

# Bangladesh

1 - 30 April 2020

In support of the Government of Bangladesh, **UNHCR continues to take measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in refugee settlements.** The monsoon and cyclone seasons are fast approaching, further complicating contingency plans.

Bangladesh authorities rescued **some 400 refugees stranded at sea on 16 April.** UNHCR and partners provided medical and other assistance. All refugees underwent 14 days of quarantine in Cox's Bazar. Other boats at sea with refugees have reportedly not been allowed to land by countries in the region.

UNHCR remains very concerned and has **appealed to countries to rescue and ensure the safe disembarkation of refugees.** In further developments in early May, some 300 refugees were rescued from boats by the Bangladesh authorities and taken to Bashan Char, an Island in the Bay of Bengal.

Key indicators **860,175** Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar district \*825,115 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 30 April 2020)

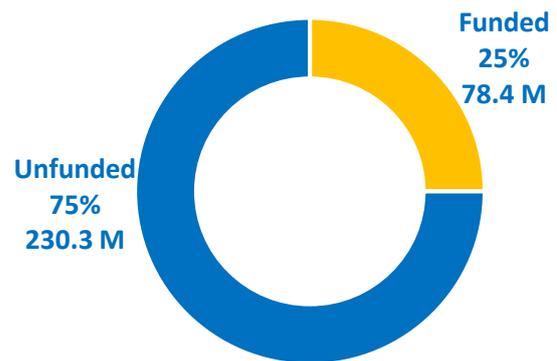
**107,065**

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

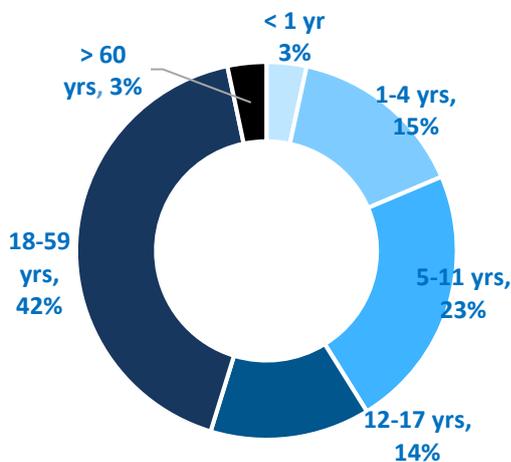
FUNDING (AS OF 29 APRIL 2020)

**USD 308.7 M**

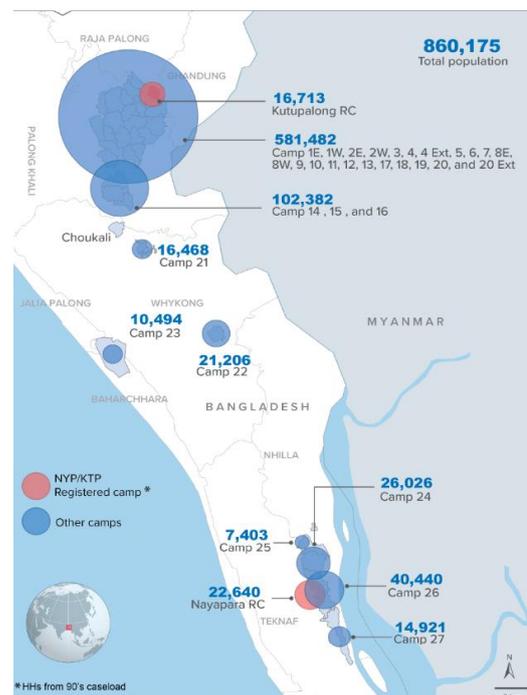
requested for Bangladesh



## AGE BREAKDOWN OF REFUGEES IN COX'S BAZAR



## POPULATION OF CONCERN



## Operational Context

- In Cox's Bazar, COVID-19 cases are gradually rising with 24 confirmed by end April. UNHCR and other agencies, in support of the Government of Bangladesh and health authorities, are **collaborating to prevent the spread of the virus and preparing for any cases** in Cox's Bazar.
- Refugees continued to undertake **dangerous sea journeys**, in particular seeking to leave Bangladesh to go to Malaysia. One **boat found stranded at sea after a ten-week ordeal attempting to reach Malaysia was rescued by the Bangladesh authorities** and brought ashore on 16 April. Other boats at sea with refugees undertaking similar journeys have reportedly been pushed back when seeking to disembarking in countries in the region. UNHCR remains very concerned about the fate of refugees on board and has appealed to all countries to rescue and ensure the safe disembarkation of refugees. UNHCR's Director for the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific issued a **News Comment** on 23 April calling for greater coordination and responsibility sharing by States in the region.
- UNHCR has advocated **for refugees coming from Myanmar to be allowed access to Bangladesh's territory**. This comes in the wake of reports of Rohingya approaching the border potentially to seek safety in Bangladesh. Increased fighting in Myanmar's Rakhine State is aggravating displacement and forcing civilians to flee conflict areas. UNHCR's request to Bangladesh comes at a time globally when there has been **an increase in measures adopted by countries based on COVID-19 fears that could block the right to seek asylum**. UNHCR's view is that States must manage their borders in the context of this unique crisis as they see fit, but that these measures should not result in the closure of avenues to seek asylum, or force people to return to situations of danger. If health risks are identified, screening arrangements can be put in place, together with testing, quarantine and other measures. These will enable authorities to manage the arrival of asylum seekers in a safe manner for both refugees and host communities, while respecting international refugee protection standards and saving lives.
- In further developments in early May, some 300 refugees were rescued from boats by the Bangladesh authorities and taken to Bhasan Char, an Island in the Bay of Bengal. The UN is waiting for government clearance to carry out independent technical assessments on Bhasan Char.



UNHCR is producing a **dedicated update on its COVID-19 prevention and preparedness activities**. Please click [here](#) for this and other resources on UNHCR's Bangladesh portal.

## Updates and achievements



### PROTECTION

#### Nearly 400 refugees rescued at sea by authorities

- At the request of the Government of Bangladesh, UNHCR and partners in Bangladesh provided shelter and assistance for close to 400 Rohingya refugee survivors who disembarked from a boat in the Bay of Bengal on 16 April. Those on-board reported that at least 30 more refugees died during the ten-week journey at sea from starvation, dehydration, illness and beatings by smugglers.
- The survivors included many women and children. They were all in weak physical condition, many were in need of immediate medical attention and psychosocial support. With the support of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC)



UNHCR protection staff assisting one of the rescued refugees in moving to a quarantine facility for further assistance in Teknaf. Photo: ©UNHCR

and Camp in Charge, UNHCR and partner organisations, including IOM, Médecins Sans Frontières, and Action Against Hunger, assisted the group and moved them to two quarantine sites and medical facilities where necessary.

- In line with established procedures and Government Directives for all individuals entering Bangladesh, the refugees received full medical screening and were monitored and quarantined for 14 days. Despite some media reports claiming that the group may be infected with COVID-19, none presented symptoms during the quarantine period. Controlled, managed and predictable procedures for new arrivals ensure that any risk of spreading the COVID-19 virus is mitigated and that communities are protected, including the Rohingya refugees who arrived by boat and were in an extremely vulnerable condition.



### MONSOON/CYCLONE SEASON

#### **A need to move quickly on critical monsoon preparations to reduce risks**

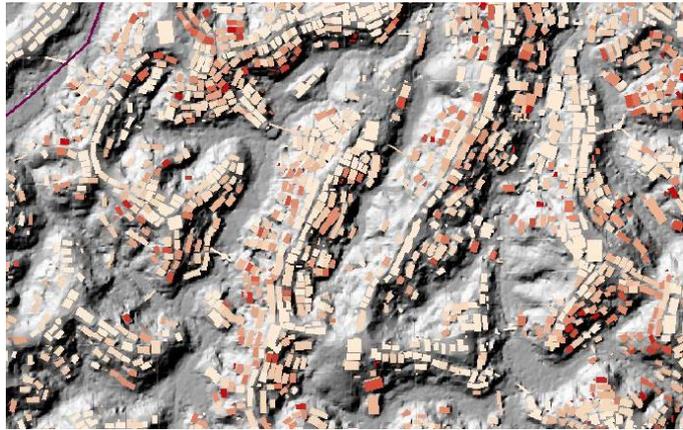
- The monsoon season is looming and UNHCR has highlighted the risk of life-threatening consequences if annual monsoon preparations cannot be completed on time in Bangladesh. Essential public health measures to limit the risks of COVID-19 spreading in the camps have reduced the pace of preparedness activities. The RRRC and humanitarian partners have limited operations to critical activities only, which has led to the suspension of some disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts in the refugee settlements, including improvements to drainage systems and slope stabilization work.
- While humanitarian operations in the camps have been scaled back to only the most critical activities, the distribution of “tie-down kits” that reinforce refugee shelters against high winds continues. Post-disaster kits and emergency relief items have been pre-positioned in case of emergency. Emergency Preparedness and Response Teams (EPRTs) and Protection Emergency Response Units (PERU) are also on standby to mobilize and deploy as necessary and have been permitted to operate in case of extreme weather.
- Refugee volunteers are a vital part of all ongoing preparations. In the past two years, many kinds of volunteers have worked alongside UNHCR and other humanitarian partners in the settlements. Over 1,600 volunteers mostly working in support of site management and monsoon preparations and response have been supported by UNHCR in 16 camps. They were primarily trained on firefighting, first aid and rescue operations to help mitigate risks that can arise in the settlements, and act as first responders when needed in support of camp authorities and local emergency services. These volunteers are integrated into an overall emergency response structure for monsoon incident response, and work alongside Camp-in-Charge officials and Bangladesh’s Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP). They are the backbone of the emergency response supported by the UN and NGOs. Lessons learned from Bangladesh’s successful and well-developed CPP have helped to build the skills and knowledge of today’s volunteers.
- During this period when the footprint of humanitarian partners needs to be lighter for the purpose of fighting COVID-19, the fact that there are trained and skilled refugees who are mobilized and active in the settlements and working around the clock to ensure the safety of their community is a great credit to the Rohingya community and a critical support for continued humanitarian work. The volunteers have now taken on additional tasks, including increased awareness raising on COVID-19 and contact tracing, in addition to their primary task of preparing for the monsoon/cyclone season. It is important to continue to support refugees’ resilience and acknowledge their committed support and integral role during times of emergency.

#### **Working with NASA to reduce risk for refugees in Cox’s Bazar**

- UN and the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) have teamed up to identify potential landslide risks in Cox’s Bazar’s Kutupalong settlement, which is the world’s biggest refugee camp. The camp is situated in one of the world’s most natural disaster-prone regions. The population density and the

fragile, hilly land where the refugees live heightens their exposure to the risk of landslides. The scarcity of land also limits the options for relocations to safer areas.

- As part of its efforts to find solutions, UNHCR and other agencies have sought to identify space for new facilities and shelters using surveys of the land and calculating the level of risk involved. This has been done with some success since the initial surveys of the settlements in 2017. NASA's satellite capacity has enabled the humanitarian operation to take a small leap forward in identifying the best areas to target energy and resources. The detailed views of the camp produced by NASA facilitate planning down to the level of individual shelters or structures in the settlements and the calculation of risks on a graded scale.



A segment of map produced by NASA showing hilly terrain and shelters or other infrastructure based on relative exposure to landslides. ©NASA

- Knowing the most vulnerable households allows UNHCR and partners to focus efforts and resources efficiently to mitigate risks of loss of life and property. NASA's technology has brought unique advantages making this a good example of international cooperation "for the benefit of all mankind" – to borrow NASA's ubiquitous motto.



## ENERGY/ENVIRONMENT

### Pressure cooker pre-pilot halted, but already yielding some positive results

- UNHCR's pre-pilot project to look at the benefits of introducing pressure cookers to the Rohingya refugee settlements has been suspended by restrictions on operations related to COVID-19. Initially, the pre-pilot project was to continue through May 2020 and assess the results of pressure cooker usage by 400 families. Preliminary results, which are now under review, and the initial feedback shows some level of success.



Recipes preferred by refugees are tested out as part of a pre-pilot to examine the benefits of introducing pressure cookers to the settlements. Photo: UNHCR

- Thus far, 200 Rohingya families have received pressure cookers. A one-week baseline monitoring and three-week post-distribution monitoring exercise were undertaken to measure LPG consumption and involved discussions with families on their experience with, and the safety of, their pressure cookers.
- While the testing of pressure cookers will need to be continued and expanded, UNHCR sees important potential benefits from the adoption of the pressure cookers, including greater efficiency in the use of fuel, improving the sustainability of the LPG programme. The introduction of LPG has contributed to environmental rehabilitation and improved protection, particularly for women and children (most of those previously collecting firewood were women and children who were often at risk on long and dangerous daily treks).
- Initial analysis of LPG consumption data for pre- and post-distribution periods shows more than a 50 percent improvement in fuel efficiency, which is similar to savings realized in Nepal by Bhutanese refugees during a similar project by UNHCR. Refugee families reported that they were able to adjust their cooking habits rapidly to the use of pressure cookers to prepare a wide variety of food, from rice and dal, to fish, meat and vegetables. As an added benefit, refugees reported saving time on cooking – about 15-30 minutes per meal.

- LPG distribution to all refugee households in Cox's Bazar and many in the host community is ongoing as one of the critical activities that must continue during the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Working in partnership

UNHCR is co-chair of the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) in Bangladesh with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. The UN Refugee Agency leads the protection response, as head of the Protection Working Group in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR has valuable partnerships with 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 78.4 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 received from the following:**

Austria, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America.

UNHCR is sincerely grateful for additional **support received from many 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**

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