

Volunteers in north eastern Afghanistan. Photo: Shaim Shahin/WHO Afghanistan

20 December 2020 – Vaccinators tackle winter conditions and challenging contexts during Afghanistan's last polio campaign of the year.

On a wintery November day, vaccinators across Afghanistan wrapped up warm, checked that they had facemasks and hand sanitizer, and headed out into the cold morning. Their mission? To reach 9.9 million children with polio vaccines, before snowfall blocked their way.

From valley peaks to muddy lanes, we look at some of the environments where vaccinators work, as well as some of the key challenges that have made 2020 one of the toughest years for polio eradicators.

For some vaccinators, the first snows had already arrived. At the top of the Panjshir valley, Khalid and Haroon started their day at 7 a.m.

"We walked 6 hours to one village and back to take polio drops to the last houses in the valley", said Khalid. The mountainous roads in this area are impassable by car, so vaccinators walk many kilometres to the most remote villages.

One proud father, Mr. Maqsoud, said, "I have ensured all my children are vaccinated during each round the drops were offered and of course I will keep vaccinating them each time the vaccinators visit our village".

Mr. Maqsoud continued, "The vaccinators walk long distances across the mountain slopes to our villages, sometimes during harsh weather conditions, to bring polio drops to our doors."

"Thanks to the people and countries that support the vaccination campaigns and make it possible for the drops to reach our doorsteps".

In north eastern Afghanistan, Mr. Ziallah had COVID-19 safety measures on his mind. Like all vaccinators working for the polio programme, he had been trained on how to safely deliver polio drops during the pandemic. The temperature was below zero, with the first snow on the ground, as Mr. Ziallah walked through the rugged terrain from home to home, ensuring to wear his mask and regularly sanitize his hands.

Zahed and Nawad, volunteers in nearby village said, "It is cold and walking through muddy lanes is not easy, but we have to do our job. There was one case of polio in this part of Afghanistan so that means there is probably the virus circulation and we have to stop that".





