



## Key protection messages

The world has witnessed the **world's fastest growing refugee crisis** in decades, with over 600,000 refugees fleeing Myanmar in just three months. UNHCR is supporting the Government and people of Bangladesh, who have generously kept their borders and homes open to refugees, to **assist and protect refugees, and to find durable solutions to their plight.**

## The Bangladesh refugee emergency is a textbook refugee crisis.

**Words matter. The men and women fleeing Myanmar are refugees.** As refugees, people fleeing persecution and violence in Myanmar are protected from *refoulement*, which means that they cannot be forcibly sent back to their country as long as it is not safe. Refugees have the **right to return to their original home voluntarily, in dignity and safety.** The refugee status of Rohingya refugees is intrinsically linked to a situation of **statelessness in Myanmar**, which has deprived them of their identity and of the right to belong to a State which entails protection, rights and services. **The fundamental rights of Rohingya refugees must be addressed to bring about any durable solutions.** Registration, including birth registration, for all refugees, is critical. UNHCR is conducting a family counting exercise, adapted to assistance provision, and is working towards a joint and harmonized database to meet several purposes such as biometric identity management, protection and assistance needs, and solutions for refugees.

---

*“They burnt our house and drove us out by shooting. We walked for three days through the jungle.”*

Mohammed, who fled to Bangladesh with his family of seven, including a baby born along the way

---

## Overcrowding creates a wide range of protection and security risks while freedom of movement promotes opportunities

**Certain areas in Kutupalong settlement are more densely populated than Dhaka, one of the world’s densest cities.** This exposes refugees to fire hazards, risks of landslides but also to risks of disease outbreaks and epidemics. Overcrowding also increases the risks of tensions within the community, and of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence. There is an urgent need for more safe latrines, accessible to all, and more water points but also for child friendly spaces, safe spaces for women and girls, community centres, schools and health facilities. Refugees’ suggestions to improve their sense of safety include lights around critical infrastructures, shelter locks, and warning systems in case of wild animal attacks and natural disasters. UNHCR is working together with authorities and communities to improve standards in the refugee settlement, to plan new sites so that basic services are in place when refugees settle and to upgrade existing shelters and infrastructures in view of the upcoming rainy season.

**Improving freedom of movement is essential** so that all refugees, including the most vulnerable, can access assistance and services. UNHCR is supporting the construction by the Bangladeshi Army of an access road connecting Kutupalong refugee settlement to the main road, as well as pathways, bamboo bridges and public lighting within the settlements.

## Refugees are women, men and children with specific needs, and capacities to contribute to society.

**Through an Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach, UNHCR seeks to ensure that all refugees in Bangladesh enjoy their rights on an equal footing and are able to participate fully in the decisions that affect their lives.**

**Children make up 55% of the refugee population** in Bangladesh. Child protection and associated services, including education, must be scaled up for the over 400,000 refugee children who are currently in desperate need of schooling.

**Women and girls represent more than half of the refugee population.** . Female headed-households, almost two out of ten families, but also families headed by a child and by an older person, face difficulties in accessing assistance and services, because of restricted mobility, limited resources and security risks.

Through community-participatory assessments, UNHCR and partners have, so far, identified over 50 community outreach workers. One in three are women. Building on existing community mechanisms and making them more inclusive ensures that all refugees are part of the decisions that affect them. The contribution of all refugees to the socio-economic fabric of Bangladesh is essential for everyone's well-being.



## While the solution to this crisis lies in Myanmar, the international community must continue to **support Bangladesh.**

**The Government and the people of Bangladesh kept borders open and saved hundreds of thousands of fleeing refugees from Myanmar. The international community must step up its support and adopt an inclusive and sustainable approach to solving the problems of refugees.**

The response to the Bangladesh refugee emergency should minimize the impact on host communities and be an opportunity to reinforce national systems like health, education, water and other infrastructure. Development programmes and creation of livelihoods opportunities for both refugee and host communities can help foster social cohesion and mutual benefits to communities. Freedom of movement and access to education and employment empower refugees, reduce dependency on humanitarian aid, and allow them to contribute to the local economies. It also provides them with useful skills when they return to their country of origin.

## Key definitions

### Who is a refugee?

Refugees are people outside their country of origin because of feared persecution, conflict, violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order, and who, as a result, require ‘international protection’. Their situation is often so perilous and intolerable, that they cross national borders to seek safety in nearby countries, and thus become ‘refugees’ requiring access to assistance from states, UNHCR, and relevant organizations. They are so recognized precisely because it is too dangerous for them to return home, and they therefore need sanctuary elsewhere.

### Are the terms ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ interchangeable?

No. Although it is becoming increasingly common to see the terms ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ used interchangeably, there is a crucial legal difference between the two. Confusing them can lead to problems for refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as misunderstandings in discussions on asylum and migration. Refugees are specifically defined and protected in international law.

### Who is stateless?

A stateless person does not have a nationality of any country. Some people are born stateless, but others become stateless. Statelessness can occur for several reasons, including discrimination against particular ethnic or religious groups, as is the case for Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. Whatever the cause, stateless people often have difficulty accessing basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement.

### What is repatriation?

Voluntary repatriation is the free and voluntary return to one’s country of origin in safety and dignity. It is the solution of choice for a vast majority of refugees. In a returnee situation, this implies the restoration of national protection (to obviate the need for international protection) and, through the reintegration process, the ability to maintain sustainable livelihoods, access basic services and fully reintegrate into communities and countries of origin.

#### CONTACT US

#### UNHCR Sub-Office in Cox’s Bazar

New cottages, Motel Road  
Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh

Tel.: +88 034163550

[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

#### COVER PHOTOGRAPH:

*“I thought I was going to die, we had no food and we have so many kids.” Twenty-three-year-old Rohingya mother Shajeda (in pink headscarf) and her children, nieces and nephews, smile after reaching the safety of a UNHCR transit camp near Kutupalong in south-east Bangladesh. (c) UNHCR / Andrew McConnell*