

# Bangladesh

1 - 31 August 2020

On 28 August, Bangladesh **restored internet connectivity** to the camps in Cox's Bazar. Refugees have widely welcomed the decision. It also offers humanitarian agencies the opportunity to widen stronger information dissemination on COVID-19 with refugees, including information about where support is available, if needed.

Since the first case was detected in May, the total number of confirmed **COVID-19 cases** in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps currently stands at just **over 100**, including 6 deaths. UNHCR continues to manage 2 COVID-19 treatment facilities and an ICU in the district hospital which serve the refugee and host community.

The monsoon continues to impact the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. Several days of **heavy rain** in August resulted in damage to shelters and other infrastructure, including flooding, and the temporary displacement of some households. Over 15,500 refugees in UNHCR-managed camps were affected by the August rains in total.

POPULATION DATA **860,697** refugees in Cox's Bazar district. \***825,637** refugees are registered under the Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration exercise. There are also **35,060** refugees from pre-2016 and who reside in the registered camps.

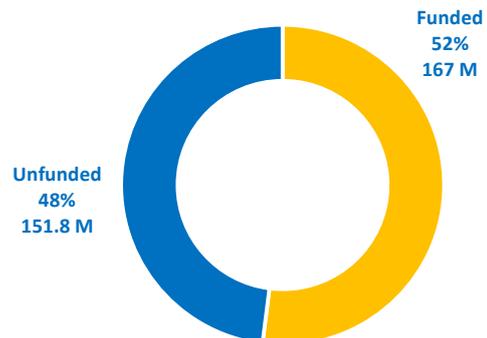
## 91,371

Number of refugee households who are being supported with cooking kits and Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinders in the camps; **10,716** families in host communities were also being supported with cooking kits and LPG.

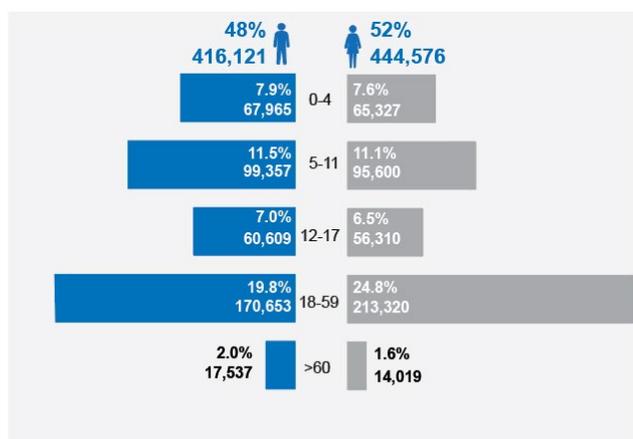
FUNDING (AS OF 31 AUGUST 2020)

## USD 318.8 M

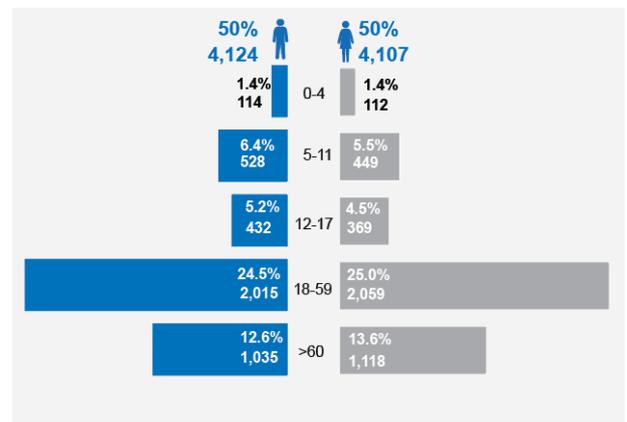
requested for Bangladesh



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



### DISABILITY BREAKDOWN BY AGE AND GENDER



## Operational Context

- This month marked the third year since refugees from Myanmar fled to Bangladesh. UNHCR called on the international community to not only maintain support for Rohingya refugees and the host communities in Cox's Bazar, but also to expand the search for solutions. Bangladesh has demonstrated a commitment to the refugees, including on the voluntariness of return, and together with the support of the international community continues to ensure life-saving humanitarian support is provided.
- On 28 August, internet services were restored to the refugee camps. This was widely welcomed by refugees. It also opens new avenues for the COVID-19 response in the camps to disseminate information on the virus and measures needed to prevent its spread. Since 14 May when the first COVID-19 positive case was detected in the camps just **over 100 refugees have been confirmed with COVID-19, and 6 have died**. UNHCR is operating two Severe Acute Respiratory Infection Isolation and Treatment Centres (SARI ITCs) with 194 beds and an ICU ward that offers treatment for refugees and the host community. So far, over 280 patients have received treatment in UNHCR-supported facilities. To date, there has been sufficient capacity for responding to confirmed cases and offering treatment.
- Similar to trends seen elsewhere globally for refugees, the **pandemic situation in Cox's Bazar is negatively affecting the overall protection environment**. Protection monitoring and case support continue to be conducted by UNHCR and partners, including with the help of refugee volunteers. The RRRC's updated list of 24 August outlining approved critical activities humanitarian agencies and partners can undertake in the camps specifically includes scope for activities related to protection presence and awareness raising. These activities can support the authorities to address safety and security concerns through activities such as legal assistance, particularly for the response to gender-based violence and child protection, as well as anti-trafficking messaging.
- In May 2020, the Government of Bangladesh requested the United Nations to undertake a protection and humanitarian mission to **Bhasan Char** to assess the immediate humanitarian situation and specific needs of 306 refugees transferred there. The United Nations agreed and formed an inter-agency team of protection experts in preparation for a visit. The UN considers it now urgent to have access to them.
- The **monsoon in 2020 continues to cause damage** to infrastructure and individual shelters. In June and July combined, UNHCR and its partners assisted over 7,700 households affected largely by wind, rain and flooding. In August, UNHCR and partners assisted 3,325 refugee households (over 15,500 people) affected by the ongoing monsoon conditions. The damage ranges from torn plastic sheeting to more serious damage such as collapsed shelters, or damage to vital infrastructure for the delivery of assistance. Bangladesh has also experienced major flooding in different parts of the country with some 5 million people reported to be affected.



**COVID-19 response activities can be found here on UNHCR's Bangladesh portal.**

## Updates and achievements



### PROTECTION / LIGHTING IN THE CAMPS

#### Solar streetlights playing a role in the protection of refugees in Cox's Bazar

- UNHCR is increasing the lighting available in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. Some 4,000 additional solar streetlights will be installed in the camps in the coming months. These extra lights are part of an effort by UNHCR to enhance the security and protection of refugees in the camps at night.

- There are already 12,000 lights installed in the 34 camps in Cox's Bazar which need regular monitoring, repair and replacement in some cases. In the camps managed by UNHCR alone there are currently around 7,000 lights that UNHCR, together with NGO partners, have provided.
- The 4,000 new lights will be prioritized for areas that have seen existing lights malfunction. Some lights are now old having been installed as part of the initial emergency response in 2017. In some cases, lights have also been stolen.
- Refugees recognise the importance of the lights for their community. Groups of volunteers from the refugee community – Safety Unit Volunteers (SUVs) – are helping to clean solar streetlight panels across the camps managed by UNHCR. UNHCR supplies the cleaning kits and training. Community involvement is essential and ensures better care and maintenance of lights, as well as their preservation from theft.
- Going forward, regardless of the type of technology used, light remains essential for refugee protection. It offers safety at night by helping refugees to navigate their way to and from their shelters. It also adds additional security in particular for women and girls who have frequently expressed feeling vulnerable at night, especially when accessing latrines. UNHCR is exploring the possibility of mini grids for providing lighting to the camps. Mini-grids would offer potential advantages, if designed adequately and could potentially lower costs.



### MONSOON/CYCLONE SEASONS

#### Strengthening local capacity to tackle monsoon challenges

- The monsoon continued to have a heavy impact on Cox's Bazar in August in the camps. Over 15,500 refugees in UNHCR-managed camps were directly affected by strong weather, which included the need for some households to temporarily relocate due to damaged shelters, soil erosion, or other hazards such as flooding that made the areas they lived in unsafe.
- On 17-19 August, a particularly heavy bout of rain in Cox's Bazar led to flooding in parts of the refugee camps. Inflatable rafts were deployed to assist refugees to temporarily relocate from flooded areas, until their shelters are habitable again. This was particularly useful for refugees who faced mobility challenges, older refugees, pregnant women and small children. UNHCR and MOAS came up with the idea of using rafts last year, and the initiative has since been rolled out in collaboration with the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS).
- The RRRRC and the Deputy Commissioner of Cox's Bazar have approved further monsoon activities with rafts in Cox's Bazar, including Disaster Reduction and Relief training focusing on flood safety awareness in Teknaf. One activity was a training for refugee and host community areas respectively. In collaboration with UNHCR and BDRCS, MOAS trained 865 volunteers working with the Bangladeshi national Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP). The training was conducted safely in line with COVID-19 requirements.



UNHCR supported partners with rafts to help relocate households affected by flooding, particularly for the safe transport of older persons, pregnant women, and young children. Photo: UNHCR/Threik

#### Responding to critical monsoon needs and identifying the priorities with refugees

- UNHCR is working closely with refugees in Cox's Bazar using a model of cooperation known as participatory budgeting. Participatory budgeting is about getting refugees involved in making decisions about the response

and its priorities. Fundamentally, the idea is that refugee communities are best placed to identify the most critical needs in their own living environments. Furthermore, they possess skills, knowledge and experience that make them invaluable contributors to humanitarian programming.

- So far, UNHCR has only integrated the participatory budgeting approach into critical activities approved by the RRRRC for the monsoon response, in line with the guidelines recently updated on 24 August which aim to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and prevent its spread in the camps.
- In Cox's Bazar, a number of initial consultation sessions were held with the refugee community to brief them on the idea, the available budget for critical monsoon repairs, and the timeline for implementation. The participatory approach is seeking views from across a spectrum of age, gender and diversity within the refugee community on what is considered most needed and the order of prioritisation. Information on any agreed and planned repair activities will also be shared with other camp actors to avoid duplication and the information will be posted on camp noticeboards for wider community awareness.
- Camp-in-Charge officers (CiCs), representatives of the Bangladeshi authorities at camp level, were consulted on the participatory approach and gave approval for their respective camps. They will remain involved in approving any final activities that are proposed. UNHCR has trained 177 site management staff and volunteers, as well as 11 elected refugee representatives, on the methodology involved.
- The plan now is, together with refugees, to deliver tangible community-selected, prioritized and designed projects that focus on critical repairs for the monsoon response.
- UNHCR hopes to see its participatory approach mainstreamed throughout all areas of its work in Cox's Bazar when the situation allows for it. The participatory budgeting approach can be an asset for the refugee community and complement its effort to increase its own resilience.
- In 2021, it is expected that this year's work will also benefit and improve the next phases of developing this approach in Cox's Bazar, in particular the joint learning experience of how UNHCR and refugees were able to work together on prioritising, designing, implementing activities, as well as monitoring and evaluating them in 2020.



UNHCR and its partners in Cox's Bazar have been integrating a participatory approach into their work for critical monsoon repairs. Photo: UNHCR/Othman



## HEALTH

### Routine immunizations re-starting amid COVID-19 pandemic

- Routine immunization coverage in the camps has been low since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. There are challenges also in order to ensure prevention and control of transmission of COVID-19. The low coverage, however, poses its own risks to the health of refugees and public health at large, particularly for vaccine preventable diseases. This is a situation seen worldwide. On July 15, the World Health Organization and UNICEF warned of an alarming decline in the number of children receiving life-saving vaccines around the world due to disruptions in the delivery and uptake of immunization services caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In Cox's Bazar, the Ministry of Health which is responsible for guiding vaccination sessions, jointly with WHO, UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR and the other partners, are proposing scaling up and strengthening of routine vaccination services at the health facilities, by making them available and accessible to the refugees. This will

not only improve the vaccination coverage, but it will also strengthen the immunization service delivery system that will be sustained beyond the pandemic. This strategy has the benefit of consolidating immunization service points, thereby reducing occupational risk especially for COVID-19.

- UNHCR is supporting this effort through its health partners by ensuring qualified staff are available to carry out vaccination sessions in support of the Ministry of Health teams. Further, refugee community health volunteers working with UNHCR's health partners will be helping to identify anyone in the community that has missed a vaccine session in the past. It is especially important to identify specific groups that are considered priority, such as children under 5 years old and pregnant women who have defaulted on vaccines to ensure adequate protection against vaccine preventable diseases. The routine immunization of refugee children in Cox's Bazar has already restarted in Camp 7 following approval by the Civil Surgeon's office in Cox's Bazar and RRRC.

## 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 number of 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. UNHCR would also like to acknowledge the crucial role played by the refugees in the response, with over 7,000 volunteers from the refugee community who are often the first responders on the ground.

**UNHCR's 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

## Financial Information

Total recorded contributions for the operation amount to some **USD 166.3 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.

In 2019/2020, support continued to be generously 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, Turkey, 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](#)