



KEY FIGURES

BENEFICIARIES

960,128

Total registered refugee population



52%
Female



52%
Children



48%
Male

as of 30 April 2023

PARTNERS

24

of partners implementing key UNHCR activities in 2023

NGO **13**

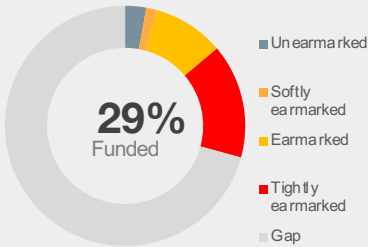
INGO **10**

Government **1**

FUNDING

275 M

Funding for 2023 operations



as of 19 April 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, including Kutupalong and Nayapara Registered Camps, 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

April 2023



Rohingya firefighters keep their communities safe as first responders. © Salim Khan, Rohingya photographer

OVERVIEW

In April in Cox's Bazar, another devastating fire struck in a month of great heat and little rain. On 24 April, a fire in UNHCR-managed Camp 21 in Teknaf damaged/destroyed 56 shelters, two learning centres, and 26 facilities including WASH infrastructure and solar streetlights. Rohingya safety unit and site management volunteers, helped by other refugees, extinguished the flames. Government emergency services and armed forces also offered critical support.

As of 30 April, 173 fire incidents have been reported this year in UNHCR camps alone (compared to 249 total fires in UNHCR and IOM camps combined in 2022, and 151 in 2021). Thanks to quick interventions by Rohingya first responders, only four of these fires spread to adjacent shelters. Nevertheless, the ever-present danger of fire sows fear and anxiety in the community, and repair costs deplete meager resources. Several large fires over the last three years (most notably the Camp 9 fire in March 2021 which engulfed a whole block, killing 15 people and displacing 50,000) led to the creation of the Fire Response Project, an interagency initiative forging a corp of trained and equipped Rohingya volunteer firefighters in each camp to stand ready. Extensive community preparedness, however, cannot compensate for the response's continued reliance on temporary shelter materials and the lack of fire breaks in the congested camps, which create perfect conditions for a small spark to spiral out of control.

"We need better site planning and more durable shelter materials that are fire- and weather-resistant," says UNHCR Rep Johannes van der Klaauw. "Not only is it crucial to preserve a sense of dignity for refugees, but the cost of maintaining and rehabilitating shelters and facilities is now unsustainable."

Also in the final stretch of the dry season (usually January-May), Teknaf communities struggled to cope with dwindling surface water supplies as rations were reduced to 12 litres/day/person (down from 20 litres) on 8 April. Monsoon rains will soon begin to replenish surface water reservoirs, temporarily alleviating the problem. However, the need for a long-term strategy to address the area's perennial water crisis persists. On a positive note, UNHCR marked [Earth Day](#) on 22 April, celebrating the greening of camps through home gardening and reforestation activities. Since 2018, through partner International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), UNHCR has planted over 400 acres of trees, herbs, and grass to restore Cox's Bazar's natural ecosystem. The SAFE+2 energy and environment programme also contributes to forest restoration by helping to eliminate the need for refugees to collect firewood as cooking fuel.

On 24 April, the refugee community celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr, the festival marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month. This was the sixth Ramadan for many Rohingya in the Cox's Bazar camps, and one of the most difficult due to the March reduction of food rations.

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, France, 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, and the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives.

Contacts:

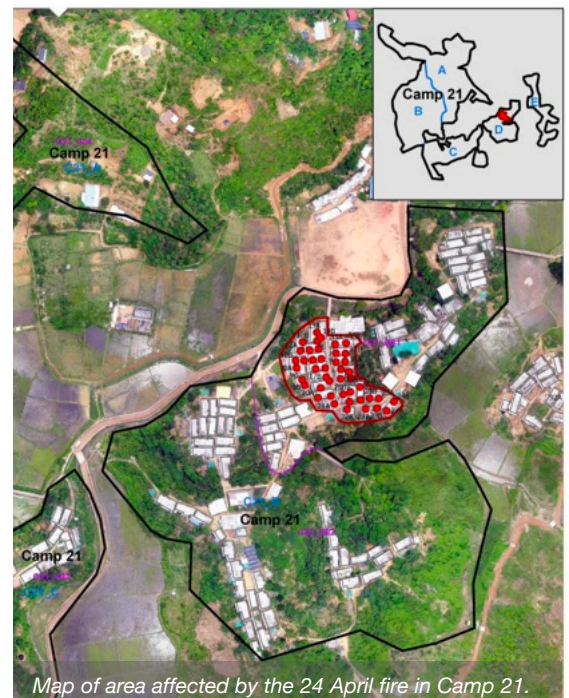
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KEY UPDATES

- 2023 JOINT RESPONSE PLAN:** The 2023 Joint Response Plan (JRP) asks for USD 876 million — including USD 67 million for operations on the island of Bhasan Char — to meet essential needs and provide protection services to nearly one million vulnerable Rohingya refugees and a half million Bangladeshis in host communities. By the end of April, 17% of required funding was received. [Read more.](#)
- FOOD RATION CUTS:** Refugees reported anxiety about the impact of the March food ration cut on their families' health and nutrition status. Funding shortfalls led to the cut, which took effect just before the fasting month of Ramadan, casting a shadow on the community's celebrations. Families lamented that they could not afford to prepare some of the foods traditionally eaten to break the ritual fast, particularly in light of higher costs caused by inflation and the lack of livelihood opportunities.
- SCREENING FOR MALNUTRITION:** Against the backdrop of the ongoing ration cuts, health and nutrition partners are on high alert for signs of deteriorating nutrition status. In April, 57,420 children aged 6-59 months were screened for acute malnutrition, identifying 55 new cases of severe malnutrition and 268 of moderate malnutrition. The children were immediately enrolled in treatment programmes, bringing the total number of children enrolled in UNHCR-supported malnutrition programmes to 3,221 by the end of April. Partners are working closely with the nutrition sector to strengthen community outreach to ensure that malnourished children do not slip through the cracks and timely intervention is consistently provided.
- CAMP 21 FIRE:** On 24 April, a fire broke out in Camp 21, affecting 239 refugees (76% women and children). No fatalities were reported. Refugees affected by the fire sought shelter with relatives or at the community centre. Multiple shelters and facilities were damaged or destroyed, including personal belongings, LPG cylinders, cooking stoves, and food items. UNHCR and partners responded comprehensively to replace and repair damage and to provide protection and medical support, including psychological first aid.
- HEATWAVE:** A heatwave swept Bangladesh in April, with record highs of 40.5 C (104.9 F) in Dhaka and 41.8 C (107.2 F) in the country's southwest. On Bhasan Char, the heat had a severe impact on the island's fledgling livelihood activities. Close to 80% of bed crop saplings were damaged, despite mitigation efforts such as spraying water, mulching, and construction of sheds. Water levels in the aquaculture ponds dropped sharply due to the heat, leading to higher fish mortality. Lack of knowledge and experience on how to best implement these activities on the island contributed to the losses. The Sector is working on adjustments based on lessons learned.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT...

- [New funding contributions](#) for UNHCR Bangladesh were received from Denmark, Canada, France and private donors including new private sector partner Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives. As of 20 April, 29% of funding needs has been received.
- On 28 April, a [photo story](#) on the Camp 11 fire and the impact of the food ration cut, by founder of UNHCR-supported Rohingyaatographer Magazine Md. Sahat Zia, was published by Himal South Asia Magazine on their website.



UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1: BASIC RIGHTS, PROTECTION & EDUCATION

- **Registration update exercise:** An exercise to verify and update the information of the registered refugees of Kutupalong Registered Camp (KRC) and Nayapara Registered Camp will begin on 2 May. In April, UNHCR staff, government counterparts and support personnel received preparatory training.
- **Community outreach pictorial materials:** The gender-based violence unit (GBV) delivered training to all 206 GBV volunteers on the new pictorial prevention posters depicting scenarios of child marriage, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), and domestic violence. The materials, which will be used by partners in outreach activities in all UNHCR managed camps from May 2023, were locally developed by partner Bengal Creative Media (BCM), contextualized for Bangladesh, and endorsed by the community through focus groups discussions.
- **SASA! Together:** In Cox's Bazar, the *SASA! Together* programme — a step-by-step community mobilization approach to change community attitudes that lead to violence against women — is now in its 'awareness phase' (phase II), with activists and leaders trained in the 'start phase' (phase I) applying specialized tools (e.g. posters, community conversations, quick chats, leadership leaflets, and community talking points) to spark mindset-shifting conversations about the ways in which men have power over women. Local activists and community leaders conducted regular awareness sessions in eleven camps, and GBV team members and partner staff who observed the sessions report that the activists and leaders show improved confidence and facilitation skills.
- **Child protection (CP) support:** In April, 2,430 children (1,253 boys, 1,177 girls) received psychosocial support (PSS); positive parenting session was delivered to 1,017 parents/caregivers (518 men, 499 women); 39 lost children (20 boys, 19 girls) and 20 missing children (18 boys, 2 girls) were identified and reunited with parents/caregivers.
- **Community-based protection (CBP) through religious engagement:** In April, 86,643 Rohingya men, women, boys and girls were reached through CBP awareness sessions via religious engagement groups, community representatives, information service centres and community centres, on topics including registration, safe use of LPG, pressure cookers, fire safety, health concerns, anti-trafficking, child protection, GBV etc. Almost 80% of community members reached were male as dissemination of messaging at mosques allows for greater reach to men and boys. Meanwhile, female religious teachers (FRTs) also disseminate messages at Friday Talim sessions, but they are fewer in number. CBP is exploring ways to engage more women in awareness activities, including increasing engagement of FRTs.
- **Preparations for placement test for Rohingya learners:** All learning facilities reopened on 30 April after a three-week break for Ramadan and Eid. A placement test to determine grade level is scheduled for mid-May, with registration ongoing through 11 May. As of 3 May, 17,190 learners have registered for the assessment, representing 51% of all enrolled learners expected to test at UNHCR-supported facilities. 7% of learners registered for the placement test are out-of-school children.
- **Camp 21 fire response:** Child protection staff and volunteers helped reunite three children who had been separated from their parents the same day. Sixteen families lost identification papers, including registration documents which UNHCR is working with the camp authorities to re-issue.

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

- **Camp 21 fire response:** More than 70 community volunteers were mobilized to respond to the fire, which damaged or fully destroyed 56 shelters and 28 community facilities. Site management and safety unit refugee volunteers extinguished the fire, while community health workers, GBV volunteers and community outreach volunteers/groups provided first aid, disseminated key safety messages, supported evacuation efforts, and made referrals to services. Shelter assistance for the fire-affected households is ongoing.
- **Improved shelter design pilot:** In positive news, the RRRC approved piloting of the improved bamboo shelter design in several camps, including fire-affected households in Camp 21. The design combines bamboo and tarpaulin walls with a basic metal skeleton, resulting in a longer life span and reduced maintenance costs, as well as being portable and easy to dismantle.
- **Monsoon and cyclone preparedness:** While shelter partners continued to receive deliveries of bamboo from suppliers, materials fell short of expected quality and quantity. By the end of April, 450,000 pieces of *muli* bamboo were received with 970,000 pieces still pending. UNHCR shelter and supply unit teams are working closely with suppliers to expedite deliveries as the arrival of the monsoon rains in May/June will trigger a new cycle of damage and repair for the fragile camp shelters. Without adequate stocks of bamboo on hand, UNHCR and partners will be unable to meet the shelter needs of refugee households needing to strengthen and repair dwellings damaged by the weather.
- **LPG refill cycle adjustment:** Data analysis of the survey on LPG savings from household use of pressure cookers was finalized, and new cycles have been proposed based on household size. The results and proposed adjustment will be shared with the government, donors and partners for review.

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

ADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS IN A GREEN ENVIRONMENT cont'd

- **Teknaf water supply:** On 8 April, water rations were reduced to 12 litres/person/day, the second adjustment in two months following February's reduction from 20 to 15 litres. Rationing is expected to continue until the beginning of the rainy season (late May/early June) to mitigate the need for large scale water trucking. Due to strong resistance in the host community village of Gilatoli, the joint pumping testing of the second Teknaf Groundwater Project borehole could not proceed as planned. Oxfam is conducting community engagement activities to better understand and address the community's concerns.
- **Acute water diarrhea (AWD):** Prevention and control activities were implemented/scaled up to address rising AWD cases in two camps (90 cases have been confirmed since the beginning of the year). Critical measures included improvement of the DPHE managed water network, water treatment and quality monitoring, cleaning campaigns, and disinfection of latrines, bathing facilities and drains. Sensitization and health promotion activities were scaled up, and community health workers in all camps received prevention and surveillance training to curb future outbreaks. As a result, cases declined significantly by the end of April.
- **Drain cleaning and solid waste management:** April activities in Cox's Bazar camps included developing a field tool to monitor and share information about blocked drains; cleaning of 47 unauthorized dumping sites by UNHCR partners with 420 cubic metres of waste collected for transport to sanitary landfills; and a joint field assessment to collect data on the impact of solid waste dumping/littering on the drains and streams in the SuLMER project area. On Bhasan Char, installation of a new plastic recycling plant and waste incinerator for non-biodegradable waste in April expands solid waste recycling capacity and increases livelihood opportunities for refugee volunteers.

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

- **Fast Retailing/UNIQLLO-supported skill development workshops:** At the conclusion of the project's pilot phase, a proposal for the second phase (June-December 2023) was submitted to FR/UNIQLLO and received feedback for review. A project learning workshop has been scheduled for 10 May.
- **Adolescent pre-vocational skills programmes:** Findings from a competency assessment of skills facilitators under partners BRAC and CODEC show that 47% need facilitation skills training and 40% need training in literacy, numeracy and facilitation, while 13% had very low competencies and should not be engaged. A capacity building proposal is being developed as an activity under the Global Affairs Canada (GAC) skills development project.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4: DIVERSIFIED FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS

- **Missions:** UNHCR hosted/participated in five visits from donors and partners to the Cox's Bazar camps and Bhasan Char in April (compared to 15 visits in March), including an ECHO technical visit and UNDP delegation. The slowdown was due to Ramadan (traditionally a month of rest and reflection for the Rohingya community) and the Eid holiday.
- **Private sector partnerships:** In April, UNHCR added Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives (MBRGI) as a new partner supporting livelihood activities in Cox's Bazar. MBRGI joins existing private sector partners Fast Retailing Co. Ltd. (UNIQLLO), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Qatar Charity.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #5: CREATING A POSITIVE NARRATIVE

- **Social media:** April social media included 28 [Facebook](#) posts, 30 [tweets](#), and 12 [Instagram](#) posts on topics including the Camp 21 fire, disability inclusion, and Ramadan, Eid and Bengali New Year greetings. Rohingya photographer Abdullah took over the UNHCR Bangladesh Instagram for the first week of April, offering an intimate glimpse of camp scenes and Rohingya dreams. Follow [@unhcr_bgd](#) to see more.
- **"Renaissance of Rohingya Culture: The Colors":** From 7-9 April, visitors learned about Rohingya art, culture and resilience through an exhibition of Rohingya paintings, sculptures, canvases and murals at the Jamuna Future Park Shopping Mall, organized by UNHCR partners Artolution and Terre des Hommes.