

Highlights

To curb the transmission of COVID-19 across the country, lockdown measures remained in place throughout June. The measures also impacted humanitarian access to the camps and delivery of services, as only some critical activities are approved by the Government. **UNHCR advocates for the continuation of all critical services in the camps, including protection activities, duly respecting COVID restrictive measures.**

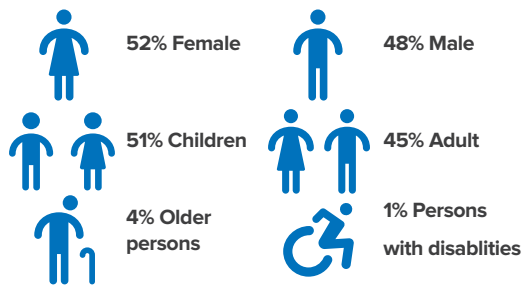
Despite the lockdown, as approved by the Government, **monsoon preparedness and response activities continued** including the mobilisation of refugee volunteers, site management support partners and UNHCR's emergency response teams when needed.

UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, Mr. Tahsan Khan, visited the camps in Cox's Bazar for World Refugee Day on 20 June.

Operational Context

Population Data

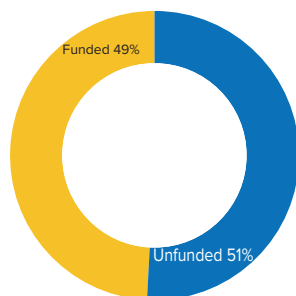
889,704 refugees in Cox's Bazar District. **854,024** refugees who arrived since 2017 and are registered under the Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration exercise, along with **35,680** refugees who have been residing in the two registered camps since the 1990s.



2021 Funding

USD 294.5 M

requested for
Bangladesh



Bangladesh continued to see a significant increase in COVID-19 positive cases in June. In the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, as of 30 June, 1,775 positive cases and 20 deaths had been recorded since March 2020. Worryingly, over 1,200 of these cases were recorded in May and June alone.

While Rohingya refugees are included in the national vaccination plan, their vaccination remains on hold, pending the arrival of vaccines to Bangladesh. Sustained advocacy for equitable access continues, with UNHCR proactively supporting the Government of Bangladesh in advocating for a rapid delivery of COVAX vaccine allocations for Bangladeshis and Rohingya refugees. As of the date of publication of this document, the Government of Bangladesh has approved the provision of vaccines for the first cohort of refugees, those aged 55+ (some 47,240 refugees), to be rolled out in August in the camps in Cox's Bazar.

Continuing lockdown measures have reduced the humanitarian footprint, and restricted activities in both the camps and surrounding host communities. Protection, including registration, gender-based violence prevention and response and child protection, as well as site management activities are not considered "critical" under a directive from the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) issued on 28 April. This has created gaps in in-person services such as mediation, legal counselling and individual support to vulnerable women, children, elderly, and disabled persons which is normally conducted by trained protection actors. UNHCR continues to advocate for the inclusion of protection and site management as critical activities. Refugee and host community volunteers continue to contribute significantly to the humanitarian response while access to the camps remains limited.

UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador visits Cox's Bazar

In celebration of World Refugee Day, UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, Tahsan Khan, visited Cox's Bazar and met with refugees to learn about their experiences. Tahsan is a well-known Bangladeshi singer-songwriter and actor who has been supporting UNHCR since 2019 and was appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador in January 2021. Tahsan visited Cox's Bazar's first Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in Sadar District Hospital which provides services to the host community as well as refugees, to mark its first anniversary. He also inaugurated a new 24-hour laboratory that will provide diagnostic services to patients treated in the ICU. Both facilities were established with UNHCR support.

While in the refugee camps, Tahsan engaged with children, adolescents, refugee volunteers and other actors working in education and gender-based violence prevention. He discussed the preservation of the Rohingya culture with young filmmakers and performed a song with Rohingya musicians. Tahsan met with Government authorities and UNHCR staff who briefed him on the wide range of activities implemented in Cox's Bazar to support refugees and host communities.



UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, Tahsan Khan, meeting with children, adolescents, volunteer teachers and other education actors in the camps during his visit. @UNHCR/Iffath Yeasmine

COMMUNITY BASED AND LEGAL PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- Rohingya Imams and female religious leaders conducted 4,530 awareness sessions reaching 52,817 individuals. Topics included COVID-19 prevention measures, cyclone and monsoon preparedness, prevention and treatment of diarrhoea, fire safety, child marriage and social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.
- Refugee volunteer Community Outreach Workers reached 3,000 refugees through home visits in lieu of group sessions to avoid large gatherings. 279 refugees were identified with specific needs and referred to relevant services. Awareness sessions about cyclone and monsoon preparedness and fire safety reached 37,772 refugees including 5,022 older persons and 228 persons with disabilities.
- Through the Interactive Voice Response project nearly 40,000 refugees received pre-recorded voice messages on their mobile phones. Messages included information on COVID-19 and monsoon preparedness.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Using remote modalities, UNHCR and partners are closely supporting the refugee volunteers; various community-based activities continue on a smaller scale including one on one awareness sessions conducted by community outreach volunteers. However, the number of female refugees reached is limited as many female refugees do not have access to mobile phones and community centres remain closed.
- Some refugees including women and children attempting to return from Bhasan Char to the camps in Cox's Bazar were arrested and detained in various police bureaux in May and June. UNHCR through its partners is providing legal assistance to these refugees while raising concern with relevant authorities about the protection needs of those arrested, notably women and children.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Achievements and Impact

- A telephone survey of 600 refugee men and boys across six camps was conducted to understand their knowledge, beliefs, and behaviours with regards to gender-based violence and traditional gender norms. The outcomes will inform the ongoing revision of UNHCR's approach to engaging men and boys on gender-based violence in the camps.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Gender based violence prevention activities and response services are not considered "critical" as per government's COVID-19 restrictions. While individual counselling and assistance on an emergency and exceptional basis has been permitted, and referral to health and mental health and psycho-social support for such cases is ongoing, most activities remain suspended. Despite efforts to provide remote individual support, in-person counselling and legal assistance had to be suspended, and due to challenges with the mobile phone network, lack of access to phones and credit, remote support is challenging, and it is assumed many cases are not being reported.

CHILD PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- An online training with 106 participants from NGOs was conducted to improve the understanding of key child protection concerns, referrals, and services, and to improve collaboration between child protection actors and refugee community groups, including child protection committees, adolescent groups, and religious leaders.
- Community-based child protection groups and volunteers continued COVID-19 awareness sessions along with other emergency monsoon preparedness sessions in the camps reaching 1,500 children and adolescent refugees with COVID-19 information and psychosocial social support; 15,000 flyers with COVID-19 prevention information were distributed to children and their families.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- COVID-19 restrictions prevented in person case management, and limited child protection activities in the camps leaving gaps and underreporting of cases.

EDUCATION

Achievements and Impact

- The Learning Centers for refugee children up to Grade 9 have been closed since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020. The rollout of the Myanmar curriculum remained equally on hold.
- A two-day online training with twenty participants from partner organizations was facilitated by UNHCR on the creation of "early childhood development corners" in the Infant and Young Child Feeding centres in the camps with COVID-19 preventative measures observed. This will provide an enabling environment for feeding practices and protection and supporting pregnant and lactating women, infants, young children, and their caregivers. The concept will be rolled out in two facilities as a pilot.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND SELF RESILIENCE

Achievements and Impact

- Seeds, seedlings, and other material support were distributed to 3,107 refugee households for homestead gardening; livestock feed and medication was distributed to 2,000 host community households; and productive assets or enterprise development support was provided to 1,129 host community households. Agricultural inputs support the nutritional security of the households, and the surplus production can provide earning opportunities. Productive asset and enterprise support to the host community households improves their standard of living by means of income generation.
- 575 refugee and 281 host community women are engaged in livelihoods activities including hand embroidery and jute bag production.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Achievements and Impact

- Public health measures to foster prevention of transmission of COVID-19 among the refugees continued. Community Health Workers from across all agencies visited 588,819 refugee households reaching 1,148,770 individuals (including repeat visits) with messages on COVID-19 prevention and identified a total of 6,613 individuals with mild or severe COVID-19-like symptoms whom they referred to health facilities. During 63,146 small group sessions on COVID-19, community health workers also informed refugees on vaccination to promote acceptance and reduce hesitancy.
- UNHCR continues to support two Severe Acute Respiratory Infection (SARI) Isolation and Treatment Centres (ITC) and one Intensive Care Unit which provide services to both refugees and the host community. The SARI ITC's occupancy remains high (95 percent in Ukhiya, 82 percent in Camp 5), and the ICU at 63 percent. Patients at the SARI-ITCs continue to receive mental health support through psychologists, and their families through psychosocial volunteers.
- UNHCR participated as a panellist representing the Bangladesh Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Working group in a side event at ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) Humanitarian Affairs Segment. Additionally, UNHCR presented on behalf of the working group in a dedicated MHPSS meeting following a donor request.

SITE MANAGEMENT

Achievements and Impact

- Despite limited access to the camps by site management partners due to COVID-19 restrictions, 100 community-led projects were completed in June. These projects are identified through consultations with the community and coordination with relevant actors. Projects included construction and repair of pathways, bridges, and stairs to facilitate safe movement in the camps, in particular through the monsoon season. The projects are identified and led by the Rohingya refugee communities with support from UNHCR partners including cash for work opportunities for Rohingya refugees in the camps.
- As a result of the monsoon rains, 200 incidents were recorded in UNHCR-managed camps. 171 incidences were caused by windstorms, four by floods, and 22 due to slope failure. The incidents affected a total of 10,496 households. UNHCR, partners and Rohingya refugee volunteers carried out damage assessments, relocated some affected families temporarily to communal facilities, and referred households for shelter and other support where needed.



A refugee cements a drainage system as part of community-led project in the camp where he lives. @UNHCR/Amos Halder

SHELTER AND SITE PLANNING

Achievements and Impact

- Shelter material, such as bamboo and tarpaulin, was distributed to 11,360 households to allow refugees to repair damage caused by heavy monsoon rains.
- A new brick road, connecting Camp 26 and 27, has considerably improved accessibility. The road is 1.1km long, and 4.37m wide, and crosses two major streams.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Although it remains possible to provide emergency shelter material support as part of the monsoon response, lockdown measures have reduced considerably the number of regular shelter assessments conducted by UNHCR's partners to ensure that refugee shelters remain in good condition.

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Achievements and Impact

- The provision of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) to refugees and host communities in Ukhiya and Teknaf continued throughout the lockdown period as one of the critical activities approved by RRRC. In June, a total of 69,154 refugee households and 12,309 host community households received refills of their LPG cannisters.
- On 6 June, World Environment Day, seedlings were distributed to 100 children in the host communities to plant in their homesteads. During the distributions, awareness sessions (respectful of COVID-19 safety measures) on the importance of environmental conservation also took place.
- The RRRC approved the plantation plan presented through the Energy and Environment Technical Working Group. In 2021, UNHCR and partners aim to bring 20 hectares of degraded land under mixed vegetation and plant 50,000 bamboo seedlings to establish a sustainable supply chain, bank protection and watershed restoration. 10,740 bamboo seedlings have already been planted in host community areas and 7000 vetiver slips were planted in the refugee camps; the vetiver grass has long roots and has proved effective for use in slope stabilization and erosion control. Maintenance of plantation, nurseries, walkway, reservoir, and silt traps is ongoing.



A refugee volunteer and member of the Elephant Response Team on duty in a watch tower. @UNHCR/ Chris Melzer

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Over 300 additional lightning arresters across all camps are needed to protect refugees from lightning strikes. 159 lightning arresters will be installed across all camps in 2021.
- Two adult elephants from Myanmar came to Bangladesh by crossing the Naf River. This appears to be a new migration corridor. The Bangladesh Forest Department and other government authorities, with help from the UNHCR supported host community Elephant Response Teams managed to safely direct elephants to the Teknaf forest. Additional elephant response capacity in the host community beyond the vicinity of the refugee camps is needed.

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Achievements and Impact

- Preventative sanitation work and hygiene promotion continues. 6,094 handwashing “tippy taps” (a cost-effective hands-free device for handwashing) were installed at shelters in June (125,720 since onset of COVID-19 response) and 73,558 WASH facilities were disinfected with chlorine solution.
- Due to continuous rainfall, there has been significant improvement in water supply in Teknaf and most reservoirs are full. UNHCR started facilitating the phase out of water rationing that was implemented to manage the water supply during the dry season (November to March).

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Due to the lockdown, progress of planned WASH activities is slow. The access restrictions in particular have slowed down the construction of new WASH facilities.

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

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