



## Thousands travel far to seek safety in Quetta after flood warnings

QUETTA, Pakistan. August 24 (UNHCR) – Tens of thousands of people have sought shelter in the southern Pakistani city of Quetta after fleeing from their distant homes in neighbouring Sindh province following flood warnings.

"I heard the evacuation announcement on the radio. We were asked to leave the town within three hours," Hazar Khan, a resident of Jacobabad in Sindh, told UNHCR late last week at a relief camp set up by the provincial government in the suburbs of Quetta.

Like many others questioned in Quetta, he had never strayed so far from his home area, some 300 kilometres away. The displaced civilians have been coming from neighbouring districts in Balochistan and Sindh provinces.



*A child walks in front of one of the many UNHCR tents set up in the suburbs of Quetta for displaced people from Sindh. © UNHCR/D.A.Khan*

"We had no time to think of anything but our safety. I took my children, hired a vehicle, which cost us five times more than usual, and left home without any luggage, food or extra clothing," Khan said.

Following the evacuation orders, floodwaters swept through parts of Sindh, including Jacobabad, and neighbouring Balochistan, where the towns of Nasirabad and Jaffarabad were particularly hard hit. Flooding in the north of the country had earlier this month swallowed hundreds of villages and displaced millions of people in Khyber Pakhtonkhuwa and Punjab provinces.

People have had to make their own way to safer areas such as Quetta, but the price of public and private transportation has skyrocketed due to demand and soaring fuel prices. Some people said they had spent their life savings to pay for a lift, while others came by tractor and trailer.



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It now costs 80,000 rupees (almost US\$1,000) to rent a truck to take two or three families and their belongings from Jacobabad to Quetta. This is more than three times the normal price.

Mir Muhammad, who came to Quetta from Shikarpur in Sindh, said he had sold a cow for 35,000 rupees so that he could pay a truck driver to bring his family to safety. In normal times, a healthy cow can sell for more than 100,000 rupees.

The government estimates that around 700,000 people have fled their homes in Sindh and sought shelter in Balochistan, while another 3.6 million people in Sindh are homeless. A further 400,000 have been displaced in Balochistan because of the floods.

The camp in Quetta, capital of Balochistan, can accommodate barely 3,000 people. But many more exhausted, thirsty and hungry civilians, including lots of children, are arriving in the city in need of shelter. They can be seen in the streets, in schools, at the railway station and anywhere they can put up a small shelter. These later arrivals are facing difficulties getting aid and accommodation.

"We and our children eat rice given to us twice a day by some charity organization," said one woman from Jacobabad in a crowd of displaced people at the relief camp. "My two-year-old girl has not had any milk since we left home days ago," she added.

Meanwhile, those living in the worst hit areas, such as Nasirabad, Jaffarabad and Jacobabad, are unlikely to be able to go home soon because it will take months for the stagnant waters to recede. They need food, clean drinking water, health and hygiene facilities and a roof over their head.

In Balochistan, UNHCR is working with its NGO partners and provincial authorities to distribute aid, including tents, plastic sheeting for shelter, blankets, jerry cans, kitchen sets and mosquito nets. The refugee agency plans to assist some 140,000 people (20,000 families) in the weeks to come.

*By Duniya Aslam Khan in Quetta, Pakistan*