

Bangladesh

May 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

Lockdown measures remained in place throughout May to curb transmission of COVID-19 across the country. **UNHCR advocates for the continuation of critical protection activities in the camps.**

The 2021 Joint Response Plan was launched by the Government and humanitarian community seeking US\$ 943 million.

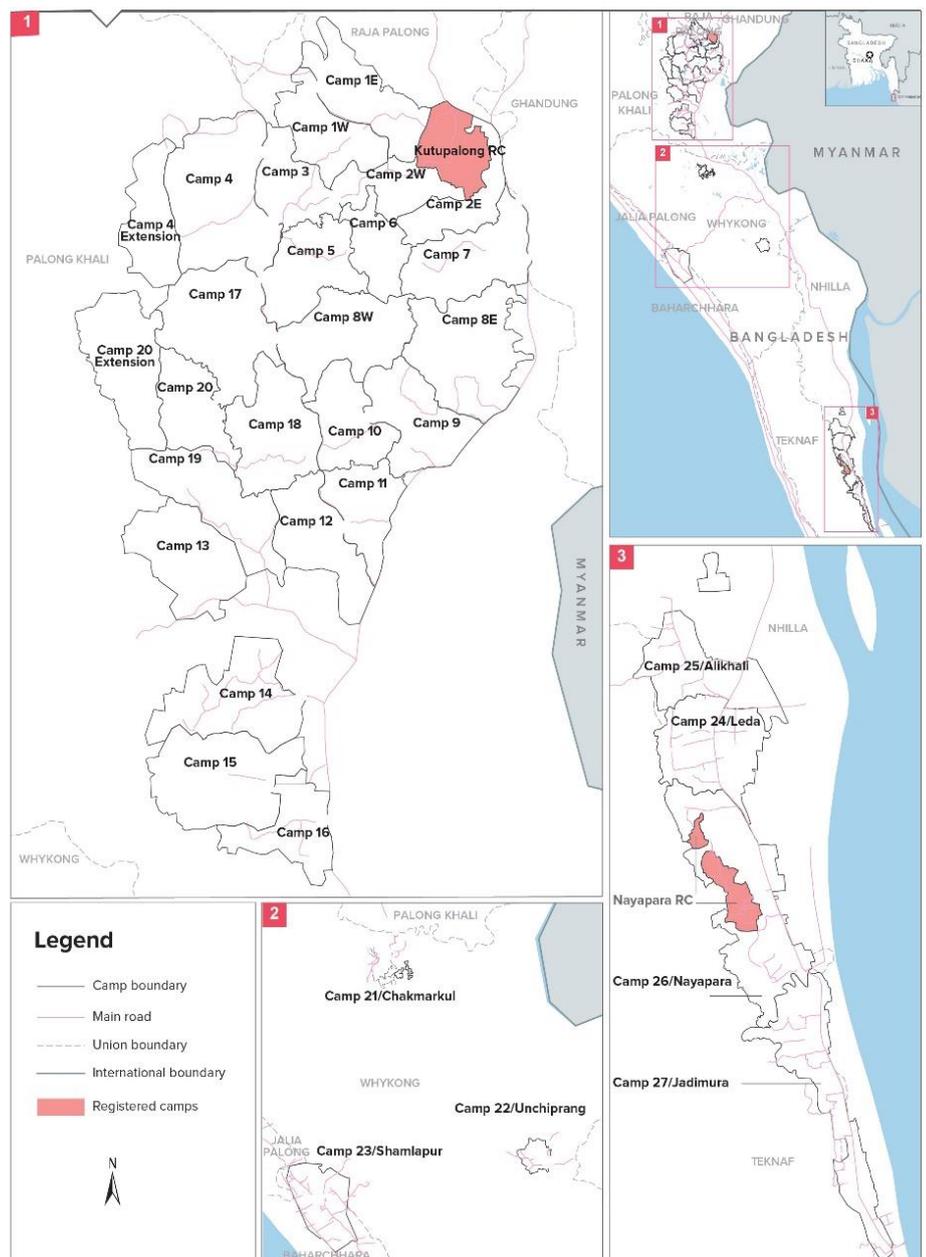
UNHCR's **Assistant High Commissioners for Protection and for Operations** arrived in Bangladesh for a four-day visit, including visits to refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, and the island of Bhasan Char and meetings with senior Government officials in Dhaka.

POPULATION DATA

888,381

refugees in Cox's Bazar District.

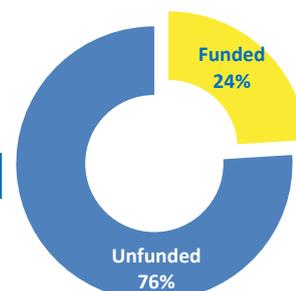
852,701 refugees who arrived since 2017 are registered under the Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration exercise, along with 35,680 refugees who have been residing in the two registered camps since the 1990s.



2021 FUNDING

USD 294.5 M

requested for Bangladesh



Operational Context

Lockdown measures have been in place across Bangladesh including the Rohingya refugee camps since the beginning of April following increasing rates of COVID-19 countrywide. This month, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) further increased restrictive measures across the 34 Rohingya refugee camps in an effort to reduce the risk of further spread of the virus. Similarly, restrictive measures have been imposed in some areas of the surrounding host communities also experiencing higher rates of infection.

The month of May has seen a notable increase in the number of COVID-19 positive cases in the camps. As of 31 May, 1,188 cases were confirmed, and more than half (over 600) of these cases were recorded in May alone. 17 deaths have been reported in the camps since March 2020, 6 of which during the period April - May 2021. During the month of May the test positivity rate among refugees in the camps increased to 13% (up from 3% in April), whereas in the host communities in Cox's Bazar, the rate decreased from 15.3% in April to 12% in May.

In addition to COVID-19, heavy rains marked the start of the monsoon and Cyclone Yaas formed in the Bay of Bengal. UNHCR mobilized its multifunctional emergency response teams, site management support partners, and volunteers in the camps to prepare and respond. Fortunately, the cyclone did not make landfall in Cox's Bazar, however the heavy rain and wind damaged nearly 700 shelters in the camps. UNHCR and partners provided material support to those households affected.

[The 2021 Joint Response Plan \(JRP\)](#) for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis was launched on 18 May jointly by the Government of Bangladesh and the humanitarian community. The JRP is seeking USD 943 million to meet the needs of over 1.4 million Rohingya refugees and members of the host community in Cox's Bazar District.

A joint visit to Bangladesh of the UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Gillian Triggs, and UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, Raouf Mazou, took place from 30 May to 2 June. It included visits to the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar and the island of Bhasan Char, as well as meetings with senior Government officials. A press release from the visit is available [here](#).



Photo 1: Gillian Triggs, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, washes her hands during a visit to UNHCR's Severe Acute Respiratory Infection (SARI) Isolation and Treatment Centre in Ukhiya. © UNHCR/Louise Donovan



Photo 2: Raouf Mazou (left), Assistant High Commissioner for Operations is briefed on UNHCR's energy and environment projects in the camps by staff member Paul McCallion. © UNHCR/Louise Donovan

Achievements



PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- The Armed Police Battalion (APBN), which is responsible for maintaining law and order in the camps, has joined the SASA! Together project. SASA! Together is a community mobilization approach for preventing violence against women through developing individual and community leadership and strengthening institutions. This engagement is expected to bring change in practices and norms by creating an environment conducive to prevent violence against women generally and intimate partner violence specifically. UNHCR is implementing SASA! Together in 15 camps.
- While protection services and facilities were mostly closed in the camps, refugee volunteer programmes continued to operate to maintain community engagement, albeit on a smaller scale. Community Outreach Members reached over 20,000 refugees through awareness raising sessions; community groups reached over 500 refugees with information through community-led discussions; and over 800 refugees joined radio listening groups and visual content watching groups. Further, over 24,000 refugees were reached through Interactive Voice Recordings on their mobile phones. Topics included COVID-19 prevention and care, fire safety and cyclone preparedness.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- During the lockdown, protection activities were limited to remote interventions and liaison with counterparts including refugee community volunteer structures and the Government authorities in the camps. Registration of refugees also remained suspended. In coordination with the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), UNHCR continued to advocate with the RRRC for inclusion of prioritized protection interventions among those other activities considered to be life-saving and thus permitted during the lockdown. The list of critical activities includes support to the most vulnerable through protection case management for specialized care and assistance, community engagement and registration.



PUBLIC HEALTH

Achievements and Impact

- Over 100 Community Health Worker (CHW) Supervisors/Managers were trained on revised key messages on COVID-19 prevention in the context of increased cases and new variants. Concerns of poor adherence to infection prevention measures including limited use of masks were expressed in the training. To ensure strict use of masks and promote infection prevention measures, CHWs committed to be extra vigilant, enhance education at household level, engage with influential community leaders for communication with communities and disseminate key messages through announcements before and after prayers in mosques, among other measures.

- An inception workshop for the 2021 Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) on food security was conducted virtually with very active participation by over 150 participants from UNHCR, WFP, IOM, and their implementing partners. The workshop highlighted progress on the secondary data review and the information gaps that will be addressed in the coming weeks in the primary data collection phase. The JAM process is expected to conclude in July after which a 2-year strategic and operational Joint Plan of Action (JPA) between WFP and UNHCR will be developed.
- The Mental Health and Psychosocial Support team completed three self-care trainings for a total of 50 supervisors of the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) sub-sector. Similarly, a training was arranged for child protection partners of UNHCR on basic psychosocial support skills during COVID-19, self-care, and care for others. These trainings across different sectors will greatly contribute to the promotion of psychosocial care of individuals during the COVID-19 situation.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Though refugees are included in the national vaccination plan and despite ongoing active advocacy with the Government of Bangladesh and related stakeholders, vaccine roll out for refugees is yet to be implemented. UNHCR is continuously advocating for vaccination of refugees and surrounding communities. It has reached out to high income countries to support the global COVAX Facility by sharing doses and earmarking vaccines for Bangladesh with specific inclusion of refugees and surrounding communities.
- The daily COVID-19 testing capacity (currently about 200-300 tests/day) is not adequate. Further, the refugee community has raised concerns about the long distances to sentinel sites for sample collection as well as to COVID treatment facilities. Refugees have also expressed fear and anxiety about isolation of those tested positive and their contacts, possible social stigma, and care for family members during isolation. UNHCR is trying to find solutions for acceptable forms of isolation of positively tested refugees with mild symptoms (currently occupying hospital beds) and is working with partners to submit a request to the Health Sector for additional sample collection sites.



Photo 3: Female refugees in a waiting room at a UNHCR-funded clinic wear masks and follow physical distancing guidance. © UNHCR/2021

**WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE****Achievements and Impact**

- Over 9,000 handwashing “tippy taps” (a cost-effective hands-free device for handwashing) were installed at household level (nearly 120,000 have been installed since the onset of COVID-19 response). Over 60,000 households received bath and laundry soap, and nearly 30,000 female hygiene kits were distributed. Regular disinfection of facilities, including latrines, water collection points and bathing cubicles is ongoing. In May, over 30,000 facilities were disinfected with chlorine solution.

**SHELTER AND SITE MANAGEMENT****Achievements and Impact**

- In preparation for the monsoon season, UNHCR continued to distribute tie down kits, consisting of rope and wire to reinforce shelters. So far nearly 90,000 households have received kits including 40,000 in May. In response to heavy rain and winds, including during Cyclone Yaas, nearly 2,000 households received material and support to fix damaged shelters.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- UNHCR continues to advocate for its partners involved in site management to have access to the camps for critical support within the COVID-19 restrictions. The partners support refugees with a wide range of issues including preparing for the monsoon season, responding to disasters, monitoring of service provision, and facilitating complaint and feedback mechanisms.



Photo 4 and 5: Refugees, volunteers and UNHCR's partners reinforce shelters in preparation for Cyclone Yaas. © ActionAid/2021

Working in partnership

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a co-chair of the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) in Bangladesh together with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. UNHCR also leads the protection response as head of the Protection Working Group in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR has valuable partnerships with a number of UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its assistance with humanitarian partners through the various sectors and working groups as part of the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). UNHCR's main government counterpart in Cox's Bazar is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and its Cox's Bazar-based Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Home Affairs in Dhaka, among other government ministries and entities. UNHCR staff work closely with the RRRC's Camp-in-Charge officials in the 34 refugee camps, as well as a range of international and national actors. UNHCR would also like to acknowledge the role played by refugees in the response, with over 7,000 volunteers from the refugee community who are often the first responders on the ground.

UNHCR partners

MoDMR (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief) | Action Aid Bangladesh | ACF (Action Contre la Faim) | Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) | BLAST (Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust) | BRAC (Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | Caritas Bangladesh | Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) | COAST (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) | CODEC (Community Development Centre) | Danish Refugee Council | FH Association (Food for the Hungry) | GK (Gonoshasthaya Kendra) | Handicap International | Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation | IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) | Light House | Mukti Cox's Bazar | NGO Forum for Public Health | Oxfam GB | Relief International | RTMI (Research, Training and Management International) | Save the Children International | Social Assistance and Rehabilitation for the Physically Vulnerable | TAI (Technical Assistance Incorporated) | Terre des Hommes

Donors

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors that have contributed to this operation as well as those that contribute to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked and broadly earmarked funds. In 2020, support was generously received from: *Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America*. UNHCR is grateful for the additional support received from individuals, foundations, and companies worldwide, including: *Athmar Holdings, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CERF, Education Cannot Wait, Foundation EDF, Giuliana Lagetto, Relief Singapore, Shih Wing Ching Foundation, Tanmeia, Thani Bin Abdullah Bin Thani Al Thani Humanitarian Fund, TTY Management B.V. and Zakat House*.

CONTACTS & LINKS

Hannah Macdonald | External Relations Officer | Cox's Bazar | macdonah@unhcr.org

Mai Hosoi | External Relations Officer | Dhaka | hosoi@unhcr.org

[Situation portal](#) - [Twitter](#) - [Facebook](#)