UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Bangladesh

KEY FIGURES

BENEFICIARIES

962,416 Total registered refugee population

52% Female

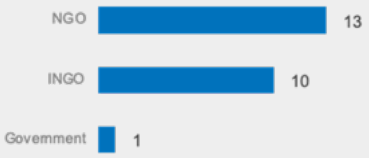
48% Male

52% Children

as of 31 July 2023

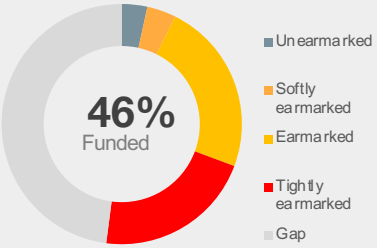
PARTNERS

24 # of partners implementing key UNHCR activities in 2023



FUNDING

275 M Funding for 2023 operations



as of 20 July 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 Nayapara and Kutupalong 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

July 2023

Refugee volunteers construct a path after excavating a natural stream in Camp 3. © Pablo Amos/UNHCR

OVERVIEW

Globally, July 2023 was the hottest month in recorded history. In Bangladesh, July's average temperature was 1.7C above normal, with the month's high of 38.4C (99F) recorded on July 31. In Cox's Bazar, the heat deepened worries about the impact of climate change on the region's ecosystem and communities. The rise of extreme weather in an area already prone to climate disaster threatens devastation. The Rohingya refugee population, who live hand-to-mouth in temporary shelters without modern conveniences, are particularly vulnerable. A 2022 report from 67 countries found that hotter days are linked to anxiety, disordered sleep, suicide attempts and intragroup conflict. Heat also affects labour capacity and cognitive learning, reducing human potential. The compounding risks make the need for solutions for the Rohingya even more urgent.

In line with the Government of Bangladesh's climate action agenda, UNHCR and partners are reducing disaster risks and strengthening ecosystems, while increasing communities' skills and resilience. For Rohingya refugees, this includes vocational skilling programmes, homestead gardening and on-farm livelihoods on Bhasan Char. For local Bangladeshis, support includes climate smart agriculture trainings and market linkages, with an emphasis on women.

Protecting the environment has been a priority since 2018, when the need to halt and reverse the deforestation caused by the mass influx of refugees led to the first 'game-changing project' to distribute liquified petroleum gas (LPG) in the camps as an alternative cooking fuel. Today, UNHCR and fellow UN agencies distribute LPG to all 190,000 refugee households through the SAFE+2 programme, saving forests and reducing carbon emissions by 407 tons yearly. Refugees no longer forage in the forests for firewood, while ongoing reforestation campaigns are regreening hills and streams. Such plantation activities, implemented by local partners, improve living conditions by reducing extreme heat, dust pollution, risk of slope failure and erosion, while creating more than 250 incentive-based volunteer positions for refugees.

Meanwhile, community-centred solid waste management is another prong in UNHCR's climate action strategy. Across camps, UNHCR and partners are cleaning drains and streams, raising awareness of health risks and good hygiene practices, systemizing household waste collection, and rehabilitating 'blackspots' (solid waste dumping grounds) into productive spaces for the community, such as vegetables gardens. Waste is sorted and processed in camp facilities by volunteers: plastics are recycled while organic waste is composted for gardening. This full-circle approach protects the environment, safeguards health and provides incentive opportunities.

However, WASH and Energy and Environment are two of the most underfunded areas of UNHCR's Rohingya response work. Through enhancing the skills of the community and increasing their ownership, UNHCR tries to create the greatest impact from dwindling funds. However, sustained funding is needed to ensure the long-term success of these holistic and human-centred climate action initiatives as well as other programmes across the response.

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, Kuwait, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Saudi Arabia. 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.

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KEY UPDATES

- 2023 JOINT RESPONSE PLAN: As of the end of July, the 2023 Joint Response Plan (JRP) is 29% funded with USD 254.4 million received against the overall appeal of USD 876 million, including USD 67 million for Bhasan Char. The 2023 Plan provides protection services and essential assistance to nearly one million vulnerable Rohingya refugees and a half million Bangladeshis in host communities. Read more.

- NEW SCHOOL YEAR: On 23 July, a new school year began in the Cox's Bazar camps and on Bhasan Char. A record 300,000 Rohingya children are now enrolled in early childhood development, pre-primary, primary, secondary, youth and adolescent learning programmes. For the first time in the camps, the Myanmar Curriculum is available for all grades, from KG to Grade 10. This new school year follows the school placement test conducted in May, which was designed to track student progress and assess grade levels, especially for out-of-school children newly enrolling in the Myanmar Curriculum.

- EXCHANGE OF NOTES: UNHCR and UNESCO signed an UN-to-UN agreement for technical support in the development of literacy learning and assessment materials for Rohingya refugee youth learners. The youth learning materials will blend basic literacy, functional literacy for English, Myanmar and numeracy with vocational and livelihood skills and vocabulary, while soft and life skills will be integrated for the adult learner group.

- COMMUNITY CONCERNS: Concerns collected through community-based protection mechanism highlighted the impact of the recent food ration cuts (from USD 12 to USD 8 per person per month) as well as rising concerns about security and health issues, including dengue and scabies, and rumours of additional ration cuts. Meanwhile, the UNHCR Helpline reported an increase in calls requesting resettlement, reporting theft of LPG cylinders, and asking for additional food assistance.

- PROTECTION INCIDENTS: Including data from April-June 2023, a rising trend of incidents including killings and abductions has been noted. Killings have risen exponentially since 2021: 22 Rohingyas were reportedly killed in 2021, rising to 41 in 2022. This year, as of Q2, at least 42 killings of Rohingyas have been reported.

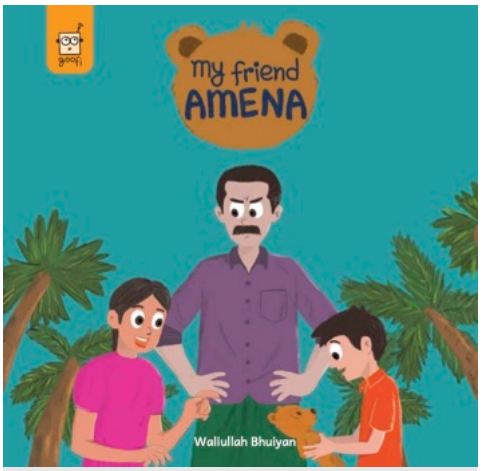
- DENGUE FEVER: While cases of the fever continue to rise in the Cox's Bazar camps, they are still below 2022 levels: 4,182 confirmed cases as of 31 July compared to 7,687 cases reported over the same period last year. Camp 3 continues to be the worst affected, accounting for 24% of confirmed cases this year and 50% of confirmed cases in 2022. A comprehensive, multi-sectoral response is focused on community awareness, improved disease surveillance and rehabilitating/eliminating areas of stagnant water where mosquitos breed. UNHCR continues to provide leadership through the Community Health Working Group.

- REGISTRATION EXERCISE: The exercise to verify and update the registration data of refugees in Kutupalong Registered Camp (KRC) is 48% complete. After KRC is fully covered, the exercise will continue in Nayapara Registered Camp.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT…

- ***"Right now, our fate is not in our hands. We are unable to go back home, we have no freedom of movement here, and hunger is the only way we pass our days."*** —Morjina, 27, a single mother of three young children. Read Morjina's story on UNHCR's global website to learn about the impact of the latest ration cuts on the refugee community in Cox's Bazar.

- In June, new funding contributions for UNHCR Bangladesh were received from FCDO, Australia, Japan and Canada. As of 20 July, 46% of overall funding needs have been received.



Watch a video about the UNHCR-supported children's book My Friend Amena. © UNHCR.

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1: BASIC RIGHTS, PROTECTION & EDUCATION

- Registration update exercise: The exercise to verify and update the registration data, including family composition, of refugees in the two registered camps continued. As of 28 July, the exercise in Kutupalong Registered Camp (KRC) is half complete with 48% of refugees in KRC verified.
- Legal assistance: To improve refugees' access to justice, a meeting was convened with legal partners to discuss Bangladeshi judicial systems and legal frameworks, clarify legal assistance functions, share practices, and identify challenges and ways to improve legal service provision.
- Women Inspire Women: An experimental session was organized in Camp 26 to provide a safe space for the change-seeking refugee women activists and leaders in working in the *SASA! Together* campaign to talk about their leadership journeys, career aspirations, and personal challenges. Ten participants, including partner staff, attended, and offered positive feedback on the pilot session. The initiative, which will be held regularly going forward, is designed to support *SASA!* female activists and leaders working to stop violence against women in their conservative community as the activists often face backlash, including threats, for questioning social norms and systems of power.
- Child abductions: Partners reported seven boys kidnapped from UNHCR-managed camps in July. With support from child protection (CP) and legal partners, government officials and the police, seven children were rescued and returned to their parents, including two boys kidnapped in June. From January-July 2023, 63 boys and one girl have been abducted, and 57 have been returned. Discussions are ongoing with stakeholders including ABPN, law enforcement agencies, camp leaders, parents and community-based CP mechanisms about mitigation measures. Legal partners continue to raise awareness and assist families to file cases.
- Mentorship training for Rohingya teachers: A fourth batch of mentorship training kicked off with partners Bard College and BRAC University. 78 master trainers, including 28 from the host community and 50 Rohingya, are enrolled in the six-month skills development programme which aims to enhance teachers' capacities and improve the quality of education.

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

- Monsoon response and update on shelter stocks: With monsoon season in full swing, 4,821 households were affected by wind, rain, waterlogging and landslides and received urgent shelter assistance. This takes the total to 21,196 households receiving shelter support in 2023 across 16 UNHCR-managed camps — a significant increase from last year, as a result of multiple hazards including Cyclone Mocha in May and the reality that many shelters (which are temporary by design and government guidelines) have exceeded their lifespans and are rapidly deteriorating. Compounding the issue is the continuing shortage of *borak** bamboo on the market.
- Improved shelter construction: To enhance the dignity of the refugees by offering sturdier shelters that are fire- and weather-resistant while complying with government standards, 12 modified bamboo shelters were constructed and handed over to refugees in Camp 7. The stilt construction will mitigate against flooding as these shelters are in a low-lying area along a natural canal. Meanwhile, UNHCR and partner NGO Forum began construction of 26 improved shelters in Nayapara Registered Camp targeting households whose shelters have severely deteriorated. The project targets 600 households in the two registered camps.
- Camp 26 relocations: 28 new improved shelters were constructed to accommodate families affected by flooding in Block H3 where 153 households face flood risk. UNHCR and partners continue to encourage remaining families to relocate to safe locations, despite some community reluctance to disrupt established routines and support structures.
- Sustainable Land Management and Environmental Rehabilitation Project (SuLMER): Construction on the upper stream of the SuLMER project area is almost complete. The new walkway will connect the excavated stream from road to road, and plantation is ongoing to regreen the site. Challenges have included relocations of shelters and an excess of solid waste. The stream rehabilitation will reduce flood risks to the community and provide a healthier environment.
- Dengue response: As of 31 July, 4,182 dengue cases including five deaths have been confirmed this year — a great improvement from 2022. However, heavy rains create conditions for mosquitos to breed, which may worsen the trend. In July, a camp-level investigation of disease-causing mosquito vectors was conducted, yielding action points for partners such as regular fumigation, use of chlorine spray, disinfection of vulnerable areas, drain-cleaning initiatives, and awareness campaigns by religious and community leaders. Different mosquito breeding grounds were also identified and targeted for elimination, including stagnant drains, unprotected bamboo pillars, handwashing points, drinking vessels for domestic animals, etc. Prevention, identification, testing, and treatment measures are ongoing.

**Two bamboo species used for housebuilding. Borak is a giant species, often used for load-bearing support. Muli, which is thinner, is also used for weaving crafts and as a source of paper pulp.*

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

ADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS IN A GREEN ENVIRONMENT cont'd

- Capacity building for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS): MHPSS needs in the community remain high, while capacity to meet these needs is low — not just in the camps but throughout Bangladesh as mental healthcare has been historically neglected due to multiple factors, including cultural stigma. Thus, enhancing the skills of local psychologists and other health professionals to identify, refer and deliver quality support is a critical priority, alongside the capacity building of Rohingya volunteers. In July, the following capacity initiatives were organized: mhGAP training to capacitate physicians and nurses on the major mental health illnesses; training on in-depth clinical interviewing skills for 20 psychologists and para-counsellors; two case discussion sessions for 33 MHPSS providers.

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

- Global Affairs Canada (GAC) skills development project: An agreement was signed with UNESCO to develop literacy learning and assessment materials for Rohingya youth aged 18-25 to prepare them for the curriculum-based vocational training courses offered under the GAC project. The materials will fill learning gaps in basic and functional literacy for English and Myanmar as well as numeracy.
- Fast Retailing (FR) skills development and production project: Aiming to scale production of the sanitary pads and female underwear to cover all the camps, UNHCR pitched distribution of the refugee-produced items to fellow agencies UNICEF and IOM. The plan supports the dignity and well-being of female refugees by offering a better-quality product as well as training a corp of skilled refugee women who receive stipends for their production work.
- Livelihoods on Bhasan Char: In July, refugees engaged in chicken rearing and vegetable cultivation livelihoods activities were able to sell their products in the market on the island. Meanwhile, NGO Forum continued skills training of 50 refugee women who will produce five jute and handicraft items for export.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4: DIVERSIFIED FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS

- Missions: In July, UNHCR hosted or assisted in 13 visits from donors and partners to Cox's Bazar camps and Bhasan Char. Visitors included a US Congress delegation, the Japanese ambassador and the European Union's Special Rapporteur For Human Rights, who met with a Rohingya delegation at a UNHCR community centre to hear about their experiences and current challenges firsthand. As part of UNHCR's partnership with Dhaka University, delegation of law students also visited camps to learn about UNHCR's legal assistance project and other protection activities.
- Private sector partnerships (PSPs): As of 31 July 2023, the Bangladesh operation has received contributions totaling USD 8.35 million from PSP donors. Projects supported by PSPs include skills and livelihood initiatives under Fast Retailing, and WASH projects under the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and energy and shelter support from Qatar Charity.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #5: CREATING A POSITIVE NARRATIVE

- Social media: In July, UNHCR Bangladesh accounts published 25 Facebook posts, 32 tweets and 16 Instagram posts on topics including visits to the camps, the impact of food cuts, and health services offered to the refugees.
- *My Friend Amena* book reading and puppet show: On 10 July, 100 school children participated in an interactive puppet show based on the children's book *My Friend Amena* organized at Dhaka's Liberation War Museum. The book, a collaboration between UNHCR and local NGO Light of Hope, is an inspiring tale of compassion and hope through a friendship that blossoms when Ali, a young Bangladeshi boy, meets a Rohingya refugee girl named Amena. Since its development, the story has been shared with numerous Bangladeshi school children through live interactive performances and readings as a tool for fostering empathy and solidarity.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT: STREAM CLEANING & REHABILITATION

After cleaning and excavation, construction on the upper stream is almost complete. © Shahirah Majumdar/UNHCR

Homestead gardening on the excavated stream in Camp 3. © Shahirah Majumdar/UNHCR

WASH: SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

Finished compost produced by Rohingya volunteers at the materials recovery facility.© Shahirah Majumdar/UNHCR

Waste is collected door-to-door in a pilot project by partner BRAC in six camps.© Shahirah Majumdar/UNHCR

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