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Shelter has been a critical need for over 730,000 refugees from Myanmar crossing into Bangladesh since August 2017. At the beginning of the influx, new arrivals often stayed in the open or lived with other refugees and among local communities or formed new settlements. UNHCR responded to their needs for shelter by distributing Emergency Shelter kits, followed with other materials to assist refugees upgrade their shelters as well as tie-down kits in preparation for the monsoon season. Overcrowding and lack of space still remain a key challenge.

### Progress

Many of the settlement areas are prone to flooding and landslides due to their hilly locations in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR collaborated with IOM and WFP through an engineering platform called the **Site Management Engineering Project (SMEP)** to develop land and infrastructure across all refugee settlements, including preparing flat land in the large Kutupalong refugee settlement. UNHCR and its partners **designed and built stronger and better-built shelters** in the newly prepared land for **over 1,300 refugee households** prioritised for urgent relocation before and during the monsoon season in mid-2018. Additionally, UNHCR and partner agencies continue to construct facilities and improved infrastructure in the settlements. To date, **23 km roads, 5 km bridges, 56 km footpaths, 54 km stairs, 81 km retaining walls and 141 km drains** were constructed.

The Government of Bangladesh has approved a mid-term shelter strategy (MTS strategy), as assistance in the refugee settlements is shifting to medium-term planning. As part of the **MTS strategy**, UNHCR is advocating for the construction of **'transitional shelters' with integrated water, sanitation and hygiene, and kitchen facilities** that offer better protection and living conditions. UNHCR is also deliberating on innovative **shelter alternatives** to address spatial constraints and congestion in the settlements. These shelters would need to be built with **specific site planning**, in which UNHCR is engaging the authorities. UNHCR and BRAC established new plants to treat bamboos which will be used for all future construction. Treated bamboo may last for 10-12 years by protecting it from fungi, insects and other biological and physical elements.

More than **90,000** families received Upgrade Shelter Kits (USKs) and Tie-Down Kits (TDK)

More than **80,000** families received padlocks for their shelters to increase safety and security particularly for girls and women

**UNHCR shelter strategy** uses multi-level approaches to:

- 1** Develop a **master site plan** for refugee settlements, in collaboration with relevant sectors, to ensure better planning and coordination of services
- 2** Improve **shelter design** that meets the minimum standard for safe, dignified and appropriate living conditions
- 3** Improve the **living environment** in refugee settlements for better protection of refugees and access to services and facilities

**98,327**  
Upgrade Shelter Kits (USK) distributed since 2017

**90,325**  
Tie-down kits (TDK) distributed since 2017

**85,415**  
families supplied with padlocks to secure their shelters

## Challenges

-  Highly congested settlements and limited options for relocation to safer areas pose health and protection risks
-  Strong coordination among shelter actors is required to ensure harmonised design and standard across all refugee settlements
-  Shelters located on hilltops are more exposed to the risks of high winds, and no current shelter designs in use can withstand a potential cyclone

## Way Forward

UNHCR's Transitional Shelter incorporates disaster risk reduction elements in its basic design with a solid core structure. This design can withstand higher winds, but not a full cyclone. It meets the minimum SPHERE standard for covered shelter space and therefore contributes to better safety, privacy, and dignity of life. UNHCR and others will continue to advocate for a sustainable mid-term shelter strategy, more land to decongest overcrowded settlements and relocate refugees from landslide-prone areas, as well as improve the areas already provided by the Government of Bangladesh. UNHCR and other actors are honing coordination and developing wider partnerships to improve shelter designs.

## Working in Partnership

UNHCR co-chairs the **Strategic Executive Group** together with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. The Refugee Agency leads on the protection response for all refugees, and heads a **Protection Working Group** in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR welcomes its valuable partnership with a number of UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its assistance with humanitarian partners through a number of working groups under the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). UNHCR's main government counterpart is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and its Cox's Bazar-based Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC). UNHCR staff work closely with the Camp-in-Charge officials in different refugee settlements, as well as with a range of international and national actors. It has a strong network of 28 partners, including:

**Action Aid Bangladesh** | **ACF** (Action Contre la Faim) | **ADRA** (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) | **BNWLA** (Bangladesh National Woman Lawyer's Association) | **Bangladesh Red Crescent Society** | **BRAC** (Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | **Caritas Bangladesh** | **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** (Gonoshasthaya Kendra) | **IRC** (International Rescue Committee) | **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** | **Sesame Workshop** | **Solidarites International** | **Terre des hommes** Foundation | **TAI** (Technical Assistance Incorporated)

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. UNHCR and partners have trained and work with safety unit volunteers (SUVs) who support the emergency response, community outreach members who support raising awareness on important issues and in addressing protection risks, community health workers who assist with outreach for health and nutrition, and others who provide further critical support to the emergency response.

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