologies. We have set ambitious goals: we aim to reach, with partners, 1 billion people with safely managed sanitation by 2030, with the Sanitation Game Plan. And by 2030, we aim to reach 450 million children and their families in highly water vulnerable areas with access to safe and affordable water supply via the Water Security for All Initiative. We call on Member States to strengthen WASH systems and scale up support to WASH, considering the challenges of climate change. We ask that WASH is included in national climate policy work and prioritized in budgets, to reach the most marginalized children. We will use the opportunity of the UN 2023 Water Conference to advocate for WASH budgets and services that close the gap to the unreached.