

# Bangladesh

1 - 31 July 2020

73 cases of **COVID-19 including 6 deaths** were confirmed in the refugee settlements as of 31 July 2020. UNHCR continues to manage two COVID-19 treatment facilities which serve both the refugee and the host communities, as well as supporting an Intensive Care Unit in the main district hospital in Cox's Bazar.

The UN is awaiting a response from the Government of Bangladesh on undertaking a humanitarian and protection mission to **Bhasan Char** to conduct an assessment on the humanitarian situation and needs of 306 refugees who were transferred there in May 2020. The mission is now considered by the UN as urgent.

**Heavy rains** continued to strike the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar in July and resulted in damage to shelters and other infrastructure, as well as the temporary displacement of refugee households in some cases. The annual **monsoon**, which runs from May until October each year has also caused heavy flooding in other parts of Bangladesh.

POPULATION DATA **860,494** refugees in Cox's Bazar district. \***825,434** refugees are registered under the Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration exercise. There are also **35,060** refugees from pre-2016 and who reside in the registered camps (as of 30 June 2020)

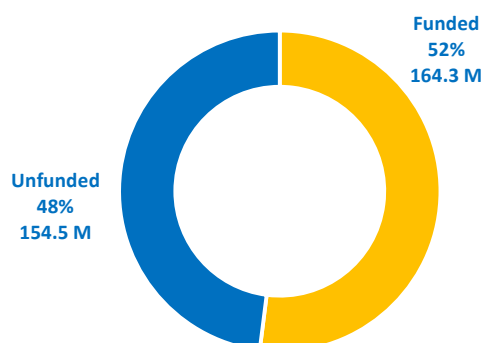
## 91,371

Number of refugee households who are being supported with cooking kits and Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinders in the camps; **10,716** families in host communities were also being supported with cooking kits and LPG.

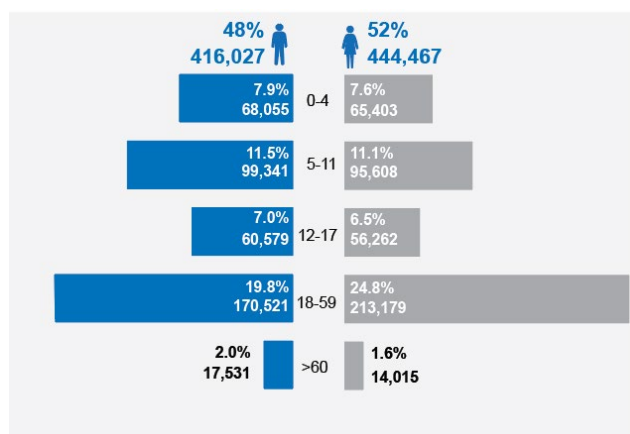
FUNDING (AS OF 31 JULY 2020)

## USD 318.8 M

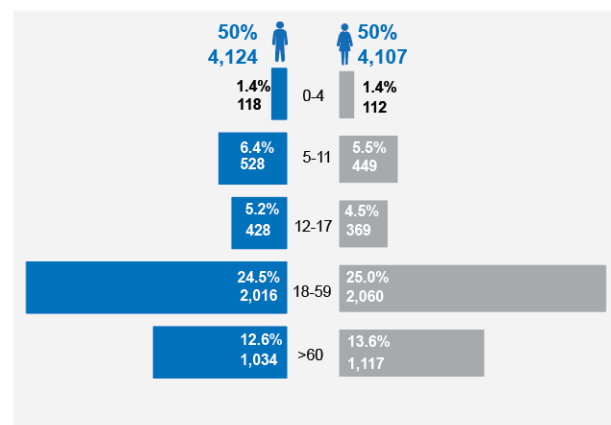
requested for Bangladesh



### AGE BREAKDOWN OF REFUGEES IN COX'S BAZAR



### DISABILITY BREAKDOWN BY AGE AND GENDER



## Operational Context

- In Cox's Bazar district, there has been some limited easing of the general lockdown measures that were in place nationwide in line further to a circular issued by the Government. UNHCR is working closely with its partners and across the humanitarian response to ensure the utmost safety is observed in all its activities for refugees, as well as in the agency's collaboration with partners. UNHCR and its partners continue to follow guidelines set by Bangladesh's Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) on **activities that are permitted in the camps**. The scope of permissible activities was interpreted in July to include limited **registration activities and expanded monsoon response** and repair work. In coordination with the RRRC and district authorities, UNHCR and its partners continue to exercise care in conducting critical activities in the camps and surrounding host communities with as low a footprint as possible to reduce the risk posed by the virus.
- An expansion of the Government of Bangladesh/UNHCR joint registration activity to all 7 registration sites is activated on a limited in scale, in compliance with Government guidelines, and observing social distancing, hygiene and other health protocols. Registration continues to be vital to update household details, such as newly born family members, in order to ensure, among other things, that families receive an adequate amount of assistance, which is based on family size and composition, as well as special needs identified in the registration process.
- Since 14 May when the first COVID-19 positive case was detected in the camps, **73 refugees were confirmed with COVID-19 infection, and 6 have sadly died (as of 31 July)**. UNHCR is supporting the Government of Bangladesh to respond to the virus by running two Severe Acute Respiratory Infection Isolation and Treatment Centres (SARI ITCs) with 194 beds and an ICU ward for refugee and host community patients. So far, over 200 patients have received treatment in UNHCR facilities.
- Similar to trends seen elsewhere globally for refugees, the **pandemic situation in Cox's Bazar is negatively affecting the overall protection environment**. Protection monitoring and case support continues to be conducted by UNHCR and partners, including with the help of refugee volunteers. The number of refugees in need of legal assistance and mediation is increasing.
- The **monsoon in 2020 continues to cause damage** to infrastructure and individual shelters. In June and July combined, UNHCR and its partners assisted over 7,700 households affected largely by wind, rain and flooding. The type of damage included small requirements for repairs of torn plastic sheeting, but also some more serious damage such as collapsed shelters and damage to water reservoirs.



**COVID-19 response activities can be found here on UNHCR's Bangladesh portal.**

## Updates and achievements



### PROTECTION

#### UN humanitarian and protection mission to Bhasan Char island

- UNHCR has received reports that the Bangladesh authorities have begun consulting with refugees in the camps regarding relocation to Bhasan Char and planning for initial "go-and-see" visits to the island, though has more recently understood that this may not take place until after the monsoon season. They include *mahjjs* and family members of those refugees currently on Bhasan Char, who initially departed from the Cox's Bazar refugee camps. UNHCR has encouraged "go and see" visits as a way to inform refugees about Bhasan Char, but the agency has not been involved in discussions with the refugees or planning for these visits.
- In May 2020, the Government requested and the United Nations has agreed to undertake a protection and humanitarian mission to Bhasan Char to meet with the 306 Rohingya refugees transferred to the island and

assess their immediate humanitarian situation and specific needs. The United Nations shared terms of reference with the Government and formed an interagency team of protection experts. Three months have passed since the refugees were transferred to Bhasan Char, and it is now urgent for the United Nations to have access to them.



## MONSOON/CYCLONE SEASONS

### Guidance on approach by the Government of Bangladesh to critical humanitarian activities during COVID-19

- An easing of some lockdown measures was allowed in Cox's Bazar District. UNHCR and its partners are following guidelines set by Bangladesh's Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) on activities that are permitted in the camps. The scope of permissible activities has been interpreted to include limited registration activities and expanded monsoon response and repair work, such as slope stabilization, de-silting/clearing drains, monsoon-related repairs and maintenance. Another area is planting, which is vital for soil stabilization.
- UNHCR is coordinating with the RRRC and examining how to safely resume some additional monsoon response activities, but with an effort to continue to limit the footprint of staff and partners on the ground in line with public health considerations and within a 'do no harm' framework. UNHCR is working with its partners and across the response to ensure coherence in its approach, with the safety of refugees and staff members continuing to be the primary consideration in how it manages the start of any new activities.

### Monsoon response in 2020 tackling a range of challenges

- **The monsoon response in 2020 has impacted the camps different compared to other years** in a number of ways. A preliminary analysis indicates also that the monsoon season in 2020 is more intense, in terms of the amount of rain and wind, compared to 2019. The degradation in the strength of shelters and infrastructures has also been affected by the age of the materials. In addition, this year's *Cyclone Amphan* did not directly hit the camps, but wind generated by its presence in the Bay of Bengal resulted in moderate damage to structures in the camps, as well as damaging and weakening the structures of many shelters. Further, due to COVID-19, UNHCR's shelter and site management teams were unable to undertake a range of activities, including drainage clearing (which contributes to flooding) and soil stabilisation activities among other important pre-monsoon activities. This situation contributed also to create conditions in 2020 that have caused exacerbated flooding. This inundated shelters in some parts of the camps resulting in a need for the temporary relocations of households and emergency repairs.
- In June and July combined, **UNHCR and its partners assisted over 7,700 households** affected largely by wind, rain and flooding. The type of damage included small requirements for repairs for torn plastic sheeting, but also some more serious damage, such as repairs for collapsed shelters and damage to water reservoirs.
- In the southern camps in Teknaf, the heavy monsoon rains in July resulted in **serious damage to eight dams** with the barriers



A burst dam in Nayapara refugee camp (Teknaf) which has been recently damaged by a surge in heavy rain. *Photo: UNHCR*

collapsing. UNHCR and its partners are undertaking work to ensure temporary repairs for the dams in two locations which will allow water to continue to be pumped, without disruption, for use by refugees.

- All eight dams will be rebuilt or repaired by October to ensure sufficient water is collected before the next dry season. Water availability in Teknaf continues to pose a challenge for the humanitarian response, signalling a need for a stronger development solution to be agreed upon by the authorities, in coordination with the humanitarian response.
- Despite the many challenges, one of the successes of this year was an engagement of **refugee volunteers** in monsoon preparedness and responses. A heavy investment was made in building capacity of the refugee community over the last years to respond to incidents and report on damage. Under the challenging circumstances that arose with COVID-19, UNHCR witnessed the importance of refugees being at the centre of the response. Volunteers were first responders in many cases, and they also supported a more comprehensive monsoon reporting system, ensuring assistance was quickly reaching all refugees in need of assistance, regardless of their location.



## SHELTER

### Distribution of emergency plastic sheeting for refugee shelters during monsoon

- It is now **close to three years** that many of the refugees in Cox's Bazar have been living in temporary **shelters** made of bamboo frames and plastic sheeting which is used for roofs and walls. As a result of degradation in the bamboo frames of shelters, because of wet monsoon conditions or erosion by insects, these structures are becoming weakened. This is one of the main causes of shelters collapsing during heavy periods of wind and rain, the type of weather which characterises the monsoon period. UNHCR continues to receive increasing reports of leaking roofs now that the monsoon season is underway. This poses not only a threat to an individuals' or family's health but can also lead to the damage of valuable household items.
- UNHCR has now also undertaken a **blanket distribution of one new plastic sheet per household** in all the camps managed by UNHCR. This will ensure all the shelters are able to fix and address roof leaks and improve their protection against the wet monsoon conditions, as well as increase the security and privacy of shelters in case of tears or other damage to the side walls. Refugees have shared that their experience of roofs leaks, telling UNHCR that whenever it rains, the dirt floors within their shelters turn to mud and at night no one in the family is able to have any sleep. Through established distribution networks, **83,909 households have been reached with this support in July**. The target is to reach 90,990 households by the beginning of August.
- In 2019, UNHCR launched a major shelter assessment targeting 81,880 households which received materials to make selected improvements. A similar round of the assessment was planned this year before the monsoon approached, but the COVID-19 circumstances cut the plan short and severely limited UNHCR's ability to mount the needed shelter response. Despite these challenges, UNHCR and its partners have managed to reach **11,557 households with emergency shelter repairs or replacement materials by mid-July of this year**. Support with transporting of materials and labour for rebuilding shelters was provided to extremely vulnerable individuals and persons with specific needs.



A refugee household repairing a sidewall using a newly distributed tarp. Photo: UNHCR



**NUTRITION****Mother-led Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) screening helping address malnutrition**

- Across 14 camps in which UNHCR supports nutrition activities in Cox's Bazar, over 36,000 mothers have been trained to screen their children for malnutrition using a mid-upper arm circumference measurement method, known as 'MUAC'. It is a simple test that can be carried out by mothers to check their children's nutrition status using a specially designed measuring tape that UNHCR and its partners supply to mothers as part of the initiative. This helps mothers in the community to identify and refer children with malnutrition for additional support in a timely manner. Under normal conditions, agencies working in Cox's Bazar are using a weight for height measurement, but this has been suspended for the time being due to COVID-19 as it requires onsite visits to centers by parents and children. Mothers were also concerned about the risk of the virus if volunteers were conducting the test on their children. The mother-led MUAC measurement initiative allows children to be safely screened at home and puts mother's minds at rest a little.
- The enrolment in treatment programmes for acute malnutrition for children aged 6-59 months increased significantly during June and July. In June, admissions doubled compared to January. So far, the work being conducted by nutrition actors has worked well and helped ensure the continued admission of children for treatment of acute malnutrition (aged 6-59 months) and to prevent potential mortalities during the pandemic.
- Based on the latest nutrition surveys carried out in 2019, the prevalence of acute malnutrition across the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar was above 10%. This is classified as a serious state of malnutrition according to WHO classifications and above the 10% UNHCR standard for refugee camps. Mortality rates are below the SPHERE humanitarian standard across all the camps. Anaemia, however, is still high especially among children 6-23 months at >55% across all the camps (>40% is critical). There were low anaemia rates among adolescent girls and women of reproductive age. Chronic malnutrition affects over 30% of children aged 6-59 months across all the camps (>30% is considered high). There was a reduction observed in the prevalence of diarrhoea across all the camps when compared to previous surveys.
- UNHCR and WFP also conducted a nutrition causal analysis (NCA) in late 2019 to determine the factors contributing to the high prevalence of malnutrition in the refugee camps in Kutupalong and Nayapara registered camps. The NCA looked at range of issues, including the current assistance for refugees, food diversity, health and nutrition factors, WASH support, protection-related issues and livelihoods access for refugees. The key recommendations of the assessment which was finalized in April 2020 were for 1) a more integrated approach between sectors in addressing malnutrition in the camps; 2) provision of diversified diets and more sustainable livelihood opportunities to improve access to alternative sources of income; and 3) community engagement to adopt globally recommended health, nutrition and WASH best practices, including better health seeking behaviour and infant and young feeding activities, among others.

**Vitamin A supplementation campaign launched in the camps**

- A roll-out of a month-long first round of a Vitamin A campaign was completed on 21 July 2020. The aim of the campaign was to provide supplements to children aged 6-59 months to boost their immunity to resist childhood infections. During the campaign, a total number of 57,290 children in areas managed by UNHCR received Vitamin A capsules provided by UNICEF in line with WHO guidelines. The agency's partners and community nutrition volunteers helped ensure the success of the campaign.
- Community Nutrition Volunteers (CNVs) and partners were first trained on Vitamin A supplementation, recommended dosage for specific age groups, and key messages advising parents and guardians on the reasons behind the campaign. CNVs then went through the camp to each of the households targeted to ensure all children aged 6-59 months received one capsule, as well as delivering key messages on the importance of Vitamin A and healthy diets.

- This activity is a global programme undertaken twice a year around the world. However, this was the first time a house-to-house campaign was conducted for refugees since the emergency in 2017. The feedback from the community through partners and volunteers was positive and many appreciated the new approach.
- Due to COVID-19, a door to door approach was used to deliver the supplements. This helped to reduce the footprint of the Vitamin A campaign in the camps. Steps were taken to prevent the risk of spreading of COVID-19 transmission by having CNVs use separate hand gloves for each child and strictly following social distancing and hand hygiene protocols.

## Working in partnership

UNHCR is a co-chair of the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) in Bangladesh with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. The UN Refugee Agency also leads on the protection response, as head of the Protection Working Group in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR has valuable partnerships with a number of UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its assistance with humanitarian partners through the sectors and working groups, as part of the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). UNHCR's main government counterpart in Cox's Bazar is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and its Cox's Bazar-based Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Home Affairs in Dhaka, among other government ministries and entities. UNHCR staff work closely with the RRRC's Camp-in-Charge officials in the 34 refugee settlements, as well as a range of international and national actors. It has a strong network of 27 partners:

MoDMR (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 7,000 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 164.3 million**. UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors that have contributed to this operation as well as those that contribute to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked and broadly earmarked funds.

In 2019/2020, support continued to be generously received from the following: Austria, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, 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.

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