

Highlights

An influx of Afghan returnees from Pakistan started in September 2023, with **the daily average of over 17,000** in early November.

As of 18 November, **374,600 returnees** were recorded. Approximately **48% are females**.

Between 15 September and 18 November 2023, a **total of 255,500 returnees have arrived at Torkham (Nangarhar Province) and 116,000 at Spin Boldak (Kandahar Province)**

Since 1 November 2023, WHO and its Health Cluster partners have reached **92,138 returnees** (31,846 women, 22,329 men, 19,952 girls and 18,011 boys) with various health services.



WHO Afghanistan Representative, Dr Luo Dapeng, visited the Torkham Point of Entry, Nangarhar Province.

SITUATION UPDATE

As of 18 November 2023, over 374,600 returnees have arrived at the Afghanistan borders since September 2023, when Pakistan decreed to repatriate illegal foreigners. These returnees stay in temporary shelters in reception centers or camps before reaching their intended destinations (mainly Nangarhar, Kandahar, Kunar and Kabul), exposing them to vulnerable living conditions, with almost 24% being children under five years of age and 48% are women.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and its Health Cluster partners have ramped up efforts to deliver essential healthcare services to the returnees. Between 1 and 21 November 2023, they have provided various health services to 92,138 returnees (56.2% female) across six regions: eastern, southern, western, southeastern, northern and central regions.

Aligned with the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005), WHO has actively worked to enhance core capacities at points of entry (PoE) in the country, closely cooperating with authorities. Two emergency hospitals in Torkham and Spin Boldak have been operationalized, providing emergency healthcare services and referrals for those crossing borders. Additionally, WHO has deployed surveillance support teams (SSTs) at PoEs to detect alerts and respond to any potential outbreaks promptly. To mitigate the risk of disease outbreaks and transmission of wild poliovirus transmission, WHO supports enhancing immunization services for returnees. Between 12 and 18 November (week 46), around 53,671 returnees were vaccinated with oral polio vaccines (OPV) in Nangarhar, Kandahar, Hilmand, Zabul, Herat, Paktika, and Kabul by 59 vaccination teams.

Despite these efforts, public health risks persist among the vulnerable returnee populations, including infectious disease outbreaks, noncommunicable diseases, malnutrition, and mental health problems. Critical challenges include a lack of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities, posing immediate threats. WHO has developed a strategic response plan for the returnees. To provide urgent support, WHO has requested US\$10 million for six months.

Health Cluster Coordination

The Health Cluster has coordinated its response by harnessing the collective efforts of all partners and stakeholders at both the national and regional levels.

- The Regional Health Cluster coordination teams have been actively collaborating with the health partners on the health response across five regions (eastern, southern, southeastern, western, and central). Their activities encompass the development of a contingency plan, conducting regular weekly meetings, and organizing ad-hoc coordination meetings with the authorities and health partners, as well as undertaking multiple joint missions with the Provincial Public Health Directorate (PPHD) and UN agencies to monitor/assess the health response.
- The inaugural meeting of the Migration Health Task Force took place on November 19, 2023, with the primary objective of ensuring migration health priorities systematically being addressed in the humanitarian response and promoting migration health coordination in cluster coordination at both the national and sub-national levels.
- During the meeting, the draft terms of reference were reviewed. The Task Force will operate under the umbrella of the Health Cluster, serving as the Chair.

Health Responses by Region

Between 1 and 21 November 2023, the Health Cluster partners have reached 92,138 beneficiaries (31,846 women, 22,329 men, 19,952 girls and 18,011 boys) with health services. This includes 55,403 received primary health care consultations; 13,561 received secondary health care services; 11,809 have been reached with health promotion activities; 5,619 received maternal, newborn and child health services; and 5,255 with mental health psychosocial support (MHPSS) services.

1. Eastern Region

- There are a total of 13 Health Cluster partners – AADA, ARCS, JACK, IOM, IRC, Islamic Relief, ORCD, PU-AMI, SCA, SCI, TDH, WHO, and WORLD – are supporting 14 HFs; a 20-bed emergency hospital with two ambulance, two comprehensive health centers (CHCs), two basic health centers (BHCs), one subhealth center (SHC), one maternity clinic, and seven mobile health teams (MHTs), with 231 workers (68 are females) to support and provide primary healthcare services.
- WHO has established a 20-bed emergency hospital located in Torkham in collaboration with WORLD. The hospital, equipped with two ambulances, has been operational since 16 November, and provided emergency healthcare services, including trauma care.
- Between 1 and 21 November, 56,894 individuals received health services in the east region (Nangarhar: 56,552; Laghman: 342).
- WHO conducted several missions to Torkham PoE, jointly with other UN agencies and provincial public health directorate (PPHD), to review and assess the health response of the returnees and conducted weekly ad-hoc meetings with all the health partners. The WHO Afghanistan Country Representative visited Torkham on 19 November 2023, held meetings with health authorities and reviewed the response activities on the ground.



The Regional Health Cluster Coordinator in the western region is visiting the Farah returnees' camp in Farah Province.

- WHO put in place one SST (composed of two members) and one PoE public health team (composed of eight members) at Torkham PoE. Between 16 and 21 November, a total of 14,354 returnees were screened for various infectious diseases; A total of 382 acute respiratory infection (ARI), 110 suspected COVID-19, and 103 acute watery diarrhea (AWD) cases were reported.
- Among them, five suspected COVID-19 cases tested positive using rapid diagnostic test (RDTs), and 18 samples were collected for PCR testing for COVID-19, with two cases tested positive. There are three RDTs conducted for AWD, all of which yielded negative results.
- There are 19 vaccination teams in Torkham (PoE and transit center), each team is comprised of two vaccinators. Between 12 and 18 November 2023 (W46), 14,990 were vaccinated with Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV), and 397 received measles vaccination.
- WHO delivered six different kits (Interagency Emergency Health Kit (IEHK), Pediatric kit (PED SAM), AWD, ARI, and pneumonia) to Nangahar, as a response for the returnees.
- In addition to the Spin Boldak PoE, WHO has deployed five SSTs to the returnees' camps in Kandahar City (Rahmat Mina). Between 16 and 21 November, a total of 1,326 returnees have been screened for various infectious diseases; 276 suspected COVID-19 cases; 25 ARI cases; and 19 AWD cases were reported.
- There were 76 RDTs conducted for COVID-19, with 39 of them testing positive. Those 39 samples were referred for COVID-19 PCR testing, and the result is still under process. Also 10 RDTs were conducted for AWD, with five cases tested positive. Those RDT positive samples were tested for AWD culture, with two cases tested positive (positivity rate:40%).
- WHO delivered 40 different kits (IEHK, PED SAM, AWD, ARI, and pneumonia) to Kandahar.
- A total of 36 vaccination teams operating in six repatriation centers in Kandahar (5), Hilmand (1) and Zabul (1) provinces. Between 12 and 18 November, 37,425 returnees were vaccinated with OPV, and 308 returnees received measles vaccines.

2. Southern Region

- A total of 10 Health Cluster partners (ARCS, BARAN, HealthNet TPO, HEWAD, IOM, Medair, SCI, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO), have provided 24/7 healthcare services to the returnees through 18 healthcare facilities (HFs) (one BHC and 17 MHTs) and six ambulances, with 288 workers (66 female staff).
- WHO established, in collaboration with HMLO, a 30-bed emergency hospital in Spin Boldak, which was inaugurated on 21 November 2023. The hospital enhances the access to healthcare services for people crossing the border, by providing emergency services including trauma care.
- Between 1 and 21 November, about 32,123 people (Kandahar: 29,168, Nimroz: 2,955) were reached through various health services provided by the Health Cluster partners.
- WHO-supported SST and the IOM team at Spin Boldak PoE have screened 7,819 individuals for priority diseases.



A trauma case received treatment at the WHO-supported 30-bed Emergency Hospital in Spin Boldak, Kandahar Province.



Outpatient consultation has been provided to the returnees in Ghazi Province.

3. Southeast Region

- There are seven unofficial border crossing with Pakistan in the southeastern region (Paktya, Paktika, Ghazni and Khost provinces). There are approximately 2,470 returnees' households stay across the region: 1170 households in Paktika, 600 in Khost, 450 in Paktya and 250 in Ghazni. To accommodate more returnees, two camps have been established Sharan District and Barmal District in Paktika Province.
- A total of eight health cluster partners (ADAA, ARCS, NAC, OHPM, PU-AMI, RHDO, UNICF and WHO) are supporting the health response to the returnees in Paktya, Paktika and Ghazni provinces, through one BHC and six MHTs, where 948 (Paktika: 874 and Paktya: 74) returnees received services since 1 November 2023.
- Between 16 and 21 November, WHO-supported SST conducted screening for 109 returnees in Angor Ada PoE in Paktika province. Two cases of AWD and 10 suspected cases of COVID-19 have been reported. Among them, two AWD cases were RDT tested negative, and 10 suspected COVID-19 cases were RDT negative.
- A total of two vaccination teams have been deployed in Barmal and Turwee in Paktika Province, where 42 returnees received OPV in week 46.

4. Western Region

- The Health Cluster partners reached 2,173 returnees in the west region (Herat) since 1 November 2023.
- At Islam Qala PoE in Herat Province, public health authority team (composed of 7 members) screened a total of 15,944 returnees between 16 and 21 November: 30 ARI cases; 18 suspected COVID-19 cases (three RDT positive); 11 AWD cases; and one suspected measles case have been reported.
- In week 46, there were 307 returnees vaccinated with OPV at Islam Qala PoE.
- In Farah province, HealthNet TPO, with support from UNFPA, has deployed two MHNTs. Additionally, JACK has upgraded the SHC to a CHC, and ARCS has also deployed one MHNT in a newly established camp for returnees from Pakistan and Iran.



A health education session was conducted for the female returnees, Farah Province (UNFPA)



An ambulance has been deployed to the returnees' camp in Balkh Province

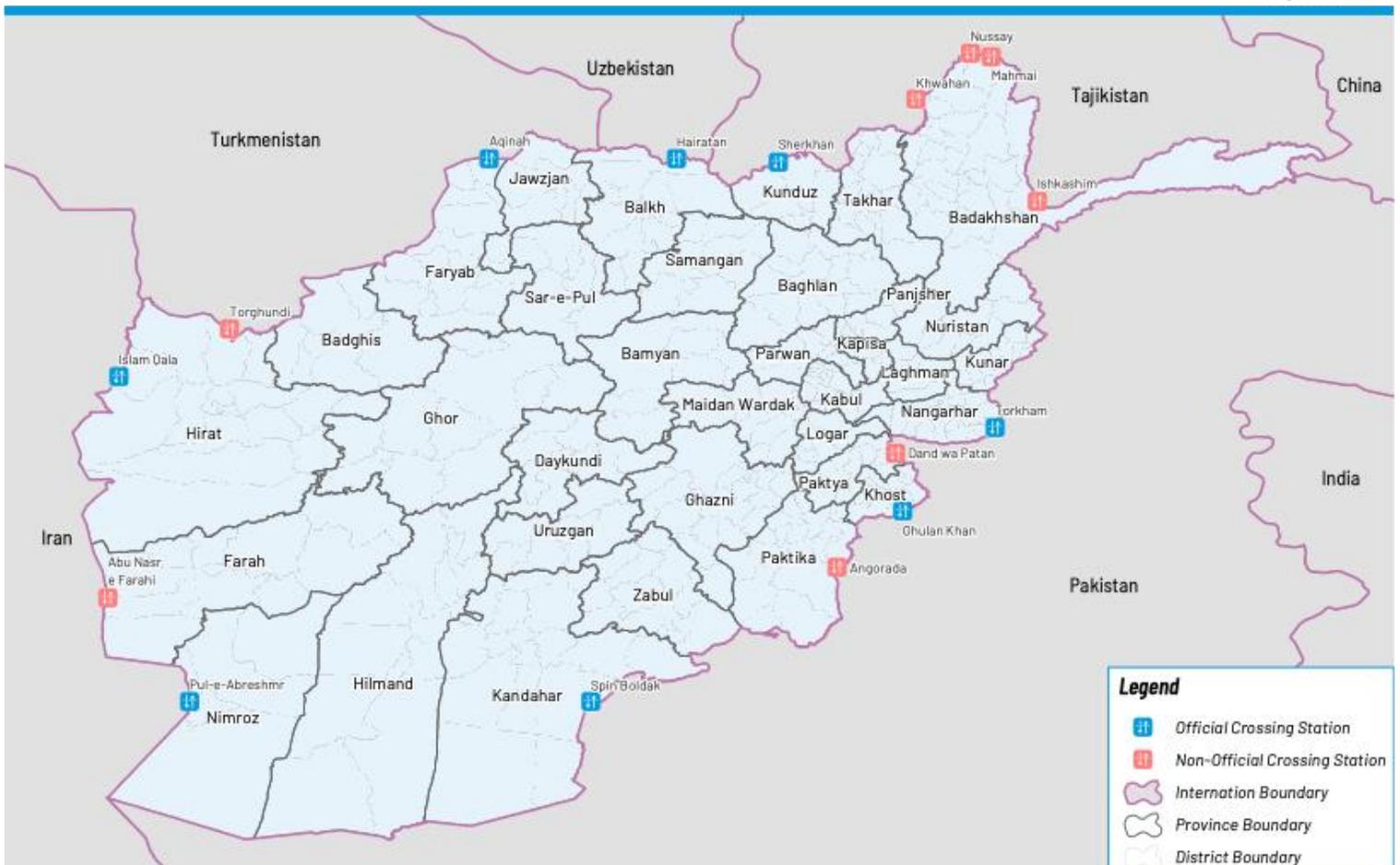
5. Northern Region

- A camp has been established for the returnees in Kabul-Mazar highway, near to Balkh international airport with capacity of 70 tents which can cover 75 families. As of 21 November 2023, a total of 1,590 families were registered in this camp.
- One MHT (ARCD) has provided health services delivery for returnees in the camp. In addition, The WHO/RHDO-supported integrated infectious disease hospital in Balkh has deployed an ambulance for referral of emergency cases for 24/7. Between 13 and 21 November, a total of 1,125 people were received health service delivery, and 12 patients were referred by ambulance.

6. Central Region

- A temporary camp with a capacity of 30 tents has been set up in the Loway Baba Jan area of Kabul city to accommodate returnees who stay for two to three days before continuing their journey to their destination.
- Kabul PPHD has set up a static clinic in the camp to provide round-the-clock services to the returnees. Between 14 and 22 November 2023, a total of 847 returnees received these services at the clinic.
- WHO has provided support by supplying two basic modules of IEHK to this facility, ensuring the availability of essential medical supplies.
- There has been one vaccination team stationed in Dehsabz district, where 907 returnees were administered with OPV and 534 with measles vaccination in week 46.

Afghanistan, Crossing Border Stations



GAPS and URGENT NEEDS

- The ongoing influx of returnees, coupled with extended stays in temporary reception areas, has amplified the demand for healthcare services. Additional support is crucial, encompassing medicine, healthcare workers (especially females), and medical supplies (RUTF, RUSF, clean delivery kits, etc.).
- The winter season has heightened health risks for returnees in temporary settings, aggravated by a shortage of winterization supplies such as blankets and heating systems.
- WASH services present a critical issue, with insufficient facilities for both returnees and humanitarian workers. Immediate intervention is vital considering the rise in infectious disease cases.
- While 48% of returnees are females, delivering reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health services has proven challenging due to limited space and resources in mobile health teams, hindering privacy and proper infection prevention and control.
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- A lack of suitable accommodation for humanitarian partner staff hampers efforts to maintain and expand response initiatives.
- While it is important to establish static health facilities, the movement of returnees makes it challenging to rely solely on static health facilities to support health response.
- With the growing number of returnees, health resources are strained, and there exists a critical funding gap in health operations. **WHO's request for US\$10 million aims to address these challenges and provide essential health assistance to those in need.**

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Thank you to the following donors for supporting WHO's health response to the returnees:

