UNHCR Bangladesh

The UN Refugee Agency

POPULATION

1,006,107 # of registered refugees

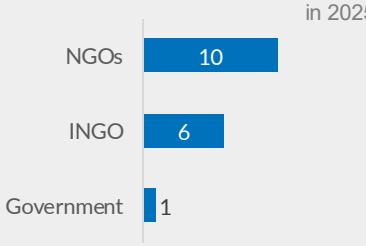
96.6% in 33 camps in Ukhiya & Teknaf
3.4% on the island of Bhasan Char

51% Female
49% Male
52% Children

as of 28 February 2025

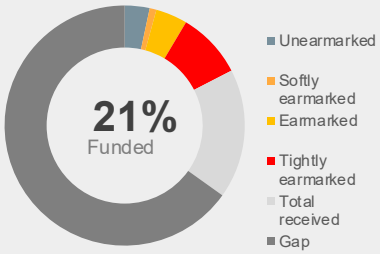
PARTNERS

19 # of partners implementing key UNHCR activities in 2025



FUNDING

275 M Funding for 2024 operations



as of 28 February 2025

HISTORY

UNHCR has been present in Bangladesh since 1992, but the relationship has deeper roots. In 1971, during Bangladesh's Liberation War, UNHCR coordinated a massive relief effort to support 10 million refugees forced to flee for protection, and helped facilitate their return to the newly independent nation in the following months.

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
February 2025

UN High Commissioner for Refugees met Rohingya youth during his February visit to the refugee camps. © UNHCR

KEY UPDATES

- 2024 JOINT RESPONSE PLAN (JRP): As of 31 December, the 2024 JRP was 68.2% funded, with USD 581.7 million received against an appeal of USD 852.4 million, according to the FTS tracker. The 2024 JRP requests continued support for one million Rohingya refugees, who depend on humanitarian assistance, and for more than 400,000 host community members. In 2023, the JRP was 66% funded with USD 578 million received against an overall appeal of USD 876 million. Read more.

- TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF US FOREIGN ASSISTANCE: The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has directed prioritization of life-saving work and reduction of expenditures to mitigate the impact of the US funding freeze on refugees. Non-essential procurement, external hiring, international travel or workshops have been suspended or delayed. The High Commissioner also directed a review of 2025 activities, with all UNHCR regional bureaux and organizational divisions to freeze USD 300 million in planned activities as part of cost-saving efforts globally. In Bangladesh, US funding in 2024 represented 55% of the contributions to the Joint Response Plan and 47% of the UNHCR operations budget. Reduced direct funding to NGOs and partners affects essential activities, while decisions on the suspension of resettlement affects durable solutions for the Rohingya.

- UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES VISITS BANGLADESH: The UN High Commissioner for Refugees visited Bangladesh on 27 February – 01 March, at the invitation of the Chief Adviser. He met with the Interim Government, key donors and heads of agencies, and visited the Rohingya camps where he met with Rohingya youth, a mothers' group, male religious leaders and female religious teachers, as well as newly arrived Rohingya refugees to hear firsthand the current context in Rakhine State and the persistent conditions forcing people to flee. Throughout his visit, he reaffirmed UNHCR principles for sustainable, dignified and voluntary returns, with a strong emphasis on promoting peaceful coexistence in Rakhine. The High Commissioner noted that the drastic reductions in funding will have a severe impact on Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee response, and reiterated the urgent need for international attention to the ongoing crisis. *Read the press release*.

- IDENTIFYING & ASSISTING NEW ARRIVALS: In February, 56,680 individuals (15,406 families) were identified in the first stage of the joint biometrics identification exercise (BIE) and received family assistance cards. These new arrivals had been among the 64,718 individuals counted in October, with the remaining 8,038 individuals, comprising 12.7% of the total, either not attending appointments (6,704 individuals), already identified (102 individuals) or registered (1,082), or identified as Bangladeshi nationals (150). Additionally, 94,429 individuals (21,978 families) not included in the October headcount were identified and scheduled for biometric identification. They include refugees who, following suspension in May 2022, had not been registered. UNHCR and GoB will continue the joint exercise as people continue to flee conflict and persecution in Myanmar. ***Note:*** Unlike refugee registration, individuals identified through the BIE are not issued with individual refugee identity documents, but an assistance card to each family entitling them to food, other life-saving assistance and protection services. *View BIE dashboard*.

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, the People's Republic of China, Denmark, Finland, the European Union, Ireland, Japan, Jersey, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the USA.

With additional support received from UN funds including UN AIDS and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF); multi-stakeholder fund Education Cannot Wait (ECW); and private donors, foundations, corporates, and companies worldwide including adidas AG, Fast Retailing Co. Ltd., Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Zakat House of Kuwait and Tanmeia Foundation.

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- BHASAN CHAR POPULATION VERIFICATION: Between 16-22 February a door-to-door verification exercise for Bhasan Char found 83% of the official population count of 36,785 individuals to be present on the island — a gap of 6,079 individuals, or 17% of the population (see Joint GoB-UNHCR February 2025 Factsheet). This data will be used to prepare a monitoring plan for spontaneous arrivals and unauthorized departures. Community feedback helped identify factors for spontaneous movements, including limited livelihood opportunities; inadequate healthcare and education services; some negative psychological impacts of life on Bhasan Char; need to maintain family and social connections; frustration with lack of access to justice, especially for survivors of gender-based violence; unfulfilled repatriation and resettlement promises; high living costs on the island compared to the mainland, and rumours of resettlement opportunities on Cox's Bazar. In a participatory assessment conducted during the exercise, refugees said a livable future on the island should be based on three pillars: freedom of movement, enhanced support and services, and reliable transportation.

- PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT: The President of Bangladesh's Footwear Producer's Association visited markets in the refugee camps and host communities in Ukhiya and Teknaf to assess footwear types, demand, pricing, supply chain dynamics, and to identify skills development opportunities for refugees in footwear production. The assessment found a vibrant consumer market for footwear in the refugee camps and identified footwear production as a low-cost investment not requiring electricity or generators. A pilot project is being developed, with UNHCR partner Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) to provide training space at the UNHCR-supported skills development centre in Camp 4 Extension. Engaging with the private sector is a critical step in reducing the aid dependency of the refugees by creating income-generating opportunities.

- EMERGENCY INCIDENTS DECLINE: Reports of emergency incidents in UNHCR camps fell 73% this month— from 78 incidents in January to just 21 in February. The trend was driven by a 75% decrease in fire incidents, from 65 incidents in January to 16 in February. UNHCR and partners also undertook key activities to improve emergency preparedness and response and bolster community resilience to fires including installation of 26 water tanks of 10,000 litres (towards a target of 90 tanks across 16 UNHCR-managed camps), as well as conducting fire drills and sessions on fire and water safety, and fire hazard awareness. Fire is a perennial threat in the congested and fragile camps during Bangladesh's dry season (December-April). In December 2024, a massive fire in Camp 1W killed two and displaced 473 households, followed by a January 2025 fire in Camp 26 killing one and displacing 61 households.

- COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP FOR CLEAN CAMPS: UNHCR and partners organized a community-led camp cleaning campaign across 11 camps where UNHCR is WASH focal. More than 1,000 community members worked alongside WASH volunteers to remove solid waste from camps and clear 2,722 feet of camp drains. With partners' drain cleaning activities significantly impacted by the funding freeze, UNHCR has stepped in to address emergency drain cleaning needs. Active community participation and ownership have noticeably improved solid waste management, leading to cleaner surroundings, better drainage conditions, and reduced health and environmental risks for residents. Community engagement is essential to ensure more sustainable waste and drainage management solutions.

- MISSION REPORT: UNHCR welcomed 19 visits from donors/partners in February, for a total of 30 missions in 2025, compared to 19 missions from January to February of 2024. High-level visitors included the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Special Envoy for Myanmar, Canada's Minister for International Development, the UK ambassador to Myanmar, and ambassadors of Ireland, Malaysia and the Netherlands.

- FUNDING UPDATE: As of 28 February, the UNHCR Bangladesh operation was 21% funded against an operating plan of USD 255 million. New contributions were received from Canada, Sweden, Japan, the UK and private sector partners Fast Retailing, World Muslim League and adidas foundation.

IN "CASE YOU MISSED IT…"

- ***"Intense conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State has worsened the plight of the Rohingya, a persecuted and stateless Muslim minority, pushing increasing numbers to flee by boat."*** Dangerous boat journeys by Rohingya seeking safety increased 80% from 2023 to 2024. *Read the story.*

- UNHCR Bangladesh published 23 Facebook posts, 25 tweets and 22 Instagram posts in February.

UNHCR chief Fillipo Grandi called for peace and solidarity with Rohingya refugees as the holy month of Ramadan began. Watch the video.

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