

BANGLADESH

23 January – 5 February 2018

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An MoU between the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and UNHCR has been signed on data sharing. The MoU stipulates that any use of information for purposes other than assistance and identification or transfer to third parties would need to be approved by UNHCR.

Planning and preparedness ahead of the monsoon continues to be the main priority for all actors. Given the limited land available in the settlements to relocate families from flood and landslide prone areas, strict prioritization will need to be undertaken.

POPULATION FIGURES

688,000* Estimated new arrivals in Bangladesh since 25 August 2017

212,000* Estimated refugee population before 25 August 2017

900,000 Estimated total refugee population currently

STAFFING & PARTNERS

216 staff currently working on the emergency compared to **49** prior to the crisis. **142** are national staff.

23 partners compared to **7** prior to the crisis

** As reported by the Inter-Sector Coordination Group.*

FUNDING

USD 83.7 million

Requested for UNHCR's initial emergency response from Sept 17 to Feb 18. Out of this amount, **USD 26.4 million** are the requirements for Jan-Feb 2018:



A Joint Response Plan, covering the period from March to December 2018, is under preparation.



Monsoon rains could put protection of Rohingya refugees at risk. UNHCR has already taken a number of steps to better protect refugees. © UNHCR/Caroline Gluck

Arrival trends

Some 688,000 refugees have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh since 25 August 2017. Refugees continue to arrive in Bangladesh, although at a significantly lower rate. The number of refugees arriving in Bangladesh has been decreasing over the past months, with more than 24,000 arrivals in November, more than 3,000 in December and 1,888 in January.¹ In the past week, however, there has been a significant increase in new arrivals, with some 676 refugees compared to 69 the previous week. All refugees who arrived last week were originally from Buthidaung township, in the Maungdaw District of Rakhine State. Most mentioned family safety and security concerns as their main reason for fleeing from Myanmar.

According to data collected via interviews with newly arrived refugees since December, 60% of refugees have close family members living in Bangladesh, while some 47% have close relatives who stayed behind in Myanmar. Most refugees arrived on foot and by boat, often using both means of transportation. In Nayapara, a discussion was held with 30 refugee men, women, girls and boys on the issues faced by children during the flight. Refugees mentioned that children suffered, in particular, from the cold and the lack of food.

Repatriation plans

On 23 November 2017, the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh signed a bilateral ‘arrangement’ on the return of refugees to Myanmar. This agreement outlines important commitments by both governments to ensure the voluntary and safe return of refugees to their place of origin in Myanmar. UNHCR currently considers that the necessary safeguards for the potential returns of refugees to Myanmar are absent. UNHCR has called on Myanmar to allow the necessary unhindered humanitarian access in areas of return and to create conditions for a safe and sustainable solution, including by implementing the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission.

Refugees remain anxious about the prospect of returns taking place in the near future. They **reiterated** that they will not consider going back to Myanmar unless questions of citizenship, legal rights, access to services and restitution are addressed. They have also shared a 200,000 signature petition with the authorities, setting out their demands on repatriation.

UNHCR’s response

Protection activities

Registration, including birth registration, of refugees is an essential protection tool. An exercise to merge data on individuals collected by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) with the family-based data collected jointly by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and UNHCR during a family counting exercise, has been completed. This exercise, which was conducted by over 250 enumerators and 28 team leaders, resulted in a unified data set with individual data grouped by families which will be used to improve the protection and delivery of assistance to the refugees. A Memorandum of Understanding on data sharing between the GoB and UNHCR has been signed. This MoU stipulates that any use of information for purposes other

¹ Information on arrivals at border points are reported through various sources which cannot always be verified or confirmed.

than assistance and identification and any transfer of it to third parties would need to be approved by UNHCR.

In order to ensure that refugees can fully participate in finding solutions for and providing support to their peers, UNHCR developed a Community Outreach Member (COM) programme in December. Since the start of the initiative and as of end of January, the group of COMs has grown exponentially from 30 individuals covering one area of Kutupalong to 229 individuals covering eight areas of the settlement. They have conducted a total of 632 home visits and 562 information sessions as well as two surveys. Overall, the COMs identified some 881 cases in need of support. They also provided direct assistance and support to more than 200 refugees and referred over 260 people to UNHCR's partners TAI and BRAC. 17 COMs will be engaged in safely referring SGBV survivors to appropriate services and in raising awareness on SGBV with community members.

Education continues to be amongst the refugees' main asks. To date, some 43 class rooms have been constructed in the various areas of the settlements, while some 12,532 children were enrolled in primary education in Nayapara and Kutupalong registered camps and in temporary learning centres in the settlements' extensions where UNHCR operates, at the start of the school year 2018. UNHCR and partners have worked to sensitize the refugee community on the importance of school attendance. During community outreach sessions and meetings with families, parents showed awareness of the



Khunsuma, 11, points at her drawing of flowers at a school in Kutupalong extension site run by UNHCR partner Save The Children. © UNHCR/Mitra Salima Suryono.

importance of education and the role they could play in the development of their children. They shared that children mostly support their family in various household chores. Such sensitization has led to increased attendance, with an average of 35 children out of 40 being present daily at temporary learning centres.

Provision of services and assistance

The relocation of 78 families from Bandarban / Lemu Chari was completed on 30 and 31 January. This was the third and last part of the relocation of a total of 9,178 refugees from the Bandarban border areas to Kutupalong. Each family received core relief items as well as an upgraded shelter kit. 14% of the population was found to be in need of specific assistance and were referred to partners for immediate follow up upon arrival in Kutupalong.

The findings of an initial risk analysis indicate that at least 100,000 refugees could be in danger from landslides and floods. Working closely with experts at Dhaka University, the assessment, carried out by UNHCR, IOM, REACH and the ADPC (Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre) suggests that up to one

third of the settlement area could be flooded and more than 85,000 refugees could lose their shelters. Another 23,000 refugees living on steep slopes could be at risk of landslides.

Planning and preparedness ahead of the monsoon continues to be the main priority for all actors in Cox's Bazar District. Key services in the settlement are also at risk of being washed away, including latrines, washrooms, tube wells, and health centres. Families are being provided with upgraded shelter kits, including biodegradable sandbags to help to anchor the structures, which are sturdier and can better protect them in heavy rains. Several engineering projects are also underway to build bamboo-reinforced footpaths and stairs, raised bridges, bamboo/brick/concrete retaining walls for soil stabilization and drainage networks. Families most at risk will be encouraged to relocate to



UNHCR has already taken a number of steps to better protect refugees ahead of the monsoon season.
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other areas, while plans are being developed to temporarily relocate others while work is carried out to reduce the steepness of the land they've been living on. Given the limited land available in the settlements, strict prioritization will need to be undertaken. In addition, UNHCR protection teams are facilitating community engagement in preparedness efforts, in particular on appropriate messaging to communities likely to be affected by landslides, floods or cyclones, and analysing community coping mechanisms and preparedness plans.

In the meantime, UNHCR continues to distribute relief items to refugees. This week, the distribution of UNHCR hygiene kits consisting of 15 items, such as bathing and laundry soap, detergent powder, nappies and water pots, has begun. The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRS) has already distributed such kits to 3,785 families in Kutupalong. Distribution will continue to reach some 50,000 families in the next days.

The response to the diphtheria outbreak also continued. According to WHO, there are some 5489 suspected cases of diphtheria and 38 deaths as of 6 February 2018. The second round of vaccination started on 27 January and some 297,976 children were vaccinated in ten days. UNHCR is using the capacities of the COMs and volunteer Rohingya Community Health Workers to play a greater role in the second phase of the diphtheria campaign to encourage refugees to seek immunization.

Peaceful co-existence between host and refugee communities

In order to minimize the impact of the emergency response on host communities and to mitigate protection risks linked to firewood collection, UNHCR started to distribute eco-friendly cooking fuel in early December. In January alone, UNHCR and partners have distributed compressed rice husks (CRHs) to 69,779 families to mitigate impacts on environment.

UNHCR, FAO, IOM and WFP are planning a pilot LPG (liquid petroleum gas) initiative to provide a safe fuel alternative for refugees that also reduces the impact on Bangladesh's limited forest reserves. This initiative is pending Government approval. According to the plans, UNHCR, FAO and IOM will each have responsibility for 2,000 households, including the procurement and distribution of 2,000 stoves, regular distribution of gas through the refilling of cylinders and fire safety training and awareness. UNHCR will most likely pilot this project in the northern part of Kutupalong settlement. WFP will be handling the refilling of gas through a system of vendors. The budgetary commitment for the first phase of the project is estimated at approximately \$350,000 for UNHCR and the pilot is expected to be rolled out by early April.

Engagement with development actors and the creation of livelihood opportunities need to be further explored to help foster social cohesion among both refugees and host communities. Freedom of movement and access to education and employment would allow for planned interventions that could help refugees contribute to the local economy, benefitting refugees and host communities. It would also provide refugees with useful skills and enhance the sustainability of return to Myanmar when conditions allow.

Working in partnership and inter-agency spirit

UNHCR works closely with other UN agencies to implement a host of inter-agency projects in various sectors. UNHCR also works in close collaboration with a range of international and national NGOs in Bangladesh, and scaled up its implementing partnership network to 23 partners, including nine national NGOs. In 2018, UNHCR also intends to pursue additional collaboration with national and local partners to enhance services and delivery, and will work to increase national and local sourcing of goods and services. In addition, UNHCR is assuming its lead role in the protection response for all refugees, co-ordinating closely on the delivery of assistance with UN agencies and other partners through the various sector working groups of the Inter-Sector Coordination Group.

UNHCR continues to support the GoB's efforts in providing protection and assistance to all refugees. UNHCR's main government counterpart is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR). In Cox's Bazar, UNHCR cooperates with the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), the local representative of the MoDMR.



UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador MIYAVI jams with some Rohingya musicians in Kutupalong refugee settlement

Donor Support

UNHCR is providing emergency assistance and protection in an evolving refugee crisis in Bangladesh. UNHCR continues to call for flexible funding in order to efficiently respond to changing needs and emerging priorities. UNHCR is grateful for the valuable support provided by all donors who have contributed towards identified immediate life-saving needs, and towards supporting the safety and dignity of refugees. The valuable support provided also helps the Government of Bangladesh, through its ministries and authorities, to manage the response with UNHCR's support.

The significant demands on the humanitarian response for Bangladesh need to be recognised. The response of the Government and people of Bangladesh has been extraordinarily generous. However, additional support is needed. UNHCR hopes that the commitment of Bangladesh towards supporting refugees' immediate needs and finding solutions will continue to be supported by the international community with adequate financial contributions and with other support in 2018. An inter-agency Joint Response Plan (JRP), covering the period from March to December 2018 is presently being finalised.

In 2018, UNHCR will continue working with authorities and partners to provide essential services for refugees, in particular enhancing access to protection services, shelter, health and nutrition, water/sanitation, education and others. Activities to protect natural resources and the environment will be supported also in consultation with local communities.

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



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