



Training Session on Gender Equality and Equity for Role Models at camp 4.

## PROTECTION CONTEXT

In August 2017, an estimated **712,152** Rohingya refugees fled from Myanmar seeking safety and protection in Bangladesh. The population, including the pre-existing refugee population living in Bangladesh combined with new arrivals, currently stands at **861,545** as of September 2020. The majority are reliant on humanitarian assistance including for shelter, food, healthcare, clean water, and sanitation. As the situation enters its third year, UNHCR and its protection partners have put in place a system to ensure a strengthened understanding of the protection landscape for Rohingya refugees, including in a range of key thematic areas across sectors, each of which requires regular monitoring. In line with global trends, the pandemic in Bangladesh is negatively affecting the overall protection environment. Mitigating the short and longer term social protection consequences of the pandemic and ensuring ways to safeguard the resilience and psychosocial well-being of communities, whilst ensuring that protection and humanitarian space does not contract, is a key priority for the UNHCR.

## PROGRESS

### Advocacy and Refugee Rights

- Registration and civil documentation:** Revised procedures on the registration of marriages and deaths rolled-out in 2019 are now being implemented in all 34 camps, and UNHCR has conducted familiarization programmes on the new procedures with Camp-in-Charge (CiC) officials and protection partners. Thus far in 2020 some **1,200** marriages and **125** divorces have been registered and certificates have been issued to refugees. The registration process, however, was temporarily suspended at the end of March owing to the COVID-19 situation, though awareness raising among refugees about the importance of civil documentation has continued, albeit on a more limited scale. The Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) confirmed the resumption of marriage and divorce registration at the beginning of September, but the 5-month suspension has resulted in a large number of undocumented marriages. Additionally, the protection mechanisms embedded in the process of marriage registration, including prevention of child marriage and non-consensual polygamy, were also affected as a result of the suspension. The handling of divorce requests has also been affected, and in many cases, those involved have been discouraged from seeking divorce by authorities and were instead referred to mediation. Reports from case workers suggest that this has intensified domestic violence. With the closure of UNHCR's registration sites in March, refugees have continued to approach protection focal points in the camps seeking the resolution of problems with family composition documentation. UNHCR is now addressing the backlog of these pending registration issues, following the reopening of registration sites on a limited basis. Birth registration for both refugees and the host community has remained suspended since 2017, though in September the district authorities announced they had resumed birth registration for children born to Bangladeshi nationals. Advocacy with the Government for the registration of refugee births is ongoing.

## Key Protection Thematic Areas

### Advocacy and Refugee Rights

- Registration and civil documentation
- Freedom of movement
- Access to justice
- Safety and security
- Education and vocational training
- Refugee status and non-refoulement
- Durable solutions

### Protection Mainstreaming

- In the delivery of all forms of assistance
- In emergency preparedness and response

### Reduced Aid Dependency

- Empowerment through livelihoods and skills training

### Community Engagement

- Outreach and communication with communities (Accountability to Affected Populations)
- Building the community's resilience to respond to COVID-19
- Strengthening refugees' participation in protection processes
- Feedback and referrals mechanisms
- Community engagement and empowerment
- Community representation
- Peaceful coexistence with host communities

### Specialized Services

- Assistance to persons with specific needs, physical and mental health, and psychosocial support
- SGBV
- Legal assistance
- Child protection
- Prevention and response to trafficking

- **Freedom of movement:** In light of the security environment and efforts to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, restrictions on movement have increased, which has impacted negatively on the well-being and livelihoods of refugees and members of host communities alike. While the situation has somewhat improved, continued advocacy, including as part of capacity building initiatives, is required to ensure that restrictions on freedom of movement and access to basic services are proportionate and in line with relevant national and international human rights law. The erection of fencing around the camps in Ukhiya has continued and is expected to be completed by the end of the year and plans to expand the project to the Teknaf camps in early 2021 are underway. Refugees and humanitarian actors have expressed concern over the fencing, though in certain locations refugees are reportedly hopeful that it will improve security in the camp. Regardless, many refugees and host community members accessing services and facilities could be disconnected from essential services and face further difficulties in movement, though authorities have indicated it would consider advice from the humanitarian community as to where access points are needed.
- **Access to justice:** The expanded presence of legal partners in the camps over the past three months has increased access to legal assistance, with **1,194** refugees being assisted in July, **1,212** in August, and **2,024** in September. Since January a total of **12,635** refugees have benefited from these programs, which include legal counselling, mediation, filing cases at police stations and courts, and legal representation. As of August, UNHCR and its partners, are now providing legal assistance in all 34 camps, having expanded responsibility for these activities in 6 remaining camps. Despite ongoing advocacy with law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, however, access to justice for refugees remains a challenge, and UNHCR's legal partners have continued to report difficulties when approaching local police to register cases. UNHCR has engaged with police to improve the situation and is working with camp administration officials to reinforce refugees' access to legal assistance and to advocate for appropriate and timely intervention by law enforcement agencies in serious crimes. As of 1 July, the Armed Police Battalion (APBn) of the Bangladesh National Police has taken over responsibility for safety and security across the 34 camps. Efforts are ongoing to build trust between the APBn and the refugee community and to minimize barriers to access to justice. Challenges have continued under the reduced humanitarian footprint resulting from COVID-19 access restrictions, and majhis and others have attempted to intervene in dispute resolution. Legal partners and CICs have progressively scaled up their presence in the camps, and efforts are ongoing to resolve cases (including those that may have initially been 'mediated' by majhis) and to increase awareness among refugees about the legal services available to them. Resumption of legal awareness sessions and the use of innovative messaging techniques will be critical activities for the remainder of 2020 and into 2021.
- **Safety and security:** UNHCR and its partners continued to undertake protection monitoring and individual case management with the help of refugee volunteers. UNHCR and its partner, BRAC, have carried out protection monitoring, while partners TAI, BRAC, BLAST and Rights Jessoré have implemented legal assistance programs in all 34 camps. In recent months the security environment in the camps has deteriorated, with criminal gangs vying for power in both Teknaf and Ukhiya resulting in a marked increase in protection incidents and serious crimes. Both refugees and members of host communities have expressed fears about the violence UNHCR is closely monitoring these developments together with the authorities. The reduced presence of protection actors and authorities in the camps because of COVID-19 restrictions has resulted in delays in the handling of protection referrals, and this has led many refugees to resort to appointed *majhis* to mediate disputes; unfortunately, such informal justice mechanisms are often undertaken in a manner that is contrary to basic protection principles. COVID-19 is also having a negative socioeconomic impact on security, with petty crimes, inter and intra-communal disputes, criminal gangs expanding their sphere of control, and heightened risks of trafficking and smuggling. Child protection cases and incidents of SGBV, particularly intimate partner violence, have been exacerbated by the pandemic. It is within this context that a pilot project on community safety was jointly launched by UNHCR, IOM and UNDP in early 2020, with the objective of promoting closer engagement between the refugee population and the police to promote access to justice. The pilot is initially targeting two camps in 2020, but in 2021 the project will be expanded to cover up to eight additional camps. Night patrolling by refugees has recently been re-instituted in a number of camps, either by the APBn or the Army. UNHCR continues to monitor the situation closely and is advocating that those involved in night patrols do so voluntarily and that they are not required to respond to potentially violent security incidents in the place of law enforcement authorities. The increased protection risks resulting from the fragile security environment has affected the psychological wellbeing of refugees and has led to a growing number of spontaneous and unauthorized relocations to other camps perceived to be safer. UNHCR continued to conduct protection assessments and advocated for relocation in cases in which individual protection risks were identified.
- **Education and vocational training:** In 2020 a total of **60,241** Rohingya refugee girls and boys aged between **3** and **24** years have been provided access to learning facilities through UNHCR's education program, including **55,186** children (aged **3-14**) who have benefitting from early childhood education, primary and junior secondary education, and **5,055** youth and adolescents (aged **15-24**) who have been engaged in life skills and resilience programs through **1,703** learning facilities. Some **1,311** teachers (**796** female and **515** male) and **87** facilitators for adolescent and youth programs (**51** female and **36** male) have been recruited, trained and deployed to support the teaching and learning process. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, learning facilities have remained closed since mid-March, but UNHCR and its partners have been working with parents and caregivers to enable them to better support their children through at-home learning initiatives with the dissemination of caregiver-led guidelines for both parents and children. The Education Sector finalized a draft version of "Back to Learning" guidelines, which have been contextualized to respond to the requirements on the ground to provide guidance on the reopening of education facilities in terms of pre-reopening measures, minimum standards for reopening, monitoring of potential COVID-19 transmission, mechanisms for reopening, and long-term planning. In collaboration with UNHCR, a system for the collection of student enrolment data has been agreed among the members of the Education Sector's Strategic Advisory Group. The proposed system will use a Kobo tool and be linked to UNHCR's registration database to avoid duplications and ensure data's accuracy. The proposed tool will be used also for the education information management system being developed by UNICEF. In line with the Government's decision to expand access to education for Rohingya children and adolescents living in Cox's Bazar, the Education Sector developed a pilot program to introduce the Myanmar curriculum in the camps starting in April, initially targeting **10,000** students in Grades 6 to 9, but unfortunately the initiation of the pilot has been delayed due to COVID-19.

- **Refugee status and non-refoulement:** Since January a total of **1,036** refugees have been registered. While the majority entered Bangladesh after fleeing Myanmar, some had previously sought asylum in other countries, including **32** in Malaysia, **18** in India, **16** in Saudi Arabia and Dubai. UNHCR continues to monitor for any new arrivals of refugees, though thus far no significant movements across the border have been reported. A group of 306 refugees who were rescued at sea by Bangladesh in May, after their boat failed to reach Malaysia, continue to be accommodated on Bhasan Char Island, despite the fact that most of them have family members in the camps. The UN continues to await a formal response on access to assess the group's protection needs. A go-and-see visit was organized for 40 representatives of the refugee community in early September. Reactions were mixed, though most of the concern related to freedom of movement on the island, the type of accommodation and facilities, and security. The UN Country Team continues to advocate for access to the island to undertake feasibility and protection assessments before any relocations take place. In line with the Government's commitment, the UN Country Team has continued to highlight the importance of obtaining the informed and voluntary consent of refugees prior to any relocation.
- **Durable solutions:** After three years of living in camps where security conditions have deteriorated, and with various restrictions in place in relation to movement, livelihoods, and communication, refugees are generally uncertain about their future and the prospects for solutions, including return to Myanmar. The risk of dangerous onward movement remains a concern as does refugees' use of negative coping mechanisms to address their current situation. While there were isolated reports of Rohingyas returning to Rakhine State during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, but these reports were largely unverified. Refugees continue to express their willingness to repatriate to Myanmar, once conditions are conducive for return.

### Protection Mainstreaming

- **In the delivery of all forms of assistance:** Since May 2020 before the monsoon season began, some 11,166 awareness sessions on emergency preparedness have been conducted by Community Outreach Members (COMs), reaching a total of 49,095 individuals including 8,689 older persons and 1,085 persons with disability. As in the past two years, COMs focused on identifying damaged shelters and referring the occupants for assistance and support. Meanwhile, 456 service projects relating to emergency preparedness have been completed by community groups, including for soil erosion prevention, drainage system repair, and shelter repair for extremely vulnerable individuals, latrine repair, bridge repair and discussions to raise awareness on preparation and response to extreme weather conditions. Refugee multi-functional teams continued to support their communities in preparing and responding to cyclone warnings, heavy rains and flooding. UNHCR took the lead in providing a coordinated on-the-ground protection response through Protection Emergency Response Units (PERUs). PERUs were activated in March and have been operational to support the COVID-19 response, identify protection gaps in the camps, coordinate delivery of protection services, and engage refugees in dissemination of important messaging. Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) have also adopted a multi-functional approach to mainstreaming protection in the monsoon response to identify persons with specific needs at higher risk of flooding or soil erosion, and providing technical support in identifying those most in need as part of the post-cyclone assessment in the aftermath of Cyclone Amphan, carried out in May.
- **In emergency preparedness and response:** In order to ensure that protection remains central to the COVID-19 response, the Protection Working Group has embedded protection mainstreaming focal points in the WASH, Health, and Site Management Sectors and has provided guidance and support, inter alia, through guidance notes, protection mainstreaming tip sheets, and the development of procedures to ensure safe and dignified burials. Efforts aim to ensure that an inclusive community-based age, gender, and diversity approach is also integrated into the multi-sectoral response to COVID-19 and that the most vulnerable, including older persons, persons with disabilities and gender diverse populations have access to targeted messaging and protection services.

### Reduced Aid Dependency

- **Empowerment through livelihoods and skills training:** Cash for work (CFW) schemes have been established to reduce aid dependency and to include unskilled and skilled volunteers in programs. This is coordinated through a Transfer Working Group and follows detailed guidance on CFW as an approach. In the first quarter of 2020, UNHCR's partner agencies engaged a total of **7,611** refugees and **87** individuals from host communities in CFW activities. The CFW activities will ensure shared benefits for both the host community and refugees. Through a local NGO, gender diverse individuals were also included in livelihoods projects to mitigate the socio-economic impact COVID-19 has had on them.

### Community Engagement

- **Outreach and communication with communities (Accountability to Affected Populations):** Since the beginning of the year, through diverse channels of communication, COMs conducted **70,849** outreach sessions reaching **383,173** refugees covering health, hygiene, COVID-19 prevention and response, emergency preparedness, and a range of general protection issues. Approximately **15%** of those reached were older persons, **29%** were children and some **1.4%** were persons with disabilities. The COMs also conducted **2,236** outreach sessions on the importance of wearing masks and their safe usage, including disseminating related awareness materials for some **2,098** Imams. In close cooperation with refugee volunteers, Information Service Centers and Community Centers continue to organize Radio Listening Groups and Visual Content Watching Groups (VCWG) that provide information on topics of interest to the communities (most recently on issues related to COVID-19, cyclone preparedness, reopening of registration centers, hygiene and monsoon messaging, among others). From January to September, **11,838** refugees participated in listening sessions and facilitated discussions. After a temporary suspension, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, VCWGs gradually resumed their activities on a small scale to disseminate accurate messages to the community, especially targeting children through the *Our Heroes* series (air on Shojong) that emphasizes the resilience of refugees and their contribution to the communities, and the *Meena Cartoon Series* that uses storytelling to discuss good practices, such as female education, the prevention of early marriages, etc. In the first 9 months (January-September), **5,901** refugees participated in visual content sessions and facilitated discussions. Questions and feedback received at these sessions go into the development of communication materials for COVID-19, registration, etc. Also, community-based volunteers working on SGBV programs, such as COMs, community support groups, male role models, and community organizers, reached **187,208** people with information on protection from sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA), SGBV services and other SGBV related issues. The decrease in COVID-19 related restrictions has enabled UNHCR and partner staff to resume more regular work with the community.

- **Building the community's resilience to respond to COVID-19:** Apart from enhancing the refugee community's access to information related to COVID-19 prevention, treatment and response, and noting the immense need for masks within the community, COMs conducted **5,713** training sessions covering **6,844** households. Some **12,659** refugee men and women participated, and **8,939** masks were made. Trained refugees were asked to train other family members and neighbors as a way to expand the benefits of the program to the wider community. In addition, outreach volunteers and partners, with the support of UNHCR, have undertaken targeted visits to older refugees as part of the Older Persons Care Support Visit Project. The purpose of the visits is to provide targeted information about care for older persons and their caregivers in the context of COVID-19. Advice was also given on how the elderly care kit that UNHCR has been distributing to older persons can be used to create a small safe zone for older family members. A total of **9,727** households/ **10,493** older persons have thus far been reached as part of the program.
- **Strengthening refugees' participation in protection processes:** The mapping of all community-based structures established by UNHCR and its partners illustrated the significant roles played by **41** community structures and over **22,000** refugees, both paid and unpaid, in humanitarian efforts and assistance programs. UNHCR's Community-based Protection staff have been working actively with **27** Community Based Organizations providing regular updates and information and, conducting leadership and capacity building activities. This included training sessions on community engagement, facilitation skills, and child marriages. Grassroots youth and women's organizations have also been receiving basic material support to help them expand their initiatives. Community mobilization activities by outreach volunteers, have now been fully incorporated in the daily activities of the COMs through Saturday Solidarity Projects—a shift from daily delivery of assistance on a case by case basis to a more community-based approach to addressing service gaps. Since January, close to **333** projects were initiated by the refugee community across 20 camps with the support of COMs. Some **8,000** refugees across different age groups, including persons with disabilities, participated in designing and implementing community led development activities which included community cleaning, community-led learning, advocacy for resumption of education for out-of-school children, handicraft making, art and recreation for children with disabilities, indoor and outdoor sports, and cloth mask making.
- **Feedback and referral mechanisms:** In early 2020, UNHCR upgraded its protection hotline and made it toll-free to provide easier access to refugees raising concerns and seeking support on various services. Since then **3,312** calls have been handled through the hotline. The number of calls received increased in July, at a time when the humanitarian footprint in the camps was reduced due to the lockdown. In the past three months, approximately **62%** of the calls received have related to basic needs and essential services, with the majority involving shelter concerns. **23%** of the calls have been on protection issues, including registration, security incidents and the arrest of refugees. Since January 2020, **36,778** visitors have approached UNHCR's Information Service Centers to provide feedback on service provision and to request assistance predominantly on the distribution of core relief items and shelter issues. Efforts to streamline common feedback mechanisms across sectors and agencies was a key priority. In May 2020, UNHCR launched an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) program to disseminate critical messages to the refugee population and gather community feedback during the pandemic. This was done in close coordination with the Government of Bangladesh and other humanitarian actors. During the implementation period from May to September 2020, **211,336** broadcast calls were made to refugees, of which **120,585** calls were answered. Amongst the refugees who answered the calls and listened to pre-recorded messages, there were **27,076** female, **82,068** male, **131** girls, **124** boys, **1,889** older women, **7,273** older men and **2,024** unspecified persons. **15,366** were persons with specific needs. Broadcast messages focused on COVID-19, elderly care, quarantine and isolation, use of masks, contact tracing, and monsoon and cyclone preparedness. A total of **44,167** incoming calls were received from refugees who listened to a pre-recorded message on COVID-19, out of which **7,410** refugees further chose to listen to an in-depth message on the pandemic. Approximately **67%** of the refugees who were called to collect feedback expressed interest in continuing to receive messages through the IVR. Feedback from the community indicated that the IVR has proved very effective in providing necessary information, while also mitigating the potential transmission of COVID-19 by minimizing human contact.
- **Community engagement and empowerment:** Placing communities at the center of the response continues to be a key priority to ensure sustainability and mitigate the short- and long-term social protection consequences of the pandemic. In this context, UNHCR supported **4,425** community-led initiatives carried out by **120** male, female, male youth and female youth groups across 25 camps (in 30 locations) with the purpose of strengthening community engagement as well as the resilience and psychosocial well-being of communities. These initiatives have focused on promoting the meaningful participation of refugees, improving camp-based infrastructure, and providing support to persons with specific needs, amongst other initiatives. Following capacity development by UNHCR and partners, community groups' volunteers have conducted discussions on disability, conflict resolution, PSEA, and community engagement. To promote community-based solutions, UNHCR continues to actively engage with religious leaders through regular meetings and teleconferences. For example, in collaboration with BBC Media Action, UNHCR and partners organized audio tutorial training for **270** imams and **40** female religious teachers in **16** camps to strengthen effective communication with communities, build their facilitations skills, and support outreach on health, emergency preparedness, and protection-related issues. Since March 2020, **imams** and **female religious teachers** have conducted **26,710** awareness sessions related to COVID-19, reaching out to **595,135** individuals in 28 camps. To address the increase in SGBV incidents and intimate partner violence during the lockdown, male role models held dialogues to promote more equitable gender roles and healthy family relationships. These dialogues mainly targeted refugee men and boys, many of whom lack work opportunities and have been confined to their shelters, leading to an escalation of violence within the home.
- **Community representation:** The elected block and camp committees in Kutupalong Camp, Nayapara Camp, Camp 4-Ext., and Camp 26 are part of UNHCR's commitment to increasing sustainable refugee self-management within the camps. Community representation is an important step in promoting inclusive and accountable community self-management, as well as alternative dispute mechanisms. The camp committees, which have **47%** female representation, have established a model of leadership that is accountable to community, and supportive of gender parity. Through their daily activities and regular community meetings the **150** elected representatives helped raise awareness on COVID-19 and protection concerns, including the prevention of child marriage, SGBV, domestic violence, and human trafficking. The camp committees also provided regular mediation services for small scale disputes that arose amongst refugees. Community meetings are held regularly with respected refugee elders, imams, and grassroots networks within the camps to promote consultative leadership and open dialogue. Refugees in the four camps which have elected representatives observe that elected refugee leaders are more responsive and helpful than the appointed "majhi" system.

- **Peaceful coexistence with host communities:** Alongside development actors, UNHCR is addressing drivers of tension between host and refugee communities, exacerbated due to COVID-19, through enhanced inter-community engagement and targeted support to host communities in the areas of livelihoods, education, and meeting the basic needs of vulnerable families. In several camps, relations between refugees and host communities have deteriorated in the first half of 2020, and UNHCR continues to monitor the situation. UNHCR continues to engage with authorities to encourage the formation of joint committees involving members of the two communities to address such conflicts, while advocating with government authorities and law enforcement agencies to help mitigate disputes, reduce protection risks, and improve the discourse on hosting refugees.

### Specialized Services

- **Assistance to persons with specific needs, physical and mental health, and psychosocial support:** Some **14,600** refugees have benefitted from structured psychosocial support in 2020. Through our implementing partner, Handicap International, **1,517** persons with specific needs participated in group-based psychosocial support activities, while **1,383** persons living with disabilities (including older persons) were supported with physical rehabilitation assistance. In addition, **340** persons with specific needs were provided individual protection assistance, including referral to specialized assistance. Community awareness and group sessions were also facilitated to enhance a safe and inclusive environment in three camps. In addition, the COMs have conducted door-to-door visits to identify and provide direct and indirect support to PSNs. In total, **51,410** visits have been undertaken, during which **16,418** PSNs were identified and **6,185** refugees received direct assistance from the COMs.
- **SGBV:** To ensure multi-sectoral support and enhance the resilience of survivors of SGBV, UNHCR provides case management support in the camps through four partners including two local organizations. Case management services are safe entry points for both male and female SGBV survivors to receive crisis and longer-term psychosocial support. Two safe shelters in Cox's Bazar continue to be operational, providing support to refugees and members of host communities, including victims of trafficking. UNHCR's COVID-19 response efforts to adapt case management to remote modalities have had a positive impact, with service provision rebounding to pre-COVID levels in July and August after dipping by **30%** in April and May. SGBV mitigation mainstreaming across sectors has resulted in joint SGBV and WASH consultation with refugee women and girls in 14 camps on where to install solar streetlights to make latrines and bathing facilities safer. Protection from sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA) was strengthened through training of **467** humanitarian staff, increasing awareness of the zero tolerance policy and mandatory reporting requirements.
- **Legal assistance:** UNHCR has now extended its legal assistance program to cover all **34** camps, and partners began implementing legal case management in the 6 new camps in August. Thus far in 2020 a total of **12,635** refugees have received legal assistance services from UNHCR and its partners BRAC, BLAST, TAI, and Rights Jessore, including legal counselling, legal representation and mediation. These services helped ensure protection-focused legal interventions while reducing refugees' dependence on *ad-hoc* dispute resolution mechanisms by majhis and other actors, who may not be appropriately trained or impartial. As part of UNHCR's comprehensive capacity building program, so far this year some **6,795** refugees and **595** community leaders have benefited from awareness raising sessions on legal protection, though these programs have been suspended temporarily since April due to COVID-19. UNHCR and its partners have also facilitated visits for **142** refugees to meet their family members imprisoned in Cox's Bazar.
- **Child protection:** UNHCR and its partners provide prevention and response programming through the provision of psycho-social support to at least **29,075** boys and girls. **100%** of nearly **1,732** reported new cases of child abuse, violence or exploitation received age and gender sensitive services in the framework of individual case management to meet their tailored needs, including about **50** children with disability. Moreover, more than **29,000** children benefitted from mental health and psychological support services since January 2020. Community-based child protection structures and mechanisms, such as adolescents support groups, parenting groups were reinforced and actively engaged in awareness activities on COVID-19 in line with the Child Protection Sub-sector guidance, as well as preparedness for the monsoon and cyclone season. UNHCR's child protection program is implemented using a socio-ecological approach to strengthen systems to prevent, mitigate and respond to Child Protection risks. With the gradual lifting of restrictions amid the COVID-19 pandemic, small scale community-led adolescent initiatives have resumed.
- **Prevention and response to trafficking:** UNHCR co-chairs the Anti-Trafficking Working Group together with IOM, and as part of prevention activities implemented directly and by partners, UNHCR conducted anti-trafficking awareness raising sessions targeting humanitarian actors, parents, adolescent boys and girls, and community leaders. Awareness campaigns through posters, billboards and radio shows have reached **3,323** refugees thus far in 2020 with messages specifically addressing the dangers of onward movement in the context of COVID-19, though most of these activities have been down-scaled since March in line with measures to mitigate transmission of the virus. UNHCR has continued to respond to trafficking incidents reported to protection staff and through the protection hotline and has assisted law enforcement agencies in search and rescue operations. Thus far in 2020, **923** victims of trafficking and human smuggling have been rescued by law enforcement agencies, and a project implemented through UNHCR's partner, TAI, seeks to reintegrate victims of trafficking. In addition, UNHCR collects and analyzes information on trafficking incidents with a view to understanding emerging trends and putting in place appropriate protection services. There are continued concerns about the restrictive nature of life in the camps, which is likely a contributing factor for people to move onwards and puts them then at risk of exploitative practices of those involved in trafficking and smuggling. Malaysia is a top intended destination, with refugees enduring arduous voyages at sea, some of which last for many months in deplorable conditions. Anti-trafficking efforts will remain in full swing especially after the monsoon and cyclone season when boat movements are expected to resume. UNHCR with its partners will continue raising awareness among the refugee population on the risks associated with such journeys and will coordinate with the authorities to take action against smugglers and traffickers. Orientation sessions on the Prevention and Suppression of the Human Trafficking Act were organized by UNHCR's partner, Rights Jessore, for local journalists and transport workers.

## Key Challenges

- The reduced humanitarian footprint in the camps due to the restrictions on movement during the lockdown compounded WASH and shelter related challenges faced by refugees. There have been recurring problems with shelter facilities, broken tube wells, malfunctioning toilets, and insufficient or overflowing drainage systems. This was further worsened during the monsoon season with camps experiencing heavy rains and storms, particularly with the onset of Cyclone Amphan in May which caused flooding, shelter damage and poor hygienic conditions due to stagnant water and clogged drainage systems. In addition to these issues, inadequate lighting and the placement of latrines and water points continue to cause protection concerns for women and girls who are disproportionately affected by poor sanitation and hygiene facilities.
- The closure of all multi-purpose centres, learning centres and child friendly spaces, without alternatives being provided, has resulted in negative coping mechanisms impacting children and adolescents. The loss of work opportunities across camps have led to an increase in child labour and child marriage. In some instances, children and adolescents have also become involved in the drugs trade and petty crime, such as theft. Most of the reported child protection cases have been categorized as high risk, including SGBV, child marriage, violence, and child labour.
- Trafficking and smuggling remain significant concerns in Bangladesh. Child trafficking in particular continues to be a major concern in a number of camps, mostly involving girls and often relating to child marriage, with the promise of economic stability through marriage being used to lure victims into trafficking and smuggling schemes.
- Thus far in 2020 several boats have left the country with refugees from the camps along with some Bangladeshi migrants intending to travel to Malaysia, and while two boats have managed to disembark in Malaysia and two have reached Indonesia, others have had to seek other options after spending months at sea in terrible conditions. Two boats have returned to Bangladesh. The first landed in Teknaf in mid-April and was allowed to disembark, and UNHCR supported the Government in facilitating 14-day quarantine for 401 passengers before they were allowed to return to their families in the camps and local communities. A second boat was intercepted in early May with 306 refugees aboard, but the Government refused to let them return to the camps and instead transferred them to Bhasan Char Island, where they currently remain separated from their other family members.
- Alleged corruption on the part of majhis remained a challenge across the camps, with reports of some of them abusing their power, preventing refugees from accessing legal assistance mechanisms, physically assaulting refugees, taking money to resolve disputes, and advocating for inappropriate resolutions in cases of intimate partner violence. In some camps, Cyclone Preparedness Program (CPP) volunteers were also implicated in inappropriate practices. With the COVID-19 restrictions on access to the camps in place since March, disputes have increasingly been mediated by majhis, community leaders or even organized criminal gangs because of the inconsistent presence of legal actors and authorities in the camps.
- Community-based structures across all camps, including for COMs and community groups, faced challenges in light of COVID-19 restrictions, affecting their ability to conduct activities and complete community-based projects.
- With the onset of the pandemic, women and adolescent girls have faced increased pressure from their families and communities due to rumors linking the spread of the virus to women, in particular targeting women perceived as deviating from traditional norms (e.g. working). This put further strain on women's participation in camp activities and limited their involvement in community-based structures. UNHCR has been working with its partners to combat such rumors, debunk the existing myths, and find avenues for women's participation.
- Increased restrictions, loss of livelihoods, suspension of educational activities, and increased criminality, among others, have compounded SGBV risks. Access to Women Friendly Spaces by survivors of intimate partner violence were impeded due to the prolonged presence of their spouses at home.
- Leaking and dripping shelters damaged by heavy rain and not yet repaired are reported to have had a negative impact on the health of children suffering from cough and fever. It was also reported that a number of children were affected by seasonal diseases, including skin diseases, chicken pox, diarrhea, and abdominal pain, but parents refuse to send them to the camp medical facilities alleging their dissatisfaction with the services.
- Unprotected water reservoirs, ponds and bridges in several camps continue to pose serious risks of drowning, particularly for children. The heavy use of roads by vehicles also poses risks. These and other risks are exacerbated by the closure of learning centers since mid-March, which has created significant free time and lack of daily routines for children, as well as lack of supervision and care that gave rise to cases of trafficking, lost children, elopements, etc.
- Policy limitations on the provision of quality, accredited education for refugee children and youth remains a concern. While overall coverage has expanded in 2019 and 2020, the absence of meaningful education and vocational training programs and the lack of certified education creates space for idleness and increases risks of exploitation, child marriage, and other harmful coping mechanisms, particularly for adolescents.
- The ban on SIM cards and access to telecommunications in the camps was the subject of much concern with the onset of COVID-19 and the critical need to spread credible information to refugees about prevention. While the ban has now been relaxed, access to telecommunications networks in the camps continues to be sporadic and inconsistent.
- Generalized insecurity caused by rivalry between criminal groups has resulted in a number of attempts at spontaneous and unauthorised self-relocation of refugees from one camp to another. This has impacted access to assistance for those who did not get official permission to relocate.
- Access to justice was negatively affected in the camps due to the reduced footprint of humanitarian actors and authorities. The resulting impunity with which criminal elements operated provided further incentive for organized criminal gangs to expand their activities. The lack of timely legal solutions has been perceived by refugees to be the result of ineffective follow-up, which negatively affected refugees' trust in the legal process. At the same time, the reduced presence of protection actors impacted negatively on the delivery of legal assistance. In an effort to seek swift solutions, refugees have continued to look to *ad-hoc* dispute resolution mechanisms through majhis, CPP volunteers and other non-legal actors, which has led to numerous reports of corruption, bias, and extortion. Very few legal literacy and counselling sessions have been held as a result of COVID 19 restrictions. Moving forward this needs to be addressed to ensure refugees have access to fair, legal-based dispute resolution mechanisms, despite the COVID-19 restrictions in place.
- Over the past nine months violence has increased across the camps, and the security situation remains particularly tense. Refugees have begun forming groups to counter these gangs, while others have reportedly joined gangs as a coping mechanism, especially considering the lack of livelihoods opportunities as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. The situation has eroded trust between communities and law enforcement agencies.

## Way Forward

- In line with its mandate responsibilities, UNHCR will continue to advocate with the Government of Bangladesh for continued access to territory for Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution in Myanmar and will support the Government and the people of Bangladesh as they continue to offer international protection to those in need until such time as conditions become conducive for voluntary repatriation to Myanmar in safety and dignity. UNHCR will support regional efforts to address the root causes of displacement in Myanmar, while seeking ways to address onward movement from Bangladesh to other countries in the region, through advocacy for a range of complementary pathways for solutions in line with the Global Compact on Refugees. To ensure the Government can continue to provide access to territory for refugees fleeing Myanmar and reception facilities, and to encourage the authorities to facilitate safe disembarkation of persons rescued at sea, UNHCR will continue to maintain quarantine facilities for new arrivals with a total capacity for as many as 1,000 persons.
- UNHCR will maintain efforts to enhance coordination with humanitarian partners to ensure effective protection programming in the 34 camps. Ongoing coordination meetings at the camp level, and various working groups at the Cox's Bazar level support efforts toward effective protection programming and interventions while ensuring a harmonized approach across the camps.
- Promoting peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities will remain a major objective of the operation through programs that support vulnerable Bangladeshis with access to basic services and livelihoods opportunities, and that provide a forum for engaging members of the refugee and host communities to address their concerns.
- UNHCR will continue to strengthen community-based protection mechanisms through an age, gender and diversity approach and ensure accountability to affected populations across the camps, including by promoting elected refugee representation bodies and supporting the expanded formation of community-led initiatives through self-organized community groups.
- UNHCR will continue to undertake regular protection monitoring in the camps and at the border – directly and through partners – to identify protection risks and inform the response, while strengthening individual case management and referral pathways and expanding outreach with refugee communities to identify and address their needs.
- UNHCR will lead the process of ensuring protection mainstreaming across all sectors through the establishment of multi-functional teams, internally within UNHCR and with partners including the refugee community. Protection principles will also be mainstreamed across all sectors through efforts led by the Protection Working Group, which has activated protection mainstreaming focal points for the Health, Site Management, Food Security, and WASH sectors since May 2020, and multiple protection mainstreaming sessions have taken place in these and other sectors.
- UNHCR will continue advocacy at the Cox's Bazar and Dhaka levels

## Working in Partnership

UNHCR co-chairs the **Strategic Executive Group** together with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. UNHCR leads on the protection response for refugees and leads the Protection Sector in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR welcomes its valuable partnership with a number of UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its protection and assistance programs with humanitarian partners through a number of working groups under the Inter-Sector Coordination Group. UNHCR's main government counterpart is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and its Cox's Bazar-based Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC). UNHCR staff work closely with Camp-in-Charge officials in different refugee settlements, as well as with a range of international and national actors. UNHCR has a strong network of 32 partners, including:

**MDMR** (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief) | **Action Aid Bangladesh** | **ACF** (Action Contre la Faim) | **ADRA** (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) | **BNWLA** (Bangladesh National Woman Lawyer's Association) | **BDRCS** (Bangladesh Red Crescent Society) | **BRAC** (Bangladesh

to enhance cooperation with police and the judiciary towards enhancing access to justice for refugees and will work closely with the authorities to find pragmatic solutions. UNHCR will expand efforts to strengthen access to formal and informal justice mechanisms through capacity building with partners, CiCs, and law enforcement authorities, and through awareness raising within the refugee and host communities (as the COVID-19 situation allows). The expanded use of community-based mediation schemes to resolve interpersonal and family conflicts will be a key component of the program, including training of partners and awareness raising with the community. A pilot community safety program will also be put in place together with UNDP and IOM.

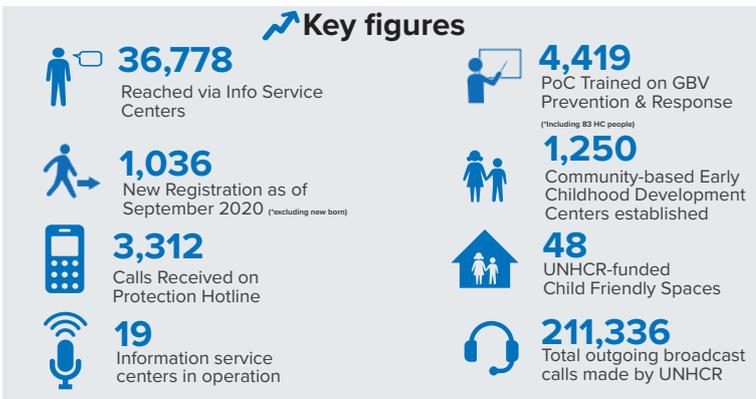
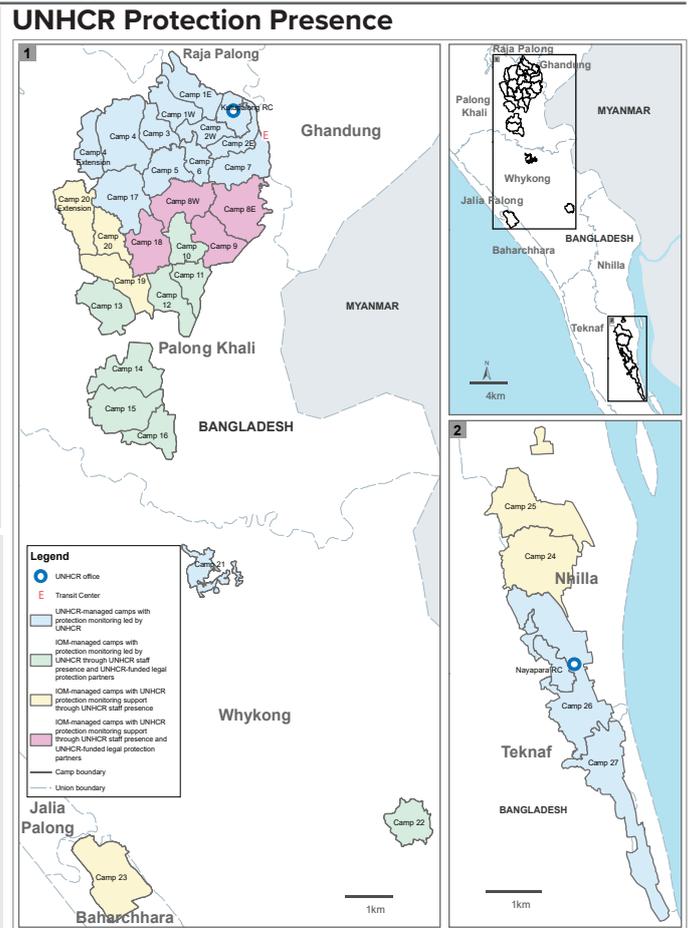
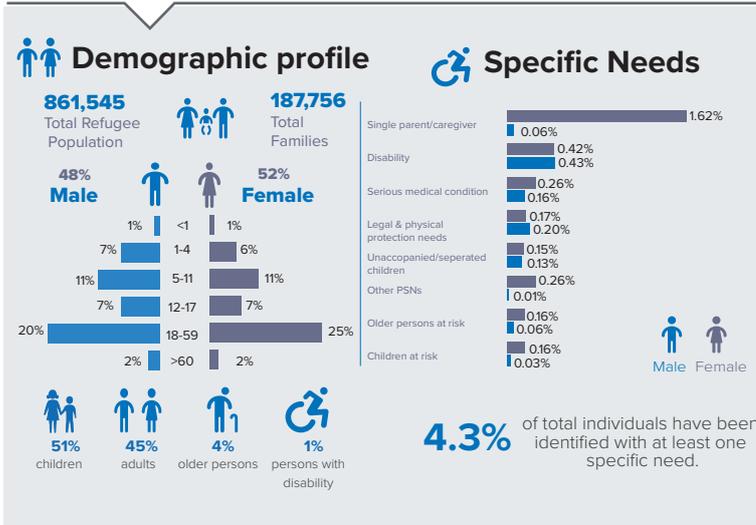
- UNHCR will advocate for more structured engagement with authorities and other stakeholders in Cox's Bazar and Dhaka to more effectively address safety and security concerns within the camps, including through systematic notification of arrest of refugees and ensuring their access to legal representation, designation of focal points within law enforcement agencies, and strengthened monitoring of detention facilities.
- UNHCR will continue to co-chair the Anti-Trafficking Working Group as a forum for information sharing and joint programming and advocacy with authorities and refugee and host communities, and will strengthen awareness raising on anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling within the camps and provide legal assistance and other support to victims of trafficking.
- UNHCR will continue to work with the Government to register refugees and provide individual documentation, while advocating for access to more effective civil registration procedures, particularly for the issuance of birth certificates.
- Access to quality education will remain a key priority, and UNHCR will continue to implement its activities under the Learning Competency Framework (LCF) and Guidelines for Informal Education Programmes (GIEP) as an interim solution while advocating for sustainable, meaningful, and equitable education for refugees and host communities. The introduction of the Myanmar curriculum in camp schools will be a priority in 2020 and 2021, as will improved quality of teaching and increased teaching-related professional development, better measurement of learning outcomes, and increased refugee and host community engagement in education programming. UNHCR will continue to support coordination efforts aimed at overall strategic enhancement of interventions within the Education Sector as chair of the Strategic Advisory Group.
- The UN Country Team continues to constructively engage the Government to advocate for a comprehensive assessment of the safety and sustainability of plans to relocate as many as 100,000 refugees to Bhasan Char Island. Advocacy surrounding the 306 refugees already relocated to the island in May after they disembarked from a boat that had failed to reach Malaysia will continue in order to ensure basic protection and humanitarian needs are fulfilled.

Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | **Caritas Bangladesh** | **CNRS** (Center for Natural Resource Studies) | **CODEC** (Community Development Centre) | **COAST** (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) | **Danish Refugee Council** | **FH Association** (Food for the Hungry) | **GK** (Gonoshasthaya Kendra) | **IUCN** (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) | **Handicap International** | **Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation** | **Light House** | **Oxfam GB** | **Relief International** | **Mukti Cox's Bazar** | **NGO Forum for Public Health** | **RTMI** (Research, Training and Management International) | **Save the Children International** | **World Vision** | **Solidarites International** | **Terre des Hommes** | **TAI** (Technical Assistance Incorporated) | **NRC** (Norwegian Refugee Council) | **WFP** (World Food Programme) | **UNDP** (United Nations Development Programme) | **IOM** (International Organization for Migration)

UNHCR would like to acknowledge the crucial role played by refugees in the response. **Over 7,000 volunteers from the refugee community** are working side by side with humanitarian agencies.

### Donor Country Contributions to UNHCR Bangladesh (2019/2020)

UNHCR's humanitarian response in Bangladesh is made possible thanks to the generous support of major donors who have contributed unrestricted funding to UNHCR's global operations, and to donors who have generously contributed directly to UNHCR Bangladesh operations. In 2019/2020, support continued to be generously received from the following: Austria, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. UNHCR is sincerely grateful for the additional support received from individuals, foundations, and companies worldwide, including: Athmar Holdings, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CERF, Education Cannot Wait, Fondation EDF, Mabarrat Ghanaem Al Khair, Qatar Charity, Shih Wing Ching Foundation, and Thani Bin Abdullah Bin Thani Al Thani Humanitarian Fund.



## Progress Against 2020 Targets

