



KEY FIGURES

BENEFICIARIES

961,175

Total registered refugee population



52%
Female



52%
Children



48%
Male

as of 31 May 2023

PARTNERS

24

of partners implementing key UNHCR activities in 2023

NGO **13**

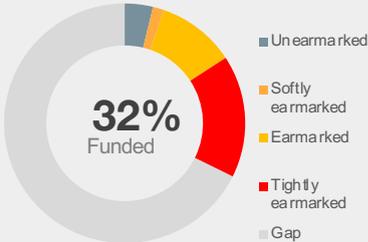
INGO **10**

Government **1**

FUNDING

275 M

Funding for 2023 operations



as of 23 May 2023

HISTORY

UNHCR has been a friend of Bangladesh since 1971, providing life-saving aid to some 10 million refugees forced to flee during the Liberation War.

Today, UNHCR and partners manage 16 camps in Cox's Bazar, including Nayapara and Kutupalong Registered Camps, plus the island of Bhasan Char, supporting the Government of Bangladesh to provide essential services and meet the protection needs of one million Rohingya refugees, including special services for women, children and persons with disabilities. Most arrived in 2017, fleeing persecution, large-scale violence and human rights violations.

Support is additionally extended to host communities while continuously working towards solutions to ensure that refugees can return in a safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable way once conditions in Myanmar allow.

OPERATIONAL UPDATE

May 2023



UNHCR Country Representative Johannes van der Klaauw visits a cyclone-affected family in Camp 21. © UNHCR

OVERVIEW

In May, the combination of several elements highlighted the desperation felt by Rohingya refugees: the destruction caused by Cyclone Mocha coupled with deeper cuts to assistance and the refugees' anxiety about slow progress toward sustainable solutions formed an atmosphere of fear and foreboding.

On 14 May, Cyclone Mocha hit the coast of Cox's Bazar, bringing fierce winds and heavy rainfall, and triggering landslides. The category 5 storm, the region's most severe in a decade, was expected to devastate the refugee camps. Fortunately for Bangladesh, the cyclone curved toward Myanmar; its centre made landfall on Rakhine state causing heavy damage, including casualties, while Cox's Bazar was lashed by the storm's outer flank. Still, nearly 34,000 refugees were affected, including 1,000 individuals displaced from their homes. In addition to 4,125 shelters that were partially damaged, 503 were fully destroyed. There was extensive damage to community infrastructure, including nearly 700 WASH, 49 education and 11 health and nutrition facilities. In Bangladeshi coastal communities, 2.3 million people were affected, and over 2,000 houses destroyed.

Hope was found in the immense dedication and high levels of preparation shown by response actors. In close coordination with the Government of Bangladesh, whose cyclone preparedness programme (CPP) has been developed over 50 years of disaster management, humanitarian partners prepared multi-functional response teams in Ukhiya and Teknaf and on Bhasan Char in the days before landfall, pre-positioned non-food items, reinforced emergency communication systems (radios, satellite phones) and relocated people to safety, devoting special attention to the needs of the most vulnerable refugees.

Refugee volunteers trained by UNHCR and partners were the heroes of the response, working tirelessly to ensure their community's safety. They screened the camps to help those in need, reunited lost children with caregivers, offered psychological support and referrals to services, repaired infrastructure, cleared drains and roads, mended bridges and rebuilt shelters. In the face of rising fear among the refugee population, they helped maintain calm, disseminated essential messages and persistently followed up on the welfare of extremely vulnerable individuals such as women-headed households, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

This was the first real test of cyclone preparedness and emergency response in six years of Rohingya response operations, and it proved the refugees' courage and capacity for endurance. With funding continuing to decline, the international community and the Government of Bangladesh can best help the community by investing in skills, livelihoods and education opportunities that will help them stand on their own feet — while also strengthening their resilience for their voluntary return to Myanmar, when conditions are conducive. Government approval of the skills development and volunteer incentives frameworks in 2022 were positive developments, but greater commitment is needed. Resilience also means constructing shelters from fire- and weather-resistant materials that will not be flattened or flooded by wind or rain or turned to ash by fire. In parallel, sustainable solutions, with respect to the well-being of the refugees, must be pursued.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. BASIC RIGHTS, PROTECTION & EDUCATION

Refugee rights are respected, and they have access to education and protection, including protection against gender-based violence.

2. ADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS IN A GREEN ENVIRONMENT

Essential and sustainable services (including safe shelters, health, nutrition, WASH, energy) are ensured, and the environment is protected.

3. SKILLS & CAPACITY BUILDING TO SUPPORT DURABLE SOLUTIONS

Work toward sustainable solutions, with voluntary repatriation at the centre, supported by skills development, livelihoods and capacity building for refugees.

4. DIVERSIFIED FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships with development and private sector actors to innovate, support and localize operations.

5. CREATING A POSITIVE NARRATIVE

Lead the narrative on the Rohingya refugee response and improve public attitudes toward the Rohingya.

DONORS

UNHCR in Bangladesh is grateful for the support of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, European Union, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jersey, the Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States of America.

With additional support received from UN funds including Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and private donors, foundations, corporates, and companies worldwide including Fast Retailing Co. Ltd., Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Qatar Charity, and the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives.

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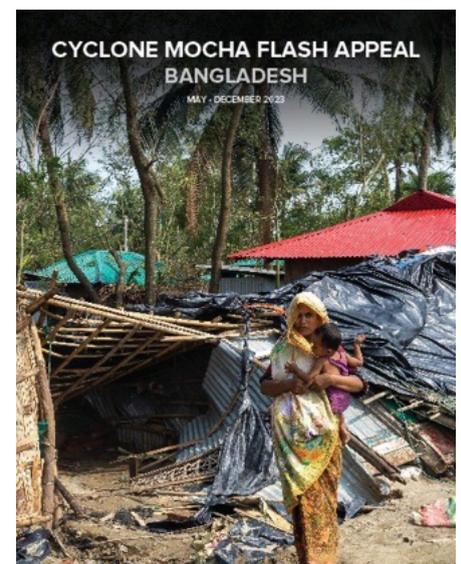
KEY UPDATES

- **2023 JOINT RESPONSE PLAN:** As of 31 May, the 2023 Joint Response Plan (JRP) was 24% funded. The plan asks for USD 876 million, including USD 67 million for Bhasan Char, to meet essential needs and provide protection services to nearly one million vulnerable Rohingya refugees and a half million Bangladeshis in host communities. [Read more.](#)
- **FOOD, SOAP & COOKING GAS ASSISTANCE:** Several cuts or adjustments were announced in May due to funding shortages. On 1 June, food rations will be reduced for the second time in three months, from USD 10 to USD 8 (down from USD 12 at the beginning of the year). Also in June: bathing soap distribution will be halved, from two pieces to one piece per person monthly, and LGP gas refill cycles will be adjusted for households who have received energy-saving pressure cookers and training (distribution of which is ongoing). A messaging campaign to inform the community of the changes and respond to their concerns was developed by the Sectors.
- **PILOT REPATRIATION INITIATIVE:** Several repatriation activities occurred in May as part of the bilateral repatriation initiative between Bangladesh and Myanmar aiming to return 1,100 Rohingya to Rakhine state. The 'Go and See' visit of Rohingya refugees from the Cox's Bazar camps to Myanmar, accompanied by Bangladesh government officials, took place on 5 May, and the 'Come and Tell' visit of officials from Myanmar to refugee camps in Bangladesh happened on 25 May. The two visits took place under the 2017 bilateral arrangement between the two countries. UNHCR was not involved in these visits. UNHCR remains committed to ensuring that Rohingya refugees can realize their right to return when they choose to do so, based on a fully informed and voluntary decision. As such, UNHCR advocates that the return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar should be voluntary, sustainable, in safety and with dignity. [Read UNHCR's statement.](#)
- **CYCLONE MOCHA APPEAL:** Rebuilding and response efforts have depleted underfunded coffers, constraining UNHCR and partners' capacity to respond to monsoon-related and other needs in the months ahead. On 16 May, a joint funding appeal was launched, calling for USD 42.1 million to support cyclone-affected Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi communities. UNHCR is appealing for USD 8.8 million to meet needs across sectors, including USD 5 million for shelter and site development. As of 29 May, UNHCR expects to receive USD 384,677 from ECHO for shelter and USD 1,436,500 from CERF for Site Development (Shelter-CCCM sector). [Read more.](#)
- **LEVEL 2 EMERGENCY:** Meanwhile, on 28 May, a UNHCR Level 2 emergency was declared for Bangladesh and Myanmar, offering stepped up support from UNHCR. In the face of a rapidly evolving humanitarian situation in the wake of destruction caused by Cyclone Mocha, the additional support from the organization will help close gaps in resources, staffing and expertise in the operations of both countries.

[See Flash Appeal: At a Glance](#)

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT...

- In May, [new funding contributions](#) for UNHCR Bangladesh were received from the Philippines and ECHO. As of 23 May, 32% of funding needs has been received.
- Watch the ['3 Facts to Know: Cyclone Mocha Response'](#) explainer video for a behind-the-scenes look at UNHCR's emergency preparations.
- UNHCR Representative Johannes van der Klaauw visited partners, Rohingya first responders and fire- and cyclone-affected households in Camp 21 and [appealed](#) the international community for support.



UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1: BASIC RIGHTS, PROTECTION & EDUCATION

- **Registration update exercise:** On 2 May, UNHCR launched the exercise to verify and update the family composition of refugees in the Kutupalong and Nayapara Registered Camps (KRC and NRC). Though uptake was initially slow, it improved over the month. By 31 May, 2,503 registered refugees (611 households) in KRC were verified out of 18,063 refugees (3,372 households) registered in the camp.
- **Addressing sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in health facilities:** 65 health staff (24 female) including medical officers, psychologists, nurses, and community volunteer supervisors participated in a two-day training on sexual misconduct and mandatory reporting of SEA facilitated by the UNHCR gender-based violence (GBV) unit. Staff learned about reporting channels for SEA and how to help victims as well as the harm caused by SEA.
- **Male role models (MRMs):** A new cohort of 120 refugees began 'male role model' training, learning about GBV and gender harmful practices, positive masculinity, social behavior change and how to identify violence. After completing 20 sessions, participants scoring at least 75% on the Gender Equal Men (GEM) scale will join 242 active male role models in Cox's Bazar and on Bhasan Char who conduct community debates to change mindsets that lead to GBV.
- **Community-based protection (CPB) feedback on cyclone preparedness, and post-cyclone management:** CBP partners and volunteers were heavily involved in camp-wide emergency preparedness response (ERP) efforts, including providing awareness sessions on cyclone preparedness and, post-cyclone, helping to identify damaged shelters and other infrastructure post-cyclone. Feedback from a focus group discussion with CBP volunteers and partner staff team offered valued learnings and recommendations for the future, including requests for:
 - Better coordination among ERP actors to avoid potentially contradictory/confusing messages or actions;
 - better training of volunteers and partner staff in ERP mechanisms;
 - training of volunteers and staff on psychosocial first aid, as well as cyclone preparedness (CPP) principles;
 - more effective engagement and coordination with essential community actors, including religious institutions/leaders, for all ERP and CPP efforts;
 - investment in more fire- and weather-resistant building materials, as well as training of community-based actors on shelter repair and maintenance.
- **Child protection (CP) initiatives in the host community:** Two workshops were held with 33 members of community-based committees in Hnilla and Whykong unions to explain committee members' roles and responsibilities in preventing and responding to child protection issues. Participants identified the need for enhanced awareness activities on substance abuse, child-marriage and child labour. Meanwhile, the workplan for host-community initiatives was finalized with four CP partners. In addition to community-based committees, the plan includes numerous capacity development efforts with local government institutions and adolescent clubs.
- **School placement test for Rohingya learners:** On 31 May, some 75,000 children across camps, including out-of-school learners intending to enroll in the Myanmar Curriculum, participated in a placement test to determine grade level. 11,160 of the test-takers are enrolled in UNHCR-supported facilities. Results of the test are expected in July.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2: ADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS IN A GREEN ENVIRONMENT

- **Cyclone Mocha:** Of 4,628 damaged/destroyed shelters, including 503 shelters that were completely destroyed, 98% of households eligible for shelter support received repair materials as of 24 May. Extremely vulnerable individuals also received labour support. Of 682 damaged WASH facilities and infrastructures (including latrines, bathing cubicles and water tanks) 76% were repaired as of 28 May. Of 49 damaged learning facilities, 45 were repaired as of 1 June. Roads, paths and drained have been cleaned, and bridges and solar streetlights repaired across camps.
- **Monsoon and cyclone preparedness:** Suppliers' deliveries of *muli* bamboo for shelter support continued to fall short of expected quality and quantity, slowing repairs across camps. To meet distribution needs for the upcoming monsoon, additional orders were issued for 760,000 pieces of *muli* bamboo to suppliers, with 400,000-520,000 pieces to be delivered by the end of June. The remaining pieces will be delivered by the end of August.
- **Community meeting on shelter support:** On 25 May, the shelter and site management teams held a focus group discussion in Nayapara Registered Camp to address community concerns regarding provision of post-cyclone shelter support, as not all households who requested shelter kits were eligible to receive them. Following extreme weather events such as heavy rains and winds or incidents such as fires, UNHCR and partners conduct technical assessments of affected shelters and distribute repair materials to households meeting a threshold of damage. While community members accepted the need to prioritize the worst-affected households for shelter support, the temporary nature of shelter materials approved by the Government of Bangladesh coupled with extreme weather conditions create an ongoing need for regular maintenance of refugee shelters, which is costly and unsustainable.

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

ADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS IN A GREEN ENVIRONMENT cont'd

- **Site development:** In different camps, work on site development schemes continued, prioritizing risky areas for slope protection, and repair and construction of drains, footpaths and bamboo bridges.
- **Menstrual Hygiene Day:** On 28 May, UNHCR and partners organized activities to raise awareness on menstrual hygiene management, including a documentary screening, workshops, rallies, quiz competitions and a henna festival.
- **Teknaf water supply:** On a positive note, Cyclone Mocha's heavy rains relieved drought conditions in Teknaf. Surface water reservoirs filled with rainwater, enabling WASH partners to restore water supply from 12 litres per person per day to 20 litres on 19 May. In parallel, several alternatives to the Teknaf Groundwater Project are being developed, including construction of a surface water reservoir for the Teknaf camps. Options to handover monitoring and production wells to the Government and the community are also being explored.
- **Drain cleaning and solid waste management:** Some 350 non-designated waste dumping areas were identified through a field assessment, as they pose public health risks and pollute the environment. Partners ACTED, NGO Forum, and BRAC collected waste from 224 of the dumping sites and cleared half of them for gardening and vegetable production. Meanwhile, BRAC began piloting of household waste collection in designated blocks of six camps. Progress will be monitored on a monthly basis before BRAC scales up the intervention. On Bhasan Char, the waste incinerator for non-biodegradable waste was inaugurated and the installation of a plastic recycling plant was completed in May.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3:

SKILLS & CAPACITY BUILDING TO SUPPORT DURABLE SOLUTIONS

- **Global Affairs Canada (GAC) skills development project:** Partners launched a second batch of vocational skills training in five trades including three new ones (solar system installation and maintenance, masonry and plumbing), targeting 1,074 refugees (572 female, 502 male). The participants will receive 360-hour vocational training, after which they can apply their skills through available livelihood activities, community work and multi-sectoral camp-based activities.
- **Livelihoods on Bhasan Char:** Local partner NGO Forum established a production centre on Bhasan Char and initiated vocational skills training for 50 refugee women. After a month-long training, participants will begin production of five jute products in July.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4:

DIVERSIFIED FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS

- **Missions:** In May, UNHCR hosted and assisted in 20 visits to Cox's Bazar camps and Bhasan Char from donors and partners. Visitors included the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, a delegation from the headquarters of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (a key partner in UNHCR's Rohingya response) and the World Bank (a key multilateral development bank partner to the Government of Bangladesh's Rohingya response).
- **New Goodwill Ambassador:** On 9 May, Aseel Omran, who is UNHCR's first Goodwill Ambassador from Saudi Arabia, visited a camp learning centre and a women and girls' safe space, where she heard from teenaged Rohingya girls participating in the Girl Shine programme. Omran learned about Girl Shine's impact on the participants, including their relationships with their caregivers, and was moved by their stories, needs and hopes for the future.
- **Private sector partnerships:** In May, projects supported by private sector partners included skills and livelihood initiatives under Fast Retailing Co. Ltd. (UNIQLO) and Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives (MBRGI), WASH projects under the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and energy and shelter support from Qatar Charity.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #5:

CREATING A POSITIVE NARRATIVE

- **Social media:** In May, UNHCR Bangladesh accounts published 31 [Facebook](#) posts, 44 [tweets](#), and 9 [Instagram](#) posts on topics including Cyclone Mocha updates, international days devoted to [biodiversity](#), [bees](#) and [menstrual hygiene](#), and the [eye surgery campaign](#) on Bhasan Char. Rohingya photographers Md. Jamal, Md. Ayas and Ro Yassin Abdumonab took over the UNHCR Bangladesh Instagram in May, introducing viewers to poignant characters in the Rohingya camps, from nine-year-old Sumaya adorned in yellow swirls of *thanaka* paste to elderly radio programme enthusiast Eliyas who sets his dial for Rohingya language broadcasts. Follow [@unhcr_bgd](#) for more.
- **Jute bag production centre web story:** On 3 May, a [story](#) on the jute production project was published on UNHCR's global website, highlighting how the project offers skills development opportunities for Rohingya refugee women and a voice making eco-friendly products.

CYCLONE MOCHA PHOTOS



Collapsed bamboo storage shed. © NGO Forum



Tree felled by the 24 May storm in Camp 27 © Sayedul Basher, SMS Volunteer

CYCLONE MOCHA PHOTOS



Reconstructed shelter in Camp 4 after damage by Cyclone Mocha. © Md. Sadek, Shelter Volunteer block Camp 4



Community outreach members (COMs) help vulnerable fellow refugees move to a safe place. © Aziz Ullah, COM

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