

P R E S S E M E L D U N G

COVID-19: A porous border with Iran means thousands of Afghans continue to cross daily going unchecked – Lockdown of Kabul a 'good first step' but more needed to avoid a devastating death toll, warns Save the Children

KABUL, 27 March – Despite a city-wide lockdown in Kabul, the threat of a COVID-19 outbreak combined with Afghanistan's weak health system, widespread corruption, decades-old conflict and ongoing political crisis, is turning the situation in the country into a perfect storm for children, Save the Children said today.

In the first two weeks of March, nearly [75,000](#) Afghans crossed the porous border from Iran, where the Coronavirus outbreak has already claimed more than 2,000 lives and infected an estimated 30,000 people. Afghanistan meanwhile has confirmed less than 100 Coronavirus cases, though the actual number is expected to be much higher. Several border crossings remain open and thousands of Afghans on average are crossing every day.

In 2020, more than [five million](#) children in Afghanistan will need humanitarian assistance just to survive. Yet this figure doesn't take into account the Coronavirus pandemic which is already spreading broadly unchecked, with potentially devastating consequences for the entire country.

Save the Children is deeply concerned for millions of children and their families who are already in a precarious situation and urgently calls for the government to step up prevention and containment measures. According to the [World Bank](#) Afghanistan only has 0.3 doctors for every 1,000 people in the country, compared to 4 doctors per 1,000 people in Italy, which is struggling to contain and treat the virus. Should families fall sick with COVID-19 Afghanistan's health system won't be able to cope while aid agencies will struggle to respond to the tidal wave of sick people we are seeing in other parts of the world.

Timothy Bishop, Save the Children's Afghanistan Country Director, said:

"The border with Iran is porous and difficult to control, so it's more than likely that many of the tens of thousands of returning Afghans are bringing the virus with them and spreading it far and wide without even knowing it. But in a matter of weeks, the epidemic will make itself known. The death toll could be unimaginable while the economic implications in a country where so many live in extreme poverty would be catastrophic.

"It is therefore essential that the international community and the Government of Afghanistan immediately begin to obtain the resources needed to respond to COVID-19 like testing kits, protective equipment for health workers and ventilators for the very sick. Priority must be given to the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities, including people with pre-existing health conditions and malnourished children – of whom there are 2.5 million in Afghanistan.

"Preventative measures such as social distancing and more wide-spread lockdowns must also be practiced. Lessons from other countries have shown such measures help to control the spread of the virus. Better screening at border crossings with Iran would also help.

"The severe economic consequences of the virus globally also carries further risks for a country like Afghanistan whose economy is almost completely donor-dependent. We cannot forget the children of

Afghanistan because a Coronavirus epidemic in the country could pale in comparison to decades of war.”

ENDS

To support Save the Children’s global COVID-19 emergency appeal, click [here](#).

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- Kabul’s lockdown means almost all government staff will remain off. All markets, business centres, wedding halls, sport clubs, and gathering points except food shops and pharmacies to remain closed for the next three weeks with possibility of extension. Crowds of more than three people won’t be allowed in the city. All public transportation including busses and mini buses won’t be allowed except small cars with not more than 4 people inside.
- In order to reduce the risks of transmission, Save the Children has temporarily suspended community based education services, vocational training programmes and temporarily closed our child-friendly spaces in line with Ministry of Education guidance.
- Save the Children is working with the Ministry of Education and other partners to quickly establish distance learning services to ensure children are still able to engage in learning and development activities.
- Save the Children continues to operate Mobile Health Teams across several provinces to ensure that pregnant and breastfeeding women are able to access maternal health services. This is being done with extreme caution using the proper personal protective equipment to ensure the safety of our staff, beneficiaries and reduce the risk of the virus spreading.
- Save the Children continues to deliver life-saving cash assistance and is distributing vital household items.
- As of 25 March, WHO¹ has reported a total of 75 confirmed cases in 12 provinces – Herat, Samangan, Balkh, Daikundi, Farah, Kapisa, Badghis, Logar, Zabul, Kandahar, Ghazni and Kabul.
- According to the Afghan government, as of 23 March, fewer than 400 COVID-19 tests had been conducted in Afghanistan which may account for the relatively low number of confirmed cases.
- Most people with the virus have a travel history outside Afghanistan. The cases are predominantly men, although one woman has also tested positive, according to the World Health Organization.
- On 14 March, the Government announced that all schools would be closed for an initial period of four weeks until 18 April.
- In response to the outbreak, the Government of Afghanistan has developed a master response plan for the health sector and has established a High-Level Emergency Coordination Committee in the area of health with various technical working groups (Surveillance and Early Detection; Coordination and Resource Mobilisation; Health Care Provision; Health Promotion and Risk communication; Infection prevention and protection); and efforts are ongoing to establish sub-national coordination structures particularly in Herat Province which has the highest number of confirmed cases to date.
- Save the Children has launched an initial \$30 million emergency appeal to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic. More details [here](#).

Bei Fragen oder Interviewwünschen wenden Sie sich gerne an unsere Pressestelle.

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Über Save the Children

Im Nachkriegsjahr 1919 gründete die britische Sozialreformerin und Kinderrechtlerin Eglantyne Jebb Save the Children, um Kinder in Deutschland und Österreich vor dem Hungertod zu retten. Heute ist die inzwischen größte unabhängige Kinderrechtsorganisation der Welt in über 120 Ländern im Einsatz. Save the Children ist da für Kinder in Kriegen, Konflikten und Katastrophen – seit 100 Jahren und darüber hinaus. Diese Kinder zu schützen, zu stärken und zu fördern ist das zentrale Anliegen der Organisation. Die Schwerpunkte der Arbeit liegen in den Bereichen Schule und Bildung, Schutz vor Ausbeutung und Gewalt sowie Überleben und Gesundheit. Save the Children setzt sich ein für eine Welt, die die Rechte der Kinder achtet. Eine Welt, in der alle Kinder gesund und sicher leben und frei und selbstbestimmt aufwachsen können.