



Children living displaced from home: Navigating life in the shadows

Globally, 47 million children are living displaced from their homes, most are fleeing overlooked or forgotten emergencies.

In the past decade, the number of people who are internally displaced within their own borders, or are living as refugees struggling in a country not their own, have been steadily increasing.¹ Millions of families have been forced or obliged to flee their homes, their communities and even their countries to escape armed conflict, violence, human rights violations or environmental and man-made disasters - often a combination of several.

The United Nations Refugee Agency latest claim is that 117.3 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes or countries worldwide (UNHCR [June 2024](#)). Of those, those displaced within their own country is at an unprecedented 68.3 million people, and 37.6 million people are living as refugees (the remaining 12.7 million are asylum seekers or others in need of international protection). By late 2023, nearly three quarters of all refugees came from just five countries: Afghanistan (6.4 million); Syria (6.4 million); Venezuela (6.1 million); Ukraine (6.0 million) and South Sudan (2.3 million).²

Children – who make up less than one-third of the global population – make up 40 per cent of the people displaced from their homes.

That’s 47 million children under 18 years old who are living in forced displacement today. Among them, the number of refugee and asylum-seeking children reached a new record of 15.7 million. Between 2018 and 2023, an average of [339,000 children were born as refugees per year](#). Millions of families, women and children around the world are surviving without the stability of home, community and often country.³



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AFTER an ISIS attack on their home in Syria in 2014, Naveen’s family sought refuge in Barika refugee camp in Iraq. Though she cannot hear or speak, her pursuit of education knows no bounds. Today she shines brightly in Grade 4. Neveen dreams of a future as a medical doctor, a testament to her unyielding determination and unwavering hope.

The average length of displacement ranges from 10 to over 20 years⁴, and so many children who are forced to flee their homes today will spend their entire childhood internally displaced or as refugees. **We are witnessing the creation of a generation with no active connection to their communities of origin or countries, trapped in endless or generational displacement with limited to no access to viable solutions.** Whether living on the move across sweltering deserts, crossing treacherous seas, or bivouacked in overcrowded camps, 47 million children right now are growing up in survival mode, struggling for a better life and a place to call home.

Global and media attention tends to shine boldly on one or two widely publicized crises. But countless displaced children are navigating crises the world has forgotten, slipping into the shadows for years on end. Today, while the State of Palestine/Israel conflict and the war in Ukraine garner international attention and substantial aid, families displaced by “marginalized” conflicts and disasters struggle for attention and support. The suffering of these children is unseen, and their voices unheard.

COVER PAGE: A child in Kassala state, Sudan. The catastrophic war in Sudan - where more than 9 million have been internally displaced and another 2 million have fled to neighbouring countries - has garnered less attention than other crises.

¹Internally displaced persons have been forced to leave their homes due to factors such as armed conflict, violence, human rights abuses, or natural and man-made disasters. They remain within their own country. Refugees are people forced to flee their homeland and seek safety in another nation due to various threats, including persecution, armed conflict, violence, or severe public unrest. www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/methodology/definition/

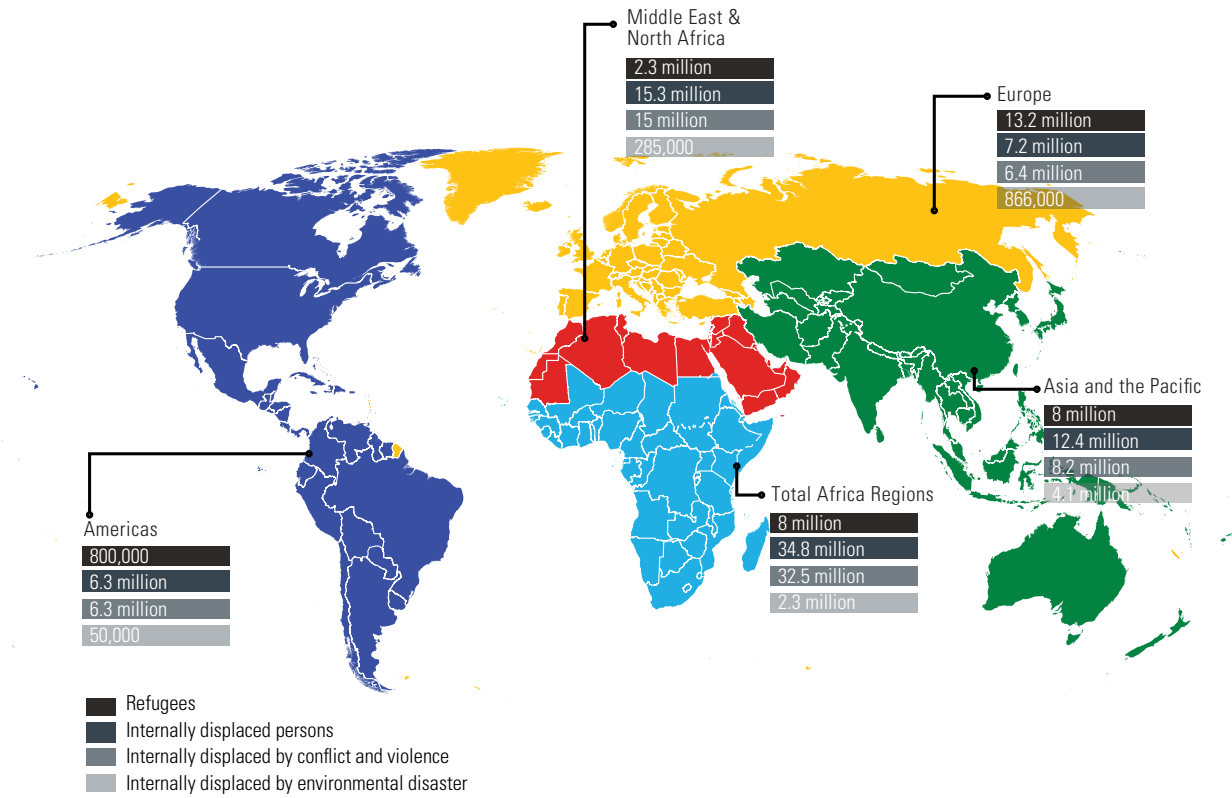
²www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/

³[IDMC-GRID-2024-Global-Report-on-Internal-Displacement](#)

⁴[The Brookings Institute](#)

The conflict in Sudan; a series of coups in the Sahel region; continuing escalation of conflict dynamics in Haiti; spreading violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are but a few examples among many overlooked emergencies. Across [Eastern and Southern Africa](#) and South and East Asia, severe weather is compounding conflict. Existing displacement challenges persist in Myanmar, while the flow of refugees and migrants intensifies across treacherous routes such as the [Darién jungle](#), the Sahara Desert, the Bay of Bengal and the Mediterranean Sea.

Regional spread of refugees and displaced persons in 2023



Source: Expert Group on Refugee, IDP and Statelessness Statistics Implementation Database



IN 2023, escalations of conflict such as in Sudan and Palestine forced millions to flee their homes. In other regions, earthquakes, storms, floods and wildfires ravaged millions of lives. Often, climate-related stress and conflict are interrelated. In Afghanistan, a child plays among destroyed homes at a camp for internally displaced who have fled the confluence of both conflict and protracted drought.

The harrowing threats of displacement on children

Adults who are displaced from home are more likely to encounter violence, injustice and persecution. But children - innocent of the conflicts and disasters that have forced their fate - are especially silenced and vulnerable. Children who are uprooted are more likely to live in poverty. With limited to no access to education, without water to stay clean and healthy, without medication, immunizations or health care, without proper nutrition, these children are forced into environments in which the ability to thrive is replaced by a struggle to survive.

The stress of dislocation can limit children's physical, cognitive and social development, jeopardizing their future and draining a nation's potential for growth and stability. They become prone to exploitation, including child labour and child marriage, as well as illness, violence and abuse. Youth have limited or no economic opportunity and become vulnerable to human rights abuses such as armed group recruitment, abduction or human trafficking. Their families lose access to legal and civil documentation and to justice. Laws, policies and discriminatory practices are far more likely to impede these children's rights, such as access to social security, finance, housing and property. Without a home or community children and youth lose a sense of identity. Stability and familiarity is replaced with uncertainty, hunger, fear, violence and depression.

Out from the shadows

It doesn't have to be this way. Children who are displaced from home by a silent emergency, by an overlooked crisis or lacking media's spotlight are no less deserving of compassion and assistance. Their stories are just as urgent. Their needs are just as pressing. It's time to turn the light on the children who are displaced by forgotten emergencies and let them emerge from the shadows.

Where refugees and internally displaced families have access to essential services, livelihood opportunities and social protection, they can realize their own and their children's potential, and host communities can benefit from their skills, creativity and diverse perspectives. Young refugees are a force for success. With the right support and access to learning and earning opportunities, millions of displaced young people have the potential to be great innovators, job creators, and pillars of families and communities around the world.

Humanitarian support for silent emergencies is chronically underfunded, denying children access to essential resources. With crucial funding from our private sector partners, UNICEF can continue to change this narrative. These children can become financially resilient by creating and connecting with learning-to-earning opportunities, income-generating skills, and cash-programme assistance.

“Inclusion pays; exclusion costs,”
 António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General



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ON 19 May 2024, 15-year-old Kosmida holds up her year-end assessment card, the first that she has ever received. At a UNICEF-supported learning centre in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, almost 9,200 children earned an assessment card. UNICEF realises the potential of all children, regardless of their home status.

UNICEF in action

A child is a child, regardless of national borders or where the media's light is cast. With UNICEF's respected role and partnerships with governments in over 190 countries and territories worldwide, we have been supporting and defending children on the move, in displacement camps and living as refugees for 78 years - amassing experience and partnerships to deal with the current global crisis. **Irrespective of what side of the border children are on, UNICEF is there.** UNICEF staff and our partners are working tirelessly for children who are internally displaced or refugees. We are reaching children in the highly-publicized conflicts - but equally reaching those in forgotten crises.

Sustainable and socially cohesive solutions: the PROSPECTS Partnership

Humanitarian organizations are straining to address the numbers of people displaced from their homes. And the process of including the internally displaced and refugees into national systems and services is slow in coming, leaving families unable to rebuild their lives in a meaningful manner. Today's protracted displacement crises require a new paradigm – one in which the private sector and governments as well as displaced families and host communities work as partners. Together, we can implement solutions in countries that do not receive mainstream media coverage, shed light on overlooked situations and provide support to those in need of a better future for all.

In 2019, UNICEF working with international partners launched the [PROSPECTS Partnership](#), a programme of new approaches to improve living conditions of displaced people and their host communities. The project is currently underway in Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Sudan and Uganda.

PROSPECTS programmes help children by boosting the agency and resilience of displaced persons and host communities. We support governments that host refugees with policies in education, child protection and social protection systems; and support national data systems to include those displaced from homes. We support the school-to-work transition for forcibly displaced and host community youth by expanding access to quality education, skills-building and dignified employment and entrepreneurship.



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GHARAM, whose family fled Syria to Jordan in 2013, is determined about her future: “I want to become a lawyer and assist people in need of protection,” she says. With PROSPECTS partnership’s cash assistance, Gharam will do just that. She is attending school and equipped with the essentials for learning. When children displaced from home are included, protected and empowered alongside their host communities, a better future is built for all.

In the five years since its inception, PROSPECTS has achieved remarkable results: 1.1 million children have enrolled in education (including acceleration and early childhood development programmes); 742,000 people in displaced or hosting communities have received social-protection benefits such as cash transfers; 102,000 people have benefited from mental health and psychosocial support services; and 462,000 have been helped with case management for issues such as gender-based violence or child labour.

In general, UNICEF programmes strengthen social cohesion, working with host communities to avoid tensions. Host communities tend to be already marginalized and often face similar risks, socioeconomic challenges and barriers to opportunities.

This year, UNICEF will continue to accelerate our efforts on the inclusion of refugee children and families into national systems and services. Achieving change requires investments in the inclusion of displaced children and families as part of a broader strategy to promote universal access to quality services for every child – everywhere. We call on our private sector partners to join us in bringing opportunities, and hope, to refugee and internally displaced children.

Most children displaced today will spend their entire childhoods in displacement. By working together, we can keep refugee children safe, healthy, learning and protected.

Catherine Russell, UNICEF Executive Director

Regional Overviews



Sub-Saharan Africa (Eastern and Southern Africa and West and Central Africa regions)

In 2023, sub-Saharan Africa faced an unprecedented crisis with 8 million refugees and 34.8 million internal displacements driven primarily by natural disasters exacerbating conflict and violence. The need for humanitarian assistance is growing each day, with 33.3 million internally displaced persons predicted by the end of 2024.

In East Africa, millions have fled conflict in Ethiopia, Somalia and the DRC, as areas that have strife also endure floods and droughts amplified by climate change and El Niño. [The Republic of the Congo](#) reported a significant increase in movements, reaching 159,000, primarily due to devastating floods. Across the [Greater Horn of Africa](#), a combination of conflict and natural disasters led to substantial displacement. Unprecedented heavy rains continue to cause devastation in [Eastern Africa](#) with almost 1 million people in Kenya, Burundi, Tanzania, and Somalia already affected by flooding in 2024. Heavy flooding in Malawi and Mozambique, compounded by prolonged drought, triggered 6 million displacements. Disease outbreaks in regions with already limited health care services, coupled with tropical storms, cyclones and severe droughts exacerbated by the El Niño phenomenon, are anticipated to inflict further devastation on communities throughout the region.

In [West and Central Africa](#), mounting humanitarian needs stem from political instability, armed conflicts and heightened resource competition due to climate change, poverty and inflation. In Niger, 181,000 people were displaced due to non-state armed groups near the Nigeria and Chad borders. In Chad, a 48 per cent increase led to 118,000 displacements, with many Chadians returning from the Sudan conflict to face internal displacement. In Cameroon, 164,000 displacements resulted as non-state armed groups exploited porous borders for attacks. Escalating political instability and insecurity in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have prompted new arrivals in coastal countries such as Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, with expectations of further influxes in 2024.

Spotlight on Somalia: A ray of hope

In Somalia, forced displacement has been harrowing for hundreds of thousands of children. The sudden uprooting from home, separation from friends and disruption of daily life often causes emotional wounds that persist for a lifetime. For children like 13-year-old Hassan, one step into a classroom is a transformative moment that can avoid that fate.

In 2021, prolonged drought devastated Hassan's family's livelihood. His father, once a successful livestock herder, watched helplessly as the family herd perished. They had no choice but to abandon their home, seeking refuge at Arladi camp in Dhusamareeb.

Adjusting to life in the camp was a struggle. Hassan missed the familiar comfort and stability of home, friends and daily routines. Living in a crowded, makeshift tent amidst commotion was his new reality. But then a temporary learning centre was established in the camp.

"I like the new school here. It is not like the other big modern schools in town, but I don't mind because I wanted to come to school to learn. In this centre, I found happiness," Hassan shares with a shy smile.

The centre has enrolled 149 students and employs five teachers who provide not only an education, but routine and emotional support. In total, UNICEF is reaching over 4,800 students in Galmudug State with temporary learning centres and an accelerated education approach.

Across Somalia, where flooding has displaced half a million children and damaged 200 schools, 300,000 children cannot access an education.





Middle East and North Africa

In 2023, in the Middle East and North Africa, an unprecedented surge of 15.3 million internally displaced people swept across the region. Countries embroiled in prolonged conflicts - such as Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Libya – are struggling with relentless waves of displacement. In the State of Palestine, an estimated 1.7 million people are internally displaced, many of whom have had to flee multiple times. They are in desperate need of basic services.

Years of violence in Syria have exacerbated the plight of millions, pushing the number of displaced to a record 7.2 million by the end of 2023. The figure is the second-highest globally, surpassed by Sudan where civil war has forced millions to seek refuge in Egypt, a nation already grappling with its own economic fragilities.

In Yemen, where 4.5 million people will be displaced by year's end, economic hardship and severe humanitarian challenges, including inadequate shelter and food shortages, are making life insufferable. In Iraq, 1.1 million individuals are displaced, enduring prolonged periods of instability.

Natural disasters are compounding the crises. In 2023, earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria's north-western regions, as well as in Morocco and Iran, compounded displacement. Floods and storms in Yemen and Libya have forced even more people from their homes, underscoring the multifaceted nature of the displacement crisis in the region.

Spotlight on Yemen: A second chance

When her home in Taizz, Yemen, was bombed, Yusra fled with her brother who later married her off due to financial struggles. Married at 12, she became a mother at 13 and now, at 16, has three daughters and lives in a camp for internally displaced people.

Here, she started attending free basic literacy and numeracy classes offered by UNICEF to help out-of-school children return to formal education. With no one to look after her children, Yusra brings her daughters to school with her.

Across Yemen, where one of every four children is out of school, a conflict spanning 10 years has led to mass displacement, a shattered economy and a failed social and education system. UNICEF has helped over 40,000 internally displaced students access basic literacy and numeracy classes as well as accelerated learning programmes.





Asia and the Pacific (includes South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific regions)

In 2023, across Asia and the Pacific regions, displacements were triggered in part by a combination of conflict and violence and natural disasters such as earthquakes, tropical storms, and droughts exacerbated by El Niño. Earthquakes in the region caused 6.1 million displacements, the highest figure since 2008, with notable impacts in Afghanistan and the Philippines. In Afghanistan, an earthquake that took over 2,000 lives also caused 491,000 displacements. [In Vanuatu](#), a tropical cyclone affected 46 per cent of the population who were already staggering from previous disasters. In Bangladesh and Myanmar, [cyclone Mocha](#) lashed communities already displaced by hardship.

Three years after the military takeover in Myanmar, the country remains deeply affected by conflict, with over 1.3 million people internally displaced. The ongoing violence has resulted in the destruction of civilian properties and heightened humanitarian needs, exacerbating the plight of already vulnerable communities. [In the Philippines](#), a combination of natural hazards and localized violence saw at least 144,000 internal displacements as of January 2024.⁵

The region is expected to receive 15.6 million forcibly displaced and stateless people in 2024⁶, with large populations anticipated from ongoing crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar. These figures highlight the complex challenges faced by populations, emphasizing the critical need for donor support to provide immediate humanitarian assistance, long-term solutions, and preparedness measures to address the diverse causes of internal displacements.

Spotlight on Bangladesh: Women take charge of their destiny

In 2017 - 2018, over 905,000 Rohingya people from Myanmar sought refuge in Bangladesh from political violence, a majority in camps in Cox's Bazar.

Sabina, a 26-year-old mother, was dealing with hardship after her husband died in 2020. To support her family, she was working as a daily-wage labourer but struggled to provide food, for her daughter, Tanisha.

In Cox's Bazar, where one of five residents live below the poverty line, and many cannot afford good food, children often go hungry.

In 2021, UNICEF and its partners launched a project to train 2,000 people, including Sabina, with income-generating skills such as tailoring and poultry-rearing – a sustainable way to improve diets. Information on nutrition is also provided to enhance their feeding practices. Sabina enrolled, trained to become a tailor and transformed her life. She now earns enough to buy meat, fish, vegetables, milk and eggs and her children's diet and overall well-being have significantly improved.

Sabina is dedicated to provide a future to her daughters, including the income to provide an education. [UNICEF's Cash Plus](#) Project has empowered Sabina and other women in Cox's Bazar to take charge of their destinies, fostering resilience and hope in their communities.

Cash transfer assistance is a proven long-term, dignified solution for families living displaced from their home and source of employment. UNICEF is leading in the approach, working on procedures to assure that cash transfers help families respond to conflict, disasters and emergencies, while buffering host communities.



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Latin America and the Caribbean

In 2023, a recorded 6.3 million people in the Latin America and the Caribbean region experienced internal displacement. A child migration crisis looms across the region, with millions of children and their families displaced due to violence, political persecution, extreme poverty and the quest for opportunities. In Brazil, 745,000 people were displaced from home and village by extreme rains and drought. In Mexico 392,000 people were displaced primarily due to floods and intercommunal conflicts. Conflict and violence in Colombia and Haiti led to the highest displacement numbers since 2009, with Colombia recording 293,000 and Haiti 245,000 displacements due to crime-related violence. In 2024, the region's forcibly displaced and stateless population is projected to reach 25 million, nearly double the number from 2018.

The Latin America and the Caribbean region faces one of the world's largest and most complex child migration crises, with millions of children and their families displaced due to violence, political persecution, extreme poverty and the desire for better opportunities. A key migration point is the Darién Gap, a treacherous expanse of dense jungle and swampland between Colombia and Panama. This region, notorious for its hazardous terrain, wildlife and presence of armed groups, is a major route for thousands of migrants seeking safety and better opportunities. Here, fleeing children and their families endure dangerous journeys and, lacking official documentation, resort to perilous treks.

The number of children migrating through the Darién Gap is rising this year, putting 2024 on track for a fifth consecutive year of record child migration levels. In the first four months of 2024, over 30,000 children crossed the Darién Gap, a 40 per cent increase from the same period last year. The crisis is expected to escalate, with estimates suggesting that 800,000 people, including 160,000 children, might traverse the jungle in 2024, many requiring urgent humanitarian assistance. UNICEF has been supporting children in the Darién Gap and Panama since 2018, providing essential services including water, sanitation, hygiene, child protection services, health care and support against gender-based violence.

Spotlight on Panama: Giving back

A UNICEF staff specialist in water, sanitation and hygiene in Panama begins his day ensuring the water pumps are operational and potable water is available for the hundreds of migrants arriving at the Lajas Blancas reception station after days of perilous jungle travel. When he was a child in an indigenous community in Nicaragua, water scarcity was a constant challenge. His pursuit of an education took him to Europe, where he studied and gained expertise in water and sanitation.

Now, in Darién Gap, he maintains systems that provide clean water to migrants, and addresses the urgent needs of those arriving exhausted, sick and dehydrated after their arduous journey.

Since 2018, UNICEF has been active in the Darién Gap, delivering health, nutrition, child protection, and recreation programmes in coordination with government institutions. We uphold the rights of children and adolescents, regardless of their nationality or migratory status. With the surge in migration from 9,222 people in 2018 to over 120,000 in 2021, UNICEF and its partners transformed an emergency water supply team into a medium/long-term potabilization plant, hiring this particular WASH specialist. His team ensures access to clean water for hydration, bathing and cooking for both migrant and host community families.

UNICEF continues to provide lifesaving services in water, sanitation, and hygiene, child protection, case management, child and maternal health and gender-based violence to communities affected by migration in Panama and Costa Rica.

UNICEF works closely with national authorities, including border police, migration services, the National Child Protection Authority, the Ministry of Health and local authorities. UNICEF's office in the Darién Gap and our implementing partners ensure the presence of over 100 professionals.





Europe and Central Asia

Throughout the European region, the war between Russia and Ukraine has exacerbated conflict-related displacements. In 2024, Europe’s forcibly displaced and stateless population is projected to increase by 2 per cent, reaching 24.9 million people. The war in Ukraine is exacting a brutal toll to this number, with forecasts of 5.8 million Ukrainian refugees across the region and over 3.7 million people displaced within Ukraine.

Natural and other disasters compound the suffering. Wildfires and storms have caused massive disaster displacements. Sea arrivals in Italy, Spain and Greece, and overland movement through south-eastern Europe, account for increasing predicted refugee numbers. In Türkiye, where 3.4 million refugees and asylum-seekers are sheltering, the 2023 earthquakes worsened the situation.

The urgent need for support and intervention is clear. Your generous contributions can profoundly impact the lives of those affected by these crises, providing them with the hope and resources they desperately need to rebuild their lives.

Spotlight on Ukraine: Art heals

In March 2024, seven-year-old Hlib’s village came under fire and intense shelling destroyed his home. He and his little sister were injured, and the family had little choice but to flee. “Some people called an ambulance, took us to another town and provided us with treatment,” he recalls, holding his painting. “Then we moved here. But I want to go home.”

Today, Hlib and his sisters attend art therapy sessions run by UNICEF’s mobile team specialists to help them overcome their trauma. Like many displaced people who have fled, the family have found shelter in a hostel. But they can never shake their fear of shelling after two years of war.

“The children are still scared and too quiet,” their grandmother says. “Now they have slowly started to heal, both mentally and physically. At the beginning we were very afraid. So we came here to these art therapy sessions to give them a little distraction.” UNICEF and partners are helping families in who have been forced to flee devastating shelling.

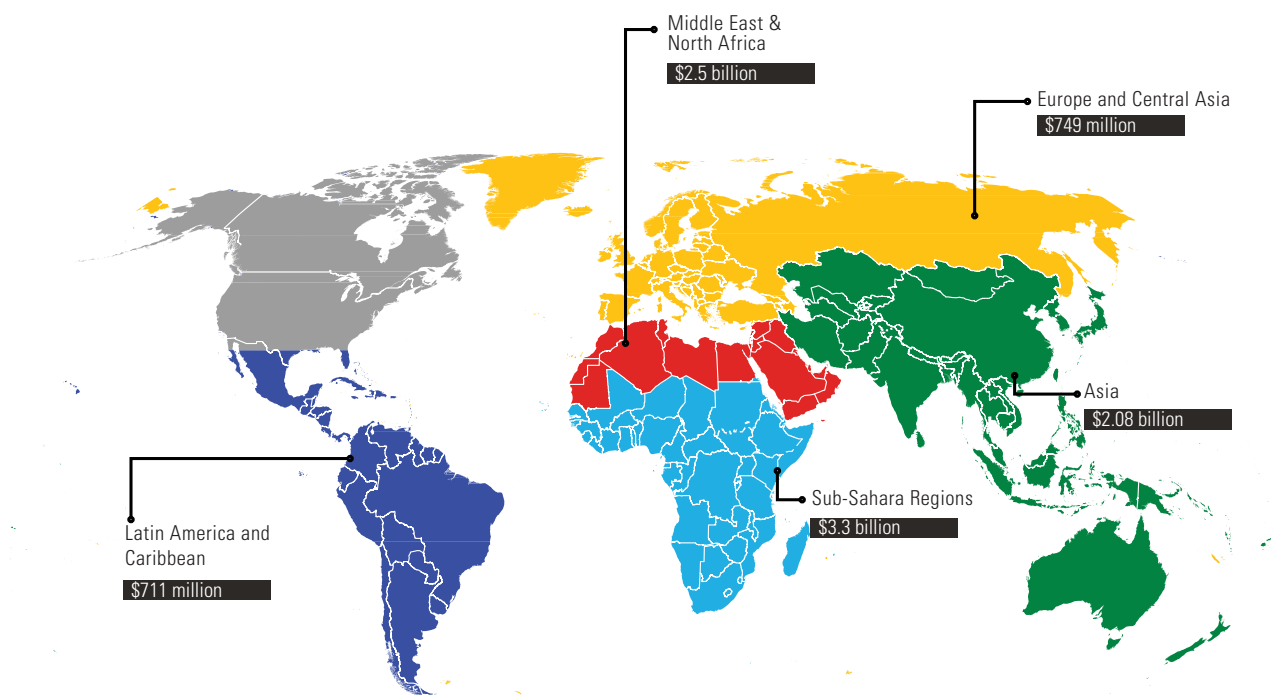


Call to action: Let displaced children thrive in the light

As the number of displacement crises rise globally, more and more children and their families are falling into the shadows. UNICEF is committed to providing support irrespective of what side of a border children are on. But we urgently need the private sector to help fund our initiatives and provide support to children in need - building a better future for us all.

UNICEF continues to appeal to the private sector to invest in children who have been displaced from their homes and countries. Your support provides a safer, more stable and prosperous life for today's children – assuring a safer, more stable, and prosperous potential for tomorrow's world.

2024 Regional Humanitarian Action for Children Appeals⁷



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IN Sudan, 9-year-old Ebtihal and her family are living in a school for displaced families in Kassala state.

⁷Global HAC figures are provided because UNICEF programmes in affected regions are designed to support displaced persons, refugees, and other affected populations

For every child

Whoever she is.
Wherever he lives.
Every child deserves a childhood.
A future.
A fair chance.
That's why UNICEF is there.
For each and every child.
Working day in and day out.
In more than 190 countries and territories.
Reaching the hardest to reach.
The furthest from help.
The most excluded.
It's why we stay to the end.
And never give up.



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