

Bangladesh

1 - 31 January 2020

Education efforts received a boost this month with a decision by the Bangladesh Government's National Task Force deciding to support the piloting of a Myanmar curriculum for refugee children.

Reports were received in January of **small numbers of Rohingya refugees leaving Bangladesh by boat** to other locations in the region. Calm sea conditions this time of year make sea journeys possible.

The second phase of the **Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR Joint Registration process has ended**. However, UNHCR will continue to update the data already collected on an ongoing basis in 2020.

KEY FIGURES

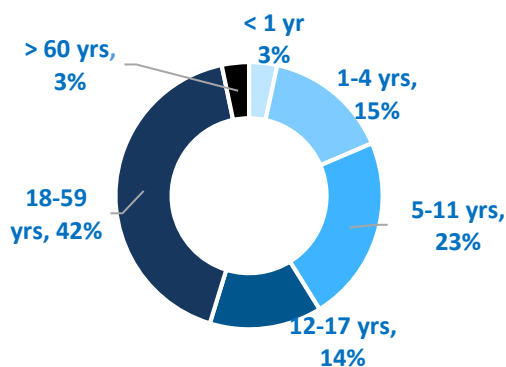
705,628* (as of 30 September 2019)

Fled Myanmar to Bangladesh since September 2017.

854,704* Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar district

*819,787 Rohingya refugees have been registered under the Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration exercise as of end December 2019. There are also 34,917 registered refugees from the pre-existing and registered camps.

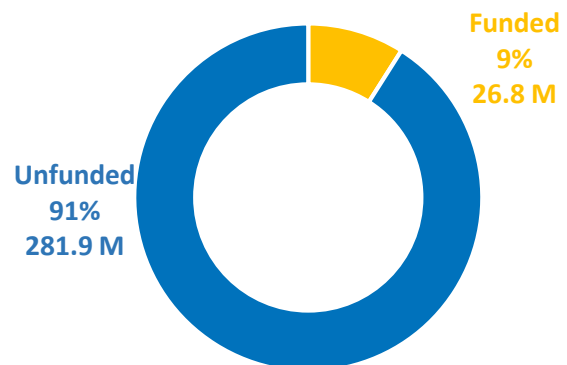
AGE BREAKDOWN OF REFUGEES IN COX'S BAZAR



2020 FUNDING (AS OF 6 FEBRUARY 2020)

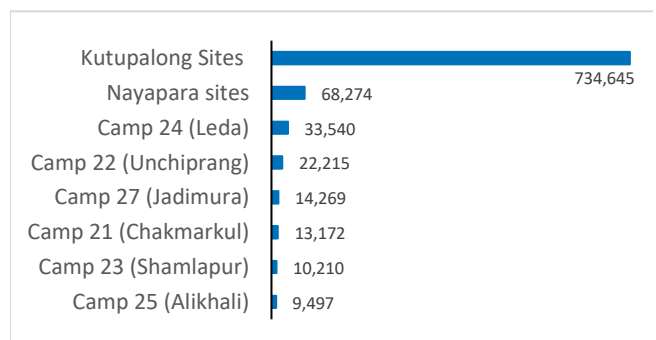
USD 308.7 M

requested for Bangladesh



POPULATION OF CONCERN

Key settlements



*Kutupalong Sites includes Camp 10, Camp 11, Camp 12, Camp 13, Camp 14, Camp 15, Camp 16, Camp 17, Camp 18, Camp 19, Camp 1E, Camp 1W, Camp 20, Camp 20 Extension, Camp 2E, Camp 2W, Camp 3, Camp 4, Camp 4 Extension, Camp 5, Camp 6, Camp 7, Camp 8E, Camp 8W, Camp 9 Kutupalong RC and Nayapara sites includes Camp 26 and Nayapara RC

Operational Context

- The overall situation of refugees in Cox's Bazar remains stable. However, there are continued limits on the freedom of movement of refugees from the settlements where they live. The Government of Bangladesh has also started fencing around the perimeter of refugee settlements, beginning their work in the northernmost settlement in Kutupalong, Ukhiya, in January.
- A ban on the use of SIM cards remains in place, which has affected refugees' ability to contact family members in Bangladesh and abroad, and created challenges for coordination at field level for officials and agencies working in the humanitarian operation.
- Construction activities in settlements have continued to be scrutinized closely by the authorities with several ongoing projects being stopped. The unpredictability of stoppages creates challenges for implementing projects.
- A small number of refugees have been reported trying to leave Bangladesh through sea movements as conditions in the Bay of Bengal improved following the recent monsoon/cyclone seasons. Such movements are generally observed at this time of year as traffickers and smugglers try to profit by exploiting refugees.
- UNHCR welcomed in late January the decision of the Government of Bangladesh at its National Task Force on the Rohingya response to expand access to education for refugee children and adolescents living in the settlements in Cox's Bazar. This is a positive step by the Government of Bangladesh to ensure access to learning. Education actors in Cox's Bazar, including UNHCR, plan to pilot the introduction of the Myanmar curriculum in the refugee settlements starting in April, initially targeting 10,000 students in grades 6 to 9. It is hoped that the use of the Myanmar curriculum will be expanded to other grades in a phased manner.

Achievements



PROTECTION

Protection Hotline use declining with limits on mobile phone use in place in Rohingya settlements

- Since January 2018, UNHCR's Protection Hotline has been playing a key role in providing information on a broad range of protection services, advice, and referrals for refugees in Cox's Bazar. The hotline can be called by refugees at any time and acts as a vital link with the refugee community to respond to problems they are facing, and to inform them of available services including counselling and emergency protection support.
- Since its inception, the line has been promoted in the settlements and boosted UNHCR's ability to address problems refugees are facing through engagement with the authorities and law enforcement. However, this has been jeopardised by the introduction in September of a ban on the ownership of SIM cards by refugees.



- The number of individual callers on a monthly basis from refugees has dropped from a peak of 513 in July 2019 to 192 in December. This steady decline in the use of the Protection Hotline service runs parallel with the reduction in availability of mobile connections and availability of mobile credit in the Rohingya settlements.
- During 2019, the helpline received calls from refugees related to their safety and protection, but also to clarify entitlements and make complaints. Approximately 70 per cent of the callers were male refugees, 30 per cent were female. The top enquiries on protection issues were about registration/documentation, physical safety, arrest/detention, durable solutions, legal assistance, reports of missing people, and SGBV. In addition, enquiries on shelter, LPG, health and food were frequently received.
- UNHCR Protection staff operated the hotline throughout the year, and were able to take follow up action on about 90 per cent of calls. To address the impact of limited access, UNHCR is in the process of implementing toll-free access to the protection hotline, starting 1 February 2020. A campaign to raise awareness on the new number is being initiated.

Enhancing engagement with Imams in the Rohingya refugee settlements

- Religious leaders and communities of faith are playing an important role in addressing community issues in the Rohingya settlements in Cox's Bazar. Religious leaders within the Rohingya community often act as arbitrators in disputes. Their opinions are influential for the community, particularly regarding issues of faith, marriage, and family. UNHCR has witnessed the positive power of engaging Imams in discussions to address issues faced by refugees including protection of women and girls and child well-being within the settlements.
- UNHCR held engagement meetings with 554 Imams in the Rohingya settlements in 2019. The meetings and discussions focussed on understanding better their roles in the community, their views on facing social and community issues within the community, and ways in which UNHCR and partners can support them. Subsequently, imam-led community discussions have been held at camp level to identify issues and resolve them, particularly where UNHCR support can help in advocating with the Bangladesh authorities.



UNHCR Community-based Protection staff, Abdiwahab Aden Ali, going through a presentation on health promotion with imams in Kutupalong refugee settlement, Cox's Bazar. Photo: UNHCR/S. O'Brien

- UNHCR also engaged with 66 imams nominated as focal points for a dialogue to understand better their approach to scriptural matters. This has paved the way for the introduction of audio message delivery in

community venues, including on child trafficking, education, domestic violence, landslide risks, personal hygiene, care for the environment, marital matters, cohesion and conflict mitigation. Congregations in the six camps where these stocktaking exercises were piloted have requested its continuation.

- The work also saw a collaboration between UNHCR and BBC Media Action, together organizing trainings for 90 imams in the six camps focusing on strengthening their facilitation skills and good practices on how to meaningfully collect community feedback.
- The engagement with imams has boosted the understanding of UNHCR's protection role, as well as diversified the level of community feedback to UNHCR on concerns shared by refugees, including on service provision.

Refugees undertaking onward movements from Bangladesh

- In January, a small number of Rohingya refugees reportedly left Bangladesh by boat to countries in the region, such incidents generally peak at the end and beginning of the calendar year in Bangladesh as the Bay of Bengal remains relatively calm for sailing in the dry season.
- Due to the mixed nature of the cases involved, it is often difficult to categorize them strictly as trafficking or smuggling. However, the majority of cases have characteristics of trafficking or potential trafficking.
- Some 69 per cent of refugees and others involved in incidents of trafficking and smuggling reported in December were rescued by UNHCR or government authorities; 76 per cent of reported incidents of trafficking and smuggling in December were undertaken by sea, with 22 per cent by land and two per cent by air.
- Over 74 per cent of refugees and others involved in incidents of trafficking and smuggling in December indicated their intended destination as Malaysia, while 7 per cent intended to travel to India and 6 per cent to Thailand. A lack of employment opportunities in Cox's Bazar is one of the drivers of this mixed movement.
- Since the mass influx of refugees in 2017, mixed movements to and from Cox's Bazar have been continuously witnessed. Police and law enforcement authorities in Bangladesh and in the region were able to rescue many victims of trafficking and several suspected traffickers were arrested. However, no special human trafficking tribunals currently exist in Bangladesh, and these cases often being examined by the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals. UNHCR is working with the authorities, local and international agencies, and the Rohingya community, to raise awareness on risks of sea movements and also offers legal and medical assistance as part of the response.

Study results expected on impact of LPG introduction in the Rohingya Response in Cox's Bazar

- UNHCR and the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources are finalizing the report of a study on the impact of LPG introduction in the refugee response. The study is based on a household level exercise conducted in 2019 that randomly surveyed 1,399 households in 15 of the Rohingya refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar and the local surrounding host community. It also included market data from 10 markets surrounding the settlements through focus group discussions and key informant interviews.
- During the initial period after their arrival, the Rohingya households on average used 4.72kg of firewood per day, while locals used 5.38kg per day per household. However, after the introduction of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) among the Rohingya, there was also a surprisingly high uptake of LPG in the host community, rising from 6.6 per cent to 21 per cent.
- By October 2019, about 97 per cent of the refugee households received LPG supplies and refills. This led to a significant drop in the demand for firewood by refugee local Bangladeshi households who had been using LPG. As a result, based on the available data, the annual demand for firewood fell from 462,000 tons in 2017 to some 37,000 thousand tons in 2019, taking it below the collection limit for local forests, and hence positively benefitting sustainable tree growth.

- The market survey further reveals that the price of firewood per kilogram rose from 12 taka to 14 taka after the arrival of the refugees, but has now dropped to 10 taka due to wider use of LPG.



A view from UNHCR's distribution point in Camp 17 (Kutupalong refugee settlement) in 2018 (left) and 2019 (right), which demonstrates the regrowth taking place with the assistance of the LPG intervention. An arrow points to the same location in each photograph. Photo: UNHCR/S. O'Brien

- With the reduction in demand and price for fuelwood, it is expected that refugees and members of the local community will also have less incentive to travel to the forest areas to collect firewood, which will help in the protection of biodiversity living there.
- Interestingly, LPG's wider introduction also impacted food habits due to the ease of cooking. Data shows that the number of food items consumed by households increased and the food diversity index rose - from 0.24 to 0.34 for Rohingya households, and from 0.34 to 0.48 for local households. LPG users also consumed more vitamins as their intake of vegetables increased in their daily diets. Health benefits of LPG use are expected to flow also from less air pollution, and less exposure to fumes in shelters where refugees normally cook.
- UNHCR is currently in the process of distributing LPG cylinders and stoves to some 30,000 Bangladeshi households living in the host communities in Cox's Bazar.

Working in partnership

UNHCR co-chairs a Strategic Executive Group (SEG) in Bangladesh 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 a range of international and national actors. It has a strong network of 27 partners:

MDMR (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief) | Action Aid Bangladesh | ACF (Action Contre la Faim) | Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) | BRAC (Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | Caritas Bangladesh | Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) | CODEC (Community Development Centre) | COAST (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) | Danish Refugee Council | FH Association (Food for the Hungry) | GK (Gonoshasthaya Kendra) | Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation | Handicap International | IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) | Light House | Mukti Cox's Bazar | NGO Forum for Public Health | Oxfam GB | Relief International | RTMI (Research, Training

and Management International) | Save the Children International | World Vision | Terre des Hommes | TAI (Technical Assistance Incorporated) | BLAST (Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust) | Rights Jessore.

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

Financial Information

Total recorded contributions for the operation amount to some **USD 27 million**. UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have contributed to this operation as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked and broadly earmarked funds.

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 and 2020, support has been received from the people and governments of:

Austria, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and CERF.

UNHCR is sincerely grateful for the additional support received from many individuals, foundations, and companies worldwide including Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Education Cannot Wait, Kuwait Finance House, Qatar Charity, and Thani Bin Abdullah Bin Thani Al Thani Humanitarian Fund.

CONTACTS

Mai Hosoi, External Relations Officer, Dhaka (Bangladesh), hosoi@unhcr.org

Steven O'Brien, External Relations Officer, Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh), obrien@unhcr.org

LINKS

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