



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Bangladesh



BANGLADESH REFUGEE EMERGENCY

Fresh arrivals cross into Bangladesh through the Palongkhali border point in Ukha, Cox's Bazar, on 9 Oct. Many said they came from Butchading in northern Rakhine state. © UNHCR/Roger Arnold

Mitigating risks of sexual and gender-based violence and responding to survivors

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) threatens displaced women and girls, as well as men and boys, in all regions of the world. It refers to any act perpetrated against a person's will based on gender norms and unequal power relationships and includes physical, emotional, psychological and sexual violence, threats of violence and coercion, and denial of resources or access to services. Forced displacement and dire living conditions are contributing factors to SGBV, which inflicts harm on women, girls, men and boys. SGBV is a **severe violation of several human rights**.

Women and girls fleeing Myanmar report harrowing stories of brutal sexual violence. Once refugees arrive to the camps, they face dire living conditions. Specialized services are not yet all in place in refugee hosting sites in Bangladesh. In addition to poor living conditions in this emergency phase of the refugee response, scarce livelihood opportunities may increase risks of various forms of gender based violence, including intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking, survival sex and early/forced marriages. In 2017, 84% of the SGBV survivors who reported incidents to UNHCR and its partners were women and 15% girls. 22% of the incidents were related to rape or sexual assault.

All SGBV-related services in Bangladesh need urgent scaling up, to provide immediate assistance to survivors and to create safer conditions in refugee-hosting areas. All survivors, including men and boys, need better access to information on prevention and response measures. **SGBV prevention and response are life-saving interventions.**

Responding to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Providing life-saving assistance and medical treatment: UNHCR is working with five national and international health partners to support existing national health facilities, in Cox's Bazar, Ukhia and Teknaf, and to reinforce services available in the refugee settlement. UNHCR health and protection teams are ensuring that Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent HIV, treatment to sexually transmitted infection and emergency contraception are available to rape survivors. In addition to this, health staff have been trained on Clinical Management of Rape. Reproductive health services must be put in place and accessible so that SGBV survivors know that they can get proper assistance confidentially when they need it.

Scaling up psychosocial support: UNHCR has a team of three psychologists and work with partners

to provide psychological first aid and psychosocial support to refugees, including to SGBV survivors.

Offering legal assistance: UNHCR is working with its partners, the Bangladesh National Woman Lawyer's Association (BNWLA), TAI and Handicap International (HI), to provide legal assistance to persons with specific needs. At least two additional counselling centres will be established in Kutupalong to assist refugees with legal matters. Impunity must be tackled as it reinforces the risks of SGBV.

Improving security and safety: Minimum standards to mitigate the risk of violence are being put in place across all sectors, such as providing lockable, well-lit, centrally located latrines so that women and children can access them safely.

"Safety means to sleep without interruption, without the sound of guns and atrocity, without the fear of rape or rape of our daughters."

Women in focus group discussion
November 2017

Preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Building on community mechanisms and leadership: in line with its Age, Gender and Diversity policy, UNHCR is conducting regular focus group discussions with women, men, the elderly, and persons living with disabilities as well as with adolescents and children. A community assessment is underway across various refugee settlements and has allowed to identify some 25 outreach volunteers so far, one third being women refugees. Diverse and inclusive representative enables UNHCR and its partners to meet the needs of all refugees and ensure that their capacities are taken into account in the emergency response.

Raising awareness on sexual and gender-based violence: UNHCR and its partners sensitize communities on preventive measures and on how to access services. A community approach to programming has been adopted so that survivors of SGBV and their children, including those born as a result of rape, are not ostracized in the community.

Improving living conditions and limiting risks: Providing access to assistance and to livelihoods is key to avoid the most vulnerable being forced into survival sex, exploitation or abuse. UNHCR management, protection and other sectors, including site planning, WASH, health education work closely so that early mitigation measures are in place to prevent SGBV. UNHCR is working on a public lighting strategy and provision of cooking fuel, as these are the main identified concern for women and children.

Reinforcing protection systems: Community and national protection systems are being strengthened, through collaboration with key Ministries, the police, judicial services, NGO and UN agencies. UNHCR is advocating for an increased number of female police officers and female site management officials and offering training on refugee protection.

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA): UNHCR has a **zero tolerance policy** in regards to SEA by humanitarian workers (including UNHCR personnel). The office has reporting and investigation mechanism to address SEA.