

ACHIEVING RESULTS
for Afghanistan's children

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Polio
Every child survives
and thrives

Country Programme of Cooperation

UNICEF and the Government of the
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

2015-2021

unicef 

د هر ماشوم لپاره
برای هر طفل



Polio

Every child survives and thrives

UNICEF has worked continuously for Afghanistan's children for 70 years. The Country Programme guides UNICEF's partnership with the Government of Afghanistan, identifying key issues, activities, and outcomes to realize the rights of Afghan girls, boys and women within a volatile development and humanitarian context. In 2018, the Country Programme was extended to 2021 to align with the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the UNICEF Strategic Plan.

Context

Afghanistan is one of only three countries in the world where polio remains endemic, together with Pakistan and Nigeria. But there is a growing sense of optimism that polio will be the second human disease, after smallpox, to be eradicated.

Instability and insecurity make it difficult to access hard-to-reach areas, and continuous population movements back and forth along the border with Pakistan further complicates vaccination efforts.

A major challenge for the polio programme has been a ban on polio campaigns that mostly affect the south, southeast and east regions.

As a result, while most of the country is polio free, 16 cases were reported by 1 October 2019.

Learn more: <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/polio-eradication>

Key facts

- **16** polio cases reported as of 1 October 2019, compared to 21 cases for all of 2018
- **15** polio cases from the southern region and 1 from the eastern region
- **15** out of **16** polio cases are from areas with access issues
- Only **11** districts in **4** out of **34** provinces reported polio cases as of 1 October 2019, compared to 14 districts in 6 provinces in all of 2018

Targets

- Children under five years who miss vaccination due to refusal in very high-risk districts to be maintained below **1%**, in 2019 the figure was **0.29%**
- **Zero** supplemental activities cancelled or postponed due to vaccine supply gaps; in 2019 the figure was zero
- Vaccine wastage rate maintained below **15%**; in 2019 the figure was **11.5%**
- Caregivers intending to vaccinate children in every round maintained at **85%**; in 2017 this stood at **85%**

HOW UNICEF ACHIEVES RESULTS

UNICEF is a key player in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and supports the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) to find innovative ways to reach children with vaccines and building both demand for, and trust in, vaccination. UNICEF, along with all Polio partners is working under the umbrella of the Polio National Emergency Operation Center (EOC) where the National Emergency Action Plan is updated every year and serves as the guiding document for all eradication activities across the country. In 2019, the NEAP focused on gaining access through flexible approaches, stopping ongoing transmission in South and East, maintaining high population immunity among population on the move, improving vaccines acceptance.

Through the Polio Plus initiative in high-risk districts, UNICEF and its partners are increasing intersectoral links with other sectors to maintain acceptance of polio vaccine and to bridge towards full integration into routine immunization and other services and maintain high immunity. This includes, for example, hygiene and sanitation promotion, safe drinking water, improved nutrition and mobile health services, and routine immunization training and support.

In high-risk areas, UNICEF and its partners use targeted strategies to increase access and to coordinate with Pakistan to reach populations on the move. To mitigate cross-border transmission, campaigns are synchronized with Pakistan and vaccination has been made mandatory for all people, regardless of age, who cross between Pakistan and Afghanistan at Torkham.



Immunization support

UNICEF is the provider of the polio vaccine in Afghanistan and strengthens the capacity of the Ministry of Public Health in procuring vaccines and managing the cold-chain for timely distribution of quality vaccines. Through UNICEF efforts, quality vaccines arrive on time, leading to minimization of wastage. To date in 2019, UNICEF procured 61.1 million doses, and distributed 53.8 million doses of the oral vaccine. No campaign was delayed due to vaccine unavailability.

Communication and social mobilization

UNICEF works with communities to dispel myths around polio vaccination through intensive efforts to scale up engagement in priority districts by:

- Mobilizing community and religious leaders, as well as celebrities, teachers and health staff to raise awareness, knowledge, and commitment.
- Expanding participation of local volunteers and social mobilizers in the Immunization Communication Network to promote awareness of the dangers of polio and mobilizing households to immunize their children.
- Conducting media campaigns on immunization.
- Building trust by strengthening the interpersonal communication skills of health workers.
- Social mobilizers to track and immunize children who were absent or missed during campaigns.
- Creating additional opportunities for immunization at transit and border crossings to reach children on the move.
- Creating opportunities for immunization at community events and health facilities for all children under 10, an initiative implemented after polio campaigns were banned in 2019.

In Afghanistan's complex context, innovative approaches are necessary for success. These include communication through SMS, community ownership of communication projects, and partnerships with the country's largest sport organizations.



Women lead the way

Thirty-five per cent of Immunization Communication Network members are women and are able to access children inside the home. This offers an unprecedented opportunity to engage women in the workforce, encouraging them to enter the public realm and participate in a national effort.



Humanitarian contexts

The south experiences high levels of insecurity and conflict. UNICEF and its partners in polio eradication aim to address quality gaps and analyse reasons for missed vaccination in accessible areas and enhance reach to the greatest extent possible in inaccessible areas. Through the Polio Plus initiative, UNICEF is supporting provision of integrated packages of basic services including water, sanitation, education and nutrition to reach families in high-risk areas and to build trust.

Challenges & opportunities

In insecure regions, polio eradication efforts encounter major challenges due to inaccessibility, including bans on house-to-house campaigns. In 2019, bans on polio campaigns across Afghanistan led to postponed or cancelled supplementary immunization activities. These limit the ability to conduct high quality campaigns and create a need for ongoing dialogue to gain access, as well as alternative means of reaching children.

High-risk mobile populations within the country and between Afghanistan and Pakistan borders remain a risk of polio transmission all over the country. Specific vaccination activities are in place to track and immunize children on the move as well as regular cross border coordination with Pakistan for synchronization of polio campaigns.

Integrated programming in polio-priority areas is promoted, enabling UNICEF and its partners to provide other services related to health, nutrition and WASH as a gateway to polio vaccination.

Budget

UNICEF Afghanistan's 2015–2021 budget for polio is US\$ 253 million.



Story

“Where I live, it is not safe for a woman to show her face. It is not easy to be a woman orchild here.”

Afia, from Southern Region

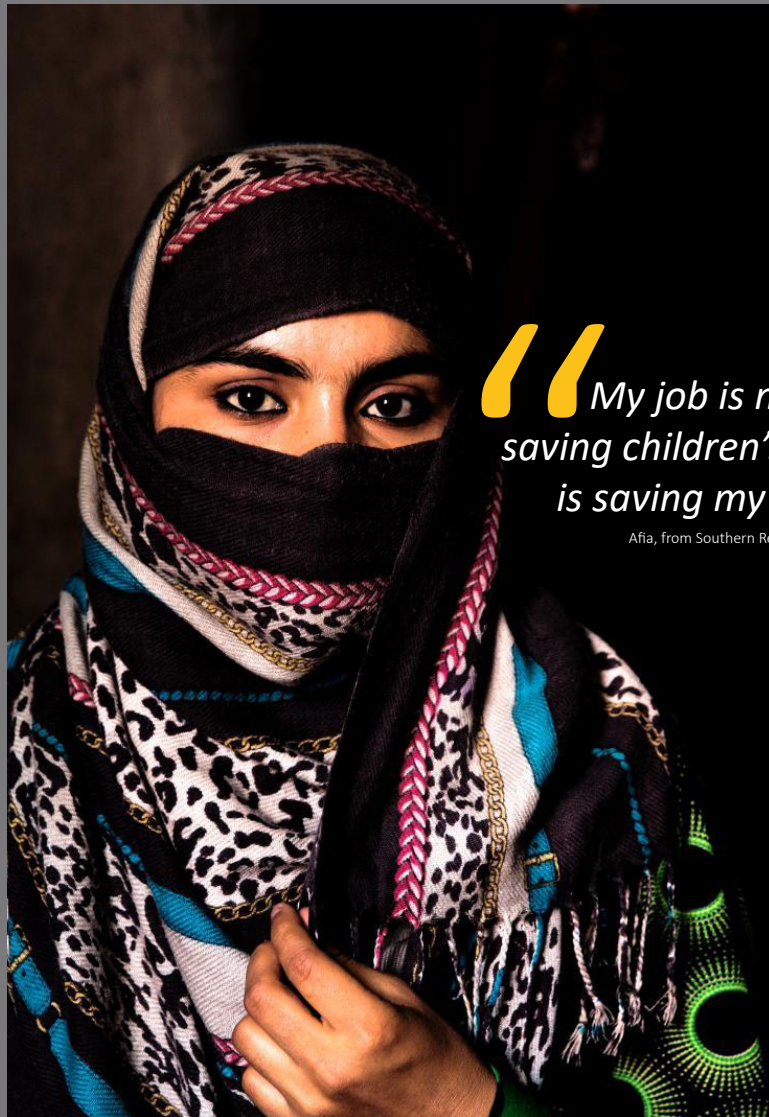
I am lucky... [my father] let me go to school and I have no pressure to get married, because I support my three unemployed brothers. However, if I wasn't working I would be forced to marry.

“I will call myself Afia. But, forgive me—it is not my real name. I have been working to eradicate polio for seven years. I am only 19 years old, and yet I manage a team of four women. In my community, there are many families that do not allow their daughters to work. I am an exception.”

“We need more women polio vaccinators and educators, because they can enter the house and check that every child has been vaccinated. Even if one child misses the vaccine, it could put the entire community at risk.”

“My job is not just saving children's lives, it is saving my own.”

Afia, from Southern Region



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Key alignments

Afghanistan National Emergency Action Plan for Polio 2019

- 🇺🇳 SDG-3 Good Health and Wellbeing
- 🇺🇳 SDG-4 Quality Education
- 🇺🇳 SDG-10 Reduced Inequalities

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