



Noor Ahmad, 15, is photographed at Guzara Transit Centre in Herat Province, Afghanistan. While at the centre he is receiving psychosocial support.

© UNICEF/UNI812625/Azizi

Spotlight on the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool 2024



© UNICEF/UNI547910/Zuniga

UNICEF works across 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to bring about positive change for children. The Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool makes vital contributions to SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.

1. UNICEF's Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool: Safeguarding the mental health and wellbeing of children and adolescents

Mental health is foundational to every child's ability to learn, connect and thrive, yet it remains overlooked in global agendas and underfunded in practice. Whether in classrooms or conflict zones, a child's wellbeing is shaped not only by physical safety or nutrition but by their mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) systems. And yet this essential aspect of development remains one of the most neglected. Globally, one in seven adolescents lives with a diagnosed mental health condition, and many more experience psychological distress without access to care. The consequences ripple through every stage of life, affecting relationships, education, employment and even survival.

Global investment in mental health is also staggeringly low. Two thirds of countries allocate less than 1 per cent of their health budgets to mental health. In humanitarian settings, the situation is even more dire, with children facing the compounded risks of violence, poverty and displacement, often without a single dedicated service in place. The cost of this neglect is immense: the annual loss in human capital due to mental health conditions among children aged 0–19 is estimated at a sobering US\$387.2 billion.

UNICEF is working to change this, not only through programmes but by transforming the systems that safeguard the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing

of children and adolescents. At the heart of this work is UNICEF's Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool: more than a funding mechanism, it is a catalyst for systemic change, allowing UNICEF to work across health, education, protection and other sectors to expand mental health services for children. Rooted in equity, resilience and partnership, the Thematic Fund reflects a simple truth: mental health is not a luxury – it is a right.

"Every contribution is an investment in resilience, connection and hope. Your support allows UNICEF to act early, act locally and work with communities to build systems that protect every child's mental wellbeing."

Kitty van der Heijden, Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, UNICEF

2. Financial results

Strategic investment powers systemic change

Mental health is one of the most underfunded areas of global health, but that is starting to shift thanks to the growing support of partners who believe in the power of early, equitable intervention. In 2024, the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool mobilized US\$2.6 million in contributions from committed partners. UNICEF extends sincere appreciation to private sector partners Jo Malone London, Sony Group Corporation, Pinterest, and others who contributed to the Fund, including through National Committees, and whose efforts continue to drive this momentum forward.

For every \$1 invested in mental health programmes, there is a projected \$24 return in health and economic benefits over a lifetime.¹

This progress reflects more than funding. It signals increasing recognition of the urgency of mental health, and a deepening trust in UNICEF’s leadership to transform systems and services across both development and humanitarian contexts.

Top Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool partners by contributions received, 2024²

Sector	Donor	Amount (US\$)
Private sector	Japan Committee for UNICEF	983,993
	United States Fund for UNICEF	940,500
	United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF	564,077
	Korean Committee for UNICEF	33,135
	Australian Committee for UNICEF Limited	22,558
	Spanish Committee for UNICEF	15,198
	Italian Committee for UNICEF – Foundation Onlus	13,307
	Dutch Committee for UNICEF	11,482
Grand total		2,584,250

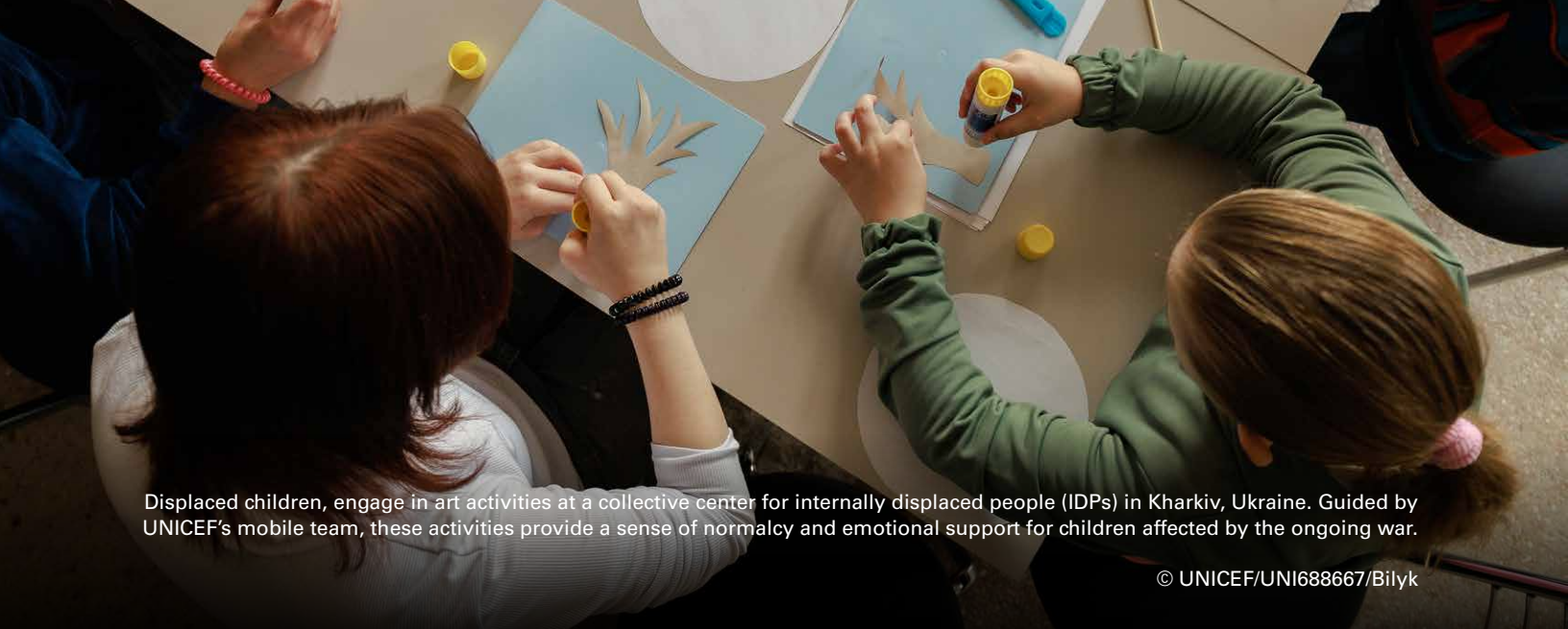
Note: Numbers may not add up due to rounding.



Children at a UNICEF-supported psychosocial support activity held in Bahçelievler Container City in Hatay, Türkiye.

© UNICEF/UNI699267/Kiliç

1 UNICEF, 2022. The Global Costs and Benefits of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Interventions in Schools and Learning Environments in Emergencies. New York: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).
2 The thematic funding contributions relate to the Strategic Plan 2022–2025.



Displaced children, engage in art activities at a collective center for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Kharkiv, Ukraine. Guided by UNICEF's mobile team, these activities provide a sense of normalcy and emotional support for children affected by the ongoing war.

© UNICEF/UNI688667/Bilyk

Why flexible funding matters

Safeguarding children's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing is not a short-term project: it requires sustained, system-level investment. That is why flexible, multi-year funding, aligned with the four-year cycle of UNICEF's Strategic Plan (2022–2025), is critical.

What sets the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool apart is not just where the money goes, but how it works. Flexible contributions allow UNICEF to:

- Respond rapidly to country-level needs
- Scale proven and promising practices
- Support innovation and cross-sectoral integration
- Strengthen national systems that sustain impact over time.

In 2024, UNICEF incurred US\$1.4 million in flexible thematic funding expense from the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool. These investments accelerated

the integration of mental health services across health, education, child protection and other cross-cutting areas, including peacebuilding, climate and gender. Every dollar spent moved UNICEF closer to its goal: safeguarding children's right to mental health.

A call to scale: What works

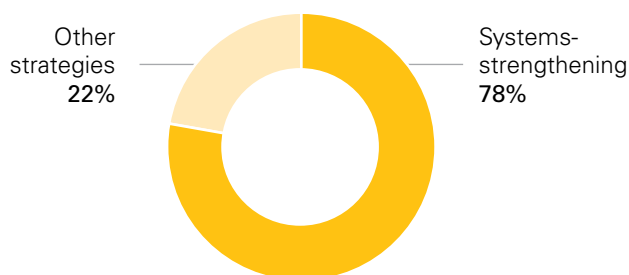
Achieving the SDGs will require far more than addressing symptoms. It demands systems that treat mental health and wellbeing as essential, not optional.

The Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool is UNICEF's most strategic vehicle to deliver on this vision. Investing in the Fund will help fuel lasting change, not only in the lives of individual children but across entire communities and countries.

We invite more partners to join us in this mission.

Together, we can help countries turn momentum into transformation and bring mental health within reach for every child.

UNICEF expense by programme strategy, 2024



In 2024, 78 per cent of Mental Health thematic funding was spent on strengthening systems to integrate mental health services.

Note: The category 'other' consists of strategies that enable systems-strengthening, including advocacy and communications; social and behaviour change; data and research; digital transformation; innovation; partnerships and engagement; and support to programme delivery.



Transparency with Thematic Funding

UNICEF has a strong financial transparency record, including for thematic funding. We encourage UNICEF partners to the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool to visit the Transparency Portal and access real-time information on spending in the countries receiving funds.

3. The footprint of the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool

The reach of the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool is truly global, with a footprint that spans all seven UNICEF regions. Its impact is felt at every level of the system, from national programmes to global leadership, reinforcing the power of coordinated, flexible investment.

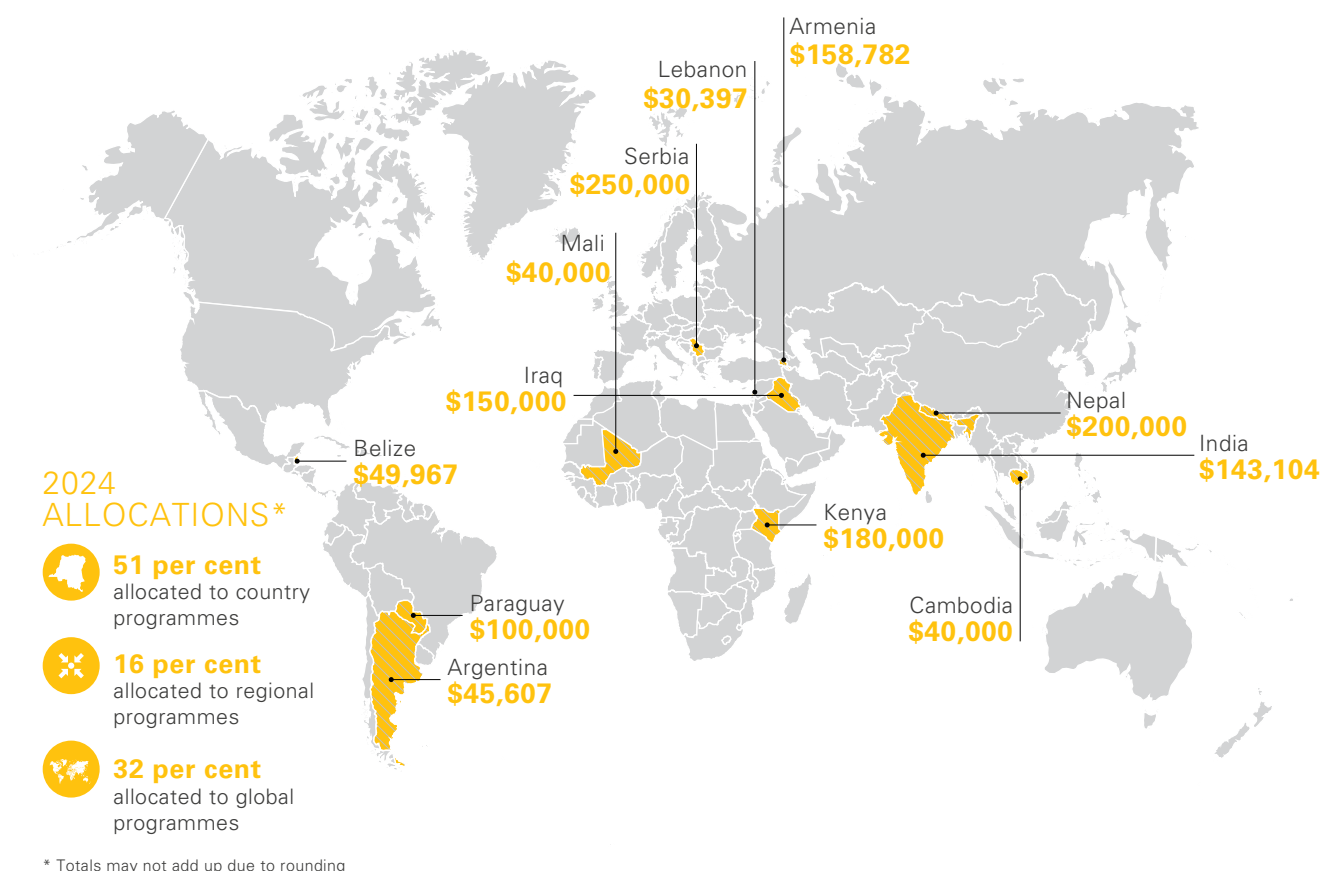
A multilevel approach to systems change

- At the **country level**: The Fund enables UNICEF to strengthen national systems, expand front-line mental health services and ensure that the most vulnerable children receive the support they need.

- At the **regional level**: It helps build technical capacity, promote cross border collaboration, inform policy and accelerate the adoption of promising practices.
- At the **global level**: It sustains UNICEF's role as a thought leader, developing guidance, tools, data frameworks and innovations that drive scalable impact worldwide.

Together, these levels reinforce one another, ensuring that flexible funding delivers services but also builds the systems and positive, nurturing environments which children need to thrive.

The Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool allocations around the world³



COUNTRY-LEVEL ALLOCATION CRITERIA

Share of children affected by mental health conditions

Workforce capacity in health, education and protection sectors

Government commitment to integrate and scale mental health services

Note: The map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or area or the delimitation of any frontiers

³ The map shows all countries that received allocations from the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool between 2022 and 2024. The allocations in 2024 are shown with full amounts.

4. From programmes to policy: Driving systemic change in child and adolescent mental health

The scale of unmet need in child and adolescent mental health is vast, but UNICEF's response is equally bold. This shift is not just about reaching more children; it is about ensuring every touchpoint in their lives is equipped to support their mental health. The Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool is supporting a paradigm shift: from fragmented service delivery to strong, integrated systems that place mental health at the core of a child's right to survive and thrive.

UNICEF's systems-strengthening model is anchored in workforce development, policy and legislative reform, social and behaviour change, data and evidence, infrastructure for service delivery and sustainable financing – and proven in delivering measurable and holistic results.

In 2024, flexible funding played a catalytic role across UNICEF's broader mental health portfolio, helping drive results at scale through national systems and community platforms.

Below are some headline sector results for which Global Mental Health thematic funding, as part of a broader portfolio of funding, was a key contributor

Workforce development

Behind every child who receives mental health support is someone who saw them, listened to them and knew how to help.

Whether a doctor, teacher, social worker or community health worker, front-line providers are the backbone of mental health systems. But they need more than good intentions. They need training, tools and support to respond with care, competence and confidence. Through the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool, UNICEF is investing in this essential human infrastructure, building national workforces that are skilled, supported and ready to deliver quality, rights-based care to children and caregivers in every setting.

A strong mental health system starts with a skilled, compassionate and well-supported workforce. In 2024, thematic funding was used to enhance the quality of mental health services globally:

- Using the Helping Adolescents Thrive Toolkit,⁴ UNICEF and partners accelerated the structured delivery of psychoeducation and social emotional skills-building among adolescents in over 15 countries. Evidence-based promotion and prevention solutions, delivered through schools, communities

- and digital platforms, and community-based messaging and advocacy campaigns developed more enabling environments for promoting the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of adolescents.
- Using Ensuring Quality in Psychological Support (EQUIP),⁵ a competency-based framework for delivering safe, high-quality MHPSS, UNICEF trained nearly **450 front-line workers from 56 countries and over 160 organizations to support children and adolescents with confidence and care.**
- Using the MHPSS Minimum Service Package (MSP),⁶ a core set of standards and tools for front-line responders in humanitarian settings, UNICEF helped train more than **600 humanitarian workers** to implement crisis-appropriate MHPSS services and supported **390 planners and decision makers** to cost, budget and plan mental health strategies in emergencies.

In numerous countries, thematic funding was critical for workforce expansion:

- In **Argentina**, UNICEF designed and launched a new national diploma in perinatology and perinatal mental health, certifying **630 professionals.**
- In **Armenia**, UNICEF mobilized a network of over **340 trained MHPSS professionals** to supervise and coach front-line staff, helping provide services to more than **20,000 refugee children** in schools.
- In **Belize**, UNICEF scaled perinatal mental health services to all primary health-care facilities, training **450 health workers**, and screening and treating over **600 pregnant and postpartum mothers.**
- In **India**, in the state of Maharashtra, UNICEF supported the development of a state-wide perinatal mental health system, integrating services from community to primary care level. The development and use of protocols and training of community and health-care workers at different levels have been completed. This pilot is planned to expand to the entire state of Maharashtra.

These efforts are doing more than training individuals; they are transforming systems. By building national workforces that are empowered, resilient and culturally responsive, UNICEF is helping countries lay the foundation for mental health care that lasts. Because wherever children seek support, someone should be ready to help – with skill, empathy and hope.

⁴ World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, 'Helping Adolescents Thrive Toolkit', WHO, Geneva, and UNICEF, New York, 2021, <www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240025554>.

⁵ World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, 'EQUIP – Ensuring Quality in Psychological Support', WHO, Geneva, and UNICEF, New York, 2022, <www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/treatment-care/equip-ensuring-quality-in-psychological-support>.

⁶ See <www.mhpssmsp.org/en>.



Zee Kone Village, Myanmar, Myo Myo Wai, UNICEF Myanmar's Programme Officer for Education, reads stories to children affected by the recent earthquake as part of UNICEF's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) activities.

© UNICEF/UNI791076/Htun

Legal and policy change

Policy and legislative reform is one of the most sustainable levers for systemic change – shaping national priorities, unlocking resources, and embedding mental health into everyday services. UNICEF works alongside governments to draft national policies, revise legislation and mobilize public budgets – ensuring mental health is protected, not just in practice but in law.

In 2024, UNICEF made significant strides globally in supporting governments to integrate MHPSS policies and service delivery in schools and other learning spaces, to enhance student mental health, performance and achievement.

In 2024, 80 countries worked on the integration of MHPSS in schools and other learning spaces – an increase from 60 in early 2022. Around 41 per cent of those countries meeting key organizational benchmarks focused on five key areas: policy development, curriculum integration, teacher training, community engagement and emergency responsiveness. These efforts were strengthened by thematic funding, which supported technical assistance, policy dialogue and capacity-building.

Thematic funding supported UNICEF's policy advocacy efforts to embed mental health in national development priorities in a number of countries:

- In **Iraq**, UNICEF supported the development of new national MHPSS guidelines for front-line workers responding to the mental health needs of children affected by armed conflict.

- In **Lebanon**, UNICEF helped integrate mental health services into the national child protection system through sectoral MHPSS guidance and frameworks.
- In **Kenya**, UNICEF supported the government to develop, test and implement a guide to integrate mental health support for pregnant adolescent girls into the full continuum of maternal care, from antenatal care, maternal and child health, and postnatal services. This marks a crucial step forward in addressing the psychological challenges faced by pregnant teenagers.
- In **India**, in the state of Gujarat, UNICEF's policy advocacy with the local government helped mobilize **US\$260,000** for the establishment of a 24/7 Model Crisis Centre, to deliver psychological, legal and medical assistance to children who experience sexual and/or physical violence.

These are not isolated policy wins; they are building blocks for national systems that recognize good mental health as a right, not a privilege. By helping governments legislate for inclusion, allocate public resources, and embed mental health into core services, UNICEF is turning advocacy into action. The Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool is a catalyst for this shift, enabling the kind of upstream reforms that create lasting, large-scale impact for children and young people.

Infrastructure for service delivery

Turning commitment into access requires the infrastructure to deliver systems that connect national plans to real services for real children.

- In **India**, UNICEF collaborated with the government in Uttar Pradesh on the expansion of MHPSS services to vulnerable communities and the strengthening of linkages to social protection assistance. About **9,800 children** directly benefited from these psychosocial support packages. Over **1 million community members** were reached with education and awareness messages delivered by **2,400 community mobilizers** trained in MHPSS with UNICEF's support.
- In **Nepal**, **89,700 children, adolescents and caregivers** in Karnali and Bagmati provinces benefited from mental health and psychosocial services, including school-based socioemotional learning and skills-building through community psychosocial workers, as well as mental health support through primary health-care centres. These interventions have led to significant improvements in adolescents' emotional wellbeing, coping skills and help-seeking behaviours.
- In **Paraguay**, UNICEF supported the establishment of 'safe spaces' in five districts. The 'safe spaces' promote emotional wellbeing and offer tools for identifying and addressing risk situations. More than **480 adolescents** and **260 adults** accessed these spaces, with transformations observed in the way adolescents and adults relate to their emotions, environments and mental health issues.

These country-led efforts demonstrate that when the right infrastructure is in place, from trained community mobilizers to safe spaces and integrated care pathways, mental health support becomes tangible, trusted and transformative. Through catalytic investments from the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool, UNICEF is helping governments build systems that are not only responsive and inclusive but also multisectoral, linking health, education, protection and social support to meet the full needs of children and families.

Data and evidence for mental health solutions

UNICEF is equipping countries with the data and tools needed to identify gaps, track progress and expand mental health services effectively.

- UNICEF pioneered the global Measuring Mental Health among Adolescents and Young People at the population level (MMAPP) initiative,⁷ which ensures that culturally adapted and clinically validated population-level data are available globally, and especially in low- and middle-income countries, to better understand youth mental health outcomes. A comprehensive package of protocols and operational guidance developed for the implementation of MMAPP has facilitated its integration into UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), as well as for data collection through other platforms and survey approaches.
- UNICEF supported the publication of cost-benefit analysis of school-based MHPSS interventions, and a comprehensive resource compendium for policy implementation, which are providing critical policy evidence to governments around the world.

These investments are guiding effective advocacy and driving change at the policy and programme delivery level to develop smarter policy, more targeted funding and stronger results at scale.

Results that last

In 2024, UNICEF and its partners achieved progress at scale:

- **66.1 million children and caregivers** reached with MHPSS services across multiple health, education and child protection sectors
- Technical support provided to over **130 countries**
- **National policies, training and guidance on mental health** advanced across all regions.

These results reflect more than programme delivery. They reflect systemic transformation – the only path to lasting, scalable and equitable mental health care for every child.



Scan the QR code or click on the image to read UNICEF's Data Companion and Scorecard for more information on progress against SDG and Strategic Plan targets. Thematic Funding as part of UNICEF's overall funding portfolio contributes to this progress.

⁷ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Measuring Mental Health Among Adolescents and Young People at the Population Level (MMAPP) – Overview', UNICEF, 2023, <<https://data.unicef.org/resources/mmapp/>>.

5. Impact story

From crisis response to systemic change in Armenia's mental health services

Armenia is a powerful example of how flexible, sustained funding can transform mental health care from a crisis response to a national commitment. For many children, the scars of conflict and displacement run deep. In 2020, the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict forced tens of thousands of ethnic Armenians to flee their homes, bringing a surge of psychological distress. . As of the end of 2024, the Migration and Citizenship Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs reports 115,388 registered refugees, including an estimated 36,000 children, who fled to Armenia following the escalation of hostilities in late September 2023 or were escorted through the Lachin corridor between December 2022 and September 2023.^{8,9} A UNICEF assessment found that 26 per cent of refugee households had at least one family member experiencing significant emotional distress.

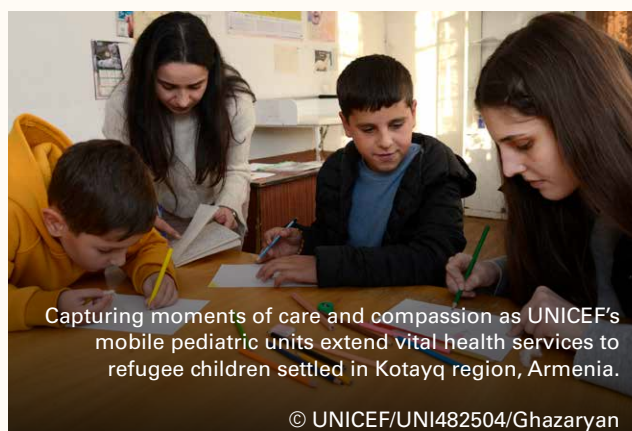
But the crisis only exposed a deeper issue. Generations of underinvestment in child and adolescent mental health had left Armenia with limited services, few trained professionals and persistent stigma. Recent prevalence data reveal an increase in mental health concerns reported by adolescents from 2014 to 2022, with adolescent girls reporting greater mental health concerns than adolescent boys. For example, 20 per cent of 15-year-old girls felt lonely most of the time or always, compared to 8 per cent of boys. Furthermore, available estimates on suicidal ideation are also concerning: as early as 2018, an estimated 6 per cent of school-aged children and 8 per cent of 17-year-olds had seriously considered suicide.

In the face of this urgent need, UNICEF Armenia is helping turn a fragmented response into a more cohesive and sustainable system of care. This work is made possible through support from UNICEF's Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool and partnerships with the European Union, the governments of Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom, and the UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS).

From emergency response to long-term care

The flexibility of the Thematic Fund has enabled UNICEF to pursue a two-pronged approach: delivering critical MHPSS for children in crisis today and strengthening national systems that will protect children's mental health into the future.

With this support, more than 100,000 displaced ethnic Armenians, including 30,000 children, have received emergency MHPSS. UNICEF and partners have trained front-line workers, reactivated mental health hotlines, and created safe spaces where children can access both group and individual support.



Capturing moments of care and compassion as UNICEF's mobile pediatric units extend vital health services to refugee children settled in Kotayq region, Armenia.

© UNICEF/UNI482504/Ghazaryan

For children like Nina, these services can be transformative: *"My mom mentioned this course, five sessions in total, and I reluctantly agreed to participate. But soon, I realized I wanted to see a psychologist and go deeper into some of the issues."*

When safe, structured support is available, help-seeking becomes possible, and healing begins.

Changing hearts and minds

Beyond direct services, UNICEF is working to raise awareness and reduce stigma. A dedicated online hub provides resources for parents, children and professionals. Creative tools such as 'Canary', a therapeutic story symbolizing resilience, and a graphic novel developed with local partners, help children process difficult emotions through storytelling.

UNICEF has also partnered with Public TV to launch a national television project and is using social media and human-interest stories to foster greater public understanding of mental health. One initiative alone has reached more than 6,200 refugee children and their families with tailored psychological support.

Building a stronger system for children

At the same time, UNICEF is helping to build the foundations of a stronger national system. This includes growing a national mental health workforce and embedding services across the continuum of care, from primary health care to schools and community platforms. As one of the founding members of the Armenian Mental Health Coalition, UNICEF has also contributed to the development and implementation of the Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan 2022–2026 – the first national road map to date to scale equitable, quality mental health care for children and youth in the country.

These advances would not have been possible without the catalytic investments of UNICEF's Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool. In Armenia, this flexible funding is helping turn crisis into opportunity. It is not only meeting today's urgent needs but also building a more resilient mental health system for the children of tomorrow.

⁸ Source: Migration and Citizenship Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Armenia.

⁹ The figure includes refugees who fled to Armenia following the escalation of hostilities in late September 2023 or who were escorted through the Lachin corridor between December 2022 and September 2023.

6. Purpose in action: How private sector partners are shaping the future of mental health

Partners in purpose: How lululemon and Pinterest are helping reimagine mental health for the next generation

Across every region, children, adolescents and caregivers face rising mental health challenges, often without access to care or tools to cope. This is where UNICEF's Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool is helping shift the landscape, and where partners such as lululemon and Pinterest are leading by example, bringing innovation, influence and purpose to the front lines of global mental health.

Both companies are members of the UNICEF-led Global Coalition for Youth Mental Health. The Coalition brings together private sector partners to raise awareness, reduce stigma and drive systemic solutions, amplifying UNICEF's reach and impact through co-created campaigns, platforms and funding models. They are also active contributors to the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool. But their role goes far beyond funding: these companies bring vision, innovation and a deep commitment to supporting a generation in need.

lululemon: Investing in whole-person wellbeing

As a global brand rooted in movement, mindfulness and social connection, lululemon brings a unique perspective to mental health — one that sees wellbeing as an interconnected system, not a standalone issue. In 2024, lululemon announced a US\$3.1 million commitment to advance global mental health, including direct support to UNICEF's Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool.

This partnership enables UNICEF to reach children, adolescents and caregivers with community-based mental health support, particularly in crisis-affected, remote and low-resource communities, while also helping strengthen the systems that deliver long-term care.

"UNICEF has the expertise to lead global efforts in supporting youth mental health and wellbeing," says Anne Wintroub, Head of Social Impact and Engagement at lululemon. "We are proud to be part of the UNICEF-led Global Coalition for Youth Mental Health, working to improve mental health outcomes of children and youth

around the world." lululemon's approach reflects what young people are asking for: mentally safe spaces, whole-person care and community-centred solutions.

Pinterest: Creative connection as care

With a mission to create a kinder, more inspiring internet, Pinterest has made digital wellbeing a core focus of its work. Since 2022, Pinterest has partnered with UNICEF to expand youth mental health programming and advocacy with a focus on creative, expressive tools that resonate with adolescents.

"Supporting youth mental health and wellbeing is foundational to our mission," says Wanji Walcott, Chief Legal and Business Affairs Officer at Pinterest. "We're proud to partner with UNICEF and Coalition members to help tackle the mental health funding gap."

Through this partnership, Pinterest is helping bridge the gap between intention and access, giving young people the tools to care for their mental health in ways that feel meaningful and familiar.

Where purpose meets systemic change

Both lululemon and Pinterest exemplify what is possible when corporate purpose meets system-level ambition. Their investments help move beyond one-off initiatives, embedding mental health into national strategies, and ensuring support reaches the most overlooked children and adolescents most often left behind.

Together, they are showing what it means to lead with empathy, act with urgency and partner for lasting change.



**Global Coalition for
Youth Mental Health
Annual Report 2024**

www.youthmentalhealthcoalition.org/media/521/file

Spotlight on the Global Mental Health Thematic Funding Pool

Zeinab Hijazi,
Global Lead on Mental Health

UNICEF Programme Group
New York, United States

www.unicef.org

Programme Coordination Unit
Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division, Geneva
Public Partnerships Division, New York
programmecoordination@unicef.org

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
July 2025