

# Bangladesh

1 - 31 May 2020

The first case of **COVID-19** was detected in the Rohingya settlements on May 14. **29 cases have been confirmed.** UNHCR opened two new Severe Acute Respiratory Infection and Isolation and Treatment Centres to support the response.

Bangladesh transferred 306 refugees rescued at sea to **Bhasan Char**. The UN has informed the Government that it would be prepared to undertake a protection visit to Bhasan Char to meet with the Rohingya refugees transferred to the island and assess their immediate humanitarian situation and specific needs.

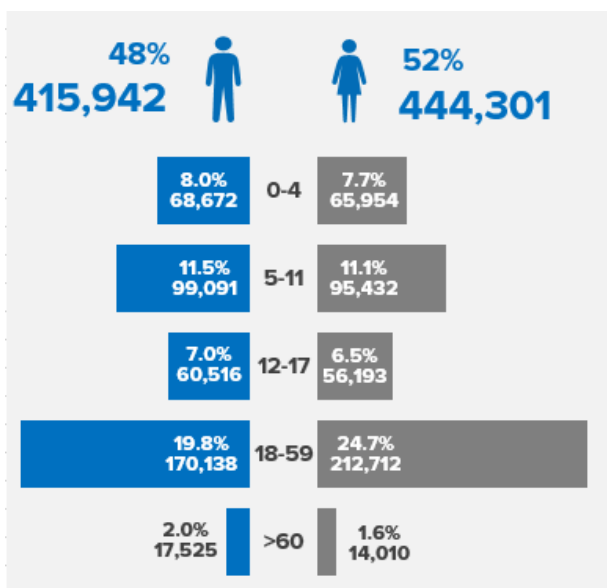
**Cyclone Amphan** made landfall near the coast of West Bengal/India and Bangladesh. The refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar were not directly impacted, but heavy rain and wind caused a number of incidents, including some 1,400 damaged shelters.

POPULATION DATA **860,243** Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar district \*825,183 Rohingya refugees are registered under the Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration exercise. There are also 35,060 Rohingya from pre-2016 and who reside in the registered camps (as of 31 May 2020)

## 88,360

Number of refugee households who are being supported with cooking kits and Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinders in the camps every month; 10,718 families in host communities are also being supported with cooking kits and LPG.

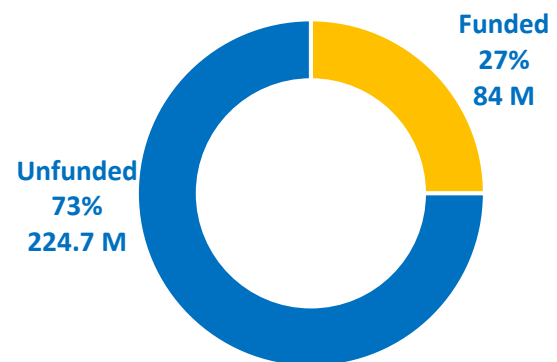
### AGE & GENDER BREAKDOWN OF REFUGEES IN COX'S BAZAR



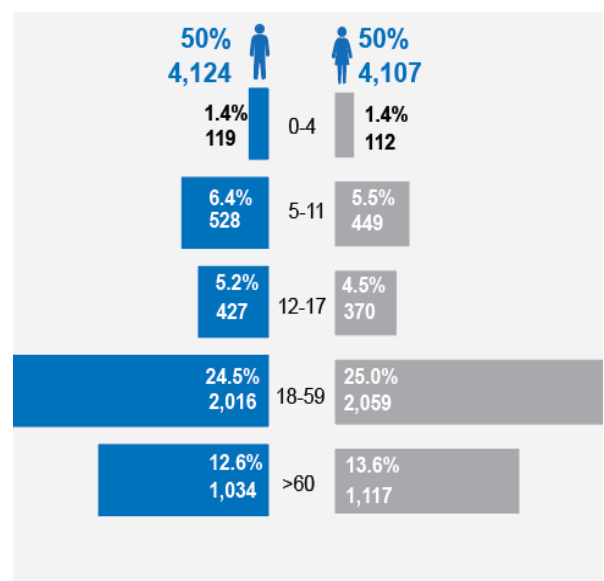
### FUNDING (AS OF 31 MAY 2020)

## USD 308.7 M

requested for Bangladesh



### DISABILITY DATA BY AGE/GENDER WITHIN THE REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS



## Operational Context

- The **first COVID-19 case was detected in the refugee settlements** in Cox's Bazar on 14 May. UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies are supporting the Government of Bangladesh and the local health authorities to contain and respond to the spread of the virus in the settlements. UNHCR has to date established two Severe Acute Respiratory Infection Isolation and Treatment Centres (SARI ITCs) with up to 200 beds, where COVID-19 positive patients are receiving treatment. Four quarantine centers supported by UNHCR have also been established for those who have had contact with COVID-19 positive patients and require isolation.
- Cyclone **Amphan** - formed in the Bay of Bengal around mid-May and made landfall on 20 May near the India/Bangladesh border, affecting West Bengal in India and Bangladesh's low-lying delta region. Although the path of the cyclone did not hit Cox's Bazar, the effects of the cyclone nevertheless was felt in the refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar, which received heavy rain and strong winds. The Bangladesh Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) raised three flags as an alert sign for refugees in the Cox's Bazar refugee settlements. The three flag was the highest alert level that refugees have seen for a cyclone since many of them first arrived in Bangladesh in 2017. Over 1,252 shelters were partially damaged and 159 shelters completely destroyed, temporarily displacing 144 households. In total, close to 6,000 refugees were affected by the cyclone.
- The annual monsoon season will soon be underway in Bangladesh. UNHCR is continuing to make **preparations** with partner agencies to update emergency preparedness and response plans and revise protocols. Refugee volunteers have received refresher orientation sessions and pre-monsoon kits are being distributed to refugees. Relief supplies are also prepositioned in locations in or close to the camps to ensure rapid response.
- Rohingya refugees continued to undertake **dangerous sea journeys** organised by traffickers and smugglers. UNHCR appreciates the decisive action taken by the Bangladesh authorities in the last month in rescuing and safely disembarking nearly 700 Rohingya refugees, after long and harrowing journeys at sea. We understand that others may still remain on boats at sea in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. Some 400 of these refugees were brought to Cox's Bazar District, where the Government, UNHCR and humanitarian partners worked closely together to ensure they were safely quarantined and received the assistance, services and specialized support they needed. All have now safely returned to their families within the camps. More recently, the Bangladesh authorities transferred more than 300 refugees to the island of Bhasan Char, the largest number of whom were rescued at sea from a vessel in distress. Most are reportedly women and children. The UN has informed the Government that it would be prepared to undertake a protection visit to Bhasan Char to meet with the Rohingya refugees transferred to the island and assess their immediate humanitarian situation and specific needs. The UN's longstanding position nevertheless remains that comprehensive technical and protection assessments to evaluate the safety and sustainability of life on Bhasan Char are essential.



**COVID-19 response activities can be found [here](#) on UNHCR's Bangladesh portal.**

## Updates and achievements



### PROTECTION

#### Refugees rescued from sea transferred to Bhasan Char island

- On 2 May, after several weeks at sea, nearly 30 Rohingya came ashore in Bangladesh, including many women and children. These refugees were subsequently sent by the Bangladesh authorities to Bhasan Char island. A further group of 277 Rohingya rescued at sea by Bangladesh on 17 May were also transferred to the island.

- In total, according to information available, there are currently 306 Rohingya refugees on Bhasan Char. UNHCR together with other UN agencies have been invited by the Government of Bangladesh to undertake a protection visit to the island to ascertain the humanitarian situation and any immediate needs of the refugee population. Discussions on the parameters of this visit are ongoing. UNHCR maintains that any relocation of refugees to Bhasan Char should be preceded by thorough and independent assessments in five key areas: safety and sustainability, UN and humanitarian personnel safety and security, protection, sustainable livelihoods and logistics and access. To date, these assessments are yet to be undertaken. Currently no specialised protection services are provided on the island by the UN or humanitarian agencies operating in Cox's Bazar.



### MONSOON/CYCLONE SEASON

#### Moving forward on annual monsoon preparations in a time of COVID-19

- Annual monsoon preparations by humanitarian agencies in Cox's Bazar were made more challenging this year by the spread and risks posed by the COVID-19. Accordingly, UNHCR has updated and revised its **Emergency Preparedness and Response Strategy for 2020** to factor in the new circumstances and to ensure that the safety of refugees and staff is incorporated as an integral element of the monsoon preparedness and response activities. The strategy also places emphasis on finding new ways of working and reasserts the need for having refugees at the centre of the response, particularly when public health restrictions have limited a wider set of humanitarian activities and/or staff from entering the settlements.
- UNHCR has put its monsoon-focused **Emergency Preparedness and Response Team (EPRT)** on standby. It consists of a roster of some 70 staff with different technical expertise who can be deployed immediately to respond to any situation or incident. In addition to having its own team ready, UNHCR continues training refugee volunteers and the partner agencies to hone emergency response skills and knowledge. A **virtual training** on disaster risk reduction was held with Action Aid, one of UNHCR's site management partners, on 21-24 May. Further similar skills sharing activities are ongoing and planned with other key partners. Refresher trainings were also held for partners such as BDRCS and the American Red Cross as well as trained refugee volunteers during the month of May. In addition, virtual trainings were conducted by the Protection Sector for its 39 Protection Emergency Response Units (PERU) comprised of 234 staff and refugee volunteers in preparation for the cyclone and to familiarize the PERU with the Sector's cyclone response plan and ensure coordination with other sectors in the camps.
- In advance of the monsoon, UNHCR has distributed **tie-down kits** to 87,795 refugee households in 16 camps which UNHCR manages in Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts of Cox's Bazar. The kit includes ropes and pegs that can help households better anchor their shelters ahead of expected strong winds.
- Furthermore, the **prepositioning of post-disaster kits (PDKs)** in and near the settlements is ongoing. This prepositioning will help ensure that assistance can be provided quickly if an emergency arises and roads are



Refugee volunteers using ropes to tie-down rooftops ahead of expected strong winds during the monsoon. Photo: © UNHCR

cut off. The kits contain a range of basic shelter and WASH-related items, such as plastic sheeting and aqua tabs to support households with very immediate needs, until more support such as rebuilding of shelters can be organised. UNHCR, IOM, WFP and other members of an inter-agency Emergency Preparedness Working Group (EPWG) have agreed to standardize PDK contents and harmonize local pre-positioning.

### Preparedness for and response to Cyclone Amphan's passage in the Bay of Bengal

- UNHCR and other agencies responded to damage caused by Cyclone Amphan-related winds and rain. The cyclone's reportedly 750 km radius had a moderately strong impact on the refugee settlements.
- There were no injuries or casualties reported. In total, however, 1,252 shelters were partially damaged across all 34 camps in Cox's Bazar, and 159 completely damaged. The camps most affected were in Ukhiya, as less severe weather was reported in southern camps in Teknaf area. A small number of communal facilities such as learning centres were also affected, and other basic infrastructure such as bamboo retaining walls that were built to reduce the risk of injury or damage occurring from soil erosion.
- Throughout May, UNHCR worked intensively with 1,600 site management refugee volunteers in 16 camps. The volunteers ran **awareness messaging campaigns** on the impending cyclone across the camps, including explaining what needs to happen when the Cyclone Preparedness Programmes' (CPP) flags are raised. The messages include the importance of securing their documents including ID cards issued by UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh, keeping emergency food safe, securely tying-down shelters, and location of safe havens and how to relocate, as well as the need to stay indoors during strong winds.
- With Cyclone Amphan looming, UNHCR called for the activation of the camp-wide Disaster Management Committee (DMC) in the camps. This is a pre-existing emergency coordination structure that has proved to be effective in dealing with past monsoon seasons. The DMC coordinates across camps for any large-scale disaster/emergency response. The meetings that were held have helped identify operational priorities and clarified how different actors plan to respond, particularly during the COVID-19 period as it differs to the situation in previous years. The engagements with the DMC were helpful and lessons learned will be reviewed for incorporation into UNHCR's revised Emergency Preparedness and Response Strategy that factors in the ongoing parallel dimensions of COVID-19 emergency response.



UNHCR staff examining a broken retaining wall that collapsed under heavy rain. Photo: © UNHCR/O. Sanchez Pineiro

### Refugee volunteers first on the scene to fight fires inside Kutupalong refugee settlement

- Two major fires occurred in the Kutupalong refugee settlement in May. Fires pose a significant risk in the camps due to the density of shelters. Over the last six months, there were 42 cases of fires affecting 133 households. In both fires occurring in May, refugee volunteers who had been trained by UNHCR were the first on the scene and helped contain the fires.
- The first fire, on 12 May, started near a marketplace (Camp 1E). The initial damage saw 234 shelters totally damaged and 247 partially damaged. Also, nearly 40 shops, a child friendly space, a mosque, some 20 latrines, and 18 bathing cubicles were destroyed. In total there were 10 injuries, but no fatalities.
- A second major fire occurred in the early morning of 17 May (Camp 5) reportedly due to a mosquito coil in one of the shelters. The damage assessments reported 20 shelters were fully destroyed, and another 7 sustained

partial damage, with 24 refugee households affected in total. Three individuals sustained injuries, including one volunteer.

- In both incidents, most of the families affected decided to temporarily stay at shelters of friends or neighbours until their shelters are rebuilt. Food (including high energy biscuits) was provided by WFP and partners, and UNHCR and BDRCS supplied core relief item kits, and some additional items such as jerrycans, blankets and hygiene items. UNHCR's partner BRAC supported the affected families with temporary shelters. UNHCR field, shelter, WASH and site management teams were on site to coordinate with the authorities and partners on shelter and other needs. The rubble was cleared by SMEP, a joint WFP/IOM/UNHCR engineering platform, prior to the repairs and rebuilding starting.



Only the ashes of former shelters remaining, as fire spread quickly during the incident. Photo: ©UNHCR

- UNHCR and its partners are rebuilding the destroyed areas. The Camp 1E area was particularly congested as it was one of the areas where refugees spontaneously settled when they first started living in Kutupalong without proper site planning. However, the restoration plan aims to reduce congestion. Some households will be able to transfer to another area of the Kutuplaong camp where shelters are available. Already 41 households decided to relocate to other areas. The rebuilt area of Camp 1E will have additional space for communal facilities to enhance general protection, as well as from fires.

### Rolling out IVR to expand coverage of messaging in camps

- The Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) approved UNHCR to use an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system for engaging and communicating with refugees. This technology is best known from customer service hotlines where callers are asked to press different numbers for different options. UNHCR's protection team is also coordinating with IOM which is also testing IVR.
- The IVR will enable UNHCR to send SMS or pre-recorded audio message services to refugees' mobile phones. Initially, UNHCR will target refugees active in networks the agency works with, including volunteers, and expand over time to other users. The technology can help ensure the delivery of time sensitive alerts, and accurate information on issues of concern to refugees, including COVID-19 or the impending monsoon season. The first pilot broadcast of the system with messages targeting refugees started on 14 May with a target to reach 20,000 refugees in UNHCR managed camps.
- UNHCR community-based protection team plans to evaluate the system through interviews with selected recipients and to review the IVR's effectiveness as a communication tool. The IVR will be one of the various ways that UNHCR continues to provide timely information to refugees and engage them in the response. It will complement other efforts made through partners and community-based volunteers to reach households with face-to-face messaging.
- The IVR will provide refugees with the option also to contact an existing UNHCR toll-free protection hotline, where they can ask for individual and confidential protection advice, or clarifications on existing assistance, or services.



## Working in partnership

UNHCR is a co-chair of the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) in Bangladesh with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. The UN Refugee Agency also leads on the protection response, as head of the Protection Working Group in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR has valuable partnerships with a several UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its assistance with humanitarian partners through the sectors and working groups, as part of the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). UNHCR's main government counterpart in Cox's Bazar is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and its Cox's Bazar-based Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Home Affairs in Dhaka, among other government ministries and entities. UNHCR staff work closely with the RRRC's Camp-in-Charge officials in the 34 refugee settlements, as well as a range of international and national actors. It has a strong network of 27 partners:

MoDMR (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief) | Action Aid Bangladesh | ACF (Action Contre la Faim) | Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) | BRAC (Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | Caritas Bangladesh | Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) | CODEC (Community Development Centre) | COAST (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) | Danish Refugee Council | FH Association (Food for the Hungry) | GK (Gonoshasthaya Kendra) | Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation | Handicap International | IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) | Light House | Mukti Cox's Bazar | NGO Forum for Public Health | Oxfam GB | Relief International | RTMI (Research, Training and Management International) | Save the Children International | World Vision | Terre des Hommes | TAI (Technical Assistance Incorporated) | BLAST (Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust) | Rights Jessore

UNHCR would also like to acknowledge the crucial role played by the refugees in the response; with over 3,000 volunteers from the refugee community who are often the first responders on the ground.

## Financial Information

Total recorded contributions for the operation amount to some **USD 84 million**. UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors that have contributed to this operation as well as those that contribute to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked and broadly earmarked funds. UNHCR's humanitarian response in Bangladesh is made possible thanks to the generous support of major donors.

**In 2019/2020, support continued to be generously was received from the following:** Austria, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

UNHCR is sincerely grateful for the additional **support received from individuals, foundations, and companies worldwide, including:** Athmar Holdings, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CERF, Education Cannot Wait, Fondation EDF, Mabarrat Ghanaem Al Khair, Qatar Charity, Shih Wing Ching Foundation, and Thani Bin Abdullah Bin Thani Al Thani Humanitarian Fund.

## CONTACTS & LINKS

**Mai Hosoi**, External Relations Officer, Dhaka (Bangladesh), [hosoi@unhcr.org](mailto:hosoi@unhcr.org)

[Situation portal](#) - [Twitter](#) - [Facebook](#)