

Bangladesh

April 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

The number of **new COVID-19 cases continued to increase** across the country, and measures to curb transmission were extended. Missions to the camps are restricted and staff presence in the office is reduced. **UNHCR is ensuring that all critical activities continue.**

UNHCR donated over USD 1 million worth of **medical and personal protective equipment** to local government healthcare facilities and NGOs operating in the camps, in support of the COVID-19 response.

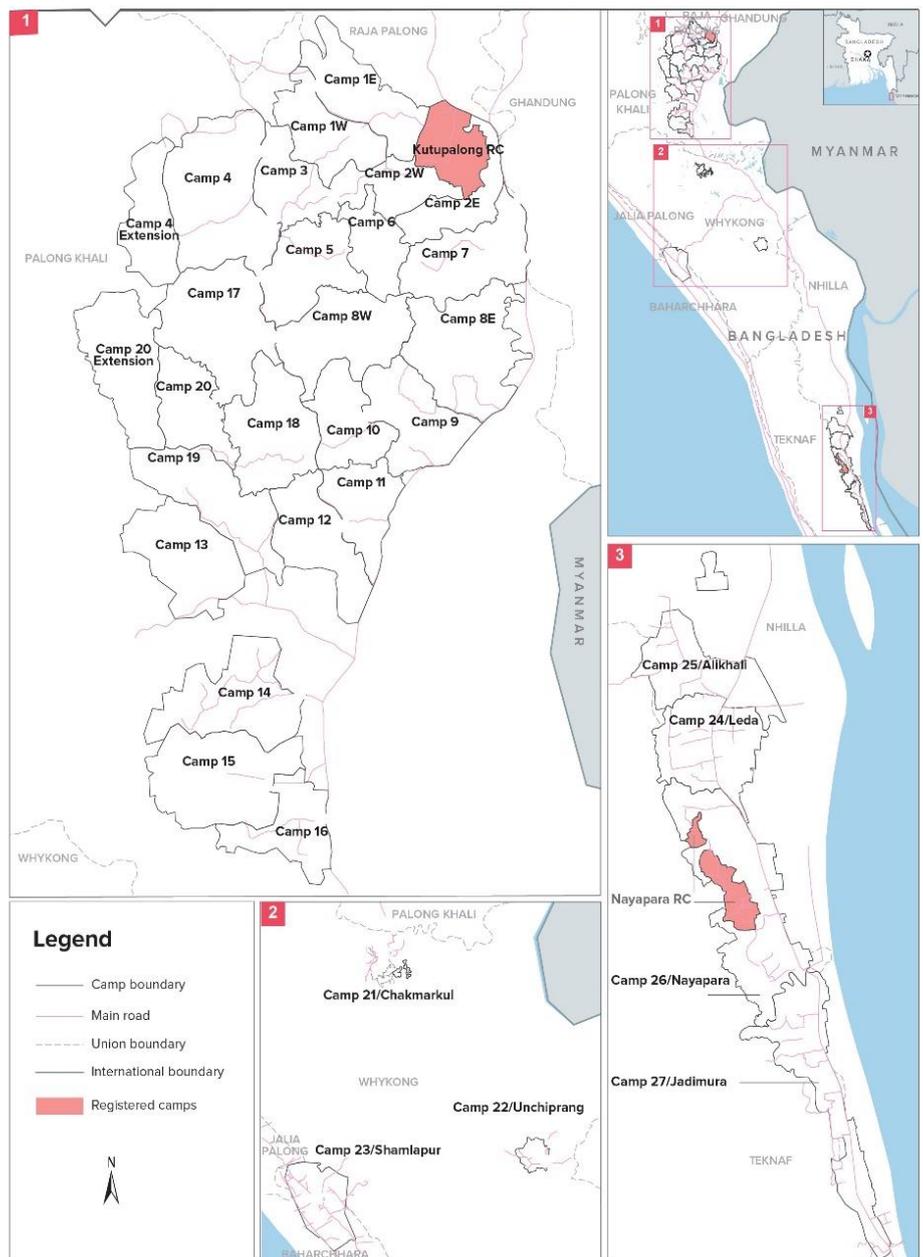
The 2021 UNHCR/WFP **Joint Assessment Mission** was launched in Cox's Bazar. The outcomes of the assessment will guide both agencies in the coming two years.

POPULATION DATA

885,811

refugees in Cox's Bazar district.

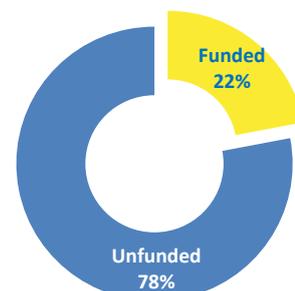
850,131 refugees who arrived since 2017 are registered under the Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration exercise, along with 35,680 refugees who have been residing in the two registered camps since the 1990s.



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. Some 52% of 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.

The country saw a steep increase in coronavirus transmission rates starting at the end of March, with daily numbers of new cases sometimes exceeding 7,000 (up to a tenfold increase in daily rates compared to winter months). Following the introduction of the country-wide lockdown on 5 April, which remained in effect throughout the month, daily numbers started gradually declining in the second half of April. The measures set out by the Government, as part of the lockdown, also affected humanitarian work as missions to the camps and staff presence in the office were limited. Critical activities continued throughout the month.

Since March 2020, there have been 7,684 confirmed COVID-19 cases in the host community in Cox’s Bazar and 560 in the refugee community. Compared to the previous months, in April 2021 COVID-19 cases amongst refugees increased by 136%, and among the host community by 86%; also 13 new deaths were

reported in the host community and one new death in the refugee community. This is the first COVID-19 refugee death recorded in 2021. Cumulatively, 86 deaths in the host community and 11 deaths among refugees were recorded since March 2020. UNHCR and other agencies have stepped up the medical response including through the provision of additional equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Sadar District Hospital in Cox’s Bazar (more details on page 3).

The 2021 UNHCR/WFP Joint Assessment Mission was launched in Cox’s Bazar and is expected to be completed in July 2021. The purpose of the exercise is to inform the development of a joint plan of action on food security and nutrition that will guide both agencies in the coming two years. The secondary data review is ongoing in areas including coordination, food assistance, health and nutrition, WASH, energy, protection, livelihoods, cash-based interventions, and registration. Furthermore, consultations with refugees and key stakeholders to support the formulation of recommendations are taking place.

UNHCR continued to support the fire response following the devastating fire in Camps 8W, 8E and 9 on 22 March, including through the re-issuance of destroyed identity documentation, increased fire safety and response training, and technical site planning and coordination. UNHCR-supported refugee volunteers continued to actively support the response. For example, by accompanying affected refugees to health care facilities, clearing debris, and identifying and referring refugees with specific needs to relevant service providers. More details can be found in this document, and in the last fire response update (6 April) [here](#).



Handwashing facilities at UNHCR’s Severe Acute Respiratory Infection Isolation and Treatment Centre in Ukiya. © UNHCR/Louise Donovan

Achievements



PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- A series of meetings with partners took place to expand collaboration on key protection issues, including with the International Rescue Committee to ensure effective legal assistance programs in the camps; with BBC Media Action on expanding and refining joint awareness raising activities; with the International Committee of the Red Cross on monitoring prisons and other places of detention; and with Save the Children on facilitating the rollout of the Myanmar curriculum in camp learning centres and expanding joint advocacy on protection issues.
- To continue promoting increased peaceful coexistence and social cohesion, a new project with religious leaders was piloted. Initial meetings with refugee imams were conducted to strengthen efforts, including through communication with host community imams. The pilot is ongoing.
- In April, through the Interactive Voice Response project more than 200,000 refugees received pre-recorded voice messages on their phones. Messages included information on COVID-19, documentation, nutrition, trafficking risks, elderly care and cyclone preparedness.
- As part of the response to the 22 March fire in Camps 8W, 8E and 9, UNHCR continued to issue refugee identity documentation that was destroyed in the fire, at key WFP distribution points. UNHCR and WFP worked together closely, utilizing community outreach mechanisms, to ensure refugees in affected camps as well as those who are sheltering in neighbouring camps are referred for new documentation. As of the end of April, 1,437 households have received family attestation documentation, which includes some 6,800 refugees. The exercise is ongoing.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The exclusion of protection from the list of critical activities during the lockdown, published by the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) has led to much of the legal protection and community-based protection work being delivered remotely. Direct contact with community volunteer structures has been impacted and there is an overt dependence on online modalities for communication and monitoring. The reduction of protection related work in the camps, if it continues, will affect the momentum of community-based volunteer structures.
- Registration of refugees also came to a halt due to the lockdown restrictions. During the reporting period UNHCR was negotiating with the RRRC to gradually restart registration activities to keep beneficiary information updated, and to ensure that assistance is provided without interruption.



PUBLIC HEALTH

Achievements and Impact

- The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine for refugees remains on hold pending the arrival of COVAX facility vaccines. Community Health Workers continued community engagement in preparation for the vaccination rollout including provision of information on the vaccine and preparation for mobilization.
- Community-based surveillance to prevent COVID-19 transmission and to identify persons with symptoms continued. Community Health Workers conducted over 550,000 household visits, identifying, and referring 10,000 individuals to health services.

- UNHCR donated over USD 1 million worth of medical equipment and PPEs to support government healthcare facilities and NGOs operating in the camps. The donations included high flow oxygen devices, surgical and medical grade masks, coveralls, gowns, and gloves.
- Over 50,000 children aged 6-59 months were screened for malnutrition using the mid-upper arm circumference approach; 4,105 children were identified with acute malnutrition and referred to appropriate nutrition services. Of those identified, only 318 were not currently enrolled in nutrition programmes, an indicator of strong community screening conducted by refugee volunteers and other actors in the camps.
- On 4 April, as part of the response to the 22 March fire in Camps 8W, 8E and 9, UNHCR-led Community Health Working Group conducted training for supervisors of Community Health Workers. 100 supervisors attended the online training which was focused on fire safety and response in the community to strengthen capacity and mitigate measures across all camps. The supervisors oversee over 1,400 refugee and host community volunteer community health workers across all 34 camps.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Due to enhanced COVID-19 infection, prevention and control measures, the number of community group sessions conducted by Community Health Workers for preventive health interventions were reduced. Only treatment of acute malnutrition and individual counselling on infant and young child feeding are being implemented under the current restrictions. The modified mother to mother group sessions that had been established to enhance sharing of infant and young child feeding practices were suspended temporarily to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Provision of mental health and psychosocial support services have similarly been reduced, with focus on individual level care.



SHELTER

Achievements and Impact

- As part of the response to the 22 March fire in Camps 8W, 8E and 9, UNHCR provided technical site planning and coordination support for the rebuilding of Camps 8E and 8W, in coordination with IOM. The structural plans which include roads, fire breaks, slope stabilization, site development priority areas, and zoning proposals for shelter and WASH facilities, were submitted to camp authorities in April for approval. Consultation with the Government are ongoing. In addition, detailed shelter level site plans for 800 households in Camp 8E were submitted to IOM to share with Shelter actors selected by the Government for shelter construction.



WATER AND SANITATION

Achievements and Impact

- The joint UNHCR-MSF construction of a centralized fecal sludge treatment plant is ongoing and will be completed by October 2021. The plant, together with the planned intermediate fecal sludge transfer network, will ensure a sustainable management system for fecal sludge from Kutupalong Registered Camp, Camps 1E, 1W, 2E, and 2W, and the immediate host community areas.
- In response to the seasonal drought in Teknaf, UNHCR completed a newly drilled borehole, and the setup of a new pipeline to connect the water source to the existing water distribution system in Camp 26 is underway. In addition, the excavation of an existing surface reservoir in Camp 26 to source an additional 2,300 cubic meters of additional water is ongoing.

**SITE MANAGEMENT****Achievements and Impact**

- Together with WFP, a drainage cleaning pilot was initiated in Camp 3. So far, over 150 laborers have cleaned 1,000 meters of drains, segregating the waste that can be recycled. UNHCR met with the Camp-in-Charge official to discuss challenges with dumping sites, and an agreement was reached to allocate a temporary site. UNHCR and WFP are preparing similar plans for other camps.
- In preparation for the monsoon season, UNHCR started the distribution of tie down kits, consisting of rope and wire to reinforce shelters. In April, nearly 40,000 households received kits and distribution is ongoing. Regular repair and maintenance of shelters takes place as required throughout the year and is ramped up advance of the monsoon season.
- Following the 22 March fire, site management partners and safety unit volunteers in UNHCR-managed camps were on increased alert and actively conducted outreach, follow-up and coordination on fire response preparedness and fire mitigation. Due to the need for COVID-19 lockdown measures conducting drills in collaboration with camp-in-charge officials and law enforcement had to be suspended temporarily. Checking and refilling of fire extinguishers is conducted regularly.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The exclusion of site management activities during the lockdown in April has impacted refugee complaints and referral mechanisms as feedback and response to refugees has been delayed, in particular in relation to the need for shelter materials and general maintenance of shelters for the upcoming monsoon.

**ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT****Achievements and Impact**

- The preliminary findings from a pilot project that provided pressure cookers to households as an energy saving initiative was presented to the Energy and Environment Technical Working Group in Cox's Bazar. The report shows up to 25% increase in efficiency, in comparison to using conventional cooking pots. The use of a pressure cooker reduces cooking time and as such reduces carbon emissions and the amount of fuel required.
- In April, six incidents of human-elephant contact have been reported in several western peripheral camps in Ukhiya. In Nayapara Registered Camp, an elephant breached the barbed wire fencing. The Elephant Response Team was activated and managed to push back the elephant safely. Rohingya refugee camps are located on the migratory path of elephants, traveling between Myanmar and Bangladesh. Members of the Elephant Response Teams are trained to safely steer elephants away from the camp to avoid human encounters. The Teams have been successful, and no serious incident has been reported this year.



A refugee woman demonstrates using a pressure cooker as part of the pre-pilot. © UNHCR/Louise Donovan

Working in partnership

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a co-chair of the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) in Bangladesh together with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. UNHCR also leads 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 various 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 camps, as well as a range of international and national actors. UNHCR would also like to acknowledge the role played by 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

Donors

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 2020, support was generously received from: *Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America*. UNHCR is grateful for the additional support received from individuals, foundations, and companies worldwide, including: *Athmar Holdings, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CERF, Education Cannot Wait, Foundation EDF, Relief Singapore, Shih Wing Ching Foundation, Tanmeia, Thani Bin Abdullah Bin Thani Al Thani Humanitarian Fund, TTY Management B.V. and Zakat House*.

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