

# BANGLADESH

07 – 21 March 2018

The **Joint Response Plan (JRP)** for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis was **launched** on Friday 16 March 2018 – appealing for USD 951 million to support some 900,000 refugees and 330,000 members of the host community in Bangladesh. The JRP reflects the funding requirements of 101 UN agencies and NGO partners.

On 20 February 2018, UNHCR and partners began relocating the first groups of families living in flood-prone areas to a safer part of the Kutupalong site. As of **17 March 2018**, over **381 families** living in areas vulnerable to flooding were relocated by UNHCR.

During her visit to Bangladesh in March, UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Cate Blanchett **called** for increased support for refugees from Myanmar, stressing the needs of refugees and host communities and warning of a “race against time” ahead of the monsoon season in Bangladesh.

## POPULATION FIGURES

**671,300\*** Estimated new arrivals in Bangladesh since 25 August 2017

**869,994** refugees, according to family counting exercise, which includes arrivals from Myanmar before and after 25 August 2017 (figure pending verification)

## STAFFING & PARTNERS

**224** staff currently working on the emergency compared to **49** prior to the crisis. **150** are national staff.  
**23** partners compared to **7** prior to the crisis.

## FUNDING

**USD 238.8 million**

Requested for UNHCR’s emergency response in 2018.

**USD 26.5 M**  
Received

**USD 212.3 M**  
Remaining needs

11%

89%



UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Cate Blanchett watches Rohingya refugee Mohammed Sayedul Islam (left, purple t-shirt), perform a new song about the Rohingya community’s concern about the upcoming monsoon, which asks, “If the rains come and the cyclones attack...what will the world do?” © UNHCR/Hector Perez

## Arrival trends

Some 671,300<sup>1</sup> refugees have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh since 25 August 2017, with the overall refugee population in the area of Cox's Bazar reaching 869,994. Although the influx has slowed since the onset of the crisis, refugees continue to cross the border into Bangladesh, with over 6,500 new arrivals having entered the country since 1 January 2018, of which 365 people arrived in the last week alone (11-17 March 2018).<sup>2</sup>

During interviews with new arrivals, close to 75% said they had left relatives behind in Myanmar. Some 25% of those interviewed also said that their relatives are planning to depart Myanmar for Bangladesh. Around 60% of those interviewed cited family safety and security as the main reasons for their flight, 25% attributed it to loss of their main property. Some 40% also cited restrictions on livelihoods as another major reason.

Since 1 January 2018, an additional 610 refugees were identified as extremely vulnerable, including unaccompanied or separated children, persons with disabilities, people ill or injured, pregnant women, and elderly persons at risk. These individuals were referred to various partners to receive assistance and services. At the Transit Center, where new arrivals are received when transported or arriving from border points, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provides dry food packages and bottled water, while Action Contre la Faim (ACF) provides hot meals and high energy biscuits, and UNHCR monitors protection cases, organizes relocations to settlement, and distributes non-food items for refugees.



*UNHCR is undertaking emergency preparedness works, including clearing and strengthening drainage channels, as part of the Site Maintenance Engineering Project (SMEP), a joint initiative of UNHCR, IOM and WFP. © UNHCR/Roger Arnold*

<sup>1</sup> Approximately 671,300 new arrivals are reported as of 25 February 2018, according to the ISCG.

<sup>2</sup> Information on arrivals at border points are reported through various sources which cannot always be verified or confirmed.



## Planning for voluntary return to Myanmar

The governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh bilaterally agreed to an ‘arrangement’ for the voluntary return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar on 23 November 2017, and a corresponding ‘physical arrangement’ that will guide the implementation on their prior agreement on returns on 16 January 2018. These agreements set forth commitments by both governments to ensure the refugees’ right to voluntary, safe and dignified return



*A young refugee girl pictured at the UNHCR Transit Center near Kutupalong refugee settlement. © UNHCR/Roger Arnold*

to their places of origin in Myanmar, and to commencing a process to address root causes in Myanmar in line with the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. While UNHCR is not a party to these bilateral agreements it is referred to therein as having a key role in assessing the voluntariness of potential returns and assisting in any actual repatriation.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, recalled on 16 March 2018 that the solutions to this crisis lie in Myanmar. He stressed that refugees have the right to voluntarily return home, but that conditions in Myanmar are not currently conducive to refugees’ safe and dignified return. He said that the odds are growing against an early solution, but that this was not a reason to give up. The High Commissioner’s comments came at the launch of the Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, which appeals for USD 951 million to enable UN agencies and NGO partners to continue delivering lifesaving assistance for the period March-December 2018. UNHCR is appealing for USD 238.8 million as part of its [Supplementary Appeal](#) for 2018 in order to continue to respond to the needs of hundreds of thousands of refugees, who are now preparing to face a harsh monsoon season.

With discussions on returns regularly being reported in the media, refugee communities remain anxious about their future. Over the past months, refugees have frequently said that they will not consider going back to Myanmar unless questions of citizenship, legal rights, access to services, justice, and restitution are addressed.

## UNHCR’s response

### *Protection activities*

On 7-8 March, UNHCR held an interactive session on refugee protection with 16 Camps-in-Charge (CICs), the Bangladeshi officials who oversee the government’s operations in the refugee settlements, during which current challenges, approaches and opportunities were discussed.

UNHCR organized a two-day information session on Protection and Access to Justice on 13-14 March 2018 for Bangladesh police personnel deployed in Cox’s Bazar district where the main refugee settlements are located. Participants included 50 male and female police personnel. The workshop provided a platform for a discussion about protection concerns and ways forward.

As part of its community outreach program, launched in December 2017, UNHCR and protection partners continue to train community outreach members (COMs) from diverse groups within the refugee community. During their home visits, COMs have identified the main concerns reported by refugees, which include access to better education, the need for sturdier shelters, the shortage of cooking fuel and water, and preparations for the monsoon and cyclone season. UNHCR and partners regularly coordinate to ensure that the issues identified by COMs are addressed and that refugees are engaged and informed about the progress of activities to improve their living conditions. COMs also refer refugees to UNHCR's partners Technical Assistance Inc. (TAI) and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) for support and assistance. UNHCR and partners are also establishing new community centers in Kutupalong, Chakmarkul, and Nayapara settlements to foster links among refugees and provide space for refugees to meet and discuss issues of community concern.

COMs have lately reported sentiments of hopelessness being expressed by the refugee community, focusing on what refugees describe as the inability of the international community to improve conditions for the Rohingya population in Myanmar. COMs also continue to receive updates from new arrivals on current conditions in Rakhine State.

UNHCR has shared a Guidance Note on Refugee Community Outreach programming with protection partners. The note includes information on principles and guidelines for the implementation of community outreach programs, and is a product of joint work between UNHCR and partners BRAC and TAI



*Currently more than 150,000 Rohingya refugees are at risk from landslides and floods due to the upcoming monsoon season. Mahmoud Farouk's family shelter was one of those at risk and he has now been moved to higher, more secure ground. © UNHCR/Hector Perez*

UNHCR together with its partner the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) continued to deliver legal counselling services to refugees on various issues, including domestic violence, and physical and mental abuse. BNWLA continued to conduct awareness raising sessions on various topics such as life skills, gender-based violence, and legal literacy. So far, they have reached 700 refugees and over 200 host community members. Community leaders also received awareness sessions on trafficking issues.

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) conducted focus group discussions with refugees concerning safety and security concerns and refugees' plans for self-protection during the monsoon season. This exercise will inform emergency preparedness and response activities, and identify gaps and needs of the most vulnerable refugees.



UNHCR and the Protection Working Group (PWG) advocacy note on birth registration was presented to the Inter Sector Coordination Group. It includes key messages on the importance of birth registration for all refugee children born in Bangladesh, drawing on national legislation which supports this right and the benefits of registration for refugees and the host country.

Over 90 unaccompanied and more than 220 separated children were assisted by UNHCR and its partners during the reporting period. As of 15 March 2018, more than 6,800 children benefitted from psychosocial support through structured play and other activities at Child Friendly Spaces (CFS), which are established throughout the settlements.



*Rohingya refugee families prepare for the monsoon by building new reinforced shelters with materials supplied by UNHCR. © UNHCR/ Roger Arnold*

### *Provision of services and assistance*

As of 21 March 2018, 53,242 families received upgraded shelter kits, including bamboo poles, rope, shelter-grade tarpaulin and tools. UNHCR and partners are accelerating shelter distributions ahead of the rainy season to reach tens of thousands more families, and also providing biodegradable sandbags to help to anchor structures. Between 9 and 15 March, 49,092 households received compressed rice husks (CRHs). This alternative fuel is helping to mitigate environmental damage. Some 198 households received core relief items (CRIs), and 2,000 households were provided with hygiene kits.

UNHCR continues to work with the Government of Bangladesh on the priority relocation of refugee families currently living in areas that are vulnerable to flooding and/or landslides to safer parts of the settlements. As of 19 March 2018, UNHCR has mobilized and relocated 381 families.

The Government has recently confirmed the availability of an additional land in Kutupalong. UNHCR, WFP and IOM continue to undertake emergency preparedness work through the Site Management Engineering Project (SMEP), which is a joint initiative to enhance monsoon preparedness and response. SMEP activities currently include earthworks and other engineering projects to ensure conditions for the safe relocation of refugees whose shelters are at risk of flooding, landslides, or both. Currently, upwards of 150,000 refugees are estimated to be living in areas that present various degrees of risk of the aforementioned natural disasters.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) issues are among the top concerns for the refugee population. UNHCR and partners continue to respond to urgent needs and to strengthen preparation efforts ahead of the rainy season. The decommissioning of malfunctioning and full latrines continued this week, with 500 removed by UNHCR partners. This will help reduce contamination of water in flooded areas during the monsoon.



*UNHCR is undertaking monsoon preparedness, including essential infrastructure work such as the widening of canals and gullies, digging culverts, flattening land, and relocating families to safer places where new land is available. © UNHCR/Hector Perez*

As part of the response to the water shortage crisis affecting the refugee and host populations in Nayapara in Teknaf sub-district of Cox's Bazar, excavation work has started on a water reservoir in Shalban area through the NGO Forum for Public Health.

As part of monsoon preparation efforts, Oxfam has brought in a team to boost the hygiene promotion capacity in Nayapara settlement which will increase coverage and messaging to the communities for the upcoming monsoon season.

Due to construction on the main road connecting the highway and the Kutupalong settlement in the north, access has been temporarily blocked along this route. UNHCR coordinated with the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society to identify a temporary distribution point for UNHCR to use in order to avoid disruption of activities.

UNHCR completed a post distribution monitoring (PDM) survey in several areas on 19 March 2018, which aims to monitor the effectiveness and the use of assistance distributed to refugees and improve programming and effective decision making. The data was collected through a simple random sampling-



based survey of household beneficiaries, and the findings, which are being compiled, will be used to inform programming, including the type of assistance that is provided.

UNHCR is coordinating with other partners including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) to pre-position medical and other relief supplies and organize mobile health teams ahead of the monsoon season.

### *Peaceful co-existence between host and refugee communities*

As of 21 March 2018, UNHCR has installed over 180 solar street lights in public areas within and on the outskirts of refugee settlements, and in host communities. They are being installed in public places, including near schools and mosques, to benefit the local community. This forms part of a total of 270 solar street lights provided by UNHCR that are being installed in areas of Kutupalong and Nayapara host communities and settlements, and the Transit Center.



*One of UNHCR's distribution points in Nayapara settlement where refugee families are receiving shelter kits.  
© UNHCR/Caroline Gluck*

## UNHCR Supplementary Appeal

The Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis was **launched** on 16 March 2018 – appealing for USD 951 million to support some 900,000 refugees and 330,000 members of the host community in Bangladesh. The JRP reflects needs of UN agencies and NGO partners to respond to the crisis from March-December 2018. UNHCR is appealing for USD 238.8 million as part of its **Supplementary Appeal** for 2018 in order to continue to respond to the needs of refugees as well as the host communities that were the first responders in assisting hundreds of thousands of refugees at the onset of the crisis.

## Working in partnership

At Dhaka level, UNHCR co-chairs the Strategic Executive Group with IOM and the UN Resident Coordinator. UNHCR exercises a lead role in the protection response for all refugees, including heading the Protection Working Group, and coordinates closely on the delivery of assistance with UN agencies and other partners through the various working groups under the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). UNHCR's main government counterpart is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR). In Cox's Bazar, UNHCR works closely with the RRRC, the local representative of the MoDMR, and appointed Camps-in-Charge in different settlements.

UNHCR is working in close collaboration with a range of international and national actors in Bangladesh, and it has scaled up its partnership network to 23 partners, including nine national NGOs. In 2018, UNHCR also plans to increase national and local sourcing of goods and services. So far, UNHCR has already signed 35 local framework agreements worth over USD 20 million, 10 of which are for construction alone, while others are for the procurement of CRIs, shelter material, and services for persons of concern.

## Donor Support

The response of the Government and people of Bangladesh has been extraordinarily generous. More support is required from the international community to assist Bangladesh in its humanitarian response to the refugee situation. UNHCR has called for the commitment of international donors to support the immediate needs of refugees and host communities in Bangladesh, and to work for a solution to the situation.

### Donor country contributions to the UNHCR Bangladesh operation in 2017 and 2018, and donor unrestricted funding to UNHCR's global operations



With thanks also to the many private donations from individuals, foundations, companies in Australia, Canada, China, Egypt, France, Ghana, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, Oman, Philippines, Portugal, Spain, Senegal, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom, UAE, and USA including Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, IKEA Foundation, Kuwait Finance House, OPEC Fund for International Development, Prosolidar-Onlus Foundation, Qatar Charity, Rahmatan Lil Alamin Foundation, The Big Heart Foundation, The Church of Latter-Day Saints, and UPS Corporate. Special thanks also to UNOPS and CERF.

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