

Bangladesh

March 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

A **devastating fire** broke out on 22 March in Camps 9, 8E and 8W, leaving 48,300 refugees without shelter.

Bangladesh saw a sharp increase in **COVID-19** infections towards the end of the month, including in Cox's Bazar district. Further restrictions have been enforced, limiting access to the camps.

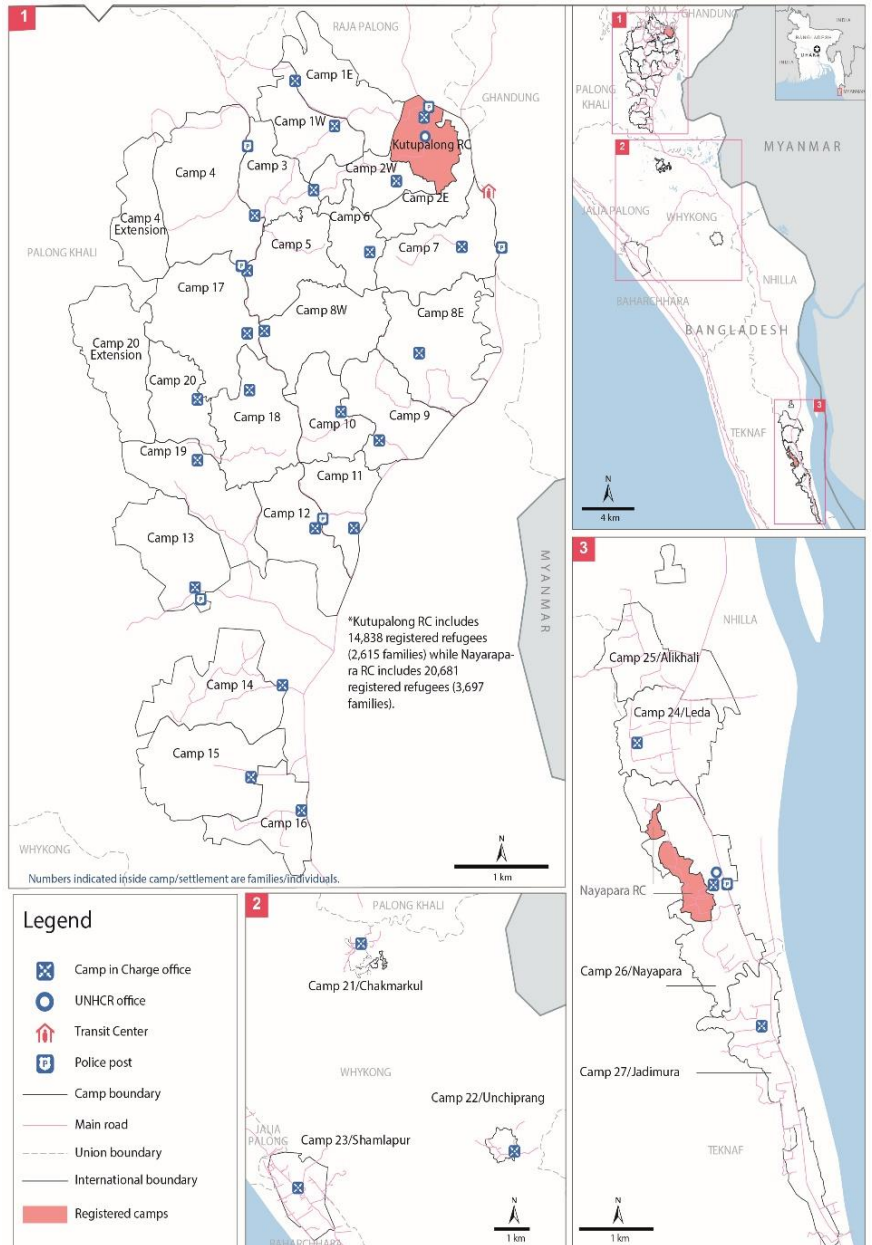
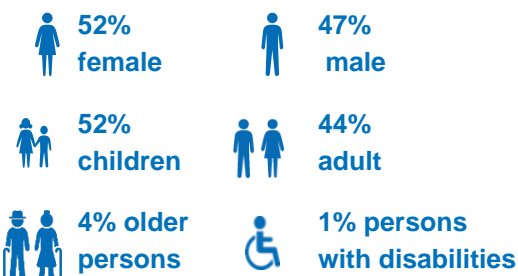
A joint UN visit to **Bhasan Char** took place from 17 to 20 March. At the time of the visit, the government had relocated over 14,000 refugees to the island.

POPULATION DATA

884,041

refugees in Cox's Bazar district.

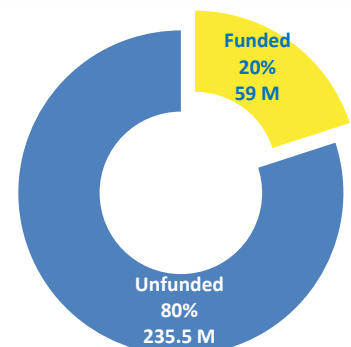
*848,361 refugees are registered under the Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration exercise. There are also 35,680 refugees from pre-2016 and who reside in the registered camps.



2021 FUNDING

USD 294.5 M

requested for Bangladesh



Operational Context

Over 884,000 Rohingya refugees reside in 34 extremely congested camps in Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh. 52% of the refugees are children. Under the leadership of the Government of Bangladesh, humanitarian actors continue to provide multi-sectoral assistance to meet the basic needs of refugee women, men, girls and boys.



Noor Hassan (7) was missing for three days following the fire, he was eventually found by his aunt. Here he is photographed by his mother after he was found; the family lost their shelter and belongings in the fire. ©UNHCR/Louise Donovan

On 22 March, a devastating fire in IOM-managed Camps 9, 8E, and 8W left 48,300 individuals without shelter and destroyed over 1,600 facilities including hospitals, distribution points, learning centres, and a UNHCR registration centre.

UNHCR's immediate response included the mobilisation of refugee volunteers from across the camps to help extinguish the fire with specialised equipment. UNHCR handed over thousands of non-food items to IOM for distribution, provided medical supplies to treat burns, psychological first aid, distribution of water, and the construction of emergency latrines. Over 300 UNHCR-supported refugee volunteers continue to actively support refugees in the fire affected camps as well as in other camps where affected refugees are taking shelter, for example, by accompanying them to health care facilities, assisting in building temporary

shelters, clearing debris, finding missing children and identifying and referring refugees with specific needs to relevant service providers. UNHCR is supporting IOM and other partners on the re-planning and rehabilitation of a part of the affected camp areas to improve their safety and access to services. Reports about UNHCR's response to the fire can be found [here](#).

In March, Bangladesh saw an exponential increase in COVID-19 cases across the country. On 29 March, the Government announced a set of measures to curb transmission. Missions to the camps are restricted and staff presence in the office is reduced. UNHCR is ensuring that all critical activities continue.

Achievements



PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- The first United Nations visit to the island of Bhasan Char took place from 17 March to 20 March 2021, led by UNHCR, and facilitated and accompanied by officials of the Government of Bangladesh. The UN team looked at the current situation and facilities on Bhasan Char and the feasibility of establishing humanitarian operations there. The UN also appraised the needs of Rohingya refugees living on the island, who totalled some 14,000 at the time of the visit, including through meetings with Rohingya men, women, boys, and girls. The UN team also held discussions with authorities, security agencies, and others working there, including NGOs, contractors, and traders. Based on the preliminary findings of this visit, the UN clearly recognizes the prevailing humanitarian and protection needs of the Rohingya refugees already relocated to Bhasan Char. The UN has therefore proposed further

discussions with the Government regarding its future operational engagement on Bhasan Char, including on the policies that govern the life and wellbeing of Rohingya refugees on the island.

- With a view to enhancing accountability processes, UNHCR started implementing the Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM) across 23 Information Service Centres (ISCs) through which community feedback and requests with regard to aid and services delivered are collected, reviewed, and responded jointly with IOM and DRC. In March, the ISCs received over 4,000 visitors. CFM data will be regularly consolidated, analysed and shared across sectors and agencies, to strengthen programming and response.
- UNHCR continues to support community self-representation, and in March started the nomination process for elected community representatives in two blocks of Camp 4 extension. Following the community consultations, a total of 102 candidates have been put forward to the nomination review board. Half of the nominees will be women. The elected block and camp committees in Kutupalong Camp, Nayapara Camp, Camp 4 extension and Camp 26 are part of UNHCR's commitment to increasing sustainable refugee self-management, as well as alternate dispute mechanisms.
- UNHCR in collaboration with BBC Media Action, developed two podcasts to increase refugees' awareness on domestic violence and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). The PSEA podcast includes information on reporting mechanisms, referral and assistance systems, the obligations of humanitarian workers and refugees, and a clear message about services being free of charge in the camps. The podcasts will be played at registration, distribution and community centres, as well as other meeting points in the camps.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Due to COVID-19 restrictions, UNHCR's large-scale legal awareness sessions in communities have remained on hold since mid-2020. UNHCR hopes to be able to resume awareness sessions organized across the camps while adhering to established mitigation guidelines.
- Together with an NGO partner, UNHCR assessed the quality of child protection cases and information management and identified areas for improvement including training needs for staff and volunteers, and resource allocation. Similar exercises will be conducted in April with other partners. UNHCR and its partners managed cases including child labour, serious medical conditions, and as a result of the fire, children that were missing temporarily.



PUBLIC HEALTH

Achievements and Impact

- In preparation of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout to refugees, the Community Health Working Group, led by UNHCR, trained over 100 Community Health Worker supervisors on vaccine-related communication and community mobilization. Messaging and information materials were also developed for use in the camps. The rollout date has not yet been announced by the Government, and there are ongoing challenges as the vaccine stock currently in country is limited. UNHCR will continue advocating for the early arrival of Bangladesh's COVAX allocation. Meanwhile, following the Government's decision to include humanitarian workers in the early phases of the national vaccination campaign, the majority of humanitarian national and international staff in Cox's Bazar received the first vaccine doses.
- In all UNHCR-supported nutrition facilities, the modified Mother-to-Mother Support Group is being implemented with an aim to enhance infant and young child feeding practices. In line with COVID-19 precautionary measures, small groups of mothers meet for each session.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The surge in COVID-19 cases have led to increased occupancy of beds in UNHCR-supported facilities. The upward trend in transmission rates has required an enhanced medical response; UNHCR has distributed additional PPE for health staff, and medicines and other supplies for case management at health facilities including quarantine centres, and Sadar District Hospital. Other community-based activities including risk communication and health promotion have been scaled up. As of 31 March, WHO reported 6,001 cases of COVID-19 in Cox's Bazar district, of which 438 are Rohingya refugees.



WATER AND SANITATION

Achievements and Impact

- The construction of the Faecal Sludge Treatment plant and its Intermediate Faecal Sludge Transfer Network in Camp 21 was nearly fully completed by the end of March. The plant has a capacity of 6,000 litres, and the network is expected to service some 5,000 individuals. The network ensures that human fecal waste is safely transferred, treated, and disposed of to reduce public health risks.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Some operational partners are having funding challenges which may impact their Water and Sanitation (WASH) service delivery, as such UNHCR may need to expand operations to cover gaps.
- UNHCR is monitoring the seasonal drought in Teknaf. As of the end of March, water reservoirs supplying water to refugees and the host community were at 40%. UNHCR is ensuring the continuity of access to basic water services through a water supply network from areas of surplus. UNHCR continues to tackle the longstanding and recurrent water shortage in Teknaf, including through a recent funding agreement with the Government of Japan, to extract, transport and distribute groundwater for refugees and host communities.



SHELTER

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The refugee camps in Cox's Bazar have a very high population density, in some areas significantly higher than the most densely populated cities in the world. This results in insufficient coverage of WASH facilities and inadequate access to services, and creates residential safety risks including vulnerability to fire and natural disasters. With a view to mitigating these issues, UNHCR and partners are exploring a possibility to introduce some double-story shelters to make use of limited space and to ensure space for fire breaks, in consultation with the authorities.



SITE MANAGEMENT

Achievements and Impact

- Training for camp-in-charge officials continued through the month of March, as part of the interagency joint Capacity Sharing Initiative in collaboration with IOM and the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC). The training, conducted by the sector leads, included humanitarian principles and refugee protection, operational

standards, principles and overviews of the main sectors including WASH, Shelter and Non-Food Items, Health, Protection, and Site Management. 38 camp-in-charge and assistant camp-in-charge officials undertook the training. Furthermore, 60 camp-in-charge staff took part in Nutrition and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support training.

- Traffic accidents remain a concern in and around refugee camps, considering high numbers and prevalence of child victims. UNHCR, in collaboration with site development teams, have assessed and identified new locations for installation of speed bumps in the camps to enhance road safety, of which 40 were identified in March. The joint UNHCR/WFP/IOM Site Maintenance and Engineering Project (SMEP) have started constructing the new speed bumps.

Working in partnership

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a co-chair of the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) in Bangladesh with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. UNHCR 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 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 partners

MoDMR (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief) | Action Aid Bangladesh | ACF (Action Contre la Faim) | Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) | BLAST (Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust) | BRAC (Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | Caritas Bangladesh | Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) | COAST (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) | CODEC (Community Development Centre) | Danish Refugee Council | FH Association (Food for the Hungry) | GK (Gonoshasthaya Kendra) | Handicap International | Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation | 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 | Social Assistance and Rehabilitation for the Physically Vulnerable | TAI (Technical Assistance Incorporated) | Terre des Hommes

Financial Information

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