

# BANGLADESH

1 March – 31 March 2019

**IN THIS UPDATE:**

- *UNHCR Protection Chief visits Rohingya refugee camps*
- *UN statement on Bhasan Char*
- *Community based Monsoon preparations*
- *Interactive game to raise awareness on monsoon risks*
- *Radios helping in mass communication*
- *VOA facilitates English language learning for refugees*
- *Mental Health in Emergency Symposium*
- *International Women's Day*
- *Over 150,000 Rohingya received new identity documents*

The **Joint Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration exercise** has provided 151,182 Rohingya with new identity documents, replacing two previously held cards. This helps streamline assistance and protection support. Five registration sites are now operating at full capacity and processing on average **up to 4,000 individuals per day**. In addition to a barcoded identity card, families receive an attestation listing household members.

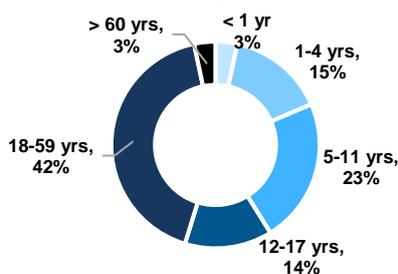
UNHCR has opened a **new health clinic** with its partner, Food for Hungry and Medical Teams International (FH/MTI) in Camp 12, Kutupalong refugee settlement. The clinic is set to **serve both refugees and the adjacent host community**. In an effort to further serve the needs of the two communities, the facility will be upgraded to a primary health center in May and will operate 24/7.

## Population figures (as of 28 February 2019)

February 2019

**909,868** Total number of refugees in Cox's Bazar  
**745,768** Estimated new arrivals since 25 August 2017

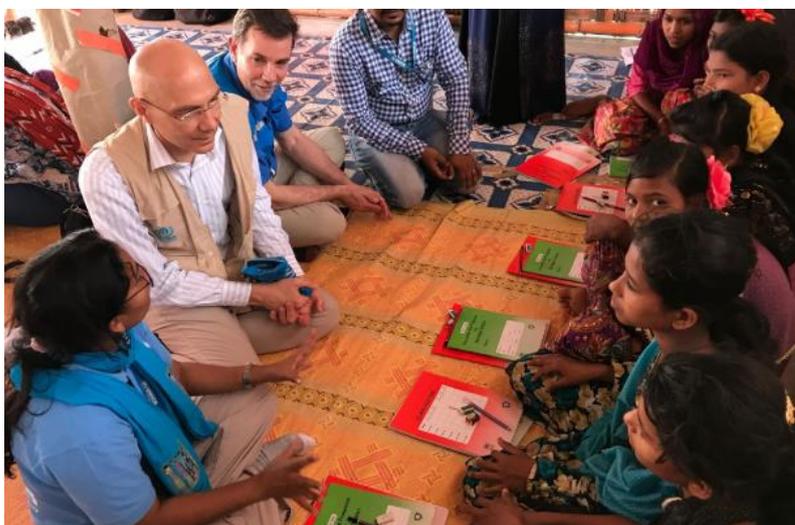
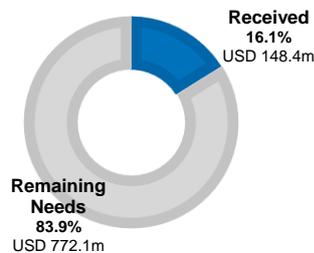
### Age breakdown of refugees in Cox's Bazar



### UNHCR FUNDING REQUIREMENTS 2019



### JOINT RESPONSE PLAN FUNDING REQUIREMENTS 2019



There are very few education opportunities in the settlements for refugees above the age of 14 years. UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Volker Turk visited a class of adolescents at a temporary learning centre run by UNHCR and its partner, CODEC, to hear about their hopes and dreams. ©UNHCR/C. Gluck

## UNHCR's Protection Chief meets with Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar

UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Volker Türk visited Cox's Bazar between 17 and 19 March. He met with Rohingya refugees in Chakmarkul and Kutupalong refugee settlements where refugees discussed how they see their futures. Türk also met key Government officials involved in the response in Dhaka and Cox's Bazar as well as other UN agencies and NGOs supporting refugees to hear the challenges they are facing and the opportunities they see as the response evolves.

While in Cox's Bazar, Türk visited one of the five registration centres in the Kutupalong settlements where a joint Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration exercise is providing biometric identity cards for all Rohingya refugees. He also saw major improvements in the camps, thanks to efforts of the Government and humanitarian community. Türk witnessed community engagement and community-based protection programmes implemented by UNHCR and its partners which are helping refugees identify their needs and solutions as well as preparing for the monsoon/cyclone. He noted that refugees felt more secure following site improvements, displayed more confidence, and were engaged in positive initiatives to strengthen their capacities.



*Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, and Dominique Hyde, Director of the Division for External Relations, meeting Rohingya families at a registration centre in Kutupalong settlement, Bangladesh. © UNHCR/Caroline Gluck*

Discussions with the Government of Bangladesh focussed on finding solutions and ways to foster conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees to Myanmar. UNHCR and the Government have agreed to focus on, and strengthen collective efforts that can lead to tangible improvements for refugees, particularly women and girls at risk. He also discussed ways to expand opportunities for refugee skills training, as an opportunity to thrive in the camps and an investment in their future should they return to Myanmar. He called attention to the fact that more than half a million young girls and boys in the camps need more opportunities to channel their energy into meaningful and productive activities and secure the future of the Rohingya population if and when the time is right for return.

Türk also expressed UNHCR's commitment to supporting Bangladeshi host communities, who generously welcomed refugees during the influx.

In Dhaka, Türk attended a High Level Dialogue (HLD) hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and met with Government officials and UN and donor communities in to explore ways UNHCR can further support the Government to find solutions and assist refugees and host communities in Bangladesh.

## UN statement on proposed Bashan Char island relocations

The United Nations in Bangladesh issued a statement on 25 March 2019 to reclarify its position on the Government's proposed relocations of Rohingya refugees to Bashan Char island in response to reports in the media, as well as concerns expressed by civil society organisations and refugees.

In its statement, the United Nations working in Bangladesh expressed appreciation to the Government's efforts to seek alternative locations for refugees to decongest overcrowded settlements in Cox's Bazar, and its willingness to engage constructively on the matter. The UN is discussing critical protection and operational issues that should be considered before any relocations take place in order to ensure that refugees would be able to live in safe, dignified and sustainable living conditions, while seeking clarification about the modalities of any relocations, basic rights and services that refugees would be able

to access as well as issues of governance and access for UN and partners to the island. The UN also emphasised that any relocation to Bhasan Char must be on a voluntary basis and that refugees should have accurate and timely information on the project so they can make free and informed decisions on the relocation.

## Monsoon preparations

Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar are preparing for another monsoon season, expected to last from May until October. For the majority of the Rohingya residing in Cox's Bazar, this is the second monsoon they will experience since they fled from Myanmar in 2017. Last year, Rohingya refugees worked in partnership with UNHCR and other agencies to reduce risks such as landslides and acting as first-responders for incidents as community volunteers.

With the foundations for the emergency response largely put in place and lessons learnt from the previous year, UNHCR and partners will now focus on more community-based approaches. Given their experience and capacity to respond, refugees themselves will be taking more active roles as first-line reporting and response actors, scaling up awareness raising within their communities, and strengthening the overall protection interventions.

In strengthening community participatory approaches, UNHCR has also developed and adapted materials to promote refugee-led preparedness activities. With training and experience of the previous monsoon season, the community has become adept at identifying risks and managing the immediate response. Having developed an audience-friendly landslides storybook, UNHCR created a new 'natural hazards' board game with an aim to facilitate interactive community sensitization on landslides, flooding, wind damage, fire and lightning. In the game, players encounter a series of 'hazard squares' and must advance by identifying the right response or mitigation measures. Piloted and tested by community volunteers, the 'natural hazards' board game is proving easy to use and inclusive; it does not rely on a facilitator, while color coding and images are self-explanatory.

## Radio listening promoting wide dissemination of information

Radio Listening Groups, where groups of refugees gather in safe public spaces to listen to the radio, have become popular in the settlements. Refugees are offered online or offline radio programmes produced by different agencies, such as Bangla Betar, Radio Naf, Internews and DW Akademie, covering a variety of issues relevant to life in the settlements including nutrition, shelter, psychosocial well-being, and other topics. Radio Listening Groups are generally facilitated by trained and experienced agencies that engage refugees in discussions on the topics covered by the radio programmes.

UNHCR and its partners recently collaborated with BBC Media Action which conducted trainings on holding Radio Listening Groups. BBC Media Action will support UNHCR's plans to launch Radio Listening Groups, starting with pilots in seven locations. UNHCR and its partners will tap into a variety of informative pre-recorded programmes, interspersed with Rohingya songs to promote participation of all refugee groups. Refugees' feedback will inform future programmes as communities are encouraged to highlight their



needs and preferences. UNHCR and its partners also underwent training conducted by BBC Media Action on radio programming with a focus on sexual and gender-based and intimate partner violence. This will support UNHCR's work on gender-based violence through sensitive messaging on prevention and response.

## Voice of America bringing English language opportunities to Rohingya refugees

Voice of America (VOA), in collaboration with UNHCR, is rolling out English language classes for adults who are interested in teaching English. The first trainings started in the Kutupalong refugee settlement at the end of March aimed at training 100 English teachers. Two staff members from VOA Learning English started to provide a week-long training for the 100 initial teachers who will further train another 2,000 volunteers/teachers.

The training will focus on class management, structuring lessons, transitioning between subjects, lesson review techniques, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and teaching concepts behind Lesson Plans. The course will run through all of the sample lesson plan activities (art projects, games, songs, rhymes, stories) to help these teachers gain familiarity and comfort with the materials.



Lesson plans will also be developed based on ideas emerging from the initial training, adding useful activities identified by participants. VOA plans to offer follow-up monthly training for the 100 teachers through live audio or video in order to reinforce the on-site training, follow up on difficulties encountered by the teachers, and assess the effectiveness of the classes. Additional materials may also be provided to supplement the lesson plans, as required.

*Teachers line up for a fun introduction during one of the VOA training sessions. ©UNHCR/O'Brien, S.*

## Emerging practice and challenges in emergency mental health response



*Mental health professionals working with refugees in Bangladesh gathered to discuss emerging trends and challenges in delivering support to the Rohingya community. ©UNHCR*

On 24 March, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) teams from UNHCR and Gonshasthaya Kendra (GK) jointly chaired a symposium on “Mental Health in Emergencies” as part of the 5th Bangladesh Clinical Psychology Conference in Dhaka. Topics included emerging paradigms in mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies; challenges for mental health services’ provision and strategic priorities for MHPSS services for Rohingya refugees.

The UNHCR/GK team presented the current mental health and psychosocial support programmes used in the Rohingya settlements. The team also shared an analysis that supports the effectiveness of community-based mental health and psychosocial support programmes

running alongside integrated mental health interventions and other complementary scalable psychological interventions.

## International Women's Day celebrated with capacity development and arts



As part of its activities for International Women's Day, UNHCR worked with BRAC to organize a workshop for women - Balance for Better – in Kutupalong refugee settlement to strengthen women's leadership capacity and for mobilize women's engagement in cultural, social, and educational activities.

The two-day workshop trained women on sharing experiences and hopes, through story-telling and art and crafts. A group of young women from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) also visited the Rohingya refugee women to explore and exchange experiences and aspirations.

## Over 150,000 Rohingya now issued with new identity documents

The joint Government of Bangladesh-UNHCR registration process for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar has registered and issued documents for over 150,000 individuals. There are currently five registration sites in operation in and around the Kutupalong refugee settlements.

The registration exercise aims to most of the population of the large Kutupalong settlement by the end of June 2019. The identity cards will provide enhanced protection and facilitate effective and efficient delivery of humanitarian services, eliminate duplications in the existing database, thus promote equity in distribution and assistance.

Registration and the issuance of documentation is according refugees the means to protect their identity. It also confirms a refugee's right to return to their country of origin if and when they choose to do so.

The identity card, also known by the Rohingya community as a 'smart card', is issued to all refugee women, men, girls and boys above the age of 12 and replaces two existing cards that they previously possessed – a Ministry of Home Affairs (white) card and a Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (yellow) family counting card.



*UNHCR teams checking and registering Rohingya for providing new identity cards which will enhance protection and make the delivery of assistance more efficient. ©UNHCR*

The Government of Bangladesh has stated that there will be no forcible return to Myanmar, seeking to allay fears over the use of information collected during the process.

## Working in partnership

UNHCR co-chairs a Strategic Executive Group (SEG) in Bangladesh with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. The Refugee Agency leads on the protection response for all refugees, and heads a Protection Working Group in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR welcomes its valuable partnership with a number of UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its assistance with humanitarian partners through a number of working groups under the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). UNHCR's main government counterpart is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and its Cox's Bazar-based Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC). UNHCR staff work closely with the Camp-in-Charge officials in different refugee settlements, as well as a range of international and national actors. It has a strong network of **28 partners**:

**Action Aid Bangladesh** | **ACF** (Action Contre la Faim) | **ADRA** (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) | **BNWLA** (Bangladesh National Woman Lawyer's Association) | **Bangladesh Red Crescent Society** | **BRAC** (Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | **Caritas Bangladesh** | **Center for Natural Resource Studies** | **CODEC** (Community Development Centre) | **COAST** (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) | **Danish Refugee Council** | **FH Association** (Food for the Hungry) | **GK** (Gonoshasthaya Kendra) | **IUCN** (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) | **Handicap International** | **Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation** | **Light House** | **Oxfam GB** | **Relief International** | **Mukti Cox's Bazar** | **NGO Forum for Public Health** | **RTMI** (Research, Training and Management International) | **Save the Children International** | **Sesame Workshop** | **Solidarites International** | **Terre des Hommes** | **TAI** (Technical Assistance Incorporated)

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**. UNHCR and partners have trained and work with **safety unit volunteers (SUVs)** who support the emergency response, **community outreach members** who support raising awareness on important issues and in addressing protection risks, **community health workers** who assist with outreach for health and nutrition, and others who provide further critical support to the refugee response.

## Donor Support

The Government and the people of Bangladesh have shown extraordinary generosity in responding to the crisis. However, more support and solidarity is required from the international community to assist the ongoing humanitarian response. Continued political efforts to work towards a solution to the situation remains vital. UNHCR is appealing for USD 307.6 million in order to respond to the needs of hundreds of thousands of refugees.

**UNHCR Bangladesh is grateful for the generous contributions of donors who have provided unrestricted and broadly earmarked funds, as well as to donors who have contributed directly to the Operation in 2018 and 2019:**



*With thanks to the many private donations from individuals, foundations, and companies such as the Arab Gulf Fund, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Education Cannot Wait, International Islamic Relief Organization, Kuwait Finance House, Qatar Charity, Rahmatan Lil Alamin Foundation, The Big Heart Foundation, The Church of Latter-Day Saints, and UPS Corporate. Special thanks also to CERF.*

**CONTACTS:** **Steven O'Brien**, External Relations Officer, UNHCR Cox's Bazar, [obrien@unhcr.org](mailto:obrien@unhcr.org)  
**Mai Hosoi**, External Relations Officer, UNHCR Dhaka, [hosoi@unhcr.org](mailto:hosoi@unhcr.org)

**LINKS:** [UNHCR data portal](#) - [UNHCR operation page](#) – [Facebook](#) – [Twitter](#) – [Latest stories](#) – [Instagram](#)