111.2 million doses of Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) was procured & distributed in 2017.
In December, UNICEF’s Representative in Afghanistan Adele Khodr joined the polio campaign team in Jalalabad and Kunar. Eastern Afghanistan is a priority region for polio eradication efforts. There are significant challenges: informal borders, continuous mobility, and chronic inaccessible children in some districts. Accompanied by health officials, the Representative monitored the quality of the vaccination campaign and directly engaged with female social mobilisers and vaccinators. At the Polio Emergency Operation Centre, the Representative interacted with provincial partners. She also visited health centres and hospitals to see routine immunisation and nutrition activities, and met with the Governor of Nangarhar.

Influential football players from the Afghan Premier League promoted polio eradication in Kandahar – the province with largest number of polio cases in 2017. The players starred in local football matches and vaccinated children in Kandahar city and Spinboldak, a high-risk district on the Pakistan border.

All players wore uniforms with polio eradication messages, which raised awareness about an impending vaccination campaign. The players also joined the vaccination campaign, and went door-to-door vaccinating children accompanied by local media.

During an interview with a local TV channel, football star Faiz Mohammad Faiz said: “Since Kandahar is a province where most polio cases are found, it is our duty to join hands. I encourage all the families and parents to vaccinate their children every time in order to help their children live a happy and polio-free life, become athletes and bring pride to their nation and family.”

“I always vaccinate my children, but sometimes there are rumours saying the vaccine is not safe. But when we see that doctors, Mullah Imams and sport athletes such as our heroes from the Premiere League and cricket players also come to our house for vaccination, it gives us the confidence that the vaccine is safe.”

Assadullah, Kandahar resident

Representative joins campaign team

Sports stars join forces

Join over a million people, and watch our latest TV advert with major Afghan stars endorsing and promoting a polio free Afghanistan.
Our hotline team spoke to 4,585 people chosen at random and in remote areas to verify campaign access and quality.

New murals painted in Kandahar

To increase public awareness in Kandahar city and the southern border with Pakistan, new murals were painted with polio messages. One mural was painted next to the friendship gate at the Afghanistan and Pakistan border. Shopkeeper and local resident Tahir Shah said: “When I came yesterday I saw a sketch drawn on the T wall at the police checkpoint. Later, it was a painting. The picture attracts a lot of people as it is the main highway connecting Kabul and Herat. Everyone can understand that it is about polio vaccination and its importance.” In total, 190 murals have been painted across Afghanistan.

Community meetings were held with over 30 elders in Khost to explain the importance of polio vaccine. As a result of the meeting, elders will now accompany social mobilisers during polio vaccination campaigns. Their influence and endorsement will encourage caregivers to vaccinate their children.

Students join circus

A roving circus educates children and parents on the dangers of polio across Afghanistan, but this time children were invited to be performers. Fifteen school children from Sofi Sahib High School conducted shows in Kandahar city and Spinboldak in parks, football stadiums and other schools. Over 7,000 school children participated in the events, which raised awareness about polio in high-risk areas.

7,588 ICN (information, communication network) members were trained for effective social mobilisation during the vaccination campaign.

7,775 full-time social mobilisers reached families with life-saving information about polio. 25% are female.

357 pieces of national media coverage on polio during December.

TOP HEADLINES IN MEDIA

- Polio vaccination in Shahwalikot now crucial
- Polio vaccine now required for Pakistan visa
- Anti-polio drive kicks off in several Provinces of Afghanistan
The key to polio eradication is building high population immunity to polio virus infection through routine immunisation as well as through supplementary immunisation activities. UNICEF is the lead agency for procuring, supplying and managing vaccine logistics in polio-affected countries.

UNICEF’s role in vaccine supply includes providing technical support to national governments, local authorities and partners to forecast supply, procure vaccines and cold chain equipment, manage in-country vaccine stocks and strengthen logistics to ensure that vaccines are maintained at optimum temperature.

To ensure adequate storage capacity for vaccines, the government and UNICEF continuously monitor the availability of relevant cold chain equipment in the country. This is done through a quarterly update of cold chain inventories to make sure that the availability and utilisation of the cold chain system is effective.

To improve skills and knowledge for vaccine management, 222 regional and provincial cold chain personnel were also trained in 2017.

In 2017

- **111.2 million doses** of oral polio vaccine
- **91,480** ice packs
- **5,732** vaccine carriers
- **2,222** cold boxes
- **99** freezers
It’s before 7AM in Jalalabad, eastern Afghanistan, and Moursal, 23, stands behind an iron gate. She hops nimbly over piles of raw sewage dredged from the roadside. A short walk away she joins her team to begin their mission for the day.

Moursal and her colleagues are Afghanistan’s polio campaigners, tasked with the colossal job of vaccinating thousands of children and educating adults in a bid to eradicate the virus. This team are on day two of a week-long campaign funded and supported by UNICEF.

“First we have culture barriers in Afghanistan,” says Moursal via a translator. “Many people do not want to see a woman working or alone in the street. But for vaccinating children we must visit every house, and only women can enter a stranger’s house.”

Moursal is responsible for overseeing more than 120 households. In total, across the Nangarhar area, a cluster of campaign teams vaccinate over 17,000 children. The virus is so serious that a single case of polio constitutes an outbreak.

Ideally, the family consents to vaccinate all children under five years old and provides details to help build a database of information to ensure no child misses the vaccine. But, it’s not so simple.

Remote and rugged, Nangarhar and its neighbouring provinces have been a haven for non-state armed groups moving back and forth across the porous Pakistan/Afghanistan border since the start of Afghanistan’s current war.

“First we have culture barriers in Afghanistan,” says Moursal via a translator. “Many people do not want to see a woman working or alone in the street. But for vaccinating children we must visit every house, and only women can enter a stranger’s house.”

This insecurity we face every day and it is getting worse,” says Noorzia, 27, a campaign colleague of Moursal. “Two nights ago there was a motorbike bomb nearby and it blew some of our windows out.” But one of the greatest obstacles for the vaccination team is often the families themselves.

In the last two years over 300,000 Afghans have been forced or coerced to return from Pakistan, where many had lived for decades. The majority of these people are poor, undocumented, vulnerable and funneled into the country through Nangarhar and Jalalabad. In Jalalabad, polio campaigners such as Noorzia and Moursal find themselves increasingly visiting families who have spent time in Pakistan.

“We see many refusal families for different reasons,” says Moursal. “Many are returnees with religious views which say that the vaccination is forbidden and there is very much fear of it..” She says that increased access to the Internet enables people to spread rumours about polio being a conspiracy invented by hostile western countries. “If the people are not educated they can believe this.”

To tackle refusals, UNICEF is supporting the deployment of specialist follow-up teams comprised of professional doctor, Islamic religious leaders and polio survivors who address misconceptions.

Back in town, Moursal and Noorzia are taking a tea break in one of their homes. I ask why they take such great risks just to work.

Moursal laughs. “I want to support my family … I do not fear death. I will sacrifice myself to help my country and these children.”