

Working environment

The context

Bangladesh has hosted Rohingya refugees from Myanmar's Northern Rakhine State for many years. More than 250,000 of them arrived in 1991-1992, and although most have returned home, two remaining camps still house some 28,000 refugees. This group has lived in the camps for more than 16 years without freedom of movement, permission to work or access to education. In addition, an estimated 200,000 spontaneously settled Rohingyas from Northern Rakhine State live outside the camps.

In the past two years, the Government of Bangladesh has strengthened its cooperation at the operational level with UNHCR. This has resulted in a qualitative improvement in the lives of the refugees in the camps, who are part of one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world.

The status of an estimated 250,000 members of the stateless Bihari/Urdu-speaking community has been resolved through the grant of Bangladeshi citizenship; they are being registered as voters and issued national identity cards.

The needs

Refugees from Northern Rakhine State in Myanmar

Living conditions in the camps have improved during the last year. Better administration of justice has resulted in a marked reduction in arbitrary arrests. A new participatory camp management scheme has been introduced, and all refugees over the age of five have received identity cards.

Women and girls' exposure to abuse, exploitation and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, though still cause for concern, has been reduced within the camps. Most of the identified health risks

have been tackled by improved health services and the timely provision of drugs and psychosocial support. Malnutrition rates have dropped dramatically.

Moreover, the involvement of UNICEF and the progressive introduction of the national curriculum in Bangla language in schools have increased attendance rates. Shelter needs in Kutupalong camp have been fully met by the construction of semi-permanent structures, while in Nayapara camp provision of better housing for the entire camp-based population will be completed by the end of 2009.

However, growing economic disparities between registered refugees, the unregistered Rohingya outside the camps and Bangladeshi nationals pose the risk of creating dependent and non-cohesive communities. The challenge is to reduce the dependency-driven humanitarian programme and open the camps to provide the refugees with the freedom of movement and access to livelihoods that would enable them to become self-reliant. This will eventually improve chances for voluntary repatriation or resettlement to a third country.

Urban refugees

All urban refugees over the age of five have been issued with identity cards. Although Bangladesh has not acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, the principle of *non-refoulement* is generally respected. However, the absence of a national legal and administrative framework for refugees and asylum-seekers leaves them in a legal limbo that can lead to problems in their daily lives. Securing the right to work for the small number of urban-based refugees also remains a challenge.

Main objectives

- Promote and implement a comprehensive plan of action to attain durable solutions for Rohingya refugees from Myanmar.
- Ensure the protection of camp-based refugees and improve their self-reliance.
- Promote refugee law and protect the human rights of urban refugees.
- Strengthen the protection of refugees within broader migration movements.

Key targets

- Rohingya refugees in camps live in adequate and durable shelters that offer physical protection and safety.
- Refugee children have access to formal primary education.
- Water at all collection points is potable and of sufficient quantity.
- All refugees have unhindered access to primary and secondary health care.
- The refugee-camp community takes full responsibility and ownership of sanitation facilities.
- Refugees have the capacity to meet their socio-economic needs, and their dependence on food assistance is gradually reduced.
- A joint UN community development programme is established to support communities hosting large numbers of both registered and unregistered refugees from Northern Rakhine State.
- A legal and practical framework for the self-reliance of urban refugees is agreed upon by all relevant stakeholders.
- Registration and refugee status determination (RSD) of urban refugees is conducted jointly by UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh.
- A national refugee institution is established.

Planning figures

| Type of population | Origin | Jan 2009 | | Dec 2009 | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| | | Total in country | Of whom assisted by UNHCR | Total in country | Of whom assisted by UNHCR |
| Refugees | Myanmar | 28,810 | 28,810 | 29,020 | 5,000 |
| | Islamic Republic of Iran | 30 | - | 30 | - |
| | Various | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Asylum-seekers | Myanmar | 20 | - | 20 | 20 |
| | Various | 2 | - | 2 | 2 |
| Total | | 28,882 | 28,830 | 29,092 | 5,042 |

Strategy and activities

UNHCR will engage with key stakeholders, including diplomatic missions, the UN Country Team and NGOs, to attain the short-term objective of enhancing the protection and living standards of Rohingya refugees from northern Rakhine State. Based on a community-mobilization approach, projects will target refugees and the surrounding population.

In addition, UNHCR will participate in training and building the capacity of NGOs and law enforcement agencies to deal with sexual and gender-based violence. The Office will help to establish district-wide identification, response, monitoring and solutions mechanisms. It will also promote the introduction of the new UNDP programme on police reform in Cox's Bazaar, as a pilot project.

In the absence of a legal framework for refugee protection, UNHCR will continue RSD for urban refugees. At the same time, it will promote Bangladesh's accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the adoption of a legal and practical framework for refugee rights, and the establishment of national structures. These moves will eventually lead to joint RSD by UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh. UNHCR will continue to build knowledge and awareness of refugee issues among NGOs, civil society and academics to help joint advocacy.



Refugees from Myanmar show their new ID cards.

UNHCR/M. Bayzid

Constraints

There is a need for continued commitment by all stakeholders to pursuing efforts leading to the self-reliance of refugees in the camps. Also necessary is an agreement on the freedom of movement of the refugees, their right to work, and their access to education and skills training.

While the majority of refugees have clearly indicated their strong desire to lead normal and productive lives, some of them may resent any phasing out of the care and maintenance programme.

Organization and implementation

| UNHCR presence | |
|-------------------|----|
| Number of offices | 2 |
| Total staff | 39 |
| International | 8 |
| National | 22 |
| UNVs | 8 |
| JPOs | 1 |

Coordination

UNHCR will continue to build its partnerships with key stakeholders such as the Government of Bangladesh, diplomatic missions, the UN Country Team, NGOs and civil society. The Office is fully engaged in the joint UN community-based development programme.

Financial information

The increased rate of UNHCR's expenditures in Bangladesh between 2006 and 2008 reflects the new political environment in the country and the qualitative improvement of facilities in the camps, in particular the refugees' accommodation, the infrastructure and services. This trend will likely continue in 2009 with additional funds required to meet emerging needs.

Partners

Implementing partners

Government: Ministry of Food and Disaster Management

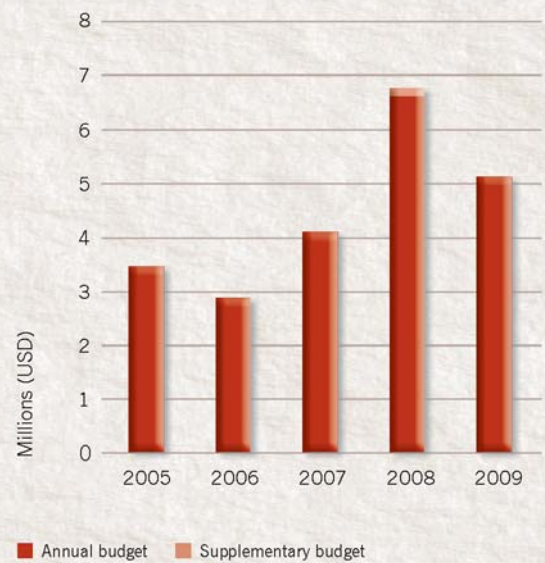
NGOs: Bangladesh Red Crescent Society; Research, Training and Management International; Technical Assistance Inc.; *Action Contre le Faim*

Operational partners

NGOs: Austcare, Handicap International, Concern

Others: WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA

UNHCR's budget 2005 - 2009



Budget (USD)

| Activities and services | 2008 | | | 2009 |
|---|------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | Annual budget | Supplementary budget ¹ | Total | Annual budget |
| Protection, monitoring and coordination | 1,438,000 | 40,000 | 1,478,000 | 1,549,373 |
| Community services | 285,471 | 0 | 285,471 | 550,000 |
| Domestic needs | 506,197 | 0 | 506,197 | 220,000 |
| Education | 90,819 | 0 | 90,819 | 20,000 |
| Food | 235,264 | 0 | 235,264 | 50,000 |
| Health | 529,829 | 55,010 | 584,839 | 580,000 |
| Income generation | 10,000 | 0 | 10,000 | 10,000 |
| Legal assistance | 122,495 | 0 | 122,495 | 130,000 |
| Operational support (to agencies) | 293,641 | 29,000 | 322,641 | 400,000 |
| Sanitation | 101,683 | 12,000 | 113,683 | 60,000 |
| Shelter and infrastructure | 843,287 | 0 | 843,287 | 846,178 |
| Transport and logistics | 41,148 | 0 | 41,148 | 40,000 |
| Water | 40,165 | 28,000 | 68,165 | 45,000 |
| Total operations | 4,538,000 | 164,010 | 4,702,010 | 4,500,551 |
| Programme support | 559,910 | 0 | 559,910 | 608,839 |
| Total | 5,097,910 | 164,010 | 5,261,920 | 5,109,390 |

¹ Includes supplementary programmes for anaemia control and prevention (USD 124,010) and water and sanitation activities (USD 40,000).

Note: Supplementary programme budgets exclude 7 per cent support costs that are recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.