

# BANGLADESH

25 August 2017 - 20 February 2018

During the Security Council briefing on Myanmar held in New York on 13 February 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, stressed that the restoration of rights is key for refugees' voluntary, safe, and sustainable return to Myanmar.

UNHCR continues advocating for the rights and safety of some 5,300 people living in a so-called no man's land at the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh, emphasising the importance of free and voluntary decisions on their future.

UNHCR began relocating the first 50 families living in one flood-prone area of Kutupalong to a new and safer part of the settlement. They will be among 381 households who will be relocated over the next week. Other families will be relocated by IOM.

## POPULATION FIGURES

**688,000\*** Estimated new arrivals in Bangladesh since 25 August 2017

**212,000\*** Estimated refugee population before 25 August 2017

**900,000** Estimated total refugee population currently

## STAFFING & PARTNERS

**220** staff currently working on the emergency compared to **49** prior to the crisis. **144** are national staff.

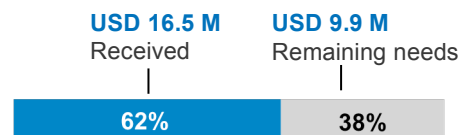
**23** partners compared to **7** prior to the crisis

\* As reported by the Inter-Sector Coordination Group.

## FUNDING

**USD 83.7 million**

Requested for UNHCR's initial emergency response from Sept '17 to Feb '18. Out of this amount, **USD 26.4 million** are the requirements for Jan-Feb 2018:



A Joint Response Plan, covering the period from March to December 2018, is under preparation.



Youngsters at a child-friendly space in Nayapara refugee settlement run by UNHCR and partner Save the Children.  
©SaveTheChildren

## Arrival trends

Some 688,000 refugees have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh since 25 August 2017. Over the past months, the number of refugees arriving in Bangladesh has decreased, with over 24,000 arrivals in November 2017 and more than 3,000 in December 2017. Nevertheless, refugees continue to arrive from Myanmar, with some 2,166 new arrivals so far in February 2018, which brings the number to over 4,000 arrivals this year alone.<sup>1</sup> Many refugees have cited their main reasons for flight as fear for their safety and security, arbitrary arrests, and restrictions on movement and livelihoods.

Refugees have settled in Cox's Bazar District, mainly in Kutupalong and Nayapara settlements. Kutupalong is more hosting more than 586,000 refugees, making it the world's largest refugee settlement. This settlement can be compared to city, with a population equivalent to Glasgow (UK) but an area 12 times smaller. While the Government of Bangladesh, with the support of UNHCR and its inter-agency partners has mounted a significant response in the past six months, conditions remain overcrowded and precarious.



*Aerial view of Kutupalong refugee settlement. © UNHCR/Roger Arnold*

## Right of return

On 23 November 2017, the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh signed a bilateral 'arrangement' on the return of refugees to Myanmar. This agreement outlines important commitments by both governments to ensure the voluntary, safe return of refugees to their place of origin in Myanmar, and it contemplates UNHCR participation in the process. Although not a party to the bilateral arrangement, UNHCR stands ready to engage with both Governments to ensure that international standards of safety and voluntariness are respected if and when repatriation takes place. Preserving the right of return and pursuing the conditions that would enable it to be exercised must remain a central priority.

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<sup>1</sup> Information on arrivals at border points are reported through various sources which cannot always be verified or confirmed.

UNHCR has made clear that the implementing modalities of the agreements between Bangladesh and Myanmar must be in line with international standards.

During the Security Council briefing on Myanmar held in New York on 13 February 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, referring to the bilateral ‘arrangement’ signed by the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar last November on the return of refugees to Myanmar, **reiterated** that conditions are not yet conducive to the voluntary repatriation of refugees. He stressed that the restoration of rights is key for their voluntary, safe and sustainable return. He called for unhindered humanitarian access in the northern part of Rakhine State and the implementation of the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission (RAC), stressing that UNHCR’s offer to support to both governments in finding sustainable solutions for refugees remains open.

Some 5,300 people have been living near the Tombru canal, in a so-called “no man’s land”, at the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh since the end of August 2017. In the course of a UNHCR monitoring visit some representatives of this group indicated their fear of returning home and their wish to seek safety in Bangladesh. UNHCR has reiterated that everyone has a right to seek asylum and that people who have fled violence must be guaranteed safety and protection. Any decision to return must be informed and voluntary.

With discussions on returns regularly being reported in the media, refugee communities in Kutupalong, Nayapara, and Chakmarkul remain anxious about their future. Over the past months, refugees have frequently **reiterated** that they will not consider going back to Myanmar unless questions of citizenship, legal rights, access to services, justice, and restitution are addressed.

## UNHCR’s response - 6 months on, achievements and challenges

### *Protection activities*

Starting in October 2017, UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh, through the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), have jointly conducted a family counting exercise to collect household level information of the entire refugee population, including gender and age disaggregated data and protection needs. This exercise also provided information on the location of people, which has been analysed with data on areas likely to be affected by the upcoming monsoon season, thus allowing for better preparedness measures to be undertaken, including relocations.

The family counting exercise covered 825,265 individuals, out of which 55% are children, 52% are women and girls, and 3% are over 65 years old. The results show a high proportion of specific needs among the refugee population, with 31% of all households identified as having at least one member with a vulnerability. The early identification of these families is allowing UNHCR and its partners to reach out to these families and ensure appropriate support and follow-up.

An exercise to merge UNHCR’s family counting data and registration data on individuals collected by Bangladesh’s Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) has been completed. This exercise resulted in a unified data set with individual data grouped by families which will be used to improve the protection and delivery of assistance to the refugees. It is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on data sharing between UNHCR and the Government, which stipulates that any use of information for

purposes other than assistance and identification or transfer to third parties would need to be approved by UNHCR.

UNHCR is increasing its community-based approach to protection. In December 2017, UNHCR and its partners launched a Community Outreach programme with refugees empowered as first responders to support their peers. In just two months, this programme has grown from 30 individuals covering one area of Kutupalong to 231 individuals covering eight areas of the settlement. These refugees, who have been selected based on their willingness to help others, have conducted a total of 1,551 home visits and 1,414 information sessions. Overall, the Community Outreach Members (COMs) identified some 1,900 cases in need of support. They also provided direct assistance and support to more than 760 refugees and referred over 410 people to UNHCR's partners Technical Assistance Inc. (TAI) and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC).

On 30 January, the Protection Working Group has launched a unified referral system where individuals with protection needs are identified and referred to specialised service providers in different locations. This is a significant achievement that will ensure greater coherence in referrals and more efficient and effective case management.

In 2017, 270 survivors of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) sought assistance from UNHCR and its partners. The vast majority of cases (73%) were physical assault, while more than 22% of the reported incidents were rape or sexual violence. Cases were referred for appropriate follow-up. Ten women friendly spaces have been created to provide a safe forum for women to share their concerns and needs, as well as to promote women's leadership and community engagement. Similarly, by end of January 2018, UNHCR had registered 5,527 child-headed families and 5,575 families with unaccompanied and separated children and referred them for follow-up. Twenty-six functioning Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) have been established and offer a space to play and learn for 10,000 boys and girls.

Education continues to be the top service requested by refugees. To date, some 168 classrooms have been constructed in the various areas of the settlements. Some 14,027 children are enrolled in primary education in Nayapara and Kutupalong registered camps, and in temporary learning centres in the settlements' extensions where UNHCR operates.

### *Provision of services and assistance*

Since the first months of the emergency, UNHCR and partners, have worked around the clock to provide life-saving assistance to refugees. In September 2017, UNHCR began airlifts to deliver much-needed aid. In four months, some 17 airlifts carried core relief items (CRIs), worth USD 13.47 million, to Bangladesh.



*Yoga and wellness coach, Fatima Al-Mansoori, conducted a yoga session with Rohingya Community Outreach Members working with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency and partner BRAC in Chakmarkul refugee settlement. © UNHCR / Caroline Gluck*

Over 61,200 newly arrived refugee families have been provided kits containing CRIs, such as sleeping mats, mosquito nets, tarpaulins, and solar lamps. Refugees were also provided with shelter kits to build their houses. During the winter months of December 2017 and January 2018, UNHCR and partners distributed 185,000 winter shawls and sweaters to help refugees stay warm. As part of its assistance programme, UNHCR is also piloting a cash distribution in Kutupalong through BRAC bank. The pilot will assist 13,000 families with one-off cash grants to be delivered in the months of February and March of 2018.

In parallel, UNHCR closely collaborated with the authorities, partners, and communities to improve the standards in Kutupalong and Nayapara settlements and to plan new site areas. Efforts focused on identifying new areas for refugees to set up their homes and in ensuring that services were in place ahead of when refugees settled. The Macro Settlement Development for Kutupalong, developed by UNHCR together with the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) and the



International Organisation for Migration (IOM), continues to improve access to

*Shelter found amongst most families in Kutupalong.*  
© UNHCR / Caroline Gluck

assistance and services by refugees and to allow all actors of the overall response in Kutupalong to identify gaps and/or address any potential duplication of service provision. UNHCR also funded the development of a six-kilometre road to connect the north to the south of Kutupalong, which was implemented by the RRRC and the Armed Defence Forces of Bangladesh (ADFB). Completed on 12 December 2017, it now constitutes Kutupalong's main lifeline, allowing all actors access to the settlement, as well as the delivery of aid, and facilitated movement for refugees within the site. Other site improvement works include the preparation of 20,345 m<sup>2</sup> of land for communal facilities, and the construction of some 6,821 steps, 12.3 km of pathways and 1.35 km of bridges.

In almost six months, Kutupalong and Nayapara have grown into *de-facto* cities with their own services, including 168 temporary learning centres for refugee children, 16 health units, 18 outpatient therapeutic centres, one stabilisation centre for treatment of malnourished children, 15 information points and over 4,700 latrines and more than 950 tube wells, supported by UNHCR and partners. The situation has slowly stabilized, with refugees starting to settle and rebuild their lives. They have tailored their houses to their own needs. Shops, restaurants, tailors, hairdressers have mushroomed within the settlements. Livelihood opportunities remain overall limited and overcrowding continues to be of concern as it exposes refugees to greater risks of fire and environmental hazards as well as communicable diseases.



Monsoon preparedness is on-going to strengthen stairs and houses. © UNHCR / Joseph Tripura

In the past weeks, preparations ahead of the monsoon season have been accelerating to mitigate the risk of an “emergency within an emergency”. Small engineering projects continue in the settlements to build bamboo reinforced footpaths and stairs, raise bridges, and to build retaining walls for soil stabilisation and drainage networks. UNHCR is also pre-positioning 35 containers with post-cyclone relief items at distribution points across Kutupalong and Nayapara settlements.

Families most at risk of floods and landslides will be encouraged to relocate to other areas. Given the limited land available in the settlements, strict prioritisation on relocations will need to be undertaken. On 20 February 2018, UNHCR began relocating the first groups of families living in one flood prone area to a new and safer part of the site. They will be among 381 households who will be relocated over the coming days. Other families will be relocated by IOM. UNHCR continues consultations with the Government on the possibility of relocating more families at risk of landslides and flooding in the coming weeks.

In addition, UNHCR protection teams are facilitating community engagement in preparedness efforts, including appropriate messaging to communities likely to be affected by landslides, floods or cyclones, and analysing community coping mechanisms and preparedness plans.

### *Peaceful co-existence between host and refugee communities*

The response to the refugee emergency presents opportunities to reinforce national systems where needs are identified by the authorities. In this regard, UNHCR continues to support medical health care facilities in refugee hosting areas with logistical support, equipment, and other immediate needs, such as ambulances, hospital tents, medicines and medical supplies, resources, and training.

In order to minimise the impact of the humanitarian response on the environment and mitigate protection risks linked to firewood collection, UNHCR started to distribute eco-friendly cooking fuel in early December 2017, sourced from local suppliers. UNHCR, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), IOM, and the World Food Programme (WFP) are also planning a pilot LPG (liquid petroleum gas) initiative to provide a safe fuel alternative for refugees. The initiative is currently pending Government approval. UNHCR is also in the process of setting up solar street lights in refugee settlements and surrounding highways. These will benefit both refugees and host communities. UNHCR will further explore possibilities for Quick Impact Projects with host communities, who have generously hosted refugees.



*Refugee children playing in Kutupalong settlement. © UNHCR / Roger Arnold*

## Working in partnership and inter-agency spirit

UNHCR is working in close collaboration with a range of international and national actors in Bangladesh, and has scaled up its implementing partnership network to 23 partners, including nine national NGOs. In 2018, UNHCR also plans to increase national and local sourcing of goods and services. In addition, UNHCR provides a lead role in the protection response for all refugees, co-ordinating closely on the delivery of assistance with UN agencies and other partners through the various working groups under the Inter-Sector Coordination Group.

UNHCR's main government counterpart is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR). In Cox's Bazar, UNHCR cooperates with the RRRC, the local representative of the MoDMR, and appointed Camp-in-Charge in different settlements.

## Donor Support

The significant demands of the humanitarian response for Bangladesh need to be recognised. The response of the Government and people of Bangladesh has been extraordinarily generous. However, additional support is needed. UNHCR has called for the commitment of international donors towards Bangladesh to meet immediate needs, and finding solutions continues to be a priority. An inter-agency Joint Response Plan (JRP) covering the period from March to December 2018 is presently being finalised.

## Donor country contributions to the UNHCR Bangladesh operation in 2017 and 2018, and donor unrestricted funding to UNHCR's global operations



With thanks also to the many private donations from individuals, foundations, companies in Australia, China, Egypt, Italy, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, Oman, Philippines, Portugal, Senegal, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand, and UAE, including IKEA Foundation, UNIQLO Co. Ltd, Sheikh Thani Bin Abdullah Foundation, OPEC Fund for International Development, UPS Corporate, Qatar Charity, Rahmatan Lil Alamin Foundation, Fondazione Prosolidar-Onlus, Kuwait Finance House and the Big Heart Foundation. Special thanks also to UNOPS and CERF.

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