

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

Child malnutrition cases rise nearly 50% in Afghanistan as hunger hits record levels

Kabul, 31 October 2022 – The number of dangerously malnourished children admitted to Save the Children’s mobile health clinics in Afghanistan has increased by 47% since January this year, with some babies dying before managing to receive any treatment, the children’s charity said today.

Demand for malnutrition treatment services has surged in recent months as families struggle to cope with Afghanistan’s worst hunger crisis on record. In January, Save the Children’s 57 mobile health teams admitted about 2,500 malnourished children for treatment. By September, that number had jumped to around 4,270 children admitted by 66 teams, according to newly released data. [i]

Experts had hoped to see a drop in hunger levels in Afghanistan during the recent summer harvest season, but the ongoing drought has led to failed crops and harvests have been much smaller than normal, forcing many rural families to sell land and livestock to buy food to feed their children.

The other major driver of the food crisis – the collapse of the country’s economy – has caused unemployment, poverty and food prices to skyrocket, with many families now only surviving on bread and water for weeks at a time.

Humanitarian organisations have provided vast amounts of life-saving food, but the needs are so high that 50% of Afghanistan’s population is still facing extreme hunger, with 6 million children and adults – nearly one eighth of the population – one step away from famine. [ii]

Save the Children doctors say they are overwhelmed with malnourished children – especially young girls who are often deprioritised when it comes to breastfeeding and complementary feeding compared to boys – and cannot keep up with the demand for services.

Nelab*, 22, comes from a family of farmers who have been hit hard by the drought. Her three children have all suffered from severe acute malnutrition, including her three-year-old daughter Maryam*, who did not receive treatment in time and died on the way to hospital. While Nelab’s son Mohammad*, 2, has recovered, her other daughter, Parsto*, who is just 11 months old, is still dangerously malnourished.

Nelab said: *“There has been less rain than usual so if we plant something it doesn’t grow and then that makes the food really expensive.*

“When there’s no food, the children go hungry or we borrow money. Sometimes we only cook one meal a week. That meal is a soup without meat. In between, we eat bread one to two times a day. The situation is much worse than a few years ago. It makes me sad to know my children are malnourished because we don’t have anything to eat, and I don’t know how I can make them better.”

Save the Children’s Country Director in Afghanistan, Chris Nyamandi, said: *“Humanitarian organisations like Save the Children are stretched to the absolute limit trying to stop children dying from hunger every day in Afghanistan. But the truth is, with so many children facing life-threatening levels of hunger, we simply do not have the resources to save them all.*

“Every day we’re faced with the heart-wrenching decision – which children do we save? It’s outrageous and horrifying to think that international leaders have the power to save these children’s lives – by working to solve the economic crisis and reinstating humanitarian funding and long-term development assistance

that was withdrawn when the Taliban retook control – but they have been too slow to find solutions and now children are dying as a result.

“Humanitarian organisations have been sounding the alarm on Afghanistan for more than a year now. It’s time the world stopped ignoring this catastrophic crisis and took action before many more children lose their lives.”

Save the Children has worked in Afghanistan since 1976, including during periods of conflict, regime change, and natural disasters. We have programmes in nine of 34 provinces and work with partners in an additional six provinces.

Since the Taliban regained control in August 2021, Save the Children has scaled up its response to support the increasing number of children in need. Delivering health, nutrition, education, child protection, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene and food security and livelihoods support. Save the Children has reached more than 3.3 million people, including 1.8 million children since September 2021.

Zusatzmaterial zum Download:

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Hinweise für die Redaktion:

- *Names have been changed.
 - Save the Children has provided malnutrition and medical treatment for Nelab’s children, Parsto and Mohammad.
 - Save the Children’s health and nutrition teams in Afghanistan are delivering lifesaving health and nutrition services for children under five and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, including treating women and children suffering from acute malnutrition. The agency is also providing counselling on recommended feeding practices to protect, promote and support breastfeeding and complementary feeding, and providing children diverse and nutritious diets. Save the Children’s health and nutrition programs in Sar-e-Pul province are funded by the European Union.
- i. Data from Save the Children’s mobile health teams in Afghanistan. In Jan 2022, there were an average of 44 malnutrition cases per mobile health team. In Sept 2022, there were an average of 65 cases per team, which is a 47% increase in cases.

	Moderate & Severe Acute Malnutrition cases	No. of mobile health teams	Average number of malnutrition cases per team (rounded up)
Jan 2022	2,506	57	44
Feb 2022	2,165	52	42
March 2022	2,557	62	41
April 2022	3,875	66	59
May 2022	3,372	66	51
June 2022	4,847	66	73
July 2022	3,423	66	52
August 2022	3,842	66	58
Sept 2022	4,268	66	65

- ii. The [Integrated Phase Classification \(IPC\)](#) is an internationally recognised famine early-warning system, based on a scale from one (minimal food stress) to five (catastrophe/famine). According to the IPC report 18.9M people (9.2 M children) are projected to face high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 and above) between June and Nov 2022. 6 million people are in phase 4, which is one level below phase 5, which is classified as famine.

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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, in der alle Kinder gesund und sicher leben sowie frei und selbstbestimmt aufwachsen und lernen können – seit über 100 Jahren.