

Bangladesh

Multi-year Strategy 2023 – 2025



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1.1 Executive Summary

The protracted Rohingya refugee crisis and volatile situation in Myanmar are expected to heighten uncertainty among refugees and exert further pressure on host countries in 2025. Amid mounting instability and growing humanitarian needs, a comprehensive approach will be essential to address the Rohingya situation, particularly the challenges of onward movements, while leveraging the capacities and expertise of a diverse range of partners and stakeholders.

In Bangladesh, UNHCR will prioritise preserving the asylum space and actively pursue solutions for Rohingya refugees, including their eventual voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation to Myanmar whenever possible. Concurrently, UNHCR will enhance the resilience of refugees during their stay in Bangladesh and explore and expand third-country solutions opportunities to address the protection needs of the most vulnerable Rohingya refugees, along with exploring complementary pathways.

Given the ongoing situation in Myanmar, the prospect of return remains uncertain, particularly following the events of February 2021 and the escalation of conflict in Northern Rakhine since November 2023. In this context, robust support for both host communities and Rohingya refugees will be crucial, ensuring they can live safely and with dignity while acquiring the education and skills necessary while in Bangladesh and for a future in Myanmar. In line with the inter-agency rationalisation exercise, UNHCR will realign its activities to focus on its core mandate and sectors.

With Bangladesh being one of the world's most climate-vulnerable and disaster-prone countries, UNHCR will protect refugees from natural hazards, fires, and environmental degradation while strengthening their resilience to climate change. Innovative solutions such as the replacement of firewood with liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) will be expanded to safeguard both refugees and the environment.

1.2 Situation Analysis

Over seven years since the influx of refugees in August 2017, over one million Rohingya refugees reside in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar District and on Bhasan Char Island. Bangladesh is not party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and lacks specific national legislation governing refugee and asylum affairs. Its interim government maintains voluntary repatriation as the primary solution for Rohingya refugees, emphasising that the stay of refugees is granted on humanitarian grounds and temporarily. Although Bangladesh supports education, skills development

and select livelihoods initiatives, these efforts are designed to align with opportunities in Myanmar and prepare refugees for sustainable repatriation and reintegration.

By the end of September 2024, over one million Rohingya refugees have received documentation from the Government of Bangladesh and UNHCR. With the current refugee population constituting around one-third of the total population in Cox's Bazar district, supporting host communities is essential to fostering peaceful coexistence.

Since 2020, the Government of Bangladesh has relocated some 35,000 refugees to the island of Bhasan Char Island as part of its efforts to decongest Cox's Bazar camps and plans to relocate up to 100,000 refugees. In October 2021, UNHCR, on behalf of the UN, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Bangladesh, outlining a shared policy framework based on Protection and Humanitarian Principles. The MoU affirms a joint commitment to ensure Rohingya refugees have access to protection and other essential services including health, education and water, sanitation and hygiene, livelihoods, capacity-building and skills development opportunities. It underlines the voluntary nature of all refugee relocations to and from Bhasan Char Island. While protection services and humanitarian assistance on the island have improved since November 2021, significant gaps remain in service delivery, access to energy and reliable transportation. These challenges not only affect the long-term sustainability of the island but also impact both refugees and humanitarian partners.

UNHCR, the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM co-chair a strategic executive group that provides policy and strategic guidance to the Rohingya response in Bangladesh, coordinating closely with key national partners. In Cox's Bazar, UNHCR works through several sectors, the Rohingya operation and coordination teams, and the heads of a sub-office group facilitated by the inter-sector coordination group. On Bhasan Char Island, UNHCR leads the humanitarian response under the Refugee Coordination Model, working closely with the government. Strategic engagement with Bangladeshi stakeholders, particularly government counterparts, civil society, academia, media, donors and the broader humanitarian community, will be essential to galvanise support and positively influence public opinion towards refugees. With humanitarian funding expected to decline in 2025, partnerships with development actors, international financial institutions and the private sector will be critical to sustain the response.

Since late 2022, the security situation in Cox's Bazar has worsened, with violent criminal activities becoming more frequent and occurring in broad daylight, fuelling fear among refugees. A 2023 multi-sectoral needs assessment revealed that 60 per cent of refugees had protection concerns, mostly related to crime and violence. Refugees continue to raise safety and security concerns, particularly for children, amid fears that they may be coerced into joining criminal groups and engaging in illegal activities. This

deteriorating security environment has hindered refugees' access to services, undermined the protection space and safety of humanitarian workers, and driven some refugees to relocate to Bhasan Char Island or undertake dangerous onward journeys, including by sea. In 2024, 539 Rohingya reportedly embarked on such journeys from Bangladesh, of which 72 per cent are women and children, and nearly one in seven reported dead or missing.

UNHCR continues to work on reducing tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities. The Government of Bangladesh and its law enforcement agencies play a critical role in maintaining security while UNHCR supports these efforts by providing protection-sensitive training to law enforcement agencies. UNHCR fosters community safety through forums, dialogue, and improved relations between refugees and security personnel.

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are almost entirely reliant on lifesaving humanitarian assistance. However, dwindling humanitarian funding, coupled with their lack of legal status, restricted freedom of movement, and limited socioeconomic opportunities, has made them increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. This heightened vulnerability has driven an increasing number of Rohingya refugees to embark on perilous onward movements by sea. UNHCR will continue to bolster the resilience of refugees, reduce their dependency on humanitarian assistance, and work towards fostering a safer environment. These efforts include measures to protect refugees from natural hazards, fires and environmental degradation. Innovative solutions to protect the camp environment and work towards climate action such as through the use of LPG in place of firewood for cooking and nature-based solutions, which must be sustained and scaled-up to protect both refugees and the environment.

Despite Bangladesh and Myanmar authorities holding meetings in 2023 for a return pilot, which included visits to Maungdaw and from Myanmar, escalating conflict in the Rakhine State has stalled these efforts. Since the resurgence of violence in Rakhine in 2023, Bangladesh has maintained and enforced a strict closed-border policy, to prevent new arrivals entering Bangladesh. UNHCR continues to advocate for regulated access to safety in Bangladesh for civilians fleeing conflict, violence and persecution in Myanmar while emphasising the importance of preventing refoulement and ensuring biometric registration of those who seek refuge in Bangladesh.

Resettlement efforts for the most vulnerable Rohingya refugees continued in 2024 following constructive dialogue with the Government of Bangladesh and key international partners. Looking ahead, UNHCR remains committed to expanding third-country solutions, including through its multi-year resettlement programme, as part of a broader solutions approach to the Rohingya crisis.

1.3 Vision and Strategic Orientation

Seven years since the last exodus from Myanmar, the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh can no longer rely on short-term humanitarian funding. This protracted situation now demands a more robust, predictable and sustainable response approach to secure longer-term investments in both Cox' s Bazar and Bhasan Char Island.

The safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar remains a strategic objective in 2025. Despite the challenging situation in Myanmar, efforts toward this outcome will continue. To safeguard the rights of refugees to return, UNHCR will remain actively engaged with the Government of Bangladesh, and advocate to ensure refugees have the information they require to make a free and informed decision. UNHCR will explore opportunities to facilitate dialogue and generate political engagement with key stakeholders to find sustainable solutions to the Rohingya crisis and sustain support for Bangladesh' s efforts.

Building on the momentum of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF), where pledges were made to support the Rohingya, UNHCR will collaborate with the Government to mobilise national and international partners. The focus will be on implementing the multi-sector pledges made at the 2023 GRF that strengthen Rohingya refugees' resilience, expand solution pathways, and address the environmental impact on shared natural resources between refugees and host communities.

In line with UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022 – 2026, UNHCR Bangladesh' s multi-year plan will focus on the following priorities between 2023 and 2025:

- Promoting an environment that respects basic rights and ensures refugees' access to protection services and education;
- Safeguarding refugees' well-being by maintaining adequate and safe living conditions and access to essential services in a climate-smart environment;
- Advancing a comprehensive solutions package, including preparations for eventual voluntary repatriation and third-country solutions, supported by skills development, livelihoods and capacity-building activities;
- Engaging diverse partnerships, particularly with development and private sector actors, to create innovative approaches and galvanise support for the refugee response with an emphasis on greater localization;
- Leading the narrative on the Rohingya refugee response, improving public attitudes towards Rohingya refugees, and promoting peaceful coexistence between Rohingya refugees and host communities.

1.4 Fair Access and Representation

In 2025, UNHCR will continue to ensure refugees are at the centre of programme decision-making processes in Bangladesh. To support this approach, UNHCR has established an internal focal point network to strengthen Age, Gender and Diversity

(AGD) mainstreaming across all operational units. This includes an annual work plan and capacity-building opportunities for refugees. Both refugees and host communities will actively participate in the design and implementation of projects that affect their lives. In addition, AGD mainstreaming will be incorporated into every partnership agreement to strengthen accountability and inclusiveness within programming. Refugee and host community focus group discussions with participants from diverse groups, such as young people, women and girls, older people and people with disabilities, will be integrated into assessments, implementation, and monitoring exercises. In line with UNHCR's focus on mainstreaming disability inclusion, UNHCR and its protection partners will receive support to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in its protection programming.

UNHCR will also increase participation of Bangladeshi women by engaging with women youth groups, female religious teachers, female community outreach members and elected women representatives. This will be done through capacity-building initiatives that encourage women to take part in decision-making processes. Women committees will be expanded and targeted support will be provided to women and youth-led organisations.

A common feedback mechanism will enable referrals among agencies and facilitate joint analysis across sectors, with shared standards for responding to feedback. In addition, UNHCR will continue operating its 24-hour, toll-free hotline, through which refugees in the camps and on Bhasan Char Island can report protection or assistance concerns. An interactive voice response system will further enhance communication, enabling UNHCR to disseminate essential information and gather feedback from refugees themselves.

2. Impact Statements

Impact statement

By the end of 2025, forcibly displaced and stateless people are equipped with the knowledge and skills to protect their rights and live in safe, enabling environment that uphold basic rights

Impact area: Attaining favourable protection environments

Outcome statements

Asylum-seekers and refugees have access to territory and registration services

Outcome area: Access to territory, registration and documentation

Forcibly displaced people are safe from gender-based violence.

Outcome area: Gender-based violence
Refugee children are safe and able to fully enjoy their rights

Outcome area: Child protection
Forcibly displaced people have optimal access to education.

Outcome area: Education
Refugee status determination procedures are in place.

Outcome area: Refugee status determination
National policies and practices provide effective protection for people with and for whom UNHCR works.

Outcome area: Protection policy and law
Impact statement

By the end of 2025, refugees live in healthy environments, are meaningfully engaged in the planning, design and implementation of humanitarian interventions, and have an increased capacity to adapt to and recover from disasters

Impact area: Realizing rights in safe environments

Outcome statements

External engagement and resource mobilization are strengthened to galvanize support and maintain public interest in UNHCR's work

Outcome area: External engagement and resource mobilization
Systems and processes are enhanced to improve the efficiency of the response

Outcome area: Systems and processes

Logistics and supply chains are optimized to meet operational needs

Outcome area: Operational support and supply chain

Forcibly displaced people have access to health and nutrition services

Outcome area: Healthy lives

Access to physically safe and secure settlements with basic facilities is ensured

Outcome area: Sustainable housing and settlements

Forcibly displaced people receive sufficient assistance to meet their basic needs

Outcome area: Well-being and basic needs

Forcibly displaced people have access to safe and adequate water, sanitation and hygiene services

Outcome area: Clean water, sanitation and hygiene

Impact statement

By the end of 2025, forcibly displaced people thrive as part of empowered communities

Impact area: Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

Outcome statements

Community engagement strengthened and expanded.

Outcome area: Community engagement and women's empowerment

Forcibly displaced and stateless people are engaged in self-reliance and livelihoods initiatives

Outcome area: Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods

Impact statement

By the end of 2025, a comprehensive solutions approach for refugees in Bangladesh will include resettlement and complementary pathways, alongside the preferred solution of voluntary repatriation

Impact area: Securing solutions

Outcome statements

Refugees benefit from resettlement and complementary pathways.

Outcome area: Resettlement and complementary pathways

Refugees are empowered to make informed decisions about voluntary return

Outcome area: Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration

3. Bangladesh 2025 Indicators and Targets

Country	Results Level	Result Area	Indicator	Population Type	Baseline	Target 2025
Bangladesh	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	18%	Not applicable
Bangladesh	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	Not applicable
Bangladesh	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	87%	Not applicable

			primary education	seekers		
Bangladesh	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	9%	Not applicable
Bangladesh	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	67%	Not applicable
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.1 Proportion of refugees and asylum seekers registered on an individual basis	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.3 Proportion of people with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA2: Status	2.1 Average processing time (in days) from registration to first instance asylum decision	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	30	30
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	11%	90%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.2 Proportion of people who do not accept violence against women	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	65%	90%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.3 Proportion of survivors who are satisfied with GBV case management services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.1 Proportion of children at heightened risk who are supported by a Best Interests Procedure	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.2 Proportion of children who participate in community-based child protection programmes	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	86%	90%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.3 Proportion of unaccompanied and separated children who are in an alternative care arrangement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	90%	100%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.3 Proportion of women participating in	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	50%	50%

			leadership/management structures	seekers		
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.2 Proportion of people with primary reliance on clean (cooking) fuels and technology	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA9: Housing	9.1 Proportion of people living in habitable and affordable housing	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	4%	25%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA9: Housing	9.2 Proportion of people that have energy to ensure lighting	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	96%	100%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA10: Health	10.1 Proportion of children aged 9 months to five years who have received measles vaccination	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	98%	95%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA10: Health	10.2. Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	83%	100%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA12: WASH	12.1 Proportion of people using at least basic drinking water services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	97%	100%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA12: WASH	12.2 Proportion of people with access to a safe household toilet	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	95%	97%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.2. Proportion of people who self-report positive changes in their income compared to previous year	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	17%	50%
Bangladesh	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.3 Proportion of people (working age) who are unemployed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	42%	20%