



KEY FIGURES

BENEFICIARIES

960,539

Total registered refugee population



52% Female



52% Children



48% Male

as of March 2023

PARTNERS

24

of partners implementing key UNHCR activities in 2023

NGO 13

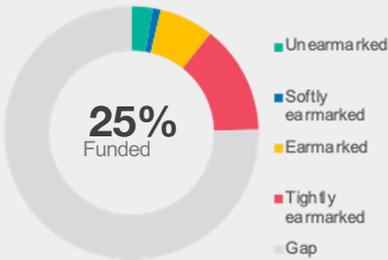
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Government 1

FUNDING

275 M

Funding for 2023 operations



as of March 2023

HISTORY

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

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

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

OPERATIONAL UPDATE

March 2023



Kite festival organized by UNHCR on Cox's Bazar beach with messages of solidarity. © UNHCR

OVERVIEW

In March 2023, the operational situation in Bangladesh became increasingly complex. The combined impacts of a 17% cut to refugee food rations, a massive fire in the Kutupalong-Balukhali megacamp destroying thousands of shelters, low levels of humanitarian funding available for the response, and a worsening security situation in the Cox's Bazar camps have added to an already challenging scenario. Coupled with global inflation (about 9% in Bangladesh) and large-scale humanitarian emergencies in Ukraine, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Syria requiring funding, these developments impact the type and qualities of services that UNHCR and partners are able to provide the nearly one million Rohingya refugees currently hosted by the people of Bangladesh after they were forced to flee their homeland.

Now well into the sixth year, the Rohingya crisis is a protracted crisis, no longer an emergency. At the same time, Rohingya refugees (who cannot legally join the labour market) remain entirely reliant on humanitarian life-saving assistance and services, including protection, health, shelter, water and sanitation, food assistance and other basic needs — as reflected in the comprehensive [Joint Response Plan for 2023](#) launched in March 2023, which aims to reach 1.47 million people (including half a million vulnerable Bangladeshis affected by the crisis).

“We need to redouble our efforts to mobilize resources and, notably, development funding to be used in a flexible manner, as humanitarian aid budgets are no longer available,” said Bangladesh country representative Johannes van der Klaauw earlier this year, emphasising the need to [transition from an emergency strategy to a stabilization and resilience agenda](#). Such an agenda includes private sector partnerships, development funding opportunities, and investments in refugee education and skills development to enhance their self-reliance. UNHCR's partnerships with diverse stakeholders (development actors, international financial institutions academia, the private sector, etc.) are critical in this scenario. Innovation is also needed for better resource management, which supports operational stability. UNHCR works with stakeholders to identify key issues and collaborate on strategic research. Findings are being applied to adapt existing programmes (such as SAFE+2 energy components), inform advocacy/policy dialogues, and plan new initiatives. In particular, climate smart innovations to protect the Cox's Bazar environment and enhance resilience of both host and refugee communities are a key UNHCR priority.

In addition to promoting a resilience agenda, UNHCR's other strategic priorities include supporting the eventual return of refugees to Myanmar through skills and capacity building; ensuring adequate living conditions (e.g. health, nutrition, shelter, WASH, etc.) in the Cox's Bazar camps and Bhasan Char; and ensuring access to meaningful education and protection services, and respect for refugee rights. Through successful advocacy by UNHCR and others, the [Government endorsed the skills development and volunteer engagement frameworks in 2022 — a significant step towards making Rohingya response operations more sustainable](#). UNHCR will continue building on this achievement in 2023 through [leading the new Livelihoods/Skills Development Sector](#), and programmes that offer skills, education and resources across many fields, including art, photography, and storytelling. UNHCR also continues to support events, publications, and exhibitions by Rohingya talent that foster empathy and build bridges between refugee and Bangladeshi communities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. BASIC RIGHTS, PROTECTION & EDUCATION

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

2. ADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS IN A GREEN ENVIRONMENT

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

3. SKILLS & CAPACITY BUILDING TO SUPPORT DURABLE SOLUTIONS

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

4. DIVERSIFIED FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS

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

5. CREATING A POSITIVE NARRATIVE

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

DONORS

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

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

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KEY UPDATES

- **2023 JOINT RESPONSE PLAN:** On 7 March, UNHCR and partners appealed for USD 876 million for the 2023 Joint Response Plan (JRP), including USD 67 million for operations on the island of Bhasan Char where 30,000 refugees have been relocated. The 2023 JRP aims to meet the essential needs and provide protection to one million Rohingya refugees, as well as support for a half million Bangladeshis in the host community. By the end of March, 10% of required funding was received. [Read more.](#)
- **FOOD RATION CUTS:** The funding shortfall has already had dire consequences. In March, refugee rations were cut for the first time, reducing the monthly food allotment per person from USD 12 to 10. Without further assistance, more cuts lie ahead, deepening desperation and likely triggering higher malnutrition rates, school dropouts, deteriorating health, increased incidents of child marriage, child labour and gender-based violence, and more families attempting high-risk boat journeys to third countries.
- **CAMP 11 FIRE:** On 5 March, a fire broke out in Camp 11, the first major test of the camp-wide Fire Response System, an interagency initiative driven by 2,800 trained and equipped Rohingya first-responders. The refugee firefighters, including 16 UNHCR-funded mobile fire fighting units (MFFUs), contained the blaze in three hours with local authorities' help. 1,135 facilities and 3,000+ shelters were destroyed/damaged, leaving 16,000 homeless. In Q1 of 2023, 249 fire incidents (123 in UNHCR camps) were counted, compared to 249 total fires in 2022 and 151 in 2021. Most fires are quickly extinguished by the refugee firefighters.
- **REPATRIATION PILOT:** From 15-22 March, a delegation from Myanmar visited the Cox's Bazar camps to verify biodata and village of origin information for the refugees proposed for the repatriation pilot. UNHCR was not involved in this bilateral initiative between the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar, and continues to advocate with authorities to ensure voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return.
- **MEDIA MONITORING:** In the first quarter of 2023, 55% of 1,029 stories on the Rohingya crisis in the Bangladesh media had a negative tone, compared to 39% of 2,357 total articles with a negative tone in 2022 — signaling increasing concern about topics such as terrorism, environmental degradation, demographics, criminality and drugs.
- **EDUCATION:** 58% of children and youth targeted for learning activities have transitioned to the Myanmar curriculum, but the lack of qualified teachers who can teach in the Myanmar language is a challenge. To address the need, UNHCR partner BRAC Institute of Education Development facilitates certified pedagogy training for teachers across the sector. As of 31 March, 2,501 teachers have been certified, and 242 teachers are currently in training.
- **ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT:** Without further funding, a break in the provision of liquid petroleum gas (LPG) for cooking is inevitable. In order to increase energy efficiency, a survey on the usage of pressure cookers to reduce LPG refill frequency was conducted in March. The results are being analyzed and the findings will be utilized to recommend and adjust the LPG refill cycle in the following months.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT...

- [New funding contributions](#) for Bangladesh were received from Sweden, Denmark, Jersey, Switzerland, and the United States, as well as several private donors including Qatar Charity. 25% of funding needed has been received.
- [Mark Manly, Head of Donor Relations UNHCR](#) visited Rohingya Refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.
- The District & Sessions Judge Mr. Mohammed Ismail inaugurated the [new mediation room in the District Legal Aid Office Cox's Bazar](#), with the support of UNHCR.

IN 2022

-  **106,000** bamboo seedlings raised
-  **50** hectares of mixed vegetation maintained
-  **1,100** environment volunteers engaged
-  **820** elephant response volunteers engaged



- Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshis are planting trees and restoring the forests! They are also using LPG instead of firewood, allowing great success for [International Forest Day](#).

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1: BASIC RIGHTS, PROTECTION & EDUCATION

- UNHCR and partners joined Rohingya women and girls to celebrate International Women's Day 2023, in a series of activities and events on this year's theme 'Embrace Equity.' The participants expressed appreciation for IWD as a reminder of the importance of women's contributions to better society and their own lives.
- A dashboard was created to track progress and challenges of reducing gender-based violence (GBV) in the camps, reflecting assessment results from [men and boys engagement programmes](#). In March, 793 men and boys were reached through 274 activities on building male role models in the communities. Topics related to harmful gender norms, healthy family relationships, toxic masculinities, gender stereotypes, and sexual and reproductive health.
- The UNHCR GBV team trained 28 participants, including nine Camps-in-Charge (CiCs), on how to identify and enable safe reporting of GBV cases, and safe use of the referral pathway. The session emphasized to participants the harm of mediating GBV cases without appropriate training and the importance of confidentiality.
- To enhance women's active participation in [SASA! Together, a community mobilization approach to create positive and sustainable changes around harmful gender norms](#), UNHCR organized a meeting between female SASA! activists and community leaders from Rohingya women's group RWEAN. In March, SASA! Together refugee activists and leaders conducted a total of 483 SASA! Together sessions in 15 camps. UNHCR is co-chair of the SASA! Together Cox's Bazar Cohort. Seven partner staff (including the GBV focal point for Bhasan Char) received a two-day training on the start phase of SASA! Together.
- UNHCR education support: UNHCR reached 15.3% of the overall refugee school age population. In March, 70,207 refugees (3-24 years) were enrolled in UNHCR-supported programmes in early childhood development (ECD), pre-primary, primary, junior secondary and youth /adolescent programmes. UNHCR provided support and incentives for 1,751 teachers/facilitators (75% are refugees) and has supported the establishment of 639 community education support groups with 3,737 total members.
- 332 persons with disabilities (PWD) were identified in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char, almost three times the number for March 2022, reflecting improved coordination between UNHCR and partner staff on [PWD identification and support](#) and positive impact of trainings.

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

- [Camp 11 fire response](#): 16 mobile firefighting units (MFFUs) and 185 volunteers were mobilized by UNHCR partners to control the fire. Working in close coordination with IOM, UNHCR provided kitchen sets to 1,900 fire-affected households. To provide health support (UNHCR leads the Community Health Working Group), 91 community health workers (CHWs) disseminated key messages, and provided first aid, ORS and drinking water, mental health support, and referrals to health facilities. UNHCR also [reprinted](#) precious identification documents lost in the fire.
- [RRRC Mohammed Mizanur Rahman sent a letter to express thanks to stakeholders of the Fire Response Project, including UNHCR. He wrote that, without the comprehensive system, the 5 March fire "could have been the biggest Cox's Bazar had ever seen."](#)
- [Monsoon preparedness](#) was impacted by quality concerns and logistical constraints faced by local suppliers in delivering massive quantities of *muli* bamboo to shelter partners across the sector. As of March, only one third (300,000 out of 900,000 pieces) of *muli* bamboo required was received. To add logistical capacity, UNHCR partners have increased numbers of offloading teams to expedite delivery.
- [Solid waste cleaning campaigns](#) were organized in Teknaf areas to prevent pollution of cultivation land, and waste was segregated at dedicated facilities. In Camps 1W and 2W SULMER project area, UNHCR partners organized a joint cleaning campaign. In Bhasan Char, WASH partners are currently focusing on drain cleaning.
- Sector partners agreed to further [water rationing \(12 litres/person/day\) in Teknaf](#), starting from 8 April. Rationing of water held in the reservoirs is necessary to prevent large scale water trucking, until the seasonal rains arrive and replenish surface water supplies. This is a reoccurring issue in Teknaf every dry season, which can last until May.
- Preliminary findings from the Geneva technical team visit will be discussed by the strategic advisory group, and will inform the development of the Ukhiya Water Strategy and the Teknaf Groundwater Project. Feasibility for the Teknaf Groundwater Project, which is necessary to supplement dwindling water supply from existing reservoirs and shallow tubewells, will be confirmed by a 7-day pumping test of two boreholes recently drilled by Oxfam.
- [Acute water diarrhea \(AWD\) prevention and control activities](#), including enhanced risk communication messaging, were initiated to address rising AWD cases in five camps.
- Ad-hoc distributions of essential household items were made to 18 relocated families from Konapara (ground zero), five new arrived households and five households with protection concerns.

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

ADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS IN A GREEN ENVIRONMENT cont'd

- [To increase energy efficiency](#), a survey on the usage of pressure cooker to reduce LPG refill frequency was conducted in March. The results are being analyzed and the findings will be utilized to recommend and adjust the LPG refill cycle in the following months.
- [The Green Innovation Hub](#) will be constructed in Kutupalong Registered Camp (KRC) in July to train refugees on electrical safety and wiring, solar street light operations and maintenance, electronic waste diagnosis and repair, solar mini-grid operations and maintenance. A cash-for-work scheme incentivizing e-waste take-back will later be launched.
- [Vaccination activities with UNICEF](#): Of Rohingya children 6 months to 7 years-old, 75% (140,785/188,576) received a third dose of the Penta vaccine, and 75% (102,471/135,977) received a second dose of the measles/rubella vaccine.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3: SKILLS & CAPACITY BUILDING TO SUPPORT DURABLE SOLUTIONS

- [Under the Global Affairs Canada \(GAC\)-supported skills development project](#), 810 beneficiaries were enrolled across 19 Cox's Bazar camps. As of March 2023, 298 beneficiaries (223 female and 75 male) completed 360-hour vocational trainings in three trades (sewing, community health, agriculture). Seven additional trades have been identified as suitable for the refugees, to prepare them for the future and their eventual return. On Bhasan Char, 31 beneficiaries received vocational training in sewing through partner BRAC. UNHCR is working with ILO on course development and beneficiary certification, considering elements such as the qualification requirements, recognition, and cost.
- As of March 2023, 250 refugee women were engaged in [Fast Retailing/UNIQLO-supported skill development workshops](#), producing 770,000 products (660,000 sanitary pads and 110,000 female underwear). Phase one has been extended to May 2023. Phase two launches June 2023. FR/Uniqlo was asked for expertise on developing a sustainable business model and using leftover materials from export processing for trainings to reduce costs.
- 10,193 adolescent and youth are enrolled in UNHCR-supported adolescent programmes, including 8,429 (4,114 are female) enrolled in 166 adolescent clubs for the GAC-supported six-month [pre-vocational course including life skills, numeracy, and literacy training](#). The BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED) designed the curriculum.
- [UNHCR is working with the office of the RRRC to secure approval for the Bridging and Upskilling programmes](#), which support learners in need of additional university-level preparation. BRAC Centre for Peace and Justice (BRAC CPJ) has enrolled 145 adolescent and youth (120 Rohingya and 25 host community) in the Refugee Higher Education Access Program (RhEAP), co-designed by Bard College, Princeton Global History Lab and Arizona State University.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4: DIVERSIFIED FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS

- [UNHCR hosted/participated in 15 missions to the refugee camps](#) in March. High-level visitors included Thailand's director-general of South Asian, Middle East and African Affairs; the Dutch Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation; the president of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the country director of the World Bank who led a scoping mission to Bhasan Char. ADB and the World Bank are key Multilateral Development Banks supporting the Government of Bangladesh on its response to the Rohingya crisis.
- [UNHCR's private sector partnerships](#) in March included Fast Retailing Co. Ltd. (UNIQLO), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Qatar Charity.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #5: CREATING A POSITIVE NARRATIVE

- [UNHCR social media](#) in March included 38 Facebook posts, 37 Tweets, and 10 Instagram posts on topics including the greening of the camps, Camp 11 fire response, funding updates, JRP launch, resilience of Rohingya women, etc.
- In December 2022, February 2023 and March 2023, [UNHCR organized visits of five Bangladeshi digital influencers and six Bangladeshi journalists](#) to the refugee camps as part of the strategic initiative to generate empathy toward the refugees and strengthen solidarity. The media visit resulted in 11 articles (five positive, four neutral, two negative).
- [Rohingya photographers took over the Instagram account in March](#), showcasing their storytelling skills and offering a glimpse of the camps through the lens of refugees. Follow [@unhcr_bgd](#) for more.
- [A kite festival to celebrate the solidarity](#) shown to Rohingya refugees hosted in Bangladesh was held on 16 March. The event echoed messages of friendship, as families elevated kites with inspirational messages. [Read more.](#)