European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Bangladesh

Introduction

For decades, Bangladesh has offered a safe haven for Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar. However, following widespread military crackdowns in Myanmar’s Rakhine state in August 2017, the massive influx of Rohingya refugees has worsened the humanitarian situation in Bangladesh. The country is also one of the most disaster-prone in the world, exposed to a variety of natural hazards including cyclones, floods and earthquakes. Its high population density (1 252 people per square kilometre in 2016) exacerbates the impact of localised disasters.

What are the needs?

Bangladesh is host to one of the most intractable refugee crises in the world: the Rohingya crisis. This ethnic, religious, and linguistic minority is subject to exclusion and discrimination in their home country Myanmar, resulting in many seeking refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh over the last 40 years. Following violent military crackdowns in northern parts of Rakhine state in August 2017, more than 745 000 Rohingya have fled across the border in search of protection and assistance. The scale of the population influx has put a tremendous strain on existing humanitarian services in the district of Cox’s Bazar. The vast majority have not been granted refugee status and are referred to as “undocumented Myanmar nationals” by the government of Bangladesh. Without legal status, they are unable to pursue education or formal employment and remain vulnerable to exploitation and serious protection risks. More than an estimated 910 000 unregistered Rohingya currently live in Bangladesh and they are entirely dependent on aid.

Being mostly low-lying and in the confluence of two large rivers (the Ganges and the Brahmaputra), much of the country is also prone to seasonal flooding, landslides, cyclones, and is therefore one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change. The frequency, unpredictability, and severity of these disasters are likely to be adversely affected by global warming, population growth, environmental degradation, and ill-maintained infrastructure – all contributing to increasing humanitarian needs.
How are we helping?

In 2019, the European Union has provided €24 million in humanitarian aid for vulnerable Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshis in Cox’s Bazar and other parts of the country. This includes €19 million for humanitarian food assistance, nutritional support, clean water and sanitation facilities, access to health care services, as well as increased protection for the most vulnerable groups. Another €5 million will scale up preparedness measures for natural hazards especially during the rainy season, which could trigger floods, landslides, cyclones and tidal surges in what is currently the most densely populated refugee camp in the world. Furthermore, the funding will also strengthen the preparedness for future earthquakes in urban areas in the congested capital of Dhaka and early action in flood prone areas of Bangladesh.

The EU has been working in Bangladesh since 2002, both in disaster preparedness and emergency response activities, with a total funding of more than €233 million. EU humanitarian aid provides life-saving support to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees living in the Kutupalong makeshift settlement and its expansion site, also known as mega camp, as well as other camps and spontaneous settlements that have developed in Ukhia and Teknaf after the massive August 2017 influx. Additionally, the EU also continues to fund emergency assistance to people affected by natural disasters.

In October 2018, the EU provided funding to support those affected by the collapse of the Padma river embankment in the central district of Shariatpur. The aid focused on the distribution of tarpaulins and shelter tool kits. Multipurpose cash grants were also provided to enable the impacted communities to meet their basic needs. In October 2017, when widespread floods swept across large parts of Bangladesh and affected eight million people, the EU provided €1.2 million to respond to the most pressing needs of the affected families. Earlier in June 2017, €1 million was allocated in response to tropical cyclone Mora, which impacted nearly three million people.

Disaster preparedness, disaster risk reduction, and resilience remain key priority areas for the EU in Bangladesh. In this context, partners continue supporting the government in the roll-out and implementation of its “Standing Order on Disasters and Disaster Management Act” at community level. This includes supporting locally identified initiatives such as the building of flood-resistant infrastructure and early warning systems, and school-based disaster preparedness. The EU, together with its humanitarian partners, seeks to ensure that people’s livelihoods are more resistant to natural disasters, thereby reducing their level of vulnerability to shocks and stresses. Since 2001, the EU has contributed more than €35 million to disaster risk reduction and resilience building activities in Bangladesh, including €5 million in 2019.