

Bangladesh

1 - 30 June 2020

50 cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in the **Rohingya refugee settlements** as of 30 June 2020; and 5 refugees died from the virus. UNHCR is supporting treatment facilities to serve both refugee and host communities, including ICU beds in the main district hospital in Cox's Bazar.

Heavy rains struck the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar affecting thousands of refugee households. UNHCR directly assisted 4,500 refugees. These rains also mark the onset of the annual **monsoon season**, which will run until October, with expected further periods of heavy rain and wind.

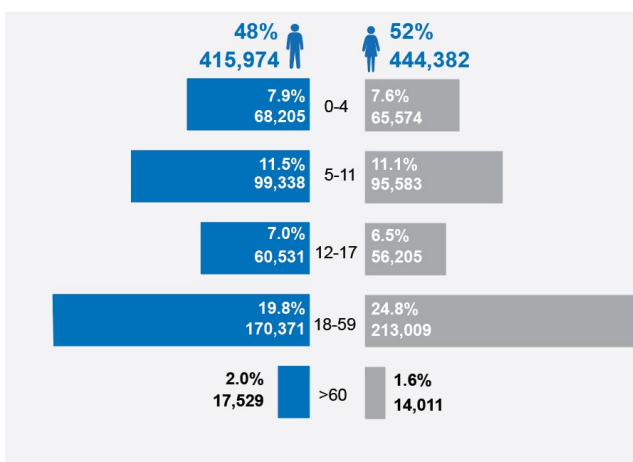
World Refugee Day (WRD) on 20 June was marked with a series of online activities due to the COVID-19 situation and the need to reduce social gatherings among people. In Cox's Bazar, many refugees took to social media to mark the day with their own WRD messages.

POPULATION DATA **860,356** Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar district *825,296 Rohingya refugees are registered under the Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration exercise. There are also **35,060** Rohingya from pre-2016 and who reside in the registered camps (as of 30 June 2020)

88,385

Number of refugee households who are being supported with cooking kits and Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinders in the camps; **10,718** families in host communities are also being supported with cooking kits and LPG.

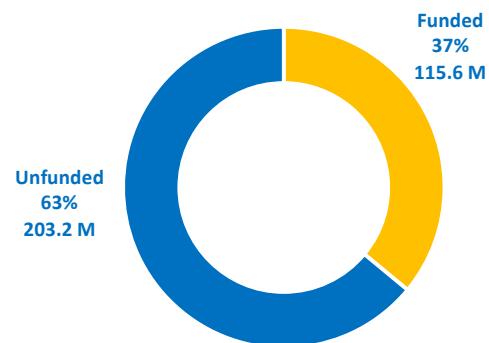
AGE BREAKDOWN OF REFUGEES IN COX'S BAZAR



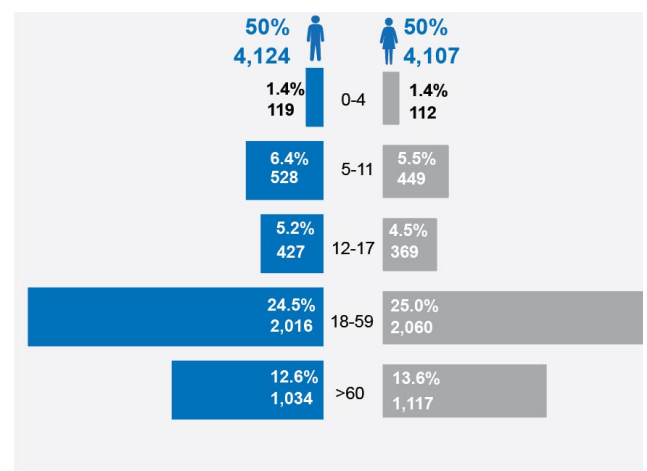
FUNDING (AS OF 30 JUNE 2020)

USD 318.8 M

requested for Bangladesh



DISABILITY BREAKDOWN BY AGE AND GENDER



Operational Context

- The **first COVID-19 case was detected in the refugee settlements** in Cox's Bazar on 14 May. Since then, 50 refugees were confirmed with COVID-19 infection, and 5 have died (*as of 30 June*). UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies are supporting the Government of Bangladesh and the local health authorities to contain and respond to the spread of the virus in the settlements. UNHCR is running two Severe Acute Respiratory Infection Isolation and Treatment Centres (SARI ITCs) with 194 beds for patients from the refugee settlements and the host community. Four quarantine centers are being operated by UNHCR for those who have had contact with COVID-19 positive patients or for new arrivals to the camps. UNHCR also supported the expansion of the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and high dependency beds within the local Cox's Bazar district hospital, adding 18 additional beds. This will ensure support for the most serious cases affected by COVID-19 in the district, as well as referrals from the Rohingya settlements. 14 host community patients were being treated in the ICU at the end of June.
- The **monsoon has arrived** which is bringing an increase in rain and wind affecting the refugee settlements. The monsoon will continue until October with the highest rainfalls often occurring in July. In June, refugees experienced three days of persistent heavy rain and wind that flooded parts of the different camps, affecting nearly 4,500 people in UNHCR managed camps when their shelters were either fully or partially damaged by winds, rain or flooding.
- Rohingya **refugees were reported to be still stranded at sea** on boats in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea, though the precise number was not known. One boat was reported landing in Aceh, Indonesia, with Rohingya on board. No boats were reported to have returned to or landed in Bangladesh during June.



COVID-19 response activities can be found [here](#) on UNHCR's Bangladesh portal.

Updates and achievements



PROTECTION

Protection mission to Bhasan Char island

- Following a request made by the Government, the UN has informed the Government that it would be prepared to undertake a protection visit to Bhasan Char to meet with the some 306 Rohingya refugees transferred to the island and assess their immediate humanitarian situation and specific needs. Terms of reference have been shared with the Government several weeks ago, and the UN is awaiting feedback. Some two months have passed since the refugees were transferred to Bhasan Char, and it is urgent for the United Nations to have access to them to assess their protection and humanitarian needs.

IVR proving to be an effective community-based protection resource in Cox's Bazar for communicating with refugees

- An approval to use an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system by UNHCR for engaging and communicating with refugees in Cox's Bazar was granted. The technology is best known from customer service hotlines where callers are asked to press different numbers for different options. Between 18 May and 2 June UNHCR tested the first series of messages on COVID-19 with IVR by sending a short SMS and calling close to 18,000 refugees, out of which close to 6,650 refugees answered and listened to pre-recorded messages (approx. 3min) on COVID-19.
- Nearly 10,000 refugees listened to a short pre-recorded message (around 10 seconds) on general precautions for COVID-19 that is played automatically when refugees call the UNHCR hotline. This was played as an introduction before providing an option to listen further or to connect to a UNHCR hotline operator.

- Over 2,400 refugees (about 77%) out of nearly 3,140 refugees that UNHCR called afterwards to ask for feedback on IVR mentioned that they would like to continue receiving messages.
- Feedback is also being compiled from active community members, including religious leaders, elected community representatives, community volunteers and members of refugee-initiated groups, in order to strengthen the target lists for messages.



MONSOON/CYCLONE SEASONS

Monsoon rains begin with flooding and damage to shelters and temporary relocations

- The monsoon rains and wind arrived in Cox's Bazar in June. Over a period of three days between 16-18 June, the refugee settlements were hit by heavy rain and wind causing flooding in some areas and soil erosion. There was significant shelter and infrastructure damage that affected thousands of refugees and more than 4,500 refugees in camps where UNHCR is helping support the response.
- Refugee volunteers were at the centre of the response in assisting with water rescue activities and the temporary relocation of affected families, as well as damage identification and repairs.
- The response was largely managed at the camp level with partners organising shelter repairs quickly, and refugee volunteers providing information to affected households and assisting them to safety.



Refugee volunteers assist households to relocate from flood-affected areas to safety. The inflatable boats were provided by UNHCR ahead of the monsoon to both BDRCS and the CPP programme. Photo: © UNHCR

However, given the scale of the incident, UNHCR also activated and deployed its multi-functional Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) to refugee camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf to follow up on damage reports and ensure the swift provision of assistance. Special care was given to assess risks resulting from soil erosion or destabilisation.

- While there were no fatalities reported in the camps UNHCR manages, some 122 shelters were fully damaged and 566 were partially damaged. There was damage to retaining walls in several areas. Most of the affected households moved temporarily to neighbouring shelters to stay with family and friends.
- For the first time this year, inflatable rafts provided by UNHCR to partners were deployed. These proved effective for the response, especially in assisting refugee households to safely relocate away from flood affected areas, particularly children. However, there is a need for volunteers to receive more training and additional equipment if they are to be a resource for search and rescue efforts as first responders.

ENVIRONMENT / REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS

Growing nurseries for re-greening the Rohingya camps and improving soil stability

- UNHCR is working closely with the Center for Natural Resources Studies (CNRS) on developing nurseries in Cox's Bazar. Two nurseries are currently growing plant and tree seedlings. In one, 150,000 tree seedlings (28 species) were prepared in order to cover 50 ha. of selected camp areas. UNHCR also has a vetiver grass nursery from which around 700,000-800,000 slips can be harvested to cover 7-8 ha. The vetiver grass has long roots and has proved effective for use in slope stabilization.

- While these nurseries are part of UNHCR's environmental work, the trees and vetiver grass will significantly contribute to protecting refugees from harm caused by soil erosion during the monsoon. The Rohingya settlements are prone to soil erosion and landslides due to the combination of hilly terrain, soft soil and annual monsoon rain conditions.
- Another expected benefit of the planting is the shade that will be provided by the trees, especially during the hot summer months that the settlements are exposed to. Trees can also help deflect wind and protect shelters. The re-greening of the settlement areas will also ensure a more pleasant atmosphere for living and cleaner air.
- Riparian planting along the banks of streams or channels in the camps can also assist with watershed management and reduce flooding that is frequently caused by soil eroding and collapsing into the channels and blocking them.
- One of the challenges presently, however, is the limited planting work that can be undertaken due to COVID-19 and the necessity to minimize movement of UNHCR and partner staff, as well as volunteers, in the camps. As a result, the seedlings in the nurseries (some of which are fast-growing) are now beginning to spread their roots into the soil of the nurseries, which can eventually decrease their ability to survive transplantation. One temporary solution is the repotting of the plants into deeper pots.
- UNHCR is already in consultation with the RRRC on areas where planting may be possible to proceed, ensuring that social distancing and other safety measures are maintained.



Before and after: Riparian planting along the banks of a channel in Kutupalong refugee settlement. Photo: © CNRS



A nursery being run under the UNHCR/CNRS partnership in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar. Photo: © CNRS

Elephant response activities continuing during COVID-19 period

- UNHCR and IUCN continue to work closely together on managing the risk of human-elephant contact in the Cox's Bazar. Both agencies are in daily contact with refugee volunteer Elephant Response Teams (ERTs) on the ground in the camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf, as well as local host community teams. ERT teams are practicing social distancing and were also supplied materials for their personal protection.
- A major upgrading of 45 of elephant watchtowers around the perimeter of the camps is being undertaken. These structures, which are important for the early spotting of elephant movements near the camps, were degraded due to age and the deterioration of the materials (mainly bamboo and rope). Many towers were also taken down as part of the safety preparations ahead of Cyclone Amphan in May. The new towers were pre-constructed in segments outside the camps and installed as flatpacks later on-site. This limited the movement of additional workers going into the camps at this critical time when COVID-19 poses a danger. Some 22 out of the 45 towers have been replaced so far.
- The project currently works with 624 ERT volunteers all year round (572 Rohingya volunteers and 52 host community members). They work from 99 watchtowers, mostly along the edges of the main refugee settlements. Since 2017 when the project started, 12 refugees and 1 host community member have been killed by Wild Asian elephants. Since January 2018, elephants have tried to enter the camps 185 times. The peak time of year for incidents is the dry season from October to January, when it is harder for elephants to find fodder in surrounding areas. The trained ERT members have successfully managed to control crowds when elephants entered areas of human habitation and in most cases were able to ward them off peacefully to nearby forest areas by using torchlight and sound. This has prevented the loss of human life and caused only minimal damage to shelters or other structures, or local crops.

- Experts believe the reduction in forest cutting due to the distribution of LPG as cooking fuel in the refugee camps and host community has also had a positive impact on the situation. There are fewer chance meetings of humans and elephants in forest areas as there is less firewood collection going on in forests. This may also have ensured elephants have more fodder to survive on in forest areas, making it less likely they emerge in search of food. With LPG's introduction in 2018, refugee demands for fuel wood reduced by 80%.
- Currently it is estimated there are approximately 40 Wild Asian elephants in the areas where camps are located, with the highest concentration (over 30%) in forest areas around Inani. UNHCR and IUCN continue working together to support conservation efforts by forest officials of the Bangladesh Ministry of Environment and Forests in Cox's Bazar. Efforts are underway for further study on the elephants in the area through a collaring initiative which will provide more information on elephant behaviour in the wild and challenges they face. Bangladesh has also developed an Elephant Conservation Action Plan (2018-2027), supported by IUCN and the World Bank. This framework will provide important guidance for any future support UNHCR can contribute towards supporting elephant conservation, and improving the safety of refugees and host communities living in proximity of elephant habitats in Cox's Bazar.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY / 20 JUNE

A series of online activities organised to mark World Refugee Day

- UNHCR in Dhaka led a series of events to mark World Refugee Day, including a refugee film festival organised with the Dhaka University Film Society (DUFS). UNHCR has been working with DUFS for the past three years to organize an International Inter-University Film Festival, with a special category on "Short Films on Refugees." This year, more than a thousand short films were produced by university students around the world and 25 were selected for screening on the DUFS Facebook page to observe World Refugee Day.
- UNHCR also engaged with Bangladeshi artists from the fields of music, film, videography, and animation. The participants were engaged to raise awareness of refugees and the humanitarian spirit by posting songs, art pieces and a video on social media platforms. Their posts reached a few hundred thousand viewers.
- UNHCR's Representative in Bangladesh published an opinion piece in major Bangladeshi newspapers in both Bengali and English, reflecting on the COVID-19 response in the camps and the need to ensure that the world keeps a focus on solutions for refugees. He was also interviewed by international media to highlight the ongoing situation of the Rohingya refugees on World Refugee Day and with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- UNHCR also engaged with a network of students from various universities in Dhaka, Noakhali and Chittagong on the situation of refugees globally and at the national level. The idea of the engagement was to work with them to carry out advocacy in their individual capacity in their own communities to explain why it is important to champion the cause of refugees.
- In Cox's Bazar, World Refugee Day was jointly celebrated with the Government of Bangladesh at the inauguration ceremony for a new Intensive Care Unit and high dependency beds in Sadar Hospital. The event was attended by members of the Government, including Members of Parliament, the District Commissioner of Cox's Bazar, the RRRC, the Civil Surgeon, amongst others. This ICU will be used to treat the most severe cases amongst the refugee and the local populations in Cox's Bazar. The event was also a platform to highlight the global displacement crises and call on continued international solidarity with refugees.

Working in partnership

UNHCR is a co-chair of the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) in Bangladesh with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. The UN Refugee Agency also leads on the protection response, as head of the Protection Working Group in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR has valuable partnerships with several UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its assistance with humanitarian partners through the 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 settlements, as well as a range of international and national actors. It has a strong network of 27 partners:

MoDMR (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief) | Action Aid Bangladesh | ACF (Action Contre la Faim) | Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) | BRAC (Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | Caritas Bangladesh | Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) | CODEC (Community Development Centre) | COAST (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) | Danish Refugee Council | FH Association (Food for the Hungry) | GK (Gonosshasthaya Kendra) | Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation | Handicap International | 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 | World Vision | Terre des Hommes | TAI (Technical Assistance Incorporated) | BLAST (Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust) | Rights Jessore

UNHCR would also like to acknowledge the crucial role played by the refugees in the response; with over 3,000 volunteers from the refugee community who are often the first responders on the ground.

Financial Information

Total recorded contributions for the operation amount to some **USD 115.6 million**. 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 2019/2020, support continued to be generously received from the following: Austria, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

UNHCR is sincerely grateful for the additional **support received from individuals, foundations, and companies worldwide**, including: Athmar Holdings, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CERF, Education Cannot Wait, Fondation EDF, Mabarrat Ghanaem Al Khair, Qatar Charity, Shih Wing Ching Foundation, and Thani Bin Abdullah Bin Thani Al Thani Humanitarian Fund.

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