

Highlights

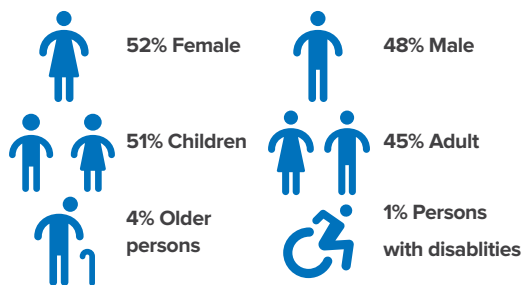
During the week of 27 July, the monsoon intensified, and Cox’s Bazar District experienced persistent rains and strong winds resulting in floods and landslides causing the death of eight refugees and 15 Bangladeshis in the host community areas. Almost 25,000 refugees were displaced within the camps. UNHCR’s emergency response was activated immediately and is ongoing.

In 2021, lockdown measures have been in place across the country including the Rohingya refugee camps since the beginning of April following increasing rates of COVID-19 countrywide. From 1 – 14 July a stricter lockdown was enforced. On 15 July the lockdown was lifted over the Eid holidays and then reinstated on 23 July. We continue to advocate with the Government to ensure continued humanitarian access to all areas in the camps and host communities, to ensure provision of vital protection and assistance services.

Operational Context

Population Data

890,276 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 **36,148** refugees who have been residing in the two registered camps since the 1990s.



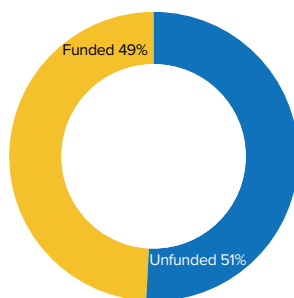
Bangladesh continued to see a significant increase in COVID-19 positive cases in July. As of 31 July, 2,451 COVID-19 cases, and 27 COVID-19 deaths were confirmed in the camps. Worryingly, more than 1,800 of these cases were recorded since May 2021, representing over 70 percent of total cases reported since the pandemic began in March 2020.

The humanitarian community is extremely grateful to the Government of Bangladesh for the inclusion of the Rohingya refugees in the COVID-19 national vaccination plan. The vaccination of Rohingya refugees will start on 10 August and will initially include refugees over 55 years of age. Altogether, it is planned that over 48,000 of the nearly 900,000 refugees will be vaccinated in the first cohort. Preparations for the roll out of the vaccination campaign are in advanced stages.

Continuing lockdown measures have reduced the humanitarian footprint, and restricted activities in both the camps and surrounding host communities. Only health and other life-saving activities and distribution of core relief items and cooking fuel are allowed to be carried out; following advocacy by the international community, disaster risk response is also permitted. However, protection, including registration, gender-based violence prevention and response, child protection, and site management activities are not considered “critical” under the directive shared by the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) on 28 April. This has created gaps in in-person services such as mediation, legal counselling, community consultations, and case management which are normally conducted by trained protection actors. Vulnerable refugees including women, children, older persons and people living with disabilities particularly depend on these assistances, and protection interventions are often lifesaving for them. Currently these services are conducted remotely or with support of trained refugee volunteers. UNHCR continues to advocate for the inclusion of protection and site management as critical activities. Refugee and host community volunteers continue to play significant roles in the humanitarian response while access to the camps remains limited.

2021 Funding

USD 294.5 M
requested for
Bangladesh



Refugee volunteers repair a bridge following the heavy monsoon rains in July. (C) UNHCR/Amos Halder

Adding to the complexity of the situation, Cox’s Bazar District experienced heavy monsoon rains and strong winds during the week of 27 July. The weather events resulted in the death of eight refugees and 15 Bangladeshis in the host community areas, as confirmed by government officials. 518 villages in Cox’s Bazar District are affected, while almost 25,000 refugees were displaced within the camps. A detailed report about UNHCR’s initial response to flooding and landslides can be found [here](#).

Even with coordinated efforts to prepare the camps and refugees in advance of monsoon season throughout the year, this monsoon season had affected over 117,000 refugees due to soil erosion and flooding, wind and storms.

COMMUNITY BASED AND LEGAL PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- Refugee protection volunteers, including Community Outreach Members, imams, female religious leaders, and community groups, reached some 85,000 refugees through awareness sessions on topics including COVID-19, emergency monsoon and cyclone preparedness, child protection, menstrual hygiene, gender-based and domestic violence, and health.
- Community groups completed 87 service projects benefiting some 3,000 refugees. The projects, supporting site management activities, included cleaning drain, repairing stairs, and bridges, as well as repairing mosques damaged by the monsoon, and sewing and distributing children's clothes. Community groups also repaired the shelters of 29 extremely vulnerable individuals.
- Community Outreach Members conducted some 3,000 home visits and referred some 1,000 refugees with specific needs, including older persons, to relevant service providers.
- Through the Interactive Voice Response project nearly 30,000 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 refugee volunteers. Various community-based activities continue on a smaller scale including individual awareness sessions conducted by refugee protection volunteers. However, the number of female refugees reached is limited as many do not have access to mobile phones and community centres remain closed.
- Prolonged lockdown has led to the reduction of many key legal services including access to courts, legal awareness sessions and mediation.
- Some refugees, including women and children, attempting to return from Bhasan Char to the camps in Cox's Bazar were arrested and detained in July. UNHCR through its partners provides legal assistance to these refugees and advocates with the Government for the release of these individuals in accordance with the national legal framework.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Achievements and Impact

- An online refresher training on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) was conducted for 20 UNHCR staff in Cox's Bazar. The objective of the training was to enhance staff members' understanding of sexual misconduct and reporting mechanisms. The participants will cascade the training to other staff members across the operation.
- An online training on "Working with LGBTIQ+ Individuals" was conducted for 62 UNHCR staff working in registration. UNHCR seeks to ensure that members of the gender diverse community enjoy safe and equal access to services and facilities.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Gender based violence prevention activities and response services are not considered "critical" activities as part of the government's COVID-19 restrictions; while case management on an emergency and exceptional basis has been permitted, and referral to health and psycho-social support for such cases is ongoing. Most GBV activities remain suspended. Despite remote case management efforts, challenges remain as many cases including in-person counselling and legal assistance are pending, and some refugees lack access to mobile phones and credit. It is assumed that there may be underreporting of cases.
- Heavy rain and flooding have resulted in displacement of thousands of refugees who are sheltering with family members or in temporary communal facilities. The weather has also damaged many solar lights, increasing the risk of gender-based violence across the camps.

CHILD PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- While learning centres and child-friendly spaces remain closed, children and adolescents, supported by refugee volunteers, engaged in small scale activities including home-based art, and discussions on the occasions of Youth Skills Development Day (15 July), World Drowning Prevention Day (25 July), and the World Day Against Trafficking in Person (29 July).
- An online workshop was held with 35 participants from partner NGOs about the "Best Interest Procedure" in child protection case management. Further workshops will take place for more personnel and monthly meetings will be instituted to discuss the preparation of case files in line with best practice.

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.

CASH BASED INTERVENTIONS

Achievements and Impact

- In Teknaf and Ukhiya sub-districts, UNHCR is running a cash assistance programme for 17,000 vulnerable Bangladeshi families, in consultation with the District Administration. The programme supports the most vulnerable with a one-time payment to cover basic needs. Recipients include those with disabilities, older persons, and widows. Two thirds of those benefiting from the programme are women
- In Cox's Bazar Sadar, in consultation with the District Administration, UNHCR supports 15,000 Bangladeshis who have been hardest hit by the economic impact of the lockdown with a one-time stipend.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Achievements and Impact

- Preparations for the COVID-19 vaccine campaign have taken place throughout the month. UNHCR has provided training to refugee and host community volunteers leading the community mobilization, prepared, printed and distributed information materials. UNHCR led the verification of eligible refugees and preparation of vaccine cards.
- The UNHCR/WFP Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) primary and secondary data collection was completed. The findings were presented to agency partners, and the full process is expected to be completed in August. The development of the Joint Action Plan, the outcome of the JAM, will guide agency activities with regards to food security and nutrition for the next two years.



Volunteer Community Health Workers conduct awareness sessions on COVID-19. (C) UNHCR/Amos Halder

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The recent surge in COVID-19 cases led to increased occupancy of beds in UNHCR-supported facilities, with the upward trend in transmission rates requiring an enhanced medical response. UNHCR distributed additional PPE for health staff, and medicines and other supplies for case management at health facilities including quarantine centres, and Sadar District Hospital in Cox's Bazar. Other community-based activities including risk communication and health promotion have been scaled up.
- Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) activities were paused in mid-July following a directive from the Government, due to the introduction of the strict lockdown. This created a gap in services for refugees in need of wellbeing support services. However, trained volunteers offered information sessions in their communities relating to stress and anger, and other issues.

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Achievements and Impact

- Preventative sanitation and hygiene promotion activities continued in all UNHCR supported camps to reduce the spread of Acute Watery Diarrhea (AWD) and COVID-19. Refugee and host community volunteers reached over 160,000 individuals with awareness messages through household visits.
- Water quality monitoring at water sources and households was scaled up, and over 200,000 water purification tablets were distributed. WASH facilities across the camps were disinfected with chlorine solution.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

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

SHELTER AND SITE PLANNING

Achievements and Impact

- Shelter material, such as bamboo and tarpaulin, was distributed to 5,808 households to allow refugees to repair damage caused by heavy monsoon rains.
- To improve access and safety in the camps, site improvement activities are ongoing throughout the year. In July, this included slope stabilisation (1,168m), drainage improvements (270m), and the construction of stairs (508m), access roads and footpaths (825m), and pedestrian bridges (49m).

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

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

SITE MANAGEMENT

Achievements and Impact

- On 14 July, an online workshop on the topic of community representation was held with IOM and the Site Management and Site Development Sector. There are currently elected camp committees in four camps: Kutupalong Registered Camp, Nayapara Registered Camp, Camp 26 and Camp 4 Extension. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss lessons learned, including achievements and challenges that the elected refugee committees are facing, as well as to discuss changes and how to streamline community representation systems in the future.
- In preparation for Eid-UI-Ahda on 21 July, partners and refugee volunteers prepared sheds for slaughtering and meat distribution, at designated sites, in line with COVID-19 guidelines. Following the holiday, the sites were disinfected by WASH volunteers.
- Despite limited access to the camps by partners due to COVID-19 restrictions, 183 community-led projects were completed in July. Projects included construction and repair of pathways, bridges, and stairs to facilitate safe movement in the camps, in particular during the monsoon season. The projects are identified and led by the Rohingya refugee communities with support from UNHCR partners and include cash for work opportunities for Rohingya refugees in the camps.

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Achievements and Impact

- The provision of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) to refugee households continued throughout the lockdown period as one of the critical activities approved by RRRC. In July, a total of 69,986 refugee households received refills of their LPG canisters.
- Forest based conservation activities, including 100% LPG fuel coverage in the camps, helps to ensure enough food for wildlife, including elephants, in the surrounding areas. We were pleased to hear that in July an elephant was born in Chakmar Ghona, near the camps, as reported by the Bangladesh Forestry Department. This news is a positive result of the important ongoing conservation activities.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Due to the continuous rain and cloud cover, solar technologies (including street and household lights) are not functioning well.



A refugee collects his household's refill of Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG). UNHCR/ Amos Halder

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, the UN Refugee Agency, in Bangladesh is grateful for the support of **Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and UN CERF**. With additional support received from individuals, foundations, and companies worldwide, including **Education Cannot Wait, Giuliana Lagetto, Shih Wing Ching Foundation, TTY Management B.V., The Big Heart Foundation, Unilever (UK), and private donors from Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, and Spain**.

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