

## P R E S S E M I T T E I L U N G

### **Afghanistan: Number of malnourished children at Save the Children clinics doubled since August**

*Berlin/Kabul, 19 January 2022* – The number of dangerously malnourished children visiting Save the Children’s mobile health clinics in Afghanistan has more than doubled since August with some dying before they can reach the hospital, the children’s charity said today.

Doctors at one children’s hospital in the north of the country told Save the Children staff that in December about 40 severely malnourished children died on their way to get medical assistance.

Demand for malnutrition treatment surged as the country plunged into its worst food crisis on record. This winter 14 million children from a total population of about 40 million are expected to face life-threatening levels of hunger and rates of malnutrition are soaring. Up to one million children could be so severely malnourished that they could be at risk of dying unless they get the treatment they need.

In August, Save the Children’s mobile health teams were each seeing an average of 39 malnourished children. By December that number had climbed to above 100, according to newly released data.

Shaida\*, aged 9 months, was treated for malnutrition at Save the Children’s mobile health clinic in Afghanistan’s Balkh province. Shaida’s\* parents were struggling to feed their family of six and had already lost one baby who died at four months after developing symptoms of a bad cold.

“We were under a lot of pressure because of [the economic situation] and were displaced and came here. Even this daughter of ours almost died but with the medication that we have got from Save the Children, she thankfully survived,” Shaida’s\* father, Rabul\* explained. “My [other] daughter was smiling in my arms [one evening] and when we woke up the next morning, she was frozen and had died.”

Save the Children provides treatment for children suffering from acute malnutrition and refers severely ill children to hospitals for specialist treatment. But with Afghanistan’s aid-dependent healthcare system on the brink of collapse, the agency warned that many children are unable to get the specialist treatment they need.

**Athena Rayburn, Director of Advocacy and Campaigns at Save the Children, said:**

*“Our overwhelmed health teams are working flat out to treat sharply increasing numbers of malnourished children. With the health system crumbling, sick and worried families have travelled up to 80km to our clinics. The sight of mothers carrying painfully thin and lifeless children, with wasted muscles and sagging skin, has become far too common.*

*“Families tell us they have done everything they can – often going without meals themselves so their children can eat. Or, worse, having to give up their children because they can’t afford to feed them. It’s every parent’s worst nightmare.*

*“Our teams go on home visits to provide support but say there just isn’t enough food. And we have started receiving the devastating news we all dread – children are dying. The reduced healthcare services and increasing number of malnourished children we are seeing is a direct result of the global assets freeze. The freeze of funds is choking the healthcare system. When sick children need treatment*

*all they find is closed doors and empty pharmacies. If a solution is not found soon, the heart-breaking reality is that children will continue to die.”*

The children’s hospital in the northern province of Jawzjan has the capacity to hold up to 12 children with life-threatening severe malnutrition and complications. But in recent weeks there have been up to 35 at any one time on the wards and doctors have reported shortages of antibiotics.

If severely malnourished children are treated in hospital - even an overcrowded one - there is every chance they will survive. Save the Children has launched an urgent fundraising appeal to continue scaling up its response to help ensure severely ill children get the treatment they need.

In the wake of conflict, economic freefall and spiralling prices, a brutal wave of hunger and hardship has swept Afghanistan. Two-thirds of the country’s children need aid to survive.

In 2021, Save the Children’s mobile health clinics treated more than 12,000 children for malnutrition. The aid agency is distributing cash, winter clothes and fuel to families in some of the hardest-hit areas to help them stay warm and fed through the bitter winter.

#### **Notes to editors:**

Malnutrition cases at Save the Children’s mobile health clinics in 2021:

	<b>Severe malnutrition</b>	<b>Moderate malnutrition</b>	<b>No. teams</b>	<b>Child malnutrition cases / team</b>
<b>Jan</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>342</b>	24	30.6
<b>Feb</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>287</b>	20	34.9
<b>Mar</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>245</b>	15	32.7
<b>Apr</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>323</b>	14	35.3
<b>May</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>302</b>	18	24.1
<b>Jun</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>620</b>	20	42.6
<b>Jul</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>483</b>	17	41.9
<b>Aug</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>236</b>	14	39.4
<b>Sep</b>		---Minimal programming due to insecurity---		
<b>Oct</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>765</b>	16	71.6
<b>Nov</b>	<b>811</b>	<b>1772</b>	27	95.7
<b>Dec</b>	<b>1074</b>	<b>2557</b>	35	103.7

- Save the Children has been supporting communities and protecting children's rights across Afghanistan since 1976, including during periods of conflict, regime change, and natural disasters. Since programmes re-started in September, Save the Children has reached 222,910 people, including 146,690 children.
- According to UN World Population Prospects, an estimated 48.5% of Afghanistan’s population are children.

#### **Zusatzmaterial zum Download (Bewegtbildmaterial und Fotos):**

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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 rund 120 Ländern tätig. Save the Children setzt sich ein für Kinder in Kriegen, Konflikten und Katastrophen. Für eine Welt, die die Rechte der Kinder achtet. Eine Welt, in der alle Kinder gesund und sicher leben und frei und selbstbestimmt aufwachsen und lernen können – seit über 100 Jahren.