



PGI SERVICES FOR AFGHAN CHILD AND ADULT MIGRANTS RETURNING FROM PAKISTAN

Pakistan Red Crescent

CASE STUDY

Photo description: Pakistan Red Crescent personnel providing services at a Humanitarian Service Point for Afghans returning to Afghanistan
Photo credit: IFRC

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Photo description: Two females en route to Afghanistan at border crossing where they access humanitarian service from Pakistan Red Crescent
 Photo credit: IFRC

Background

As part of the Pakistan Red Crescent (PRCS) response to the return of Afghan migrants from Pakistan to Afghanistan, programing has been established for children and adults in vulnerable situations. The main features of the program implemented by PRCS for Afghan returnees include the establishment of Humanitarian Services Point (HSP) in Torkham Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, a medical care facility at Chaman in Baluchistan province, and provision of essential services such as health care, safe drinking water, and gender-sensitive sanitation facilities targeting 60,000 people under an IFRC supported operation.

PRCS has established separate medical check-up facilities for men and women, created women and children safe spaces, and provides Mental Health and Psychosocial Support by male and female volunteers. Community feedback is collected by trained volunteers to ensure services meet the needs of returnees.

The program integrates Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) and Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) to ensure the dignity, safety, and participation of diverse groups including children, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. For example, the operation includes an Information Desk that provides information on legal documentation verification/authorization process at government offices. Coordination is maintained with IFRC and the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) to ensure effective service delivery and information sharing.

The PRCS response program addresses the urgent needs of Afghan returnees in a culturally sensitive manner, recognizing their vulnerabilities, including gender roles, traditional norms, and limited access to services. The rationale lies in ensuring dignity, safety, do no harm, and inclusion for all, especially children, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. The program promotes community trust, respects cultural values, and ensures that essential services are accessible, relevant, and responsive to the needs of diverse returnee groups.

Who was Supported and How

The people supported by the program are Afghan migrants who have been residing in Pakistan for the past four decades, including the recent influx of Afghans following the regime change in Afghanistan.

The Government of Pakistan introduced a policy known as the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan, which started in October 2023 and continues through 2025. This plan targets undocumented Afghan nationals, Afghan Citizen Card holders, and holders of Proof of Registration (PoR) cards through a structured, multi-phase deportation process.

Inequalities and discrimination based on gender are already significant challenges in Pakistan, with weak structures and systems to protect vulnerable groups. This has further increased the vulnerabilities of Afghan migrants and exposed them to harm and exploitation. The program was carefully designed based on a rapid assessment involving Afghan women to understand their issues and challenges while considering the cultural context.

In the initial phase of the response, the needs of vulnerable communities—such as children, women, persons with disabilities, and the elderly—were identified through focus group discussions to ensure that all planned interventions respected privacy, dignity, and safety while meeting the needs of the community.

The services included separate medical check-up facilities for men and women, women and children safe spaces, and Restoring Family Links. A safe space was also provided where women could privately share personal health-related issues, relax, and feed their babies. Dedicated female staff and volunteers were hired and trained on Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) to deliver these services. PRCS has provided essential materials for Women and Children Safe Spaces to support recreational and hygiene needs. These include drawing books, toys (cars, dolls, puzzles), whiteboards, coloring and storybooks, stationery, pampers, sanitizers, wipes, and tissue rolls.

PRCS also supports returnees with access to safe drinking water, handwashing areas, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, and accurate information during their journey to Afghanistan. Moreover, customized dignity kits are being distributed along with sessions on menstrual hygiene management for women and adolescent girls. Additional facilities include separate toilets, cleanliness items, and medical care at HSPs.

PRCS supports People Living with Disabilities through provision of wheelchairs at HSPs and assists access to local protection and assistance services.

A complaint and feedback mechanism has been established within the HSPs to collect feedback from the people returning back to Afghanistan.

Successes

Through the operation there have been a number of successes.

- Implementation of HSPs equipped with essential services tailored to the urgent needs of Afghan migrants. These HSPs serve as a practical demonstration of dignity, access, participation, and safety in action.
- Inclusive service delivery, including wheelchairs provided for persons with limited mobility, and Information-sharing tools such as face-to-face communication, banners, standees, and posters were developed in culturally appropriate and easy-to-understand formats to ensure accessibility for all returnees.
- Safe spaces created for children in Torkham and Chaman allowing them to engage in recreational activities and experience a sense of normalcy during a time of transition and stress.
- A referral mechanism was established with public health facilities, and cases of pregnant women were referred to access services and received proper treatment.
- Community feedback mechanism was established, involving trained male and female volunteers who engage with returnees after they receive services to collect their opinions, complaints, and suggestions—helping PRCS take timely and informed decisions to improve service quality.
- With the technical assistance of IFRC, PRCS ensured a gender-balanced workforce, and trained on PGI Minimum Standards across all services.
- As of the mid-point of the operation, PRCS provided services to **42,707 individuals**, including children, women, men, persons with disabilities, and the elderly.

Challenges and Difficulties

There are several challenges and difficulties as part of this complex emergency. In particular, rapidly evolving context, government decisions, and the vast needs of Afghan migrants, all within limited resources and a short timeframe.

PRCS anticipated these challenges at the planning stage and ensured close coordination with public authorities, district administration, and provincial headquarters, along with clear communication within teams and with other stakeholders. It also ensured that PRCS teams were properly sensitized on humanitarian principles to provide assistance with respect and confidence. Communication channels were strengthened to stay updated and to share feedback with the concerned departments to resolve field-level issues. Feedback was also shared through dashboards with relevant colleagues to respond to queries and provide timely assistance.

To address procurement delays, IFRC took the lead in procuring dignity kits; making use of the IFRC systems allowed for speedier procurement.

However, there are challenges beyond the capacity of PRCS, for example, cases of gender-based violence (GBV), human trafficking, and sexual exploitation and abuse among women and children within migrant families. Due to the complexity of legal status, lack of legal support, unavailability of GBV referral services, limited expertise among staff, and the conservative cultural context, it is a struggle for PRCS to adequately facilitate or assist GBV victims and survivors.

Lessons Learned

- 1- A comprehensive and effective response can be achieved through a well-coordinated and well-planned emergency approach. Given Pakistan's long history of migration and displacement due to its unique geographic and geopolitical position, it is crucial that humanitarian standards, systems, and tools—particularly those related to migration and HSP programming—are well disseminated and understood by operational teams to ensure a practical and timely response during such emergencies.
- 2- Building staff capacity in managing Women and Children Safe Spaces is an important area that should be prioritized. Staff should be trained in planning and facilitating various activities, including recreational sessions, psychosocial support, life skills training, storytelling, art and craft sessions, basic literacy and numeracy classes, awareness sessions on protection and hygiene, and peer support group activities to create a safe, inclusive, and empowering environment for women and children.
- 3- Feedback analysis highlighted a high demand for food and milk for newborn babies. Although this need was discussed at various levels within PRCS and IFRC, limited resources, a short operational timeframe, and strict procurement standards and guidelines made it challenging to fulfill this requirement.
- 4- While strengthening coordination mechanisms at the national level is important, the most critical and impactful coordination occurs at the district and community levels. Local-level coordination enables more direct benefits for communities, helps fill service gaps, and is essential for strengthening GBV referral pathways through a comprehensive and synergized response.