



Authorized nominee of a disabled girl just received cash at Jaliapalong Union, Ukhiya.

PROTECTION CONTEXT

Since August 2017, an estimated **716,915** Rohingya refugees fled from Myanmar seeking safety and protection in Bangladesh. The population, including the pre-existing refugee population living in Bangladesh combined with new arrivals, stands at **866,457** as of December 2020. The majority are reliant on humanitarian assistance including shelter, food, healthcare, clean water, and sanitation. As the situation entered its fourth year, UNHCR and its protection partners strive to strengthen the response mechanisms to address protection needs of the Rohingya refugees, including in a range of key cross cutting issues across sectors, each of which requires regular monitoring. The COVID-19 pandemic is negatively affecting the overall protection environment in Bangladesh. Mitigating the short- and longer- term social protection consequences of the pandemic and ensuring ways to safeguard the resilience and psychosocial well-being of refugee communities, while ensuring that protection and humanitarian space does not contract, is a priority for the UNHCR.

Key Protection Thematic Areas

Advocacy and Refugee Rights

- Access to territory and non-refoulement
- Registration and civil documentation
- Freedom of movement
- Access to justice
- Safety and security
- Capacity building
- Education and vocational training
- Durable solutions

Protection Mainstreaming

- In the delivery of all forms of assistance
- In emergency preparedness and response

Reduced Aid Dependency

- Empowerment through livelihoods and skills training

Community Engagement

- Outreach and communication with communities, Accountability to Affected Populations
- Building the community's resilience to respond to COVID-19
- Strengthening refugees' participation in protection processes
- Feedback and referrals mechanisms
- Community engagement and empowerment
- Community representation
- Peaceful coexistence with host communities

Specialized Services

- Assistance to persons with specific needs, physical and mental health, and psychosocial support
- Gender-based violence (GBV)
- Legal assistance
- Child protection
- Prevention and response to trafficking

PROGRESS

Advocacy and Refugee Rights

- **Access to territory and non-refoulement:** Since January 2020, a total of **1,554** refugees have been registered as new arrivals in Cox's Bazar. While the majority entered Bangladesh after fleeing Myanmar, some had previously sought asylum or stayed in other countries, including **43** in Malaysia, **30** in Saudi Arabia, and **21** in India. UNHCR continues to monitor for any new arrivals of refugees, though throughout 2020 no significant movements across the border have been reported. A group of 306 refugees who were rescued at sea by Bangladesh authorities in May after their boat failed to reach Malaysia continue to be accommodated on Bhasan Char Island, despite the fact that most have family members in the camps. The UN continues to await a formal response on access to the island to assess the group's protection needs. A go-and-see visit was organized for 40 representatives of the refugee community in early September and representatives were asked by the Government to encourage refugees to agree to relocate to the facility. Following the visit, the government organized the relocation of refugees from different camps in Cox's Bazar in December, with some **3,498** refugees being relocated in two movements. The UN Country Team continues to advocate for access to the island to undertake protection and technical assessments, and in line with the Government's commitment has continued to highlight the importance of obtaining the informed and voluntary consent of refugees prior to any relocation.
- **Registration and civil documentation:** Awareness raising to refugees on the importance of civil documentation has continued, albeit on a more limited scale due to COVID-19. Following the reopening of UNHCR's registration sites in September after five months of lockdown, marriage and divorce registration was fully resumed in all 34 camps with tools developed with the technical support of UNHCR. Thus far in 2020, some **1,271** marriages and **139** divorces have been registered and certificates issued to refugees. However, it has been noted that some Camp in Charge officials

(CiCs) are unwilling to approve divorce and instead refer couples for mediation contrary to their wishes. This is said to have increased the risk of domestic violence and difficulties accessing justice in cases of abuse. Bangladesh has yet to align civil registration laws and regulations with international standards as a step towards making civil registration universally accessible. Birth registration and certification for both refugees and members of host communities was suspended in 2017. The Government resumed it only for children born to Bangladeshi nationals in 2020. While formal birth certificates are not issued to refugee children by the Government, new born children are added to the cases of their parents in the UNHCR-Government joint registration database based on the documents issued by the healthcare facilities in the camp such as antenatal card, vaccination card and birth notification. Antenatal cards and vaccination cards are also used to register children if they were born at home.

- Freedom of movement:** In light of the security environment and efforts to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, restrictions on movement have increased and this has impacted negatively on the well-being and livelihoods of refugees and members of host communities alike. While the situation has somewhat improved in the past few months, continued advocacy and awareness building is required to ensure that restrictions on freedom of movement and access to basic services are proportionate and in line with relevant national and international human rights law. The erection of fencing around the camps in Ukhiya has been completed and the project has been initiated in Teknaf. Refugees and humanitarian actors have expressed concern over the fencing, though in certain locations refugees are reportedly hopeful that it will improve security in and around the camps. Regardless, many refugees and members of host communities could face problems accessing essential services and facilities, though authorities have indicated it would consider advice from the humanitarian community as to where access points are needed.
- Access to justice:** UNHCR has completed the expansion of its legal assistance program, which now covers all 34 camps through its partners BRAC, TAI and BLAST. Legal services have largely resumed on almost the same scale as before COVID-19, with the exception of prison visits for relatives of detained refugees which remain suspended. Some 2,013 refugees were provided legal assistance in October, while 2,194 benefitted from the program in November and 1,731 did so in December. Since January, a total of 18,593 refugees have received some form of legal assistance, including legal counselling, mediation, filing of cases at police stations and courts, and legal representation, surpassing the target for the year which was set at 15,954. Legal awareness sessions have resumed in the camps since November, albeit on a reduced scale in line with COVID-19 guidelines, with participants sharing positive feedback about legal assistance programs and their rights and legal obligations in Bangladesh. Despite ongoing advocacy with law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, however, access to justice for refugees remains a challenge, and UNHCR's legal partners have continued to report difficulties when approaching local police to register cases. UNHCR has engaged with police to improve the situation and is working with camp administration officials to reinforce refugees' access to legal assistance and to advocate for appropriate and timely intervention by law enforcement agencies in serious crimes. As of 1 July, the Armed Police Battalion (APBn) of the Bangladesh National Police has taken over responsibility for safety and security across the 34 camps. Efforts are ongoing to build trust between the APBn and the refugee community and to minimize barriers to access to justice. Challenges have continued under the reduced humanitarian footprint resulting from COVID-19 access restrictions, and majhis and others have attempted to intervene in dispute resolution. Legal partners and CiCs have progressively scaled up their presence in the camps, and efforts are ongoing to resolve cases (including those that may have initially been 'mediated' by majhis and others) and to increase awareness among refugees about the legal services available to them. To improve access to justice in 2021, advocacy with law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, scaled up legal awareness sessions, the use of innovative messaging techniques, and community-based dispute resolution through mediation, will remain critical activities.
- Safety and security:** UNHCR and its partners continued to undertake protection monitoring and individual case management with the help of refugee volunteers. UNHCR and its partner, BRAC, have carried out protection monitoring, while partners TAI, BRAC, BLAST and Rights Jessore have implemented legal assistance and anti-trafficking programs in all 34 camps. Refugees have become increasingly concerned about the security situation across the camps following violent clashes between armed criminal gangs in the Ukhiya camps in early October. Between 3 and 5 October, sporadic violence and open conflict between two gangs in Kutupalong and surrounding camps resulted in at least 8 deaths and numerous injuries among refugees, while many shelters were burned and thousands of refugees were made to flee to adjacent camps. This violence comes amid expanded activities of criminal gangs in the camps, including abduction, murder, assault, extortion, and collecting of "taxes" from shopkeepers, majhis, and refugee volunteers. Both refugees and members of host communities have expressed fear about the violence. UNHCR is closely monitoring these developments together with the authorities. COVID-19 has continued to have a negative socioeconomic impact on security, with petty crimes, inter- and intra-communal disputes, criminal gangs expanding their sphere of control, and heightened risks of trafficking and smuggling. Child protection cases and incidents of GBV, particularly intimate partner violence, have reportedly been exacerbated by the pandemic. It is within this context that a pilot project on community safety was jointly launched by UNHCR, IOM and UNDP in early 2020, with the objective of promoting closer engagement between the refugee population and the police to promote access to justice. As part of the project, UNHCR, UNDP and IOM conducted 6 batches of training for a total of 148 APBn personnel, including 42 female officers. The pilot is initially targeting two camps in 2020, but in 2021 the project will be expanded to cover up to eight additional camps. Night patrolling by refugees has recently been reinstituted in a number of camps, either by the APBn or the Army. UNHCR continues to monitor the situation closely and is advocating that those involved in night patrols do so voluntarily and that they not be required to respond to potentially violent security incidents in the place of law enforcement authorities. The increased protection risks resulting from the fragile security environment has affected the psychological wellbeing of refugees and has led to a growing number of spontaneous and unauthorized relocations to other camps that are perceived to be safer. UNHCR continued to conduct protection assessments and advocated for relocation in cases in which individual protection risks were identified.
- Capacity building:** Over the course of 2020, UNHCR has organized training for 1,350 humanitarian workers on a range of issues relating to the protection of refugees. The trainings included different topics, notably protection and humanitarian principles, protection mainstreaming, code of conduct, mediation and legal assistance. A group of 25 police officers from the district were trained by UNHCR on protection and access to justice for refugees, while as part of a joint project implemented by UNHCR, UNDP and IOM on community safety, 378 police officers from the district were trained on crime prevention in schools and beat policing. UNHCR facilitated training on refugee protection for 25 senior APBn officers as part of a three-day training organized by the Protection Working Group (PWG).

- Education and vocational training:** In 2020 a total of **61,307** Rohingya refugee girls and boys aged between 3 and 24 years have been provided access to learning facilities through UNHCR's education program, including **56,252** children aged 3-14 who have benefitted from early childhood education, primary and junior secondary education, and **5,055** youth and adolescents aged 15-24 who have been engaged in life skills and resilience programs through **1,714** learning facilities. Some **1,186** teachers (**725** female and **461** male) and **152** facilitators for adolescent and youth programs (**76** female and **76** male) have been recruited, trained and deployed to support the teaching and learning process. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, learning facilities have remained closed since March 2020, as have all schools across Bangladesh, but UNHCR and its partners have been working with parents and caregivers to enable them to better support their children through at-home learning initiatives with the dissemination of caregiver-led guidelines for both parents and children. From 13 to 14 October, UNHCR's Education Unit organized a ToT training in collaboration with mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) colleagues on COVID-19 awareness, psychosocial support including psychological first aid, basic psychosocial counselling skills, and mental health for responders. In addition, as part of commemorating World Mental Health Day, a training on trauma-informed care in the classroom was organized for technical officers, head teachers and school supervisors on 7 and 21 October. UNHCR and the Institute of Education and Research, Dhaka University jointly conducted a material development workshop focusing on education in emergencies and refugee education on 19 December, with the aim of incorporating these topics in the curriculum of the university's Master of Education program. UNHCR and its partners organized a three-month occupational skills development training in tailoring, handicrafts, and solar system repair for adolescents and youth in December, with a total of **1,710** adolescent and youth (**1,230** female and **480** male) participating. Some **25** students have been selected to pursue online studies through an opportunity from EdX, an online platform for higher education developed by Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that hosts courses from top universities all over the world. Enrolled students will be able to study three courses for the duration of 2021, which is the minimum credit required for acquiring certificates. The students received vouchers that would allow them to access the courses as part of the Micro Bachelors, Micro Masters, and Online Master's programs.
- Durable solutions:** After years of living in camps where security conditions have continued to deteriorate, and with various restrictions in place in relation to movement, livelihoods, and communication, refugees are generally uncertain about their future and their prospects for solutions, including return to Myanmar. The risk of dangerous onward movement remains a concern as does refugees' use of negative coping mechanisms to address their current situation. While there have been isolated reports of Rohingyas returning to Rakhine State during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, these reports were largely unverified. Refugees continue to express their willingness to repatriate to Myanmar once conditions are conducive for return.

Protection Mainstreaming

- In the delivery of all forms of assistance:** Since before the monsoon season began in May 2020, some **11,758** awareness sessions on emergency preparedness have been conducted by Community Outreach Members (COMs), reaching a total of **51,848** individuals including **8,947** older persons and **1,085** persons with disability. As in the past two years, COMs focused on identifying damaged shelters and referring the occupants for assistance and support. Meanwhile, **456** service projects relating to emergency preparedness have been completed by community groups, including for soil erosion prevention, drainage system repair, and shelter repair for extremely vulnerable individuals, latrine repair, bridge repair and discussions to raise awareness on preparation and response to extreme weather conditions. Refugee multi-functional teams continued to support their communities in preparing and responding to cyclone warnings, heavy rains and flooding. UNHCR took the lead in providing a coordinated on-the-ground protection response through Protection Emergency Response Units (PERUs). PERUs were activated in March and have been operational to support the COVID-19 response, identify protection gaps in the camps, coordinate delivery of protection services, and engage refugees in dissemination of important messaging. Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) have also adopted a multi-functional approach to mainstreaming protection in the monsoon response to identify persons with specific needs at higher risk of flooding or soil erosion, and providing technical support in identifying those most in need as part of the post-cyclone assessment in the aftermath of Cyclone Amphan, which was carried out in May.
- In emergency preparedness and response:** In order to ensure that protection remains central to the response, the Protection Working Group has embedded protection mainstreaming focal points in the WASH, Health, and Site Management Sectors and has provided guidance and support, inter alia, through guidance notes, protection mainstreaming tip sheets, and the development of procedures to ensure safe and dignified burials. Efforts aim at ensuring an inclusive community-based age, gender, and diversity approach is integrated into the multi-sectoral response to the refugee crisis – and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic – and that the most vulnerable, including older persons, persons with disabilities and gender diverse populations have access to targeted messaging and protection services.

Reduced Aid Dependency

- Empowerment through livelihoods and skills training:** Cash-for-work (CFW) schemes have been established to reduce aid dependency and to include unskilled and skilled volunteers in a range of programs. This is coordinated through the Transfer Working Group and follows detailed guidance on CFW as an approach. In the third quarter of 2020, UNHCR's partner agencies have engaged a total of **88,437** individuals in CFW activities that will ensure shared benefits for both the refugee and host communities. Meanwhile, in collaboration partners UNHCR has provided cash support to host communities to help address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their socio-economic situation, with **32,516** individuals receiving a one-off unconditional cash grant through mobile money transfers and direct cash distributions.

Community Engagement

- Outreach, communication with communities, and Accountability to Affected Populations:** Since the beginning of the year, through diverse channels of communication, COMs have conducted **82,635** outreach sessions reaching **439,219** refugees covering health, hygiene, COVID-19 prevention and response, emergency preparedness, and a range of general protection issues. Approximately **15%** of those reached were older persons, **29%** were children and some **1%** were persons with disabilities. In addition, COMs conducted **2,236** outreach sessions on the importance of wearing masks and their safe usage, including disseminating related awareness materials for some **2,098** imams with a coverage of **1,529** mosques. From January to December, the COMs conducted in total **55,727** home visits and **14,518** monitoring visits, reaching **246,337** refugees, including **25,303** persons with specific needs (PSNs) who were identified and assisted by COMs, of which **3,636** cases were considered urgent. COMs accompanied **3,398** refugees

to service points and referred **4,747** to specialized outreach volunteers and **1,472** to partners for assistance. By extending their support to the Registration Unit, since June **248** COMs have conducted **9,785** elderly support visits reaching some **10,554** older persons and their caregivers. To create awareness among the refugee community on child marriage, COMs conducted **3,567** training sessions for **19,228** refugees. Separately, COMs also conducted **546** sessions for **850** female religious teachers and **1,001** imams since October. From January to December **1,578** interested learners from the COMs program and from CBOs have been enrolled in the Coursera online learning platform, completing more than 600 courses on a range of subjects from different academic institutions. This opportunity was subsequently extended to all other interested refugees. In close cooperation with refugee volunteers, Information Service Centers and Community Centers continued to organize Radio Listening Groups and Visual Content Watching Groups that provide information on topics of interest to the communities (most recently on issues related to COVID-19, cyclone preparedness, reopening of registration centers, and hygiene and monsoon messaging, among others). From January to December, **22,929** refugees participated in listening sessions and facilitated discussions. After a temporary suspension due to COVID-19, these activities were gradually resumed on a small scale to disseminate accurate messages to the community, especially targeting children through the “Our Heroes” series that emphasizes the resilience of refugees and their contribution to their communities, and the “Meena Cartoon Series” that uses storytelling to discuss good practices, such as female education and the prevention of early marriages. Over the course of 2020 some **7,874** refugees participated in visual content sessions and facilitated discussions. Questions and feedback received at these sessions have gone into the development of communication materials for COVID-19, registration, and other issues of interest. Also, community-based volunteers working on GBV programs, including COMs, community support groups, male role models, and community organizers, reached **187,208** people with information on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), GBV services and other GBV related issues. The loosening of COVID-19 restrictions has enabled UNHCR and partner staff to resume more regular work with the community.

- Building the community’s resilience to respond to COVID-19:** Apart from enhancing the refugee community’s access to information related to COVID-19 prevention, treatment and response, and noting the immense need for masks within the community, COMs initiated training in mask-making for the community, coupled with the awareness sessions on the importance of wearing of masks; some **7,392** training sessions were conducted for **17,247** refugees (**1,671** men and **15,576** women) from **9,022** households, and with the support of COMs those trained have thus far produced nearly **12,000** masks. Those trained were asked to train other family members and neighbors as a way to expand the benefits of the program to the wider community. In addition, outreach volunteers and partners, with the support of UNHCR, have undertaken visits to older refugees as part of the Older Persons Care Support Visit Project, during which they provided information about care for older persons and their caregivers in the context of COVID-19. Advice was also given on how the elderly care kit that UNHCR has been distributing to older persons can be used to create a small safe zone for older family members. A total of **10,493** older persons have thus far been reached as part of the program.
- Strengthening refugees’ participation in protection processes:** A mapping of all community-based structures established by UNHCR and its partners illustrates the significant roles played by **41** community structures involving over **22,000** refugees, both paid and unpaid, in humanitarian efforts and assistance programs. UNHCR’s Community-Based Protection staff have been working actively with **33** community based organizations providing regular updates and information and conducting leadership and capacity building activities. This has included training sessions on community engagement, facilitation skills, and child marriage. Grassroots youth and women’s organizations have also been receiving basic material support to help them expand their initiatives. Community mobilization activities by outreach volunteers have now been fully incorporated in the daily activities of the COMs through Saturday Solidarity Projects – a shift from daily delivery of assistance on a case by case basis to a more community-based approach to addressing service gaps. Since January, close to **549** projects have been initiated by the refugee community across 20 camps with the support of COMs. Some **11,642** refugees across different age groups, including persons with disabilities, have participated in designing and implementing community led development activities which included community cleaning, community-led learning, advocacy for resumption of education for out-of-school children, handicraft making, art and recreation for children with disabilities, indoor and outdoor sports, and cloth mask making.
- Feedback and referral mechanisms:** In early 2020, UNHCR upgraded its protection hotline to a toll-free number to provide easier access to refugees raising concerns and seeking support on various services. Over the course of the year, **4,287** calls were handled through the hotline, with highest number of calls between May and August at a time when the humanitarian footprint in the camps was largely reduced due to COVID-19 movement restrictions. Approximately **62%** of the calls received related to basic needs and essential services, with the majority involving shelter concerns. Following the resumption of the regular presence of humanitarian agencies since September, calls on protection issues have been the majority, mainly relating to registration, documentation and identity management. Over the course of the year some **63,756** visitors have approached UNHCR’s Information Service Centers to provide feedback on service provision and to request assistance, predominantly on the distribution of core relief items and shelter issues. Efforts to streamline common feedback mechanisms across sectors and among agencies was a key priority. In May, UNHCR launched an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) program to disseminate critical messages to the refugee population and to gather community feedback during the pandemic. This was done in close coordination with the Government of Bangladesh and other humanitarian actors. Between May and December, **294,655** broadcast calls were made to refugees, of which **143,427** calls were answered. Among the refugees who answered the calls and listened to pre-recorded messages, **31,631** were adult women, **98,605** were adult men, **159** were girls, **141** were boys, **2,206** were older women, and **8,652** were older men. Broadcast messages focused on COVID-19, elderly care, quarantine and isolation, use of masks, contact tracing, and monsoon and cyclone preparedness. A total of **47,081** incoming calls were received from refugees who listened to a pre-recorded message on COVID-19, out of which **11,051** refugees further chose to listen to an in-depth message on the pandemic. Approximately **68%** of the refugees who were called to collect feedback expressed interest in continuing to receive messages through IVR. Feedback from the community indicated that IVR has proven to be very effective in providing necessary information while also mitigating the potential transmission of COVID-19 by minimizing human contact.
- Community engagement and empowerment:** Placing communities at the center of the response continues to be a key priority and is necessary to ensure sustainability of protection interventions and to mitigate the short- and long-term social protection consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, UNHCR supported **5,489** service projects while community-led discussions were carried out by **120** male, female, male youth and female youth groups in 35 locations across 31 camps aimed at strengthening community engagement and improving the resilience and

psychosocial well-being of communities. These initiatives have focused on promoting the meaningful participation of refugees, improving camp-based infrastructure, social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, and providing support to persons with specific needs, among other initiatives. In December, all community group facilitators were trained on leadership and interpersonal communication through ToTs that will be followed by trainings delivered to all community group volunteers and community-led discussions with the wider refugee population. Following capacity development by UNHCR and partners, community group volunteers have conducted discussions on disability, conflict resolution, PSEA, and community engagement. To promote community-based solutions, UNHCR continues to actively engage with religious leaders through regular meetings and teleconferences. For example, in collaboration with BBC Media Action, UNHCR and partners organized audio tutorial training for **270** imams and **40** female religious teachers in **16** camps to strengthen effective communication with communities, build facilitation skills, and support outreach on health, emergency preparedness, and protection-related issues. Since March, imams and female religious teachers have conducted **49,222** awareness sessions related to COVID-19, reaching out to **899,222** individuals in 28 camps. Moreover, UNHCR and its partners held weekly engagement meetings and teleconferences with more than **800** imams and **328** female religious teachers in 26 camps. The meetings and teleconference sessions focused on COVID-19 prevention measures, monsoon and cyclone preparedness, domestic violence, child marriage and other protection issues in the camps.

- **Community representation:** The elected block and camp committees in Kutupalong Camp, Nayapara Camp, Camp 4-Extension, and Camp 26 are part of UNHCR's commitment to increasing sustainable refugee self-management within the camps. Community representation is an important step in promoting inclusive and accountable community self-management, as well as alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. The four camp committees, which have **47%** female representation, have established a model of leadership that is accountable to the community and supportive of gender parity. Through their daily activities and regular community meetings, the **150** elected representatives have helped raise awareness on COVID-19 and other protection concerns, including the prevention of child marriage, GBV, domestic violence, and human trafficking. The camp committees also provided regular mediation services for small scale disputes that have arisen among refugees. Community meetings are held regularly with respected refugee elders, imams, and grassroots networks within the camps to promote consultative leadership and open dialogue. Refugees in the four camps that have elected representatives have expressed their preference for an elected camp committee system over the appointed "majhi" system. The elected camp committee focal points represent the voice of refugee communities in sector specific and camp coordination meetings led by CiCs, UNHCR and partners. Such closer engagement with the elected block and camp representatives facilitates two-way communication with the refugee community, improves the community's understanding and knowledge of services provided and projects implemented in the camps, serves as a platform for refugees to speak up about the challenges they face and the urgent needs and concerns they have, and allows them to present their suggestions. Following a series of capacity building sessions on camp coordination, camp management, and mediation, block and camp committee members are able to carry out their responsibilities more effectively and efficiently.
- **Peaceful coexistence with host communities:** Alongside development actors, UNHCR is addressing the drivers of tension between host and refugee communities, which have been exacerbated due to COVID-19, through enhanced inter-community engagement and targeted support to host communities in the areas of livelihoods, education, and meeting the basic needs of vulnerable families. In several camps, relations between refugees and host communities have deteriorated in the first half of 2020, and UNHCR continues to monitor the situation. UNHCR continues to engage with authorities to encourage the formation of joint committees involving members of the two communities to address such conflicts, while advocating with government authorities and law enforcement agencies to help mitigate disputes, reduce protection risks, and improve the discourse on hosting refugees.

Specialized Services

- **Assistance to persons with specific needs, physical and mental health, and psychosocial support:** Some **16,690** refugees have benefitted from structured psychosocial support in 2020. Through our implementing partner, Handicap International, **3,366** persons with specific needs participated in group-based psychosocial support activities, while **1,929** persons living with disabilities (including older persons) were supported with physical rehabilitation assistance. In addition, **481** persons with specific needs were provided individual protection support, including referral to specialized assistance. Community awareness and group sessions were facilitated to enhance a safe and inclusive environment in three camps. In addition, the COMs conducted door-to-door visits to identify and provide direct and indirect support to PSNs. In total, **51,410** visits have been undertaken over the course of the year, during which **16,418** persons with specific needs were identified and **6,185** received direct assistance from COMs.
- **GBV:** To ensure multi-sectoral support and to enhance the resilience of survivors of GBV, UNHCR provides case management support in 20 camps through four partners, including two local organizations. Case management services are safe entry points for both male and female GBV survivors to receive crisis and longer-term psychosocial support. Two safe shelters in Cox's Bazar continue to be operational, providing support to refugees and members of host communities, including victims of trafficking. UNHCR's COVID-19 response efforts to adapt case management to remote modalities have had a positive impact, with service provision rebounding to pre-COVID levels. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) was strengthened through training of **798** humanitarian staff and **25** refugee volunteers, increasing awareness of the Zero Tolerance Policy and mandatory reporting requirements. Some **94** community-based groups are working on GBV prevention and response with UNHCR and its partners. A total of **260,369** people were reached by community-led messaging on GBV, including locations for services and the benefits those services offer survivors. UNHCR and its partners are implementing SASA! Together in Cox's Bazar. SASA! Together is a community mobilization approach and uniquely designed to address the core driver of violence against women: the imbalance of power between women and men, girls, and boys. It is led by women and men who live and work in the community and are supported throughout the journey by dedicated SASA! Together staff.
- **Legal assistance:** UNHCR has now extended its legal assistance program to cover all 34 camps, and partners began implementing legal case management in the 6 new camps in August. Thus far in 2020 a total of **18,593** refugees have received legal assistance services from UNHCR and its partners BRAC, BLAST, TAI, and Rights Jessore, including legal counselling, legal representation and mediation. These services helped ensure protection-focused legal interventions while reducing refugees' dependence on *ad-hoc* dispute resolution mechanisms by majhis and other actors, who may not be appropriately trained or impartial. As part of UNHCR's comprehensive capacity building program, in 2020 some **15,053** refugees,

including **1,783** community leaders, have benefited from awareness raising sessions on legal protection, though these programs were suspended between April and November due to COVID-19; these activities have now resumed, albeit on a reduced scale in line with COVID-19 guidelines.

- **Child protection:** UNHCR and its partners have provided prevention and response programming through the provision of psycho-social support to **60,081** boys and girls since January 2020. A full **100%** of the nearly **2,543** reported new cases of child abuse, violence or exploitation received age and gender sensitive services in the framework of individual case management to meet their tailored needs. This included some **258** children with disability. Community-based child protection structures, such as community-based child protection committees, adolescent support groups and parents groups, were reinforced to actively engage in awareness activities on COVID-19 and emergency preparedness issues. With the gradual easing of access restrictions relating to the pandemic, small scale community-led adolescent initiatives have resumed with public health measures. Some **8,473** adolescents have received vocational and life skills sessions, while **480** community led initiatives have been undertaken under the supervision of child protection partners over the course of 2020.
- **Prevention and response to trafficking:** UNHCR co-chairs the Anti-Trafficking Working Group together with IOM, and as part of prevention activities implemented directly and by partners, anti-trafficking awareness raising sessions were organized targeting humanitarian actors, parents, adolescent boys and girls, and community leaders. Awareness campaigns through posters, billboards and radio shows have reached **3,323** refugees thus far in 2020, with messages specifically addressing the dangers of onward movement in the context of COVID-19, though most of these activities have been down-scaled since March in line with measures to mitigate transmission of the virus. UNHCR has continued to respond to trafficking incidents reported through the protection hotline and has assisted law enforcement agencies in search and rescue operations. In 2020, **932** victims of trafficking and human smuggling have been rescued by law enforcement agencies and UNHCR partners. In addition, UNHCR collects and analyzes information on trafficking incidents with a view to understanding emerging trends and putting in place appropriate protection services. The restrictive nature of life in the camps, the lack of access to livelihoods and educational opportunities, and increasing criminal activity are reported to be factors contributing to refugees' decisions to move onwards through organized human smuggling networks, despite the well-known risks of exploitation and abuse they may face during their journey, and the potential that they may be subjected to trafficking. Malaysia is the primary intended destination, with refugees enduring arduous voyages at sea, some of which last for many months in deplorable conditions. Anti-trafficking efforts remain a priority especially after the monsoon and cyclone season when boat movements are expected to resume. UNHCR and its partners will continue raising awareness among the refugee population on the risks associated with such journeys and will coordinate with the authorities to take action against smugglers and traffickers.

Key Challenges

- The reduced humanitarian footprint in the camps due to restrictions on movement during the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the WASH and shelter related challenges faced by refugees. Recurring problems with shelter facilities, broken tube wells, malfunctioning toilets, and insufficient or overflowing drainage systems persist, and this has worsened during the monsoon season with camps experiencing heavy rains and storms.
- Inadequate lighting near latrines and water points continue to cause protection concerns for women and girls, who are also disproportionately affected by poor sanitation and hygiene facilities.
- The closure of all multi-purpose centres, learning centres and child friendly spaces, without alternatives being provided, has resulted in negative coping mechanisms impacting children and adolescents. The loss of work opportunities for adults across the camps has led to an increase in child labour and child marriage. In some instances, children and adolescents have also become involved in the drugs trade and petty crime, such as theft. Most reported child protection cases have been categorized as high risk, including GBV, child marriage, violence, and child labour.
- Trafficking and smuggling remain significant concerns in Bangladesh. Child trafficking in particular continues to be a major problem in a number of camps, mostly involving girls and often relating to child marriage, with the promise of economic stability through marriage being used to lure victims into trafficking and smuggling schemes.
- Thus far in 2020 several boats have left the country with refugees from the camps along with Bangladeshi migrants intending to travel to Malaysia, and while two boats have managed to disembark in Malaysia and two have reached Indonesia, others have had to seek other options after spending months at sea in terrible conditions. Two boats have returned to Bangladesh. The first landed in Teknaf in mid-April and was allowed to disembark, and UNHCR supported the Government by facilitating 14-day quarantine for more than 400 passengers before they were allowed to return to their families in the camps and local communities. A second boat was intercepted in early May with 306 refugees aboard, but the Government refused to let the refugees return to the camps and instead transferred them to a government-run facility on Bhasan Char Island, where they currently remain separated from their family members.
- Alleged corruption on the part of majhis remained a challenge across the camps, with reports of abuse of power, preventing refugees from accessing legal assistance mechanisms, physically assaulting refugees, taking money to resolve disputes, and advocating for inappropriate resolutions in cases of intimate partner violence being reported. With the COVID-19 restrictions on access to the camps in place since March, disputes have increasingly been mediated by majhis, community leaders or even organized criminal gangs because of the inconsistent presence of legal actors and authorities in the camps.
- Community-based structures across all camps, including for COMs and community groups, faced challenges in light of COVID-19 restrictions, affecting their ability to conduct activities and complete community-based projects.
- With the onset of the pandemic, women and adolescent girls have faced increased pressure from their families and communities due to rumors linking the spread of the virus to women, in particular targeting women perceived as deviating from traditional norms (e.g., working or failing to wear appropriate clothing). This has placed further strain on women's participation in camp activities and has limited their involvement in community-based structures. UNHCR has been working with its partners to combat such rumors and to find avenues for women's participation.
- Increased restrictions, loss of livelihoods, suspension of educational activities, and increased criminality, among others, have compounded GBV risks. Access to women friendly spaces by survivors of intimate partner violence have been impeded due to the prolonged presence of their spouses at home.
- Unprotected water reservoirs, ponds and bridges in several camps continue to pose serious risks of drowning, particularly for children, while careless driving on camp roads also poses dangers especially for younger children. These and other risks are exacerbated by the

closure of learning centers since mid-March, which has created significant free time and lack of daily routines for children. At the same time, the lack of supervision and care of children and youth has given rise to cases of trafficking, lost children, child marriage, child labor, and other forms of exploitation.

- Policy limitations on the provision of quality, accredited education for refugee children and youth remains a concern. While overall coverage has expanded in 2019 and 2020, the absence of meaningful education and vocational training programs and the lack of certified education creates space for idleness and increases risks of exploitation, child marriage, and other harmful coping mechanisms, particularly for adolescents. The closure of camp schools since March has seriously exacerbated the situation.
- The ban on SIM cards and access to telecommunications in the camps was the subject of much concern with the onset of COVID-19 and the critical need to spread credible information to refugees about prevention. While the ban has now been relaxed, access to telecommunications networks in the camps continues to be sporadic and inconsistent.
- Generalized insecurity caused by rivalry between organized criminal gangs has resulted in a number of attempts at spontaneous and unauthorized self-relocation of refugees from one camp to another. This has impacted access to assistance for those without official permission to relocate. In a number of camps, landlords have begun evicting refugees from their land forcing them to move to another location, and several disputes between local landlords and refugees have been reported, including in relation to evictions of families when others would be willing to pay higher rent.
- There has been rising insecurity in the camps with reports of extortion and bribery and the threat of violence by armed gangs, particularly targeting refugee volunteers including female volunteers.
- Although access to justice has improved, prison visits by relatives of

detained refugees remain suspended, and legal literacy sessions have just resumed in November on a limited scale.

- The impunity with which criminal elements operate provides further incentive for organized criminal gangs to expand their activities. The lack of timely legal solutions has been perceived by refugees to be the result of ineffective follow-up, which has often negatively affected refugees' trust in the legal process. At the same time, the reduced presence of protection actors affected the timely delivery of legal assistance. In an effort to seek swift solutions, refugees have continued to look to *ad-hoc* dispute resolution mechanisms through majhis and other non-legal actors, which has led to numerous reports of corruption, bias, and extortion. Moving forward this needs to be addressed to ensure refugees have access to fair, legal-based dispute resolution mechanisms, despite the COVID-19 restrictions in place.
- Over the past nine months violence has increased across the camps, and the security situation remains particularly tense. Refugees have begun forming groups to counter these gangs, while others have reportedly joined gangs as a coping mechanism, especially considering the lack of livelihoods opportunities. The situation has eroded trust between communities and law enforcement agencies.
- Rumors surrounding Bhasan Char remain persistent throughout the camps as the Government has not undertake a systematic information dissemination campaign. More than 3,400 individuals were relocated to the island in December and further relocation movements are expected in 2021. Motivations for signing up to relocate to the island include the increasing presence of organized criminal gangs in the camps, tensions with other refugees or with members of host communities, and hopes for better livelihood or educational opportunities on Bhasan Char.

Way Forward

- In line with its mandate responsibilities, UNHCR will continue to advocate with the Government of Bangladesh for continued access to territory for Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution in Myanmar and will support the Government and the people of Bangladesh as they continue to offer international protection to those in need, until such time as conditions become conducive for voluntary repatriation to Myanmar in safety and dignity. UNHCR will support regional efforts to address the root causes of displacement in Myanmar, while seeking ways to address onward movement from Bangladesh to other countries in the region through advocacy for a range of complementary pathways for solutions in line with the Global Compact on Refugees. To ensure the Government can continue to provide access to territory for refugees fleeing Myanmar, and to encourage the authorities to facilitate safe disembarkation of persons rescued at sea, UNHCR will continue to maintain reception and quarantine facilities for new arrivals with a total capacity for as many as 1,000 persons.
- UNHCR will maintain efforts to enhance coordination with humanitarian partners to ensure effective protection programming across the 34 camps. Ongoing coordination meetings at the camp level, and various working groups in Cox's Bazar, support efforts toward effective protection programming and interventions while ensuring a harmonized approach. Close engagement with IOM and other key partners will therefore remain crucial.
- Promoting peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities remains a major objective of the operation through programs that support vulnerable Bangladeshis with access to basic services and livelihoods opportunities, and that provide a

forum for engaging members of the refugee and host communities to address their concerns.

- UNHCR will continue to strengthen community-based protection mechanisms through an age, gender and diversity approach and will ensure accountability to affected populations across the camps, including by promoting elected refugee representation bodies and supporting expansion of community-led initiatives through self-organized community groups.
- With regard to child protection programming, in 2021 particular focus will be given to: meaningful participation of refugee children and communities; setting up and maintaining best interests determination procedures for complex cases; improving services for children most at-risk, including those with disabilities; promoting awareness on child protection minimum standards; ensuring meaningful integration of child protection activities within other sectors; and promoting adolescents' access to life-skills and vocational training.
- UNHCR will continue to undertake regular protection monitoring in the camps and at the border – directly and through partners, including refugees – to identify protection risks and inform the response, while strengthening individual case management and referral pathways and expanding outreach with refugee communities to identify and address their needs.
- UNHCR will lead the process of ensuring protection mainstreaming across all sectors through the establishment of multi-functional teams, internally within UNHCR and with partners including the refugee community. Protection principles will be mainstreamed across all sectors through efforts led by the Protection Working

Group, which has activated protection mainstreaming focal points for the Health, Site Management, Food Security, and WASH sectors since May 2020, and multiple protection mainstreaming sessions have taken place in these and other sectors.

- UNHCR will continue advocacy at the Cox's Bazar and Dhaka levels to enhance cooperation with police and the judiciary towards enhancing access to justice for refugees and will continue to work closely with the authorities to find pragmatic solutions. UNHCR will expand efforts to strengthen access to formal and informal justice mechanisms through capacity building with partners, CiCs, and law enforcement authorities, and through awareness raising within the refugee and host communities (as the COVID-19 situation allows). The expanded use of community-based mediation schemes to resolve interpersonal and family conflicts will be a key component of the program, including training of partners and awareness raising with the community. A pilot community safety program will also be expanded to cover 10 camps in 2021, in partnership with UNDP and IOM.
- UNHCR will advocate for more structured engagement with authorities and other stakeholders in Cox's Bazar and Dhaka to more effectively address safety and security concerns within the camps, including through systematic notification of arrest of refugees and ensuring their access to legal representation, designation of focal points within law enforcement agencies, and strengthened monitoring of detention facilities.
- UNHCR will continue to co-chair the Anti-Trafficking Working Group along with IOM as a forum for information sharing and joint programming and advocacy with authorities and refugee and host communities, and will strengthen awareness raising on anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling within the camps and provide legal

assistance and other support to victims of trafficking.

- UNHCR will continue to work with the Government to register refugees and provide individual documentation, while advocating for access to more effective civil registration procedures, particularly for the issuance of birth certificates.
- Access to quality education will remain a key priority, and UNHCR will continue to implement its activities under the Learning Competency Framework and Approach (LCFA) and Guidelines for Informal Education Programs (GIEP) as an interim solution while advocating for sustainable, meaningful, and equitable education for refugees and host communities. The introduction of the Myanmar curriculum in camp schools will be a priority in 2021, as will improved quality of teaching and increased teaching-related professional development, better measurement of learning outcomes, and increased refugee and host community engagement in education programming. UNHCR will continue to support coordination efforts aimed at overall strategic enhancement of interventions within the Education Sector as chair of the Strategic Advisory Group.
- The UN Country Team continues to constructively engage the Government to advocate for a comprehensive assessment of the safety and sustainability of plans to relocate as many as 100,000 refugees to Bhasan Char Island. Advocacy surrounding the 306 refugees already relocated to the island in May after they disembarked from a boat that had failed to reach Malaysia will continue in order to ensure basic protection and humanitarian needs are fulfilled.

Working in Partnership

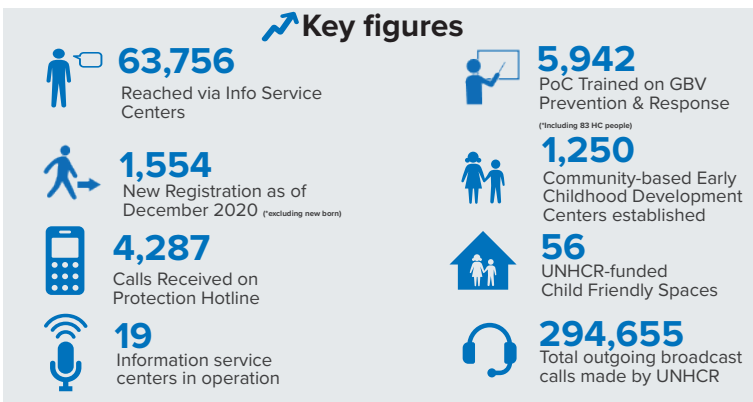
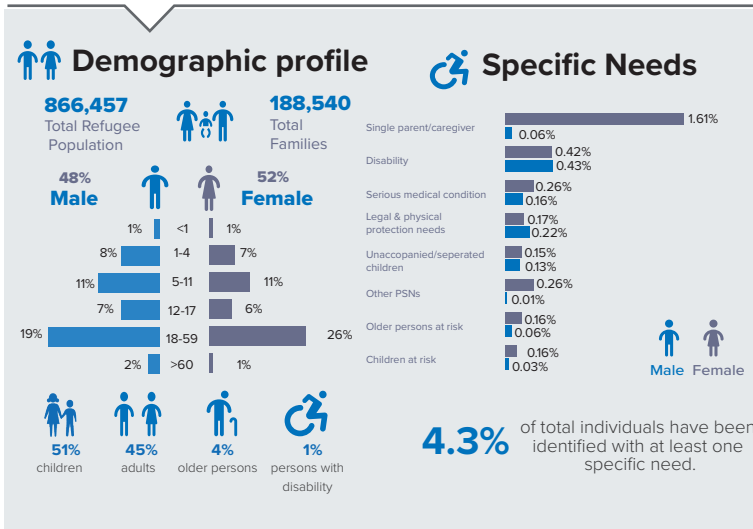
UNHCR co-chairs the **Strategic Executive Group** together with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. UNHCR leads on the protection response for refugees and leads the Protection Sector in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR welcomes its valuable partnership with a number of UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its protection and assistance programs with humanitarian partners through a number of working groups under the Inter-Sector Coordination Group. UNHCR's main government counterpart is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and its Cox's Bazar-based Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC). UNHCR staff work closely with Camp-in-Charge officials in different refugee settlements, as well as with a range of international and national actors. UNHCR has a strong network of 32 partners, including:

MDMR (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief) | **Action Aid Bangladesh** | **ACF** (Action Contre la Faim) | **ADRA** (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) | **BNWLA** (Bangladesh National Woman Lawyer's Association) | **BDRCS** (Bangladesh Red Crescent Society) | **BRAC** (Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | **Caritas Bangladesh** | **CNRS** (Center for Natural Resource Studies) | **CODEC** (Community Development Centre) | **COAST** (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) | **Danish Refugee Council** | **FH Association** (Food for the Hungry) | **GK** (Gonosasthaya Kendra) | **IUCN** (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) | **Handicap International** | **Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation** | **Light House** | **Oxfam GB** | **Relief International** | **Mukti Cox's Bazar** | **NGO Forum for Public Health** | **RTMI** (Research, Training and Management International) | **Save the Children International** | **World Vision** | **Solidarites International** | **Terre des Hommes** | **TAI** (Technical Assistance Incorporated) | **NRC** (Norwegian Refugee Council) | **WFP** (World Food Programme) | **UNDP** (United Nations Development Programme) | **IOM** (International Organization for Migration)

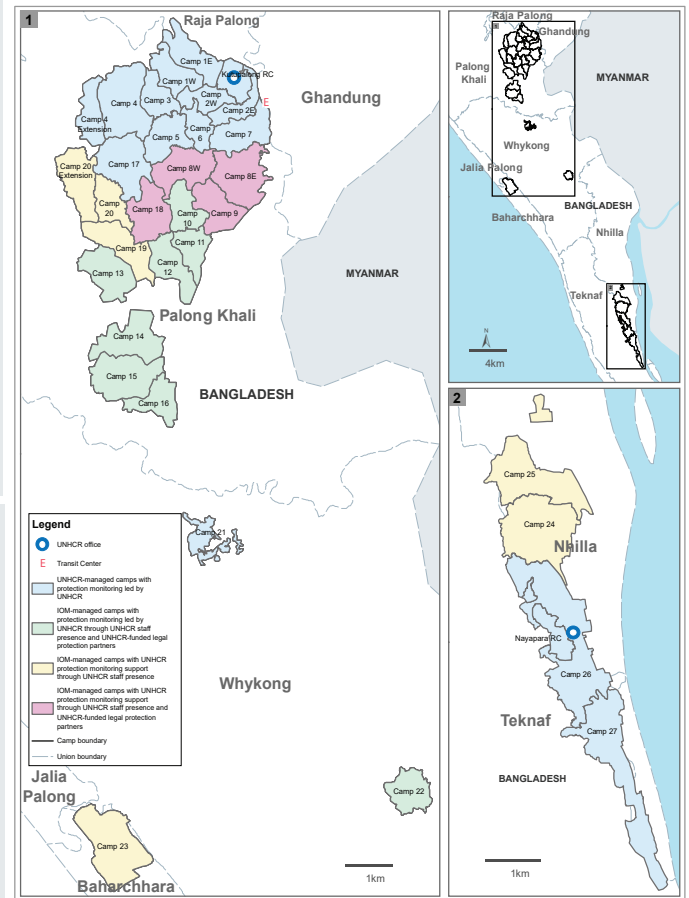
UNHCR would like to acknowledge the crucial role played by refugees in the response. **Over 7,000 volunteers from the refugee community** are working side by side with humanitarian agencies.

Donor Country Contributions to UNHCR Bangladesh (2019/2020)

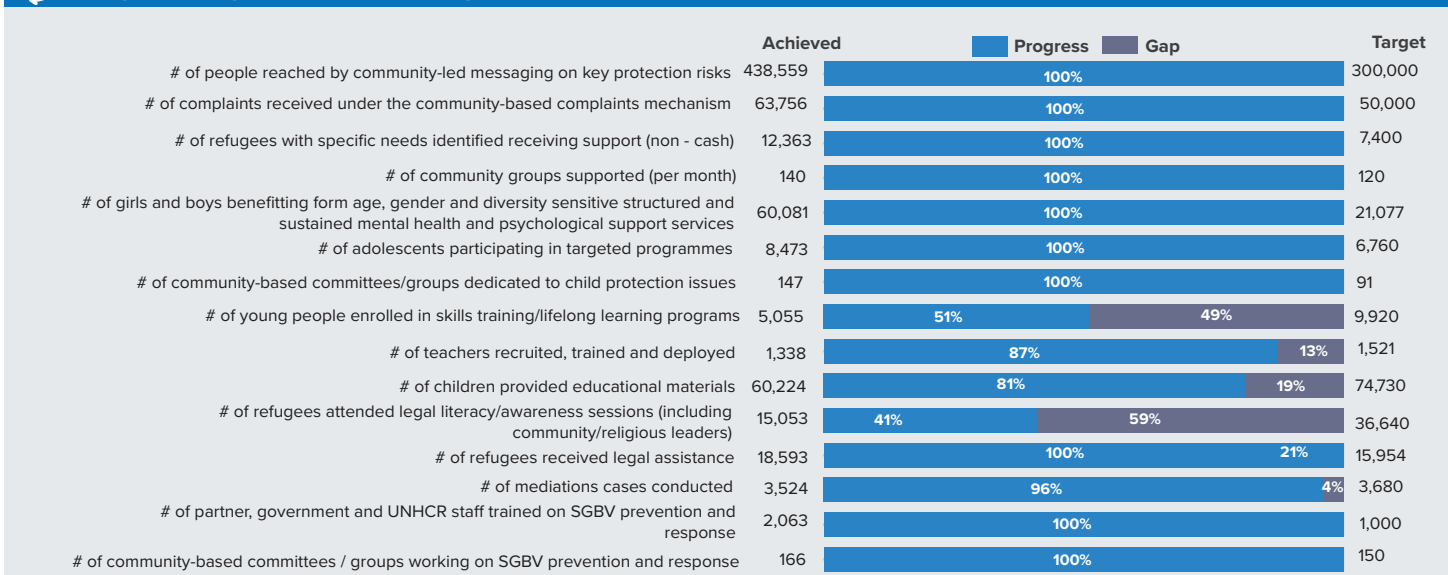
UNHCR's humanitarian response in Bangladesh is made possible thanks to the generous support of major donors who have contributed unrestricted funding to UNHCR's global operations, and to donors who have generously contributed directly to UNHCR Bangladesh operations. In 2019/2020, support continued to be generously received from the following: Austria, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, 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, Turkey, 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.



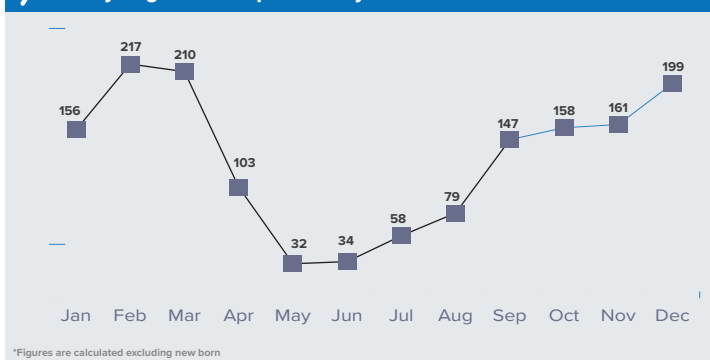
UNHCR Protection Presence



Progress Against 2020 Targets



Newly Registered Population by Month



Hotline Analysis

