



Community mobilization activities through Saturday Solidarity Project implemented by the COMs have seen 19 projects initiated and continued under the leadership of the refugee community.

PROTECTION CONTEXT

August 2017, an estimated 711,364 Rohingya refugees fled from Myanmar seeking safety and protection in Bangladesh, increasing the total number of refugees to 860,356 as of June 2020. The majority are reliant on humanitarian assistance including shelter, food, healthcare, clean water, and sanitation. As the situation enters its third year, UNHCR and its protection partners have put in place a system to ensure a strengthened understanding of the protection landscape for Rohingya refugees, including in a range of key thematic areas across sectors, each of which requires regular monitoring. Congruent with global trends, the pandemic in Bangladesh is negatively affecting the overall protection environment. Mitigating the short and longer term social protection consequences of the pandemic and ensuring ways to safeguard the resilience and psychosocial well-being of communities, whilst ensuring that protection and humanitarian space does not contract is a key priority for the Operation.

PROGRESS

Advocacy and Refugee Rights

- **Registration and civil documentation:** Revised SOPs on the registration of marriages and deaths rolled-out in the last part of 2019 are now being implemented in all 34 camps, and UNHCR has conducted familiarization programmes on the new SOPs with CiC staff and protection partners. Thus far in 2020 at least 1,211 marriages and 125 divorces have been registered and certificates have been issued to refugees. The registration process, however, has been temporarily suspended since the latter part of March owing to the COVID-19 situation, though UNHCR has engaged with the Government to resume the process, and awareness raising among refugees about the importance of civil documentation is ongoing. Birth registration for both refugees and the host community remains suspended despite ongoing advocacy with the Government.
- **Freedom of movement:** Due to recent changes in the political and security environment, security forces have heightened restrictions on the movement of refugees within the district. UNHCR has raised concern with key government counterparts and the situation has improved to some extent, but continued advocacy is required including as part of capacity building initiatives. In line with measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Government has imposed more restrictions on refugees' movements within and outside of the camps, which has impacted negatively on the well-being and livelihoods of refugees and members of host communities alike. As a result, protection incidents have increased, particularly domestic violence and organized criminal activity.

Key Protection Thematic Areas

Advocacy and Refugee Rights

- Registration and civil documentation
- Freedom of movement
- Access to justice
- Safety and security
- Access to basic services
- Education and vocational training
- Refugee status and non-refoulement
- Durable solutions

Protection Mainstreaming

- In the delivery of all forms of assistance
- In emergency preparedness and response

Reduced Aid Dependency

- Empowerment through livelihoods and skills training

Community Engagement

- Outreach and communication with communities (Accountability to Affected Populations)
- Building the community's resilience to respond to COVID-19
- Strengthening refugees' participation in protection processes
- Feedback and referrals mechanisms
- Community engagement and empowerment
- Community representation
- Peaceful coexistence with host communities

Specialized Services

- Assistance to persons with specific needs, physical and mental health, and psychosocial support
- SGBV
- Legal assistance
- Child protection
- Prevention and response to trafficking

- **Access to justice:** UNHCR has organized a series of trainings for lawyers engaged by legal assistance partners, focusing on international protection, legal protection, access to justice, and guidelines on the provision of legal assistance and the facilitation of mediation mechanisms. Access to justice for refugees remains a challenge despite ongoing advocacy by UNHCR with law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, and in recent months UNHCR's legal partners have reported experiencing difficulties when lawyers approach local police to register cases. Confusion between the sub-district level police station and the camp level police post as to which entity should register and follow up on a case remains a challenge, and refugees and lawyers alike must navigate this distinction without clear guidelines from the authorities. UNHCR continues to engage with the police to improve the situation and is working with camp administration officials to reinforce refugees' access to legal assistance and to advocate for appropriate and timely intervention by law enforcement agencies in serious crimes and human rights violations.
- **Safety and security:** Protection monitoring and case support continues to be conducted by UNHCR and its partners, including with the help of refugee volunteers. Whilst UNHCR and its partner, BRAC, have continued to carry out protection monitoring in 2020, partners TAI, BRAC, BLAST and Rights Jessore have provided legal assistance to the refugee population. In recent months the security environment in the camps has further deteriorated, with a marked increase in protection incidents and serious crimes such as robbery, intimidation, drug trafficking, arbitrary killing and arrest, murder, and abduction. The worsening situation has triggered violent reactions by both law enforcement agencies and criminal gangs, as well as protests and numerous cases of unauthorized relocation of refugees from one camp to another. In recent months, organized criminal gangs have been increasingly active in the camps in Ukhiya, including abduction for ransom, physical assault, drug trafficking and other criminal activities. It has also been reported across the camps that groups claiming to be associated with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) have been demanding "taxes" from refugee volunteers, shopkeepers, and majhis. UNHCR is closely monitoring the situation together with the authorities. The reduced staff presence in the camps, coupled with limited mobile communication possibilities as well as the reduced presence of authorities in the camps, results in referrals taking longer to be attended to. The number of refugees in need of legal assistance and mediation is thus increasing; with appointed representatives of the community (Majhis) taking advantage of these gaps to mediate disputes in a manner that is contrary to basic protection principles and often involves abuse of authority, extortion and bribery: in particular in cases involving domestic disputes and divorces, with women bearing the brunt of inequitable and unfair treatment. Notably, the socio-economic impact of COVID 19 is also having a negative impact on security; with petty crimes, inter and intra-communal disputes rising, criminal groups expanding their spheres of control with relative impunity, and heightened risks of traffickers and smugglers preying on vulnerable refugees and host communities alike. SGBV, child protection cases and cases of intimate partner violence have also been exacerbated by the pandemic. It is within this context that a pilot project on community policing was jointly launched by UNHCR, IOM and UNDP in early 2020, with the objective of promoting closer engagement between the refugee population and the police to promote access to justice. The pilot will initially target two camps, but over the course of the pilot it will be expanded to cover eight camps.
- **Access to basic services:** UNHCR and other humanitarian actors work in a coordinated manner to provide access to basic services to refugees in the camps along with vulnerable members of host communities. UNHCR continued to receive complaints from refugees regarding access to food distributions, as many have been prevented from collecting rations because of lost documentation or because they have not yet been registered in WFP's SCOPE database. As part of COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the Government in March, UNHCR registration sites were closed, and registration has since then been carried out remotely for urgent cases based on protection monitoring or referrals from protection actors. These remote procedures remain in place for the most part, though the registration site at the Transit Center has partially reopened since May to register new arrivals. As part of its COVID-19 response, in March the Government suspended regular repair and maintenance of shelters or construction of new shelters except in emergency situations, and this has resulted in a huge number of complaints from refugees that their shelter needs have not been addressed in a timely manner. Similarly, limited WASH maintenance and repair has brought about countless complaints from refugees about the lack of functioning tube wells, latrines and other facilities, and after more than three months of suspension these issues are becoming increasingly critical. With COVID 19 negatively affecting the most vulnerable and marginalized populations to a greater degree and in specific and diverse ways, UNHCR continues to ensure that an Age Gender and Diversity approach is integrated in the COVID 19 response in order to ensure that basic services and protection can be accessed by all segments of the community in line with "DO NO HARM" and "Leave no one behind" principles.
- **Education and vocational training:** In 2020 a total of **60,224** Rohingya refugee girls and boys aged between 3 and 24 years have been provided access to learning facilities through UNHCR's education program, including **55,186** children (aged **3-14**) who have benefitted from early childhood education, primary and junior secondary education, and **5,038** youth and adolescents (aged **15-24**) who have been engaged in life skills and resilience programs through **1,703** learning facilities. Some **1,311** teachers (**799** female and **512** male) and 87 facilitators for adolescent and youth programs (**51** female and 36 male) have been recruited, trained and deployed to support the teaching and learning process. Due to COVID-19, learning activities have been suspended since mid-March, but UNHCR and its partners have been working with parents and caregivers to enable them to better support their children through at-home learning initiatives with the dissemination of caregiver led guidelines for both parents and children. In collaboration with BARD College, a five-day mentorship training was facilitated for **25** master trainers, and the program has continued virtually after closure of learning facilities. These mentors will act as co-facilitators and translators in a ten-month certified teacher training program. The Government of Bangladesh has agreed to expand access to education for Rohingya children and adolescents living in Cox's Bazar. In line with the Government's decision, the Education Sector developed a pilot program to introduce the Myanmar curriculum in the camps starting in April, initially targeting **10,000** students in Grades **6 to 9**, but unfortunately the initiation of the pilot has been delayed due to COVID-19.

- **Refugee status and non-refoulement:** Since January a total of **460** refugees have entered Bangladesh after fleeing Myanmar, along with a number of others who had initially sought asylum in other countries, including **15** from India, **1** from Saudi Arabia and **8** from Malaysia. In mid-April, UNHCR successfully advocated with the Government for the disembarkation of nearly **400** Rohingya refugees who were at risk of refoulement to Myanmar following a failed attempt to travel to Malaysia that forced them to return to Bangladesh. The refugees were accommodated at UNHCR's quarantine facilities, were provided with medical check and were transported to the camps after their 14 days of quarantine--- illustrating that access to territory and public health imperatives are not mutually exclusive. In a policy reversal, however, in May, a group of **306** refugees who were rescued at sea by authorities and who managed to disembark from another boat that had been bound for Malaysia were taken into custody by border authorities and transferred to Bhasan Char Island, where the Government first indicated that the move was a measure to curb the spread of COVID 19 and later stated that those on the Island would remain there until such time as they can return to Myanmar – this despite the fact that most have family members in the camps and that all services are available in Cox's Bazar. Refugees have expressed concerns with the on-going discourse on possible relocation to Bhasan Char; fearing separation from family members and social networks and the uncertainty of the prospect of being compelled to move to a new living environment where their knowledge of services and conditions is limited. The Office continues to await a formal response on possible access to the Island to assess their needs of over **300** refugees who were rescued at sea and initially placed on Bhasan Char in May by authorities who indicated that the move was a measure to curb the risk of COVID 19.
- **Durable solutions:** After three years of living in camps where security conditions remain tenuous, and with various restrictions in place in relation to movement, livelihoods, and communication, coupled with a lack of improvement in Myanmar, refugees are feeling uncertain about their futures and prospects for solutions. As such, the risk of onward dangerous movements remains a concern as does refugees' use of negative coping mechanisms to address their current situation; with some refugees expressing a wish to return to an insecure future at home and/or undertake dangerous journeys, rather than continue to live in current conditions.

Protection Mainstreaming

- **In the delivery of all forms of assistance:** Since May 2020 before the monsoon season began, some **6,850** awareness sessions on emergency preparedness have been conducted by Community Outreach Members (COMs), reaching a total of **30,865** individuals including **6,279** older persons and **683** persons with disability. As in the past two years, COMs focused on identifying damaged shelters and referring the occupants for assistance and support. Meanwhile, **456** service projects relating to emergency preparedness have been completed by community groups, including soil erosion prevention, drainage system repair, and shelter repair for extremely vulnerable individuals, toilet repair, bridge repair and discussions to raise awareness on preparation and response to extreme weather conditions. Refugee multi-functional teams continued to support their communities in preparing and responding to cyclone warnings, heavy rains and flooding. UNHCR took the lead in providing coordinated protection response through Protection Emergency Response Units (PERUs). PERUs were activated in March and have been operational to support the COVID-19 response, identify protection gaps in the camps, coordinate delivery of protection services, and engage refugees in dissemination of important messaging. Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) have also adopted a multi-functional approach to mainstreaming protection in the monsoon response to identify persons with specific needs at higher risk of flooding or soil erosion, and providing technical support in identifying those most in need as part of the post-cyclone assessment in the aftermath of Cyclone Amphan carries out in May.
- **In emergency preparedness and response:** In order to ensure that protection remains central to the COVID 19 response, the Protection Working Group has embedded protection mainstreaming focal points in the WASH, Health, and Site Management Sectors and has provided guidance and support, inter alia, through guidance notes, protection mainstreaming tip sheets, and the development of procedures to ensure safe and dignified burials in order to ensure that an inclusive community-based age gender and diversity approach is integrated into the multi-sectoral response to COVID 19 and that the most vulnerable including the elderly, persons with disabilities and gender diverse populations have access to targeted messaging and protection services.

Reduced Aid Dependency

- **Empowerment through livelihoods and skills training:** Cash for work (CFW) schemes have been established to meet the objective of addressing needs by introducing cash into the economy and to achieve operational objectives by including unskilled and skilled volunteers. This is coordinated through the Cash Working Group following detailed guidance on CFW as a programmatic approach. In the first quarter of 2020, UNHCR's partner agencies were able to engage a total of **7,611** refugees and 87 individuals from host communities in the CFW scheme. This scheme also allowed the inclusion of host communities in humanitarian operations, where possible and feasible, which is encouraged to promote social cohesion and shared benefits. Through a local NGO gender diverse populations were included in livelihoods projects to mitigate the socio economic impact COVID 19 has had on them.

Community Engagement

- **Outreach and communication with communities (Accountability to Affected Populations):** Through diversified channels of communication, COMs conducted **50,012** outreach sessions reaching **314,423** refugees covering health, hygiene, COVID-19 prevention and response, emergency preparedness, and a range of general protection issues. Approximately **18%** of those reached were elderly, **30%** were children and some **2%** were persons with disabilities. Radio Listening and Video Watching Groups have become increasingly popular as men, women, boys and girls participate in discussions of diverse topics around their protection and wellbeing. Interestingly, the use of storytelling methods has helped to enhance interaction and increase children’s understanding of the role they play in the fight against COVID-19. Also, community-based volunteers working on SGBV programs, such as COMs, community support groups, male role models, and community organizers, have reached **111,604** people in the community with information on SGBV services and other SGBV specific issues.
- **Building the community’s resilience to respond to COVID-19:** Apart from enhancing the refugee community’s access to information related to COVID-19 prevention, treatment and response, and noting the immense need for masks within the community, COMs have begun conducting training on cloth mask-making and safe use of masks. In total, **1,961** training sessions were conducted covering **2,525** households. Some **4,552** refugee men and women participated, and **3,206** masks were made. Trained refugees were asked to train other family members and neighbors as a way to enlarge the benefits of the program to the wider community. In addition, outreach volunteers and partners, with the support of UNHCR, have undertaken targeted visits to elderly refugees as part of the elderly care support visit project. The purpose is to provide information specific to elderly care during the COVID-19 outbreak to older persons and their caretakers. Advice was also given on how the elderly care kit that UNHCR has been distributing to older persons can be used to create a small safe zone for older family members. Up until June, the COMs have conducted visits to **4,027** households reaching some **4,453** refugees.
- **Strengthening refugees’ participation in protection processes:** CBP has completed the mapping of all community-based structures established by UNHCR and its partners, findings of which reveal the significant roles played by **41** community structures and over **22,000** refugees, both paid and unpaid, in humanitarian efforts and assistance programs. In addition, CBP has established a forum for grassroots youth and women’s organizations, which serves as a means for information exchange and sharing of ideas and good practices among the community. Apart from regular updates and information sharing, leadership and capacity building activities were conducted through seminars and training sessions on topics largely agreed and chosen by the members. Grassroots youth and women’s organizations have also been receiving some basic material support in crucial areas to help them expand their initiatives. Community mobilization activities by outreach volunteers, representing a major shift from one-on-one delivery of assistance, have now been fully incorporated in the daily activities of the COMs through Saturday Solidarity Projects. Since January, close to **90** projects have been initiated by the refugee community across **20** camps with the support of COMs. Several hundred refugees across different age groups, including persons with disabilities, participated in designing and implementing community led development activities involving community cleaning, community-led learning, advocacy for resumption of education for out of school children, handicraft making, art and recreation for children with disabilities, indoor and outdoor sports, and cloth mask making.
- **Feedback and referral mechanisms:** UNHCR upgraded its protection hotline at the beginning of 2020 to be toll-free to reduce barriers for refugees to raise concerns and seek immediate support from UNHCR and its partners. Since then some **2,005** calls have been handled through the hotline, and the number of calls has significantly increased since April as a result of wide dissemination of the new hotline number across the camps. Roughly **56%** of calls received have related to basic needs and essential services, with the majority involving shelter, while 32% related to protection issues including security incidents, reports of missing persons, and arrests of refugees. At the same time, **21,455** visitors have approached UNHCR’s Information Service Centers since January to provide feedback on service provision and to request assistance, predominantly in relation to core relief items and shelter. Efforts have also been made to streamline common feedback mechanisms across sectors and agencies. In May and June, UNHCR piloted and launched an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) program to disseminate critical messages to the refugee population and gather community feedback during the pandemic. This was done in close coordination with the Government of Bangladesh and other humanitarian actors. During the pilot phase some **57,234** broadcast calls were made to refugees, of which **24,294** calls were answered. Broadcast messages focused on COVID-19, elder care, quarantine and isolation, and monsoon and cyclone preparedness. A total of **21,917** incoming calls were received from refugees who listened to a pre-recorded message on COVID-19, out of which **4,746** refugees further chose to listen to an in-depth message on the pandemic. Based on feedback from the community the IVR has proved very effective in providing necessary information while also mitigating the potential transmission of COVID-19 by minimizing human contact.
- **Community engagement and empowerment:** Placing communities at the center of the response continues to be a key priority to ensure sustainability and mitigate the short and longer term social protection consequences of the pandemic, whilst ensuring ways to safeguard the resilience and psychosocial well-being of communities. In this context, UNHCR supported **3,078** community led initiatives by **120** men, women, youth boys’ and youth girls’ groups across **25** camps (in **30** locations) to promote meaningful participation of refugees, address and remove barriers, improve infrastructure in communities, empower persons with specific needs, and preserve hope within the camps. UNHCR embarked on conducting a mapping of religious leaders and structures with the aim of promoting community-based solutions to community-identified needs. Pilot training opportunities with the Protection Unit as well as BBC Media Action were offered to imams to strengthen outreach on key issues around health, emergency preparedness and protection. Notwithstanding the overall decrease in the number of SGBV incidents reported in the camps, increasing trends in intimate partner violence were seen, and to address this male role models held dialogues on more equitable gender roles and nurturing healthy family relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic. Refugee men and boys who are confined to their shelters due to the lockdown and who lack work opportunities were the primary targets of these initiatives. This engagement by male role models has contributed to improved self-awareness and harmony within refugee families.

- **Community representation:** Building on the refugee elections held in 2018 and 2019, the elected block and camp committees in Kutupalong Camp, Nayapara Camp, Camp 4-Ext., and Camp 26 are the core of UNHCR's commitment to increasing sustainable refugee self-management within the camps. In these four camps, refugees observed that elected refugee leaders have been more responsive and helpful than the previously appointed "majhi" system (appointed representatives of the community) who continue to take advantage of service gaps due to COVID 19 to mediate disputes in a manner that is contrary to basic protection principles and often involves abuse of authority, extortion and bribery:-- in particular in cases involving domestic disputes and divorces, with women bearing the brunt of inequitable and unfair treatment. In contrast, the elected committees are establishing a model of leadership that is accountable to the refugee community and that supports gender parity. Community representation is an important step in promoting inclusive and accountable community self-management as well as alternative dispute mechanisms which contribute to access to justice in line with protection principles.
- **Peaceful co-existence with host communities:** Alongside development actors, UNHCR is addressing drivers of tension between host and refugee communities which have been exacerbated due to COVID 19 through enhanced inter-community engagement and effective and targeted support to host communities, in particular in the areas of livelihoods, education, and meeting basic needs of vulnerable families. In several camps, relations between refugees and host communities have worsened in the first half of 2020, and UNHCR continues to monitor hostile behavior against refugees on the part of members of host communities. Some of the incidents reported include arbitrary increase in rents for land on which refugees have built shelters, threats and harassment of refugees to forcibly vacate the land they occupy, physical violence, robbery and extortion. UNHCR continues to engage with authorities to encourage the formation of joint committees involving members of the two communities to address such conflicts, while advocating with government authorities and law enforcement agencies to help mitigate disputes, reduce violence and curb the deteriorating negative discourse on refugees, which has emerged in the COVID 19 context.

Specialized Services

- **Assistance to persons with specific needs, physical and mental health and psychosocial support:** Some **9,803** refugees have benefitted from structured psychosocial support in 2020. Through our implementing partner, Handicap International, **653** persons with specific needs participated in group-based psychosocial support activities, while 966 persons living with disabilities (including the elderly) were supported with physical rehabilitation assistance. In addition to this, **205** persons with specific needs were provided individual protection assistance, including referral to specialized assistance. Community awareness and group sessions were also facilitated to enhance a safe and inclusive environment in three camps.
- **SGBV:** To ensure multi-sectoral support and enhance the resilience of survivors of SGBV, UNHCR provides case management support in the camps through four partners including two local organizations. This case management response to incidents of SGBV is one of the safe entry points for both male and female SGBV survivors to receive crisis and longer-term psychosocial support. Through several modalities, UNHCR ensures that survivors receive appropriate support with an age, gender, and diversity approach. As the world is adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR has contextualized the SGBV Area of Responsibility Guidance Note on Remote Case Management. UNHCR facilitated a webinar for GBV Sub-Sector case workers and case managers on remote case management and also translated the material into Bangla for better dissemination. Two safe shelters in Cox's Bazar managed by Relief International and Light House continue to be operational, providing support to refugees and members of host communities. Due to COVID-19, medical screening is carried out prior to making referrals to community-based safe shelters. Some 219 partner staff benefitted from several PSEA training sessions facilitated by UNHCR.
- **Legal assistance:** In the first six months of 2020 a total of **8,205** refugees received legal assistance services from UNHCR and its partners BRAC, BLAST, TAI, and Rights Jessore, including legal counselling, legal representation and mediation. Some **62** cases were filed at police stations and **1** case was filed with the Court. These services helped ensure protection-focused legal interventions while reducing refugees' dependence on ad-hoc dispute resolution mechanisms by majhis and other actors, who may not be appropriately trained or sufficiently impartial. As part of UNHCR's comprehensive capacity building program, **6,795** refugees and **595** community leaders benefitted from awareness raising sessions on legal protection. Meanwhile, UNHCR and its partners facilitated 5 visits for **142** refugees to meet their family members imprisoned in Cox's Bazar, though these visits were suspended in mid-March due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.
- **Child protection:** UNHCR's child protection program is implemented using a socio-ecological approach to strengthen systems that prevent, mitigate and respond to child protection risks. UNHCR and its partners provide prevention and response programming through provision of psychosocial support, case management of identified children at risk, and establishment and strengthening of community-based child protection structures. Activities are implemented through three key output areas including community-based child protection, specialized age and gender sensitive child protection services through individual case management, and AGD-sensitive structured and sustained mental health and psychological support services. Through these activities, over **22,854** children received appropriate and relevant services from UNHCR and its partners between April and June. In line with Child Protection Sub-Sector guidance, adolescent support groups were engaged in awareness raising activities on COVID-19 and preparedness for the monsoon and cyclone season.
- **Prevention and response to trafficking:** As part of prevention activities, including through the Anti-Trafficking Working Group that UNHCR co-chairs with IOM, UNHCR and its partners conducted anti-trafficking awareness raising sessions targeting parents, adolescent boys and girls, and community leaders. Awareness campaigns through posters, billboards and radio shows have reached **3,323** refugees thus far in 2020 with messages specifically addressing the dangers of onward movement in the context of COVID 19. UNHCR also responds to trafficking incidents reported to protection staff and through the protection hotline, and assists law enforcement agencies in search and rescue operations as appropriate. In the first half of 2020, **903** victims of trafficking and human smuggling were rescued by law enforcement agencies, and a project implemented through UNHCR's partner, TAI, seeks to reintegrate victims of trafficking. In addition, UNHCR collects and analyzes information on trafficking incidents with a view to understanding emerging trends and putting in place appropriate protection services.

KEY CHALLENGES

- WASH and shelter issues remained serious concerns for the refugee community during the first six months of 2020. Recurring problems with facilities, such as broken tube wells, malfunctioning toilets, and insufficient drainage systems, were further complicated by government restrictions on essential services in the camps due to COVID-19. With heavy rains and storms, particularly Cyclone Amphan in May, flooding, shelter damage and generally poor hygienic conditions were observed, especially with regard to standing water caused by poor or clogged drainage systems. Problems with latrines and water points are especially concerning for the protection of women and girls, who are often tasked with fetching water and who are disproportionately affected by poorly functioning facilities.
 - The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated psychological distress and increased the prevalence of domestic violence, physical abuse, child marriage, child labour and neglect. The absence of alternative recreational and learning activities following the closure of all community centers, learning facilities and child friendly spaces has resulted in children and adolescents developing a range of negative coping mechanisms. A number of children have also become involved in income generating activities with the consent of their parents. With regard to case management, most reported cases have been categorized as high risk including SGBV, child marriage, violence, and child labour.
 - Trafficking and smuggling remain significant concerns in Bangladesh. Child trafficking in particular continues to be a major concern in a number of camps, mostly involving girls and often relating to child marriage, with the promise of economic stability through marriage being used to lure victims into trafficking and smuggling schemes.
 - Thus far in 2020 several boats have left the country with refugees from the camps and Bangladeshi migrants intending to travel to Malaysia, and while two boats have managed to disembark in Malaysia and one has reached Indonesia, others have had to seek other options after spending months at sea in horrible conditions. Two boats have returned to Bangladesh, and there are reports that at least one additional boat may continue to languish at sea. The first boat that landed in Bangladesh in mid-April was allowed to disembark, and UNHCR supported the Government in facilitating 14-day quarantine for 401 passengers before they were allowed to return to their families in the camps and local communities. A second boat was intercepted in early May with 306 refugees aboard, but the Government refused to let them return to the camps and instead transferred them to Bhasan Char Island; despite interventions by UNHCR and various stakeholders, the Government continues to state that refugees remain on the island until they are able to return to Myanmar, and is now encouraging their family members in the camps to join them.
 - Alleged corruption on the part of majhis remained a challenge across the camps, with reports of majhis abusing their power, preventing refugees from accessing legal assistance mechanisms, physically assaulting refugees, taking money to resolve disputes, and advocating for inappropriate resolutions in cases of intimate partner violence. In some camps, Cyclone Preparedness Program (CPP) volunteers were also implicated in inappropriate practices. With the COVID-19 restrictions on access to the camps in place since March, disputes have increasingly been mediated by majhis, community leaders or even organized criminal gangs because of the inconsistent presence of legal actors.
 - Community-based structures across all camps, including for COMs and community groups, faced challenges in light of COVID-19 restriction.
- Such restrictions concern freedom of movement in the camps, limitations on the number of participants for any given project, the types of activities allowed for implementation, delivery and/or procurement of materials for project implementation, etc.
- With the spread of the pandemic, women and adolescent girls faced increased pressure from their families and communities due to the rumors linking the onset of the pandemic to women's behavior being perceived as deviating from the traditional norms and rules as set in the religious scriptures. This put further strain on women's activities and participation in the camps as well as in the community-based structures. UNHCR has been working with partners to combat such rumors, debunk the existing myths and find avenues for women's participation.
 - Restricted access to the camps has negatively impacted community outreach activities facilitated by partners, many of whom have faced the same challenges as UNHCR in terms of not just accessing camps, but also closure of community spaces, challenges in procurement of materials required for projects, and transport issues.
 - Increased restrictions, loss of livelihoods, suspension of educational activities, and increased criminality, among others, have compounded SGBV risks. Access to Women Friendly Spaces by survivors of intimate partner violence were impeded due to the prolonged presence of their spouses at home.
 - The government's ban on SIM cards and access to telecommunications in the camps has continued to be the subject of much concern with the onset of COVID-19 and the critical need to spread credible information to refugees about prevention. While the ban has supposedly been relaxed, access to telecommunications networks in the camps continues to be sporadic and inconsistent.
 - Reduced freedom of movement resulted in a number of attempts of unauthorized self-relocation of refugees from one camp to another because of generalized insecurity. Camp administration officials often refused to authorize relocations and returned refugees back to their original camps. Refugees were forced to either seek other options outside the camps or remain without access to assistance.
 - Access to justice was largely compromised in the camps due to the limited presence of camp administration and law enforcement agencies, who did little to deter perpetrators from committing crimes – which provided further incentive for organized criminal gangs to expand their activities. The lack of timely solutions was perceived by refugees to be the result of ineffective follow-up by the authorities, which negatively affected refugees' trust in the legal process. At the same time, the reduced presence of protection actors, including UNHCR and legal partners, impacted negatively on the delivery of legal assistance. In an effort to seek swift solutions, refugees continued to look to ad-hoc dispute resolution mechanisms through majhis, CPP volunteers and other non-legal actors, which led to numerous reports of corruption, bias, and extortion. Very few legal literacy and counselling sessions were held because of the limited presence of legal partner staff, and going forward this needs to be addressed to ensure refugees have access to fair, legal-based dispute resolution mechanisms despite the COVID-19 restrictions in place.
 - Threats posed by criminal elements and the resulting security operations carried out by police, particularly in the Teknaf camps, has exacerbated fear among the refugee population.

Over the past six months violence has increased across the camps, and the security situation in the southern camps remains particularly tense. Refugees have begun forming vigilante groups to counter these criminal gangs, while an increasing number of refugees have reportedly joined the gangs as a coping mechanism, especially considering the lack of livelihoods opportunities as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Law enforcement agencies have been alleged to support criminal gangs, and often keep silent on allegations of looting, beating, violence and robbery in which these groups are involved.

- Leaking and dripping shelters damaged by heavy rain and not yet repaired are reported to have had a negative impact on the health of children suffering from cough and fever. It was also reported that a number of children were affected by seasonal diseases, including skin diseases, chicken pox, diarrhea, and abdominal pain.
- Unprotected water reservoirs, ponds and bridges in several camps continue to pose serious risks of drowning, particularly for children.

WAY FORWARD

- In line with its mandate responsibilities, UNHCR will continue to advocate with the Government of Bangladesh for continued access to territory for Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution in Myanmar and will support the Government and the people of Bangladesh to ensure they continue to offer international protection to those in need until such time as conditions become conducive to voluntary repatriation to Myanmar in safety and dignity. UNHCR will support regional efforts to address the root causes of displacement in Myanmar, while seeking ways to address onward movement from Bangladesh to other countries in the region, through advocacy for a range of complementary pathways for solutions in line with the Global Compact on Refugees. To ensure the Government continues to provide access to territory for refugees fleeing Myanmar and to encourage the authorities to facilitate safe disembarkation of persons rescued at sea, UNHCR will continue to maintain quarantine facilities for new arrivals, with a total capacity of as many as 1,000 persons.
 - UNHCR will maintain efforts to enhance coordination with humanitarian partners to ensure effective protection programming in the 34 camps. Ongoing coordination meetings at the camp level, and various working groups at the Cox's Bazar level, support efforts toward effective protection programming and interventions while ensuring a harmonized approach across the camps.
 - Promoting peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities will remain a major objective of the operation through programs that support vulnerable Bangladeshis with access to basic services and livelihoods opportunities, and that provide a forum for engaging members of the refugee and host communities to address their concerns.
 - UNHCR will continue to strengthen community-based protection mechanisms through an age, gender and diversity approach and ensure accountability to affected populations across the camps, including by promoting elected refugee representation bodies and supporting the expanded formation of community-led initiatives through self-organized community groups.
 - UNHCR will continue to undertake regular protection monitoring in the camps and at the border – directly and through partners – to identify protection risks and inform response, while strengthening individual case management and referral pathways and expanding outreach with refugee communities to identify and address their needs.
- This and other risks are exacerbated by the closure of learning centers since mid-March, which has created significant free time and lack of daily routines for children.
- Policy limitations on the provision of quality, accredited education to refugee children and youth remains a concern. While overall coverage has expanded in 2019 and 2020, the absence of meaningful education and vocational training programs and the lack of certified education creates space for idleness and increases risks of exploitation, child marriage, and other harmful coping mechanisms, particularly for adolescents.
 - Conflicts between host and refugee communities have continued to escalate over the past few months resulting in several killings, abductions and physical assaults. Access to water was occasionally blocked by members of host communities, and blockage or destruction of water distribution networks and WASH facilities was fueled by frustration and fear among both communities.
- UNHCR will lead the process of ensuring protection mainstreaming across all sectors through the establishment of multi-functional teams, internally within UNHCR and with partners including the refugee community. Protection principles will also be mainstreamed across all sectors through efforts led by the Protection Working Group, which has activated protection mainstreaming focal points for the Health, Site Management and WASH sectors since May 2020.
 - UNHCR will expand efforts to strengthen access to formal and informal justice mechanisms through capacity building with partners, CiCs, and law enforcement authorities, and through awareness raising within the refugee and host communities (as the COVID-19 situation allows). The expanded use of community-based mediation schemes to resolve interpersonal and family conflicts will be a key component of the program, including training of partners and awareness raising with the community. A pilot community policing program will also be put in place together with UNDP and IOM.
 - UNHCR will continue advocacy at the Cox's Bazar and Dhaka levels to enhance cooperation of police and the judiciary towards enhancing access to justice for refugees and will work closely with the authorities to find pragmatic solutions. UNHCR and its partners will expand mediation mechanisms in the camps to provide remedies to minor disputes between refugees.
 - UNHCR will advocate for more structured engagement with authorities and other stakeholders in Cox's Bazar and Dhaka to more effectively address safety and security concerns within the camps, including through systematic notification of arrest of refugees and ensuring their access to legal representation, designation of focal points within law enforcement agencies, and strengthened monitoring of detention facilities.
 - UNHCR will continue to co-chair the Anti-Trafficking Working Group as a forum for information sharing and joint programming and advocacy with authorities and refugee and host communities, and will strengthen awareness raising on anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling within the camps and provide legal assistance and other support to victims of trafficking.

- UNHCR will continue to work with the Government to register refugees and provide individual documentation, while advocating for access to more effective civil registration procedures, particularly for the issuance of birth certificates.
 - Access to quality education will remain a key priority, and UNHCR will continue to implement its activities under the Learning Competency Framework (LCF) and Guidelines for Informal Education Programmes (GIEP) as an interim solution while advocating for sustainable, meaningful, and equitable education for refugees and host communities. Advocacy efforts will focus on the introduction of the Myanmar curriculum in camp schools, improved quality of teaching and increased teaching-related professional development, better measurement of learning outcomes, and increased refugee and host community engagement in education programming.
- UNHCR will continue to support coordination efforts aimed at overall strategic enhancement of interventions within the Education Sector as chair of the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG).
- The UN Country Team continues to constructively engage the Government to advocate for a comprehensive assessment of the safety and sustainability of plans to relocate as many as **100,000** refugees to Bhasan Char Island. Advocacy surrounding the **306** refugees already relocated to the island in May after they disembarked from a boat that had failed to reach Malaysia will continue in order to ensure basic protection and humanitarian needs are fulfilled. The immediate understanding of the current humanitarian situation on the island should not be conflated with a full assessment for the sustainability of future relocations.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

UNHCR co-chairs the **Strategic Executive Group** together with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. UNHCR leads on the protection response for refugees and leads the Protection Sector in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR welcomes its valuable partnership with a number of UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its protection and assistance programs with humanitarian partners through a number of working groups under the Inter-Sector Coordination Group. UNHCR's main government counterpart is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and its Cox's Bazar-based Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC). UNHCR staff work closely with Camp-in-Charge officials in different refugee settlements, as well as with a range of international and national actors. UNHCR has a strong network of 32 partners, including:

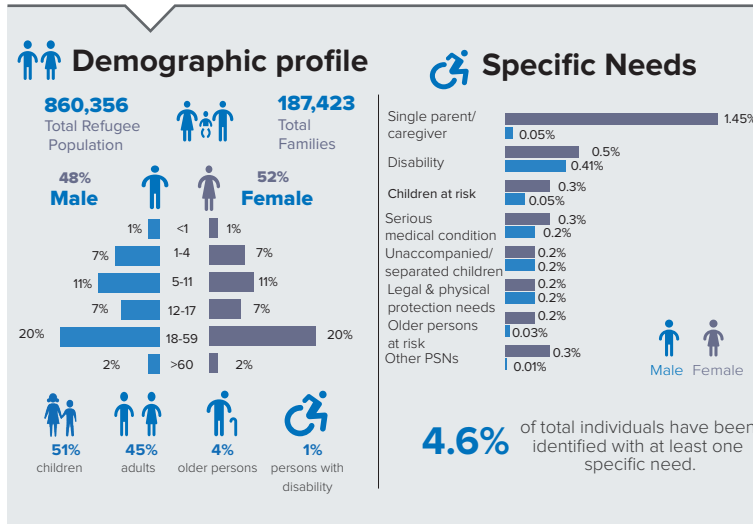
MDMR (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief) | **Action Aid Bangladesh** | **ACF** (Action Contre la Faim) | **ADRA** (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) | **BNWLA** (Bangladesh National Woman Lawyer's Association) | **BDRCS** (Bangladesh Red Crescent Society) | **BRAC** (Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | **Caritas Bangladesh** | **CNRS** (Center for Natural Resource Studies) | **CODEC** (Community Development Centre) | **COAST** (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) | **Danish Refugee Council** | **FH Association** (Food for the Hungry) | **GK** (Gonoshasthaya Kendra) | **IUCN** (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) | **Handicap International** | **Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation** | **Light House** | **Oxfam GB** | **Relief International** | **Mukti Cox's Bazar** | **NGO Forum for Public Health** | **RTMI** (Research, Training and Management International) | **Save the Children International** | **World Vision** | **Solidarites International** | **Terre des Hommes** | **TAI** (Technical Assistance Incorporated) | **NRC** (Norwegian Refugee Council) | **WFP** (World Food Programme) | **UNDP** (United Nations Development Programme) | **IOM** (International Organization for Migration)

UNHCR would like to acknowledge the crucial role played by refugees in the response. **Over 3,000 volunteers from the refugee community** are working side by side with humanitarian agencies.

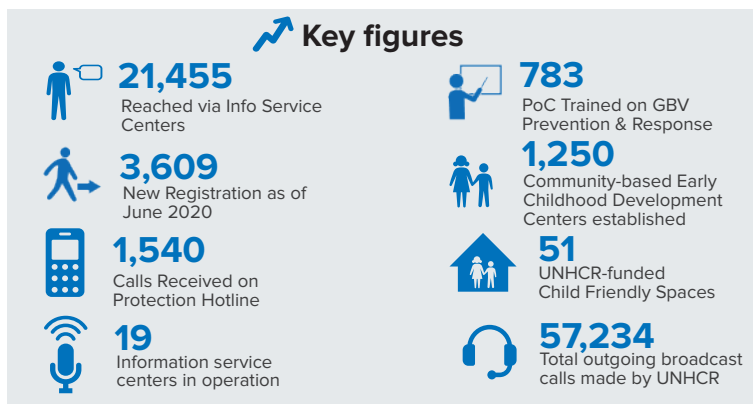
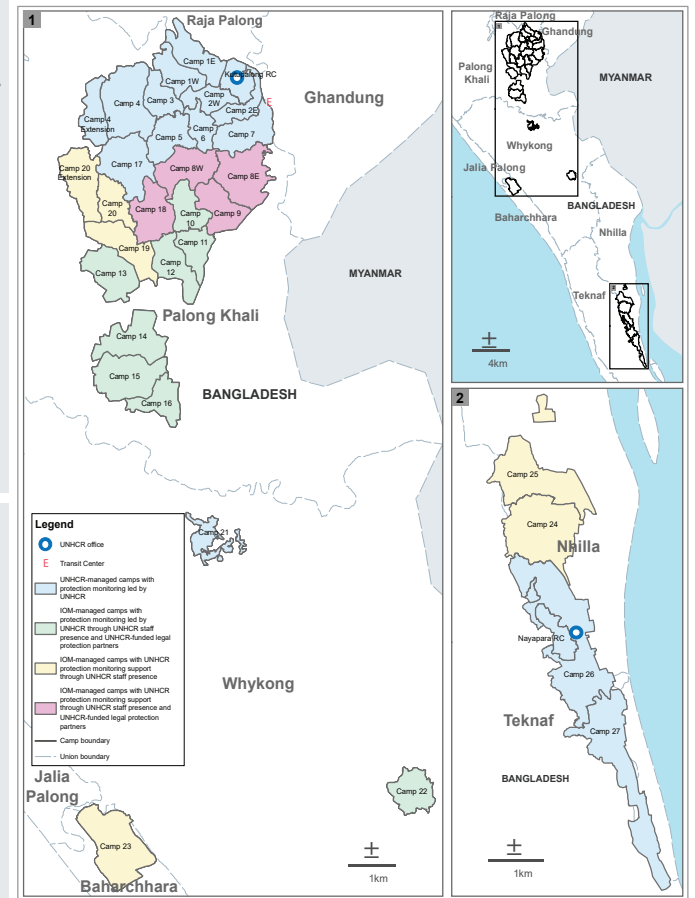
Donor Country Contributions to UNHCR Bangladesh (2018/2019)

UNHCR's humanitarian response in Bangladesh is made possible thanks to the generous support of major donors who have contributed unrestricted funding to UNHCR's global operations, and to donors who have generously contributed directly to UNHCR Bangladesh operations. In 2018 and 2019, support has been received from the people and governments of: Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

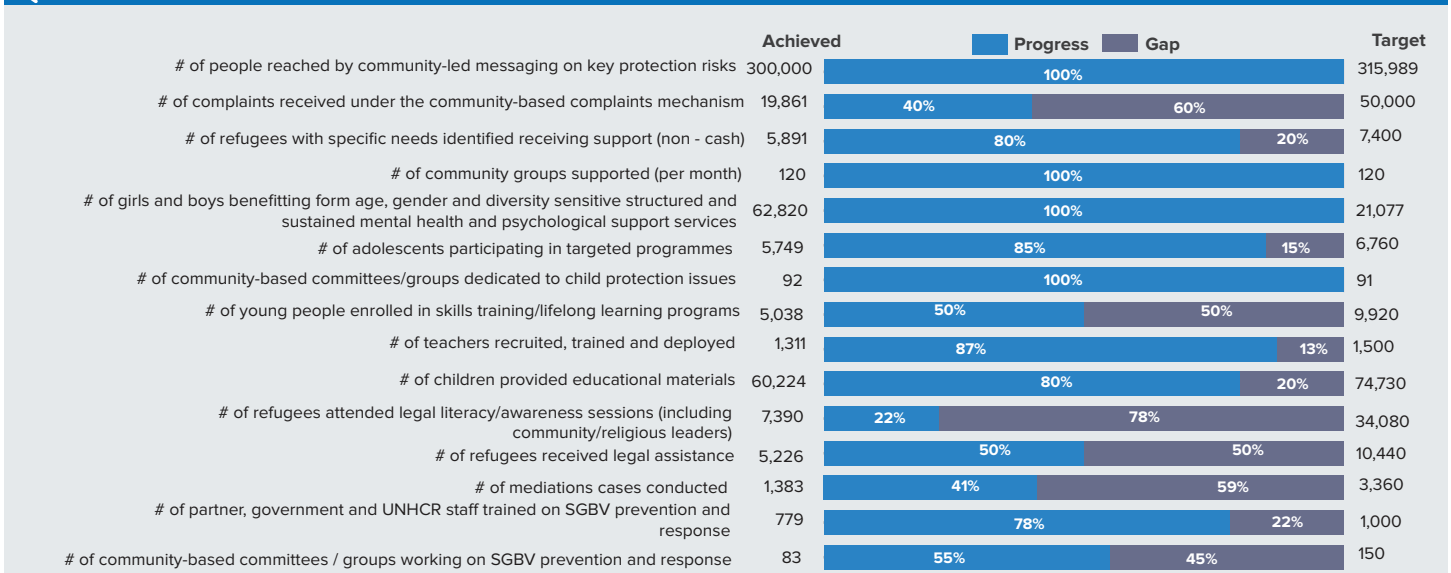
UNHCR is sincerely grateful for the additional support received from many individuals, foundations, and companies worldwide including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Education Cannot Wait, Kuwait Finance House, Qatar Charity, and Thani Bin Abdullah Humanitarian Fund.



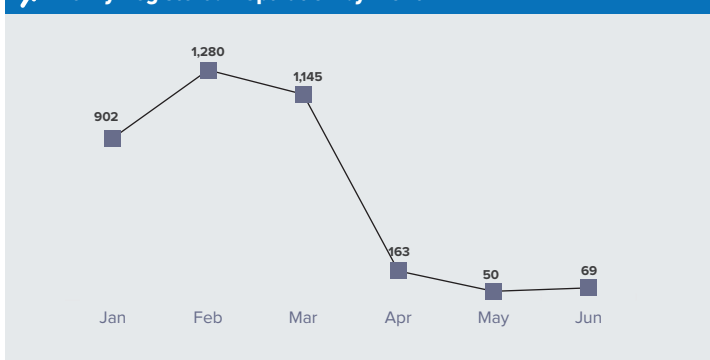
UNHCR Protection Presence



Progress Against 2020 Targets



Newly Registered Population by Month



Hotline Analysis

