

AFGHANISTAN

Returns Response

Health Situation Report No. 4

30 November 2023

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World Health
Organization

Afghanistan



HEALTH
CLUSTER
Afghanistan

Highlights



As of 25 November, **413,700 returnees** have been received. Approximately **48% are females**.

274,600 returnees arrived at Torkham (Nangarhar Province) and **134,100 at Spin Boldak** (Kandahar Province).



Since 1 November 2023, WHO and its Health Cluster partners have provided **117,511 returnees** (41,224 women; 29,239 men; 24,459 girls; and 22,589 boys) with various health services.



WHO has requested **US\$ 10 million for six months**. To date, only a paltry US\$ 500,000 has been received, leaving a funding gap of **US\$ 9.5 million**



Returnees' Camp in Torkham, Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan.

SITUATION UPDATE

An influx of Afghan returnees from Pakistan continues. As of 25 November, more than 413,700 returnees have crossed the borders since September 2023, including 274,600 who were received in Torkham in Nangarhar and 134,100 in Spin Boldak in Kandahar. It is estimated that more than 1.3 million undocumented Afghans resided in Pakistan prior to September 2023, which means that a large number have yet to return to Afghanistan.

Aggravated by the harsh winter, those who are returning must endure a long journey from Pakistan to reach the borders, where limited resources are available, including food and water, healthcare services and proper water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities. The majority of returnees are children and adolescents, with almost 24% of returnees being children under five years of age.

In a country with fragile healthcare systems, the risk of communicable diseases, particularly polio is high. Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only two countries where the wild poliovirus remains endemic. In response, the World Health Organization (WHO) has strengthened vaccination of returnees at the borders and frequented routes and supported the Sub-National Immunization Day (SNID) implemented in the south, eastern, southeastern, northeast, and western (Farah and Herat), central (Kabul) regions. The campaign started on 27 November for four days, which included vaccination of returnees in the host communities.

While the process of registration for the returnees is ongoing at the reception centers, many returnees have arrived and resettled mainly in Nangarhar, Kandahar, Kunar, Kabul, and Kunduz. Some were forced to live in temporary shelters because they lost their homes. The susceptibility to health risks of those vulnerable populations is of great concern, all of which place a heavy burden to the country's already fragile health system. Long-term intervention for these returnees is greatly needed.

Aligned with the border consortium, WHO and its Health Cluster partners have supported these vulnerable returnees. As of 28 November 2023, 117,511 returnees (55.8% female) across six regions have received some form of health assistance by health partners.

Health Cluster Coordination

The Health Cluster has coordinated returnees' health response by leveraging the collective efforts of all partners and stakeholders at the national and regional levels.

- The Regional Health Cluster coordination teams have collaborated with the health partners on the health response across five regions (eastern, southern, southeastern, western, and central). Their activities include the development of a contingency plan, conducting weekly and ad-hoc coordination meetings with the relevant authorities and health partners, as well as undertaking joint missions with the Provincial Public Health Directorate (PPHD) and UN agencies to monitor/assess the health response.
- During the reporting period, regional Health Cluster coordination meetings were conducted in southeastern region and central region. Also, bilateral meetings were conducted in the eastern region with Islamic Relief World (IRW), and IFRC to enhance the coordinated response and address existing gaps.
- The second meeting of the Migration Health Task Force took place on 30 November where the situation of returnees, health coordination and response efforts, as well as 4Ws data collection and management were discussed.
- An Expression of Interest (EOI) for the position of Co-Chair of Migration Health Task Force has been shared with partners. Interested health partners are requested to submit their EOI by December 3.



WHO has established a 20-bed emergency hospital located in Torkham in collaboration with WORLD, 1.5km away from Torkham PoE.

Health Responses by Region

Between 1 and 28 November 2023, the Health Cluster partners have reached 117,511 beneficiaries (41,224 women; 29,239 men; 24,459 girls; and 22,589 boys) with health services across the six regions (eastern, southern, southeastern, western, northern and central). This includes 70,260 people who received primary health care (PHC) consultations; 16,427 received secondary health care services; 15,537 have been reached with health promotion activities; 7,569 received mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services; 7,482 received maternal, newborn and child health services; and 236 received trauma care services.

1. Eastern Region

- There are 12 Health Cluster partners – AADA, ARCS, JACK, IOM, IRW, PU-AMI, SCA, SCI, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, and WORLD – supporting 14 health facilities (HFs); a 20-bed emergency hospital with two ambulance; two comprehensive health centers (CHCs); two basic health centers (BHCs); one sub health center (SHC); one maternity clinic; and seven mobile health and nutrition teams (MHNTs), with 231 workers (68 are female) to support and provide primary and secondary healthcare services.
- WHO has supported Drug Addiction Treatment Center located in Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, in partnership with WORLD. There were 10 male returnees admitted in the center.
- WHO conducted several missions to Torkham Point of Entry (PoE), jointly with NGOs, 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.
- There are 14 vaccination teams in Torkham (PoE and transit center). Between 19 and 25 November 2023 (week 47), 15,206 were vaccinated with Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV), and 485 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.

- WHO has put in place one surveillance support team (SST) (composed of two members) and one PoE public health team (eight members) at Torkham PoE. Between 22 and 28 November, 17,158 returnees were screened for various infectious diseases: 408 acute respiratory infection (ARI), 113 suspected COVID-19, and 74 acute watery diarrhea (AWD) cases were reported.
- Among 105 COVID-19 suspected cases tested with rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs), six cases were positive with PCR (positivity rate: 5.7%). Six RDTs were conducted for AWD, all yielding negative results.



Provision of primary health care services to the returnees in Eastern Region (IRC)

2. Southern Region

- Nine Health Cluster partners (ARCS, BARAN, HealthNet TPO, IOM, Medair, SCI, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO) are providing 24/7 healthcare services to the returnees through 18 healthcare facilities (one BHC and 17 MHTs) and 10 ambulances, with 244 workers (64 female staff).
- WHO-supported 30-bed emergency hospital in Spin Boldak, equipped with two ambulances, is located 5km away from Spin Boldak PoE. The hospital provides emergency services, including trauma care for returnees and the host communities.
- 32 vaccination teams are operating in five repatriation centers in Kandahar (3), Hilmand (1) and Zabul (1) provinces. Between 19 and 25 November, 32,948 returnees were vaccinated with OPV; 451 returnees received measles vaccines.

- WHO has deployed a SST in Spin Boldak, and five SST in the returnees' camps in Kandahar city (Rahmat Mina). Between 22 and 28 November, a total of 959 returnees have been screened for various infectious diseases: 195 suspected COVID-19 cases, 82 AWD, 33 ARI cases, and 17 suspected dengue fever. AWD cases were reported.
- There were 89 RDTs conducted for COVID-19, with 35 testing positive. Of these 89 RDTs, 31 samples were referred for PCR testing, and one case was positive for COVID-19 (positivity rate: 3.2%). Seven RDTs were conducted for AWD, with one case testing positive. This sample was tested for AWD culture, and the result is pending. 16 RDTs were conducted for dengue fever, all of which yielded negative results.
- WHO delivered 40 various kits (IEHK, PED SAM, AWD, ARI, and pneumonia) to Kandahar.



WHO-supported 30-bed emergency hospital in Spin Boldak was inaugurated on 21 November.

3. Southeast Region

- There are seven unofficial border crossing with Pakistan in the southeastern region (Paktya, Paktika, Ghazni and Khost provinces). According to OCHA, approximately 2,470 returnees' households are staying across the region: 1170 households in Paktika; 600 in Khost; 450 in Paktya; and 250 in Ghazni. Almost 80% of returnees are female and children.
- Seven Health Cluster partners (ADAA, ARCS, NAC, OHPM, PU-AMI, UNICF and WHO) are supporting the health response to the returnees in Paktya, Paktika and Ghazni provinces, via one BHC and five MHNTs.
- Joint needs assessment teams were established for four provinces by partners to be deployed to the districts to review the situation.
- Between 22 and 28 November, WHO-supported SST conducted screening for 68 returnees in Angor Ada PoE in Paktika province: 28 suspected COVID-19 cases; 11 ARI cases; and five AWD cases have been reported. Among them, five AWD cases were RDT tested negative, and 28 suspected COVID-19 cases were RDT negative.
- Two vaccination teams have been deployed in Angor Ada (Barmal district) and Qamardin Bazar (Turwee district) in Paktika Province, where 163 returnees received OPV in week 47.



Provision of primary healthcare services to the returnees in Paktika province (OHPM)



Female healthcare workers providing reproductive maternal, newborn and child health services for the returnees in Ghazni province.

4. Central Region

- In the central region, specifically in Kabul, Kapisa, Logar, Wardak, and Parwan provinces, returnees have been accommodated within the communities. Provincial committees have been established in all five provinces to coordinate the response.
- There are six Health Cluster partners (ARCS, CAF, OHPM, SCA, UNICEF, and WHO) supporting these returnees by providing healthcare services at the existing static health facilities, distributing emergency medical kits, and deploying SSTs and vaccination teams. Additionally, seven MHNTs are on standby in Parwan, Kapisa, Daikundi, and Bamyán provinces (three teams supported by ARCS, one team each by AKHS, CAF, MOVE and OHPM)
- Kabul PPHD set up a static clinic in a temporary camp in the Loway Baba Jan area in Kabul to provide round-the-clock services to returnees. Between 14 and 28 November 2023, 1,192 returnees received these services at the clinic.
- There is one vaccination team stationed in Dehsabz district, where 400 returnees were administered with OPV and 239 with measles vaccination in week 47.

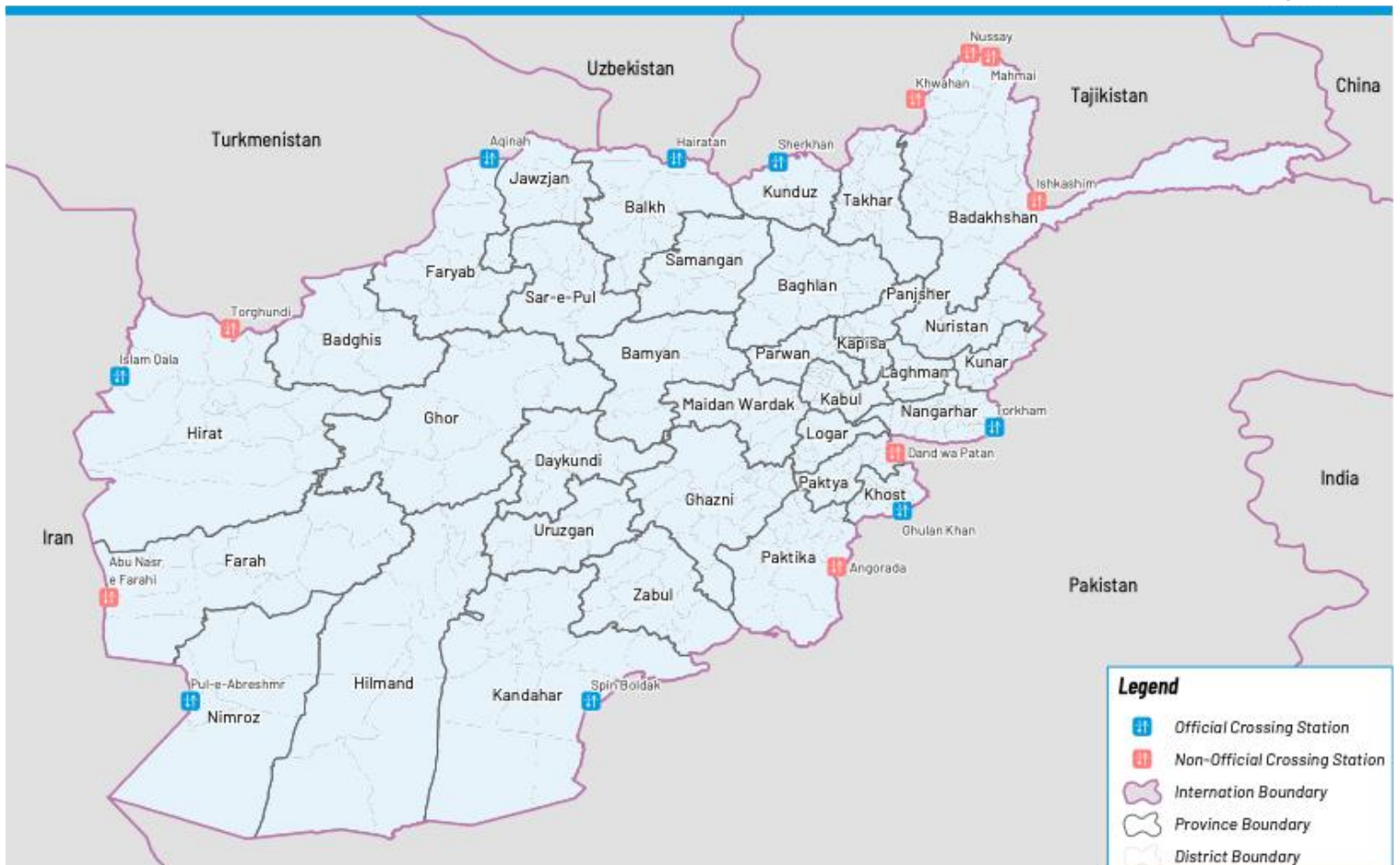
5. Western Region

- While Islam Qala PoE in Herat is currently closed, returnees from Iran are being accommodated in temporary camps and within the host communities in Herat and Farah provinces.
- There are four Health Cluster partners (ARCS, JACK, HealthNet TPO and UNFPA) that are supporting the health response for the returnees in Herat and Farah provinces through one CHC and three MHNTs.
- At Islam Qala PoE in Herat Province, public health authority team (composed of 7 members) screened a total of 17,519 returnees between 22 and 28 November: 25 ARI cases; 23 suspected COVID-19 cases (four RDT positive); and 11 AWD cases have been reported.
- One vaccination team has been deployed in Islam Qala PoE. In week 47, there were 210 returnees vaccinated with OPV.

6. Northern Region

- A camp has been established for the returnees in Kabul-Mazar highway, near Balkh international airport with capacity of 70 tents which can cover 75 families. As of 29 November 2023, a total of 1,590 families were registered in this camp.
- One MHT (ARCD) is providing health service 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 22 and 29 November, a total of 347 people were received health service delivery, and 11 patients were referred by the ambulance.
- There are also two Health Cluster partners (BDN, and ORCD) providing health responses to returnees through the deployment of two MHNTs.

Afghanistan, Crossing Border Stations



GAPS and URGENT NEEDS

- As the number of returnees grows, demand for healthcare services is amplified at the borders as well as the returnees' destination locations. Additional support, encompassing medicine, healthcare workers (especially females), and medical supplies, is crucially needed.
- The winter season has heightened the vulnerability of the returnees, especially those staying in temporary shelters. Their plight has been aggravated by the shortage of winterization supplies, such as blankets and heating systems. This has contributed to an increase of ARI cases among the returnee population, especially children, elderly and those with comorbidities.
- With 48% of returnees are female and children, delivering Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health services has proven challenging due to limited space and resources in mobile health teams. This has hindered privacy and proper infection prevention and control measures.
- Poor hygiene conditions persist among the returnees, due to limited water and hygiene materials and overcrowded shelters. Immediate intervention is vital, considering the rise in infectious diseases, such as AWD and scabies.
- While it is important to establish static health facilities to provide consistent healthcare services, the movement of returnees presents a challenge. A flexible approach that combines static facilities with mobile health teams and outreach services is crucial to effectively support the health response for the returnees.
- As the surge of returnees is expected to continue, and the demand for aid grows, WHO has requested US\$ 10 million for six months to address these challenges and provide essential health assistance to all those in need. To date, only US\$ 500,000 has been received, leaving a massive funding gap of US\$ 9.5 million, jeopardizing the lives of countless returnees, primarily women and children. Closing this funding gap will help ensure that no one is left without essential health assistance.

For more information on the response to #HeratEarthquake, contact:

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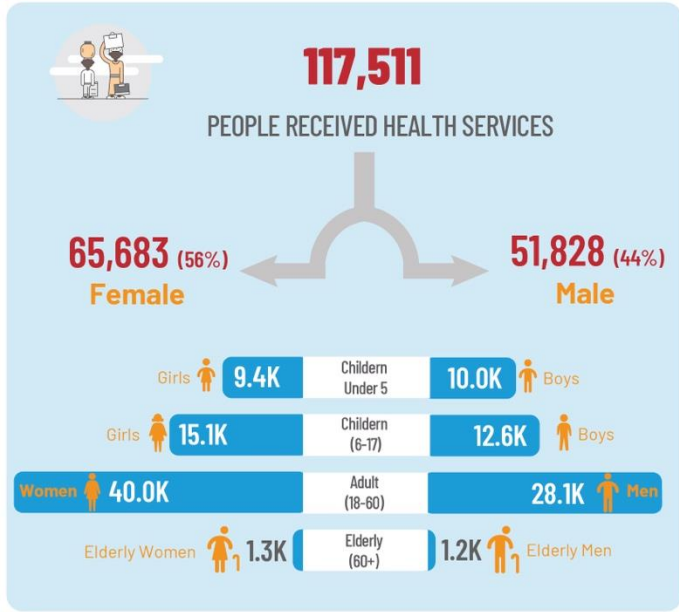
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Thank you to the following donors for supporting WHO's health response to the returnees:





Province	District	Organization Acronym (IP)	Primary health care services	Secondary health care services	Health promotion & risk communication	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPS)	Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH)	Trauma care
Farah	Farah	UNICEF (JACK)	✓					
		IDM	✓					
Hirāt	Hirāt	WVI	✓					
		UNICEF (BARAN)	✓					
		ARCS	✓					
Kandahar	Kandahar	UNICEF (BARAN)	✓					
		WHO (HEWAD)	✓					
		IDM	✓					
		HEBAIR	✓					
		SCI	✓					
		ARCS	✓					
		UNICEF (BARAN)	✓					
Laghman	Garghayi	UNFPA (HealthNet TPO)	✓					
		SCI	✓					
		IRC	✓					
Nangarhar	Muhmand Dara	TDH	✓					
		UNFPA (AADA)	✓					
		ARCS	✓					
		HealthNet TPO	✓					
		IDM	✓					
		IRC	✓					
		IRW	✓					
		UNICEF (JACK)	✓					
		UNFPA (ORCD)	✓					
		PS-AHI	✓					
Nimroz	Zaranj	SCA	✓					
		SCI	✓					
		WHO (WORLD)	✓					
Paktika	Barmal	UNFPA (GHPH)	✓					
		ARCS	✓					
Paktya	Dand Wa Patan	UNFPA (AADA)	✓					
		UNFPA (AADA)	✓					

Descriptions:

On 3 October 2023, the Government of Pakistan announced its decree "Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan" setting a 1 November deadline for the 'voluntary return' of all undocumented Afghans in Pakistan to their country of origin. As this decree applies to an estimated 1.3 million undocumented Afghans residing in Pakistan. Returnees coming to Afghanistan from Torkham (Nangarhar), Spin boldak - (Kandahar) border crossings recently Herat and Paktya border crossing also opened for returnees.

Note: The figures show only information from partners that reported their presence and activities to the Health Cluster.

21 Health Cluster partners actively participated in the returnees response through 4Ws:

AADA, ARCS, BARAN, HEALTHNET TPO, HEWAD, IDM, IRC, IRW, JACK, MEDAIR, OHPM, ORCD, PU-AMI, SCA, SCI, TDH, WORLD, WVI, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO.

DISCLAIMER:

The boundaries, denominations, and designations displayed in this product are defined by the data shared with the Afghanistan Health Cluster. The elements and freshness of the data are the responsibilities of the data providers and no endorsement nor acceptance of it by the Health Cluster and WHO Afghanistan can be assumed.

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