UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Bangladesh

POPULATION

1,005,675 # of registered refugees

96.4% in 33 camps in Ukhiya & Teknaf
3.6% on the island of Bhasan Char

51% Female

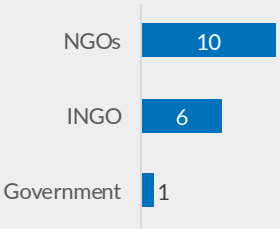
49% Male

52% Children

as of 31 January 2025

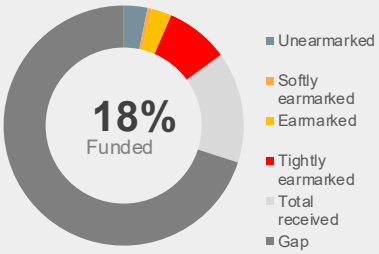
PARTNERS

19 # of partners implementing key UNHCR activities in 2025



FUNDING

275 M Funding for 2024 operations



as of 31 January 2025

HISTORY

UNHCR has been present in Bangladesh since 1992, but the relationship has deeper roots. In 1971, during Bangladesh's Liberation War, UNHCR coordinated a massive relief effort to support 10 million refugees forced to flee for protection, and helped facilitate their return to the newly independent nation in the following months.

Today, UNHCR and partners manage 16 camps in Cox's Bazar, including Nayapara and Kutupalong Registered Camps, plus the island of Bhasan Char, supporting the Government of Bangladesh to provide essential services and meet the protection needs of one million Rohingya refugees, including special services for women, children and persons with disabilities. Most arrived in 2017, fleeing persecution, large-scale violence and human rights violations.

Support is additionally extended to host communities while continuously working towards solutions to ensure that refugees can return in a safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable way once conditions in Myanmar allow.

OPERATIONAL UPDATE

January 2025

A visit from Clowns Without Borders brought smiles to all. © UNHCR/Shagufta Tazin Shathy

KEY UPDATES

- 2024 JOINT RESPONSE PLAN (JRP): 2024 JOINT RESPONSE PLAN (JRP): As of 31 December, the 2024 JRP was 68.2% funded, with USD 581.7 million received against an appeal of USD 852.4 million, according to the FTS tracker. The 2024 JRP requests continued support for one million Rohingya refugees, who depend on humanitarian assistance, and for more than 400,000 host community members. In 2023, the JRP was 66% funded with USD 578 million received against an overall appeal of USD 876 million. Read more.

- TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF US FOREIGN ASSISTANCE: The US funding freeze, announced in January, will have severe implications for the Rohingya response in Bangladesh. In 2024, US funding represented 55% of the contributions to the Joint Response Plan and 47% of the UNHCR operations budget. Reduced direct funding to NGOs and partners affects essential activities, while decisions on suspension of resettlement affects durable solutions for the Rohingya. UNHCR received waivers authorizing spending of US funding on lifesaving activities, and is seeking more clarity. Meanwhile, in order to limit the impact on the people UNHCR serves, the High Commissioner has directed prioritization of life-saving work and reduction of expenditures.

- IDENTIFYING & ASSISTING NEW ARRIVALS: UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) jointly launched the biometrics identification exercise (BIE) for new arrivals in January, reaching 34,695 individuals (1,971 families) from the October 2024 headcount. The exercise aims to improve the integrity of the headcount data by using biometrics (fingerprints but not iris scans at this stage, per GoB approval) to identify and remove individuals who may have been double-counted, as well as registered refugees who may have presented themselves as new arrivals. Unlike regular registration, individuals are not issued with legal identity documents through the BIE, but an assistance card is issued to each family entitling them to food and other life-saving assistance. In January, UNHCR also finalized preparations for the distribution of liquified petroleum gas sets and pressure cookers to new arrival families.

- CAMP SAFETY & SECURITY: Serious security incidents declined in the fourth quarter of 2024, with 424 incidents affecting 611 refugees — a 40% reduction in the number of refugees directly affected by incidents compared to Q3. The decrease in gunshots/suspected use of firearms and killings (58% decline) can be attributed to the truce between organized groups on 8 November. However, increased fears of forced recruitment, abductions and child kidnappings for ransom were reported. *Read the Q4 'Joint protection monitoring report'.*

- ONWARDS MOVEMENTS: In 2024, 11,300 Rohingya refugees attempted to find safety and protection by land and sea/river movements, of which 9,200 embarked on perilous sea/river journeys and 657 were reported deceased or missing from maritime movements. Compared to 2023, there was a 112% increase in the number of people attempting boat movements, with the vast majority of movements observed between Myanmar and Bangladesh. 2024 witnessed the highest number of attempted sea/river journeys and was the deadliest year on record since 2015. The trend is expected to continue into 2025, highlighting the need for urgent and comprehensive responses. *Visit the data portal. Read the yearend report 'Desperate irregular journeys: Rohingya refugees in search of protection'.*

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. BASIC RIGHTS, PROTECTION & EDUCATION
Refugee rights are respected, and they have access to education and protection, including protection against gender-based violence.

2. ADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS IN A GREEN ENVIRONMENT
Essential and sustainable services (including safe shelters, health, nutrition, WASH, energy) are ensured, and the environment is protected.

3. SKILLS & CAPACITY BUILDING TO SUPPORT DURABLE SOLUTIONS
Work toward sustainable solutions, with voluntary repatriation at the centre, supported by skills development, livelihoods and capacity building for refugees.

4. DIVERSIFIED FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS
Partnerships with development and private sector actors to innovate, support and localize operations.

5. CREATING A POSITIVE NARRATIVE
Lead the narrative on the Rohingya refugee response and improve public attitudes toward the Rohingya.

DONORS

UNHCR in Bangladesh is grateful for the support of Australia, the People's Republic of China, the European Union, Ireland, Japan, Jersey, Luxembourg, the Republic of Korea, and Switzerland.

With additional support received from UN funds including Education Cannot Wait (ECW), UN AIDS and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and private donors, foundations, corporates, and companies worldwide including Fast Retailing (UNIQLO), Muslim World League, adidas Foundation, Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives (MBRGI), and SONY.

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- PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT: Five large private sector investors from Chittagong and Cox's Bazar visited refugee camps in Ukhiya to explore possibilities of establishing production facilities within or near the camps. The investors, who covered their own costs, expressed interest in starting small pilots and engaging in advocacy with the Government of Bangladesh to expand livelihoods opportunities for refugees that can also benefit local Bangladeshi communities. They also expressed interest in visiting Bhasan Char. Engaging with the private sector is a critical step in reducing the aid dependency of the refugees by creating income-generating opportunities, and helps mitigate the impact of dwindling funding for the response

- CAMP 26 FIRE: On 16 January, a fire broke out in Camp 26, a UNHCR-managed camp in Teknaf, killing a 5-year-old girl, injuring 47 individuals, and damaging more than 50 shelters and other structures. This is the second major fire of the winter season, following the December 2024 fire that displaced 473 households in Camp 1W. Rohingya refugees trained in firefighting were first on the scene, using mobile fire-fighting units to contain and extinguish the blaze. 61 households (273 people) were displaced, including more than 100 children. UNHCR and partners provided medical and protection services, including child reunification and psychological first aid, and arranged communal shelters for families who lost their homes. Support was also provided to families who chose to stay with relatives. 29 households received temporary emergency shelter kits. The fire-affected zone is located on privately-owned land, complicating reconstruction and rebuilding plans.

- RESTORING E-WASTE: UNHCR established temporary one-stop service centres in Camp 1W and Camp 26 to provide emergency repair services for solar home systems and small-scale solar-powered items (lamps, mobile phone chargers, etc.) damaged in the recent fires. In Camp 1W, 89% of 301 damaged items brought to the centre were repaired. In Camp 26, 88% of 129 items collected were repaired, with many of the lights repaired the same night as the fire. UNHCR-trained energy ambassadors also led awareness sessions at the temporary service centres to help the community prevent future fires.

- TEKNAF WATER CRISIS: With Teknaf's water reservoirs at 60% of last year's levels due to inadequate rainfall, daily water rationing continued in five camps: Nayapara Registered Camp, and Camps 24, 25, 26, 27. As of 15 January, each person will receive 10 litres per day, half the regular allotment of 20 litres per person per day. An extensive outreach campaign was conducted to raise awareness and support community adaptation to water rationing, including 80 discussions with community groups/leaders and 4,927 household visits. 100 days of water trucking is estimated to be needed for camps and affected host communities before the rainy season starts, costing some USD 1.5 million. UNHCR is supporting the WASH Sector to develop a response plan, including water trucking and other solutions. *Read urgent WASH Sector appeal.*

- CHOLERA OUTBREAK: The UNHCR-led Community Health Working Group and the Health Sector launched an oral cholera vaccination campaign in the camps in Cox's Bazar and on Bhasan Char to address a cholera outbreak (531 confirmed cases between June and December 2024), reaching 100% of the refugee population. Some 35,000 new arrivals, though not initially included in the target group, were also reached. The number of confirmed cases declined from 151 in December 2024 to 49 cases in January 2025, and are expected to further decrease following the vaccination. UNHCR is closely monitoring the health situation as water shortages, especially in Teknaf, put refugees at increased risk of transmission.

- MISSION REPORT: UNHCR welcomed nine visits from donors/partners in January, including the UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Tahsan Khan, Clowns Without Borders, a private sector delegation from Chittagong, and technical teams from the UK, Australia and USA.

- FUNDING UPDATE: As of 31 January, the UNHCR Bangladesh operation was 18% funded against an operating plan of USD 255 million.

IN "CASE YOU MISSED IT…"

- ***"I see determination and hope in the refugees' eyes. At the same time, I see frustration, and this is the reality in any refugee crisis throughout the world."*** UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Tahsan Khan shared a solidarity message from the Camp 1W fire site, where he met survivors and learned about UNHCR's response. *Click for more.*

- UNHCR Bangladesh published 29 Facebook posts, 33 tweets and 24 Instagram posts in January, including news and updates on the Camp 26 fire, the Clowns Without Borders visit, e-waste repair pop-ups, and more.

Watch UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Tahsan Khan's message of solidarity.

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