
SOHS 2018 CASE STUDY:

BANGLADESH



ALNAP is a global network of humanitarian organisations, including UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, donors, academics and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve the response to humanitarian crises.

Groupe URD is an independent institute which specialises in the analysis of practices and the development of policy for the humanitarian and post-crisis sectors.

About this case study

This case study is one in a series of five research pieces which fed into the analysis for *The State of the Humanitarian System 2018*. This research was conducted and written in April 2018.

sohs.alnap.org

Author

Charlotte Heward, with Nayeem Wahra, Audrey Chabrat.

The views contained in this report do not necessarily reflect those of ALNAP Members.



Suggested citation:

Groupe URD & ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System 2018 case study: Bangladesh*. ALNAP Paper. London: ALNAP/ODI.

© ALNAP/ODI 2018. This work is licenced under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial Licence (CC BY-NC 3.0).

ISBN 978-1-910454-84-8

Translation and editing by Etienne Sutherland, Groupe URD

Communications management by Maria Gili and Cara Casey-Boyce

Copyediting by Anna Brown

Contents

Acronyms	4
Acknowledgements	4
Executive summary	5
The refugee crisis in Bangladesh: What future for the Rohingya?	5
One of the largest stateless populations in the world	6
Another massive yet disorganised humanitarian response	6
Major gaps remain	7
The refugees' voices are not being heard	7
Systematic coordination challenges in large-scale crises	8
Introduction	9
1 Context overview	10
1.1 A massive refugee crisis	10
1.2 One of the world's most persecuted minorities	10
1.3 A leading role for the International Organisation for Migration	11
2 Analysis and findings	12
2.1 The early stages of the response	12
2.2 Limited coordination and efficiency	14
2.3 Coverage and sufficiency	15
2.4 Relevance and appropriateness of aid modalities	21
2.5 Accountability and engagement	24
2.6 Coherence, complementarity and connectedness	27
2.7 Wider impact: bleak prospects	31
Endnotes	34
Bibliography	36

Acronyms

ACF	Action Against Hunger
CSO	civil society organisation (national/local)
CwC WG	Communication with Communities Working Group
DFID	UK Department for International Development
ECHO	Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission
GUK	Gana Unnayan Kendra
(I)NGO	(international) non-governmental organisation
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISCG	Inter Sector Coordination Group
IYCF	Infant and Young Child Feeding
JRP	Joint Response Plan
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NFI	non-food items
OCHA	United Nations Office for Humanitarian Action
OCV	oral cholera vaccine
PLW	pregnant and lactating women
RRRC	Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
SAM	severe acute malnutrition
SOHS	State of the Humanitarian System report
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to all stakeholders who participated in the development of this study. In particular we would like to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of all interviewees who trusted the research team and provided their views. Without their availability this case study would not have been possible.

Executive summary

The refugee crisis in Bangladesh: What future for the Rohingya?

Nearly 700,000 Rohingya refugees fled Myanmar during 2017 and 2018, embarking upon long and difficult journeys across the Naf River and over the border into Bangladesh. Since then they have lived crammed together in makeshift shelters of tarpaulin, ropes and bamboo on the barren hills of Kutupalong camp.

This mass displacement was triggered by human rights violations and violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar. Villages were burnt down; parents and relatives were killed in front of traumatised children, and women and girls were raped or abused.

The Bangladeshi government responded rapidly to the arrival of the Rohingya refugees, allocating 23.5 km² of land in the Cox's Bazar area and providing assistance via several different government departments.

Cox's Bazar is situated in the Chittagong Division in south-eastern Bangladesh, near the border with Myanmar. The area is extremely prone to natural disasters and is inhabited by already impoverished communities. It is one of the few districts in Bangladesh where multiple cultural and religious identities are visible, including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. Almost 1 million refugees arrived in this tiny district within a couple of weeks, turning the villages and forest land of Balukhali and Kutupalong into the largest refugee encampment in the world.³

When the 2017 influx started, the population of Bangladesh, and of Cox's Bazar district in particular, were the first responders to the mass arrival of refugees flowing across the border. Host populations were very welcoming and helpful. With no specific regulations on where to go at first, the refugees themselves chose to settle in or around camps when they arrived.

More than 500,000 refugees are currently living in the Kutupalong camp. According to the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, around 1 million Rohingya are now thought to be living outside Myanmar, but no third country has yet offered to take them in.

One of the largest stateless populations in the world

Decades of discrimination have left the Rohingya people stateless. In Myanmar, they are effectively denied citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law, and the state restricts their movements and access to land, education and public services. Those who were displaced by earlier waves of violence, in 2012 and 2016, live in dire humanitarian conditions. Unwanted in Myanmar, and now also in Bangladesh, Rohingya migrants have undertaken dangerous voyages by boat towards Malaysia and Thailand in recent years.

The initial generosity of the Government of Bangladesh, opening its borders in 2017 to the flow of Rohingya families fleeing violence in their villages, does not extend to considering a future for the refugees in that country and strongly rejects the possibility of local integration. Several repatriation plans are being discussed but the conditions are still not in place to enable a safe return of the Rohingyas to Myanmar. This is notably because UNHCR and most other UN agencies have not been able to access Northern Rakhine since the crisis started in 2017.

It is likely that the refugees will remain in Bangladesh for months or even years, so their future will depend on developments in the country. It is therefore crucial that longer-term activities are implemented inside and outside the camps. These people have been traumatised by the violent events they experienced in Myanmar. Without income-generating activities, land to cultivate, or information about their future, their situation could become more and more difficult to bear.

Another massive yet disorganised humanitarian response

According to different stakeholders, the response did not meet the necessary quality standards during the two first months. Most importantly, quality was not considered a priority because the huge number of people requiring assistance was overwhelming. Despite the mobilisation of the humanitarian sector, enormous gaps in the response remain. Before 25 August 2017, 303,070 Rohingya were already in Bangladesh. By 15 February 2018, 671,000 further arrivals had been registered. This mass influx of people has obviously affected the host community in Cox's Bazar, which was already made up of 336,000 people. This host population was finally included in the 2018 Joint Response Plan (JRP)¹ after months of advocacy from donors and protection agencies.

The rainy season in Bangladesh starts in May or June and ends in September or October, with specific cyclone risks during the first and last months of the season. Contingency and preparedness activities started very late,² only a few weeks before the season was expected to begin, and remained very limited, with the possibility of moving to a safer place reserved only for the most exposed households. Refugees mentioned that they did not feel respected by aid agencies, and felt it was their right to be involved in decision-making. There was a great deal of anxiety among refugees and aid actors regarding the rainy season as the camps are located in areas at risk of floods with no other land made available.

Major gaps remain

During the initial months of the response priority was given to life-saving assistance, food security, shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) over mental health support. However, depression, anxiety and other mental health issues are very common, and there is a clear need for consistent mental health and psychosocial support to help the refugees cope and begin a healing process. At the same time, mental health is a delicate matter for the Rohingyas, and even for the Bangladeshis, thus a great deal of cultural sensitivity is required.

Protection is not fully nor satisfyingly ensured. There are questions about safety in the camps as no one knows what happens after the aid workers leave at night. Concerns are also voiced about the specific situation of women and girls, with many reports noting situations of abuse and exploitation, most occurring within the Rohingya community itself. In addition, almost a year on from the peak of the crisis, victims of gender-based violence may well be dealing with pregnancy and childbirth.

There are also questions about the role of the majhis (traditional leaders) in the camps. Although some of them can be relied on as helpful focal points, the system as a whole seems to be corrupt, with numerous cases of majhis withholding beneficiary cards and asking for money.

The refugees' voices are not being heard

Among agencies, there is an increasing sense of the importance of accountability, with different approaches emerging. To engage the refugees themselves as agents of their own protection, a Community Outreach Programme has been launched in which refugees are empowered as first responders to support their peers.

However, the Rohingya response in Bangladesh is currently failing to achieve mandated accountability standards. The population is not systematically involved in needs assessments and in programming activities, even though there have been some efforts to engage with the host community.

Attempts to increase accountability to affected people are hampered by communication challenges due to language barriers. Bangladeshis do not understand the Rohingya language and communication with international staff is limited. This means that three-way translation is sometimes needed, leading to miscommunication, even though locally recruited staff speak Chittagonian, which is very close to Rohingya. Literacy is low among the Rohingyas, so the effectiveness of approaches such as complaints boxes is unclear. Besides, the government does not allow refugees to have Bangladeshi SIM cards or mobile phones, making it hard for beneficiaries to call agency hotlines. As a result, the system is not really effective, even though some beneficiaries borrow phones or SIM cards if they want to reach hotlines. In addition, cultural norms that restrict women's involvement in many areas are a major challenge for accountability mechanisms.

Systematic coordination challenges in large-scale crises

The massive influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees in 2017 received an enormous amount of media attention internationally, producing huge funding. Despite the situation in Bangladesh proving to be similar to that of Haiti after the earthquake in 2010 and Southeast Asia following the tsunami in 2004, it seems that few lessons have been learned by the international community. Several different monitoring and coordination mechanisms headed by different stakeholders (Bangladeshi District Administration, Relief Commissioner and Army, the United Nations) caused misunderstandings and numerous errors, gaps and overlaps in the sector-wide response.

Donors and aid actors have been advocating for longer-term approaches to be allowed in the refugee camps and with host communities. More generally, they know that the Rohingyas' future depends on investment in the Cox's Bazar district and in Bangladesh as a whole. In order to achieve a sustainable solution, a major shift in policy will be required, easing pressure on Bangladesh, enhancing refugee self-reliance, expanding access to third-country solutions and supporting conditions in the country of origin to allow a safe and dignified return.

Introduction

This country case study focuses on Bangladesh and specifically on the response to the Rohingya refugee crisis. It is part of the 2018 edition of The State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) report and has been carried out by a mixed team comprising a researcher from Groupe URD and an independent consultant from Bangladesh, who facilitated access to both national and international actors involved in the response to humanitarian needs in Bangladesh.

The study is based on the results of 14 face-to-face interviews and three focus groups conducted by the two consultants at field level, in Dhaka and the Cox's Bazar area, and a thorough literature review. Interviews were conducted with staff from Bangladeshi institutions and national authorities, UN agencies, international, national and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), donors, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as 25 beneficiaries through focus group discussions in the camps and settlements.

The interviews were semi-structured, based on the interview protocol developed within the framework of the SOHS research methodology. All interviews were transcribed and coded and a qualitative analysis was carried out.

Findings were reached through a combination of literature review, knowledge of the country context and thorough analysis of the interviews with all the stakeholders that were met.

1 Context overview

1.1 A massive refugee crisis

Since 25 August 2017, nearly 700,000 people have fled Myanmar for Bangladesh, embarking upon long and difficult journeys across the border marked by the Naf river. This mass displacement of refugees was triggered by human rights violations and violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar. Villages were burned down, parents and relatives were killed in front of traumatised children, and women and girls were raped or brutalised.

The Government of Bangladesh responded rapidly to the arrival of the Rohingya refugees, notably by allocating 23.5 km² of land in the Cox's Bazar area, and by providing assistance and continued support stretching across a wide range of government departments.

Cox's Bazar is situated in the Chittagong Division in southeastern Bangladesh, near the border with Myanmar. This area is very poor and is extremely prone to natural disasters. The total area of Cox's Bazar district is about 2,491 km² (940 km² of which is forest land) and, according to the last census, the total population of the district is 1,773,709. This is one of the few districts in Bangladesh where multiple cultural and religious identities are visible. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and people of other religions have been living there. Almost 1 million refugees arrived in the tiny district within a couple of weeks, turning the villages and forest land of Balukhali and Kutupalang into the largest refugee encampment in the world.

Despite the mobilisation by the humanitarian sector, enormous gaps in the response remain. Before August 2017, there were already 303,070 Rohingya living in Bangladesh. By 15 February 2018, a further 671,000 arrivals had been registered. This massive influx of people has clearly affected the host community in Cox's Bazar, which is made up of 336,000 people.

1.2 One of the world's most persecuted minorities

Decades of discrimination have left the Rohingya people stateless. The Government of Myanmar has restricted their movements, withheld land rights and blocked their access to education and public services. Earlier waves of violence in 2012 and 2016 led to dire humanitarian conditions for those who were displaced. Effectively denied citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law, they are one of the largest stateless populations in the world. Unwanted in Myanmar and Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees have also undertaken dangerous voyages by boat in recent years to Malaysia and Thailand.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), around 1 million Rohingya are now thought to live outside Myanmar, but they have not been welcomed by a third country. In 2012, to discourage the Rohingyas from crossing the border in search of a safe haven, Bangladesh ordered aid organisations to stop providing assistance to the Rohingyas. The Bangladesh authorities believed that the international non-governmental organisations' (INGOs) actions in providing aid was encouraging more people to cross the border illegally. Doctors Without Borders (MSF-Holland), Action Against Hunger (ACF) and the British agency, Muslim Aid, which were working with refugees living outside the registered camps, stopped their activities on receiving this order. Whereas the total number of those who had crossed the border was estimated to be 300,000, Bangladesh recognised only 29,000 as refugees. The rest were categorised as 'Undocumented Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh' and hundreds more were turned away at the border by the Bangladeshi authorities.

1.3 A leading role for the International Organisation for Migration

After the expulsion of INGOs in 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) drafted the National Strategy on Myanmar Refugees and Undocumented Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh. It then selected the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) as the coordinating organisation for NGOs working with undocumented Myanmar nationals who had entered Bangladesh at different times and were living outside the registered camps. UNHCR remained the leading agency for registered camps until August 2016, but with limited capacity to influence governmental bodies (according to aid workers present in the country before 2017). The 2013 strategy stipulated that the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner's job, a Bangladeshi-instigated role, was to coordinate activities related to the 29,000 refugees living in the two registered camps only. The 300,000 others received irregular assistance from a small number of INGOs that were allowed to remain in the district.

“ If you look at it, the speed at which the crisis broke, and the speed at which the humanitarian community was able to scale up, is actually quite remarkable. It's an unprecedented crisis in many, many ways, in terms of the scale of it and the speed of it. When you then look at the gaps in the insight planning or things that may look haphazard, I think it's easy to understand, if you understand the number of people that were crossing per day, and how, within a short period of time, this came about. ”

Humanitarian worker from an INGO

To ensure the participation of other governmental and non-governmental agencies, IOM took the lead in organising sectoral coordination bodies, which ultimately became the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), instead of clusters.

2 Analysis and findings

2.1 The early stages of the response

During the first days of the crisis, in August and September 2017, the response was a charitable one, led by the host communities, local NGOs, charities and religious organisations. It should be noted that local administrations were among the first responders. Improvements were gradually made. The Bangladeshi Army played a major role in the response and provided some structure and organisation.

Before the INGO-led aid operation kicked in, the delivery of assistance was disorganised. Those refugees living close to main roads in Cox's Bazar would receive goods but those in less accessible areas got very little.

“ I think we are covering a lot. In terms of numbers we have quite a good number of beneficiaries. In terms of quality, unfortunately, quality is not measurable, especially in emergencies. I don't mean that we are not doing well on this, but we don't have time to really measure and evaluate the quality of the work that we are providing. ”

Humanitarian worker from an INGO

The main focus during this first phase was life-saving assistance and services. Food assistance, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services were provided as well as medical care. Most aid workers interviewed felt that they were doing their best, that a lot was being done, but that the needs far exceeded the capacity of the sector in what, at the time, was one of the fastest-growing refugee crises in the world.

International and local actors often have good knowledge of humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law and generally respect them. However, this protracted refugee crisis, with major political constraints, in a congested environment where land is limited, meant that there were specific challenges.

The entire humanitarian system had to be set up; this is one of the reasons why this crisis has been a major learning experience and challenge for aid actors. A lot of capacity development was necessary in order to have national staff with the necessary skills. This took place in all sectors, and notably in sectors that are not traditional in Bangladesh, such as protection and psychosocial services.

Protection services were indeed crucial. A lot of refugees who crossed the border had urgent protection needs (separated and unaccompanied children, women and girls who had been raped and were still bleeding, people who arrived totally traumatised, and so on). There were questions about safety in the camps as no one knew what happened after the aid workers left at night. Concerns were voiced about the specific situation of women and girls, with many reports noting situations of abuse and exploitation, most occurring within the Rohingya community itself. In addition, almost a year on from the peak of the crisis, victims of gender-based violence may well have been dealing with pregnancy and childbirth.

“ If agencies only get permission for two months in a row, after one month of delay, then there is a big problem for them to complete the job. It’s not only the job, but also the issue of hiring the right people, because if they cannot see what they’re free to do after two months, this is a problem. Again, there is a need of some sort of good level of coordination ... at present, as we talk with the different agencies, they were telling us that they had to go through a quite significant number of coordination from Dhaka to Cox’s Bazar and then the camp. So, it can also be making delay, which is a bit frustrating for them. ”

Humanitarian worker from an INGO

According to different people who were interviewed, the response did not meet the necessary standards of quality during the two first months. Quality was not a priority as the huge number of people to assist was overwhelming. Project cycles were extremely stretched with unrealistic deliverables. Although the funding was there, the structural capacities to implement the response were not always in place in a timely manner. It took time for NGOs, including those already working in the context, to switch from a recovery to an emergency approach.

2.2 Limited coordination and efficiency

It took until October 2017 to clarify who would take the leading role in coordination between IOM and UNHCR. This caused confusion and unfortunate delays on the ground and still remained unclear at the time of the field visit. Aid workers witnessed a significant ‘battle for territory’ between the two agencies. NGOs mentioned that they did not apply for UN funds as much because they were worried of the dependence this funding might create. The crisis gave UNHCR the opportunity to expand its area of influence, particularly outside the camps, in informal settings and host community areas.

Humanitarian stakeholders also experienced a number of bureaucratic challenges related to obtaining authorisation to deliver aid along with coordination issues that hindered the efficient delivery of aid. The management and coordination of the response still looks like an ad hoc arrangement. Projects are only getting approval on a three-month basis, which indicates that the authorities are trying to solve a chronic problem with short-term solutions and aid actors are not able to provide the most relevant assistance.

The humanitarian response for the Rohingya refugee crisis is facilitated by the ISCG in Cox’s Bazar. The ISCG Secretariat is led by the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) which is designed to be an inclusive decision-making forum made up of heads of international humanitarian organisations. At the sub-national level, UNICEF leads the nutrition sector and child protection sub-sector and co-leads the education sector with Save the Children. UNICEF also co-leads the WASH sector with Action against Hunger.

It is worth noting that the Cluster System was not activated.⁴ The sector organisation pre-existed in Bangladesh following previous crises, however, the government did not want to modify the whole setting for the Rohingya crisis, located only in Cox’s Bazar district.

UN agencies and the NGO forum considered that not activating the Cluster System could be an advantage as they would remain more independent as they didn’t have to include a national government counterpart in the sectors as they would have had to in each cluster.⁵

Actors in this crisis were overwhelmed both by the number of people who needed assistance, and by the number of agencies working in the same area, with very little indication as to who was doing what and where. Thousands of new agencies, with varying degrees of experience, arrived in Bangladesh, some without a strategy for what to do. For NGOs (particularly the less well-known) it appears to have been an opportunity to ‘get a slice of the pie’ and build a presence in a context that had been a humanitarian desert prior to the influx of refugees. Many of these new actors arrived without the knowledge or competence required and did not understand the complexity of the situation. There was therefore the risk of additional harm being done by aid workers not responding to the actual needs of people who were already extremely vulnerable.

Several monitoring and coordination mechanisms headed by different stakeholders (Bangladeshi District Administration, Relief Commissioner and Army, and the UN) caused misunderstanding and overlap. Some actors even mentioned an ‘outbreak of meetings’ at one point. Sector leads reportedly were not directive enough towards aid workers and were themselves overwhelmed and not able to provide a clear picture of the situation to aid actors involved.

“ It’s obviously a very large-scale response. The capacity was not there at the beginning, but it was also an overfunded response. ... The coordination has been very challenging, and you really can see the difference between how it was in September and October, when we were in the camps and there were basically no actors. We went back just with IFRC [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies], MSF and Caritas, the usual ones. Ten days later ... people are fighting to find a place to work. So, the coordination and the effectiveness of the response is a major issue. I think it’s very well acknowledged at the sector level, but yes, clearly this is one of the challenges we are facing, it’s the multi-level of coordination and with very limited links. ”

Humanitarian worker from an INGO

2.3 Coverage and sufficiency

Sector overview⁶

Food assistance: The majority of refugees are dependent on food assistance. Refugees noted the need for more diverse produce in food baskets. Women in general are happy with the present situation regarding food distribution and other support. They are grateful to the host community and the camp management. However, it emerged during the discussions that the general rations were not big enough for every family as the number of family members varied and the frequency of distributions was not regular.

Nutrition: Food insecurity has been a major issue. Regarding the nutritional status of refugees, a survey revealed that in November 2017 acute malnutrition was prevalent among all children and less than 16% of children had an acceptable diet (food diversity and frequency).

Health: Beneficiaries highlighted that one month after the outbreak of diphtheria in December 2017, there were no more cases in their camp, and they knew where to go for medicine and health support. At the beginning of the response it was unclear who was the authority giving permission to set up clinics. They still need psychosocial and mental health support. But there is a government initiative to provide mental health care and counselling. Monsoon and cyclone seasons bring potential further challenges because of the poor sanitation (latrines) and hygiene.

Education: Most Rohingya adolescents cannot read or write in either the Myanmar or the Bengali languages, but only in Arabic. After coming to Bangladesh, people and especially women and young girls, are provided with classes on personal hygiene and some life skills.

Protection: Globally, the protection of refugees has been under serious threat, but Bangladesh has kept its borders open. The Bangladesh authorities have agreed to host almost 700,000 Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar in the space of six months. However, the people in the camps are extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The sites often have no lighting. The majority of the population are women or girls (52%) and more than half are minors (55% under 18). The fact that the refugees do not have legal status or identity documents means that they do not have freedom of movement or access to the justice system, legal work opportunities, or public services such as education and healthcare.

WASH: In some camps, such as Tung Chi Pro camp in Cox's Bazar, there is not enough water for daily washing and bathing. Regular sessions on hygiene awareness are taking place and this is helping the camp residents, but the scarcity of safe water is hampering best hygiene practices.

Shelter: Many of the shelter conditions are well below the Sphere standards because of the lack of space, and also because of the restrictions imposed by the Bangladeshi government (low quality of constructions). Notably, the roofing materials (mostly polythene sheets) are not sustainable during the cyclone and rainy seasons. The shelters are not disaster-resistant. Moreover, they are located very close to each other which is a fire hazard. The relocation of the camps to an adjacent area to make the settlements less vulnerable is ongoing, but site planning remains a challenge.

2.3.1 High level of funding for the response

Unlike many other crises in the world, funding of the first phase of the response to the current refugee crisis in Bangladesh was not an issue. Funding has been relatively good; there was money and agencies are working. This is partly due to strong media and civil society mobilisation in the months of October and November 2017.

Around \$324 million was raised during 2017, which represents 74% of the response plan. Total funding to the Bangladesh-Rohingyas refugee crisis, to respond to the basic needs of 1.2 million people, is estimated at \$436 million. A new Joint Response Plan (JRP) was launched on 16 March 2018, requesting \$951 million to provide life-saving assistance to 1.3 million people. A 2018 country snapshot estimates total funding to be \$73.4 million at the moment, with \$1.6 million under the response plan, and \$71.7 million from other funding.

“ Yes, funding now is okay, but, again, thanks to communication, thanks to the media. There was a media machine working on this until donors started to realise that they had to contribute to this. A few years ago, that was not the case, at all. ”

Representative from an INGO

Obtaining detailed information about funding per sector is not easy because many agencies are working with funds that have been issued outside the JRP. The Bangladeshi population has also been very generous in providing funds, whether through the private sector, religious organisations or individuals.

Different countries and donor organisations have contributed to funding the humanitarian response in Bangladesh. As can be seen in the table below, the US, the UK, and to a lesser extent, Australia and the European Commission, have been the main donors.

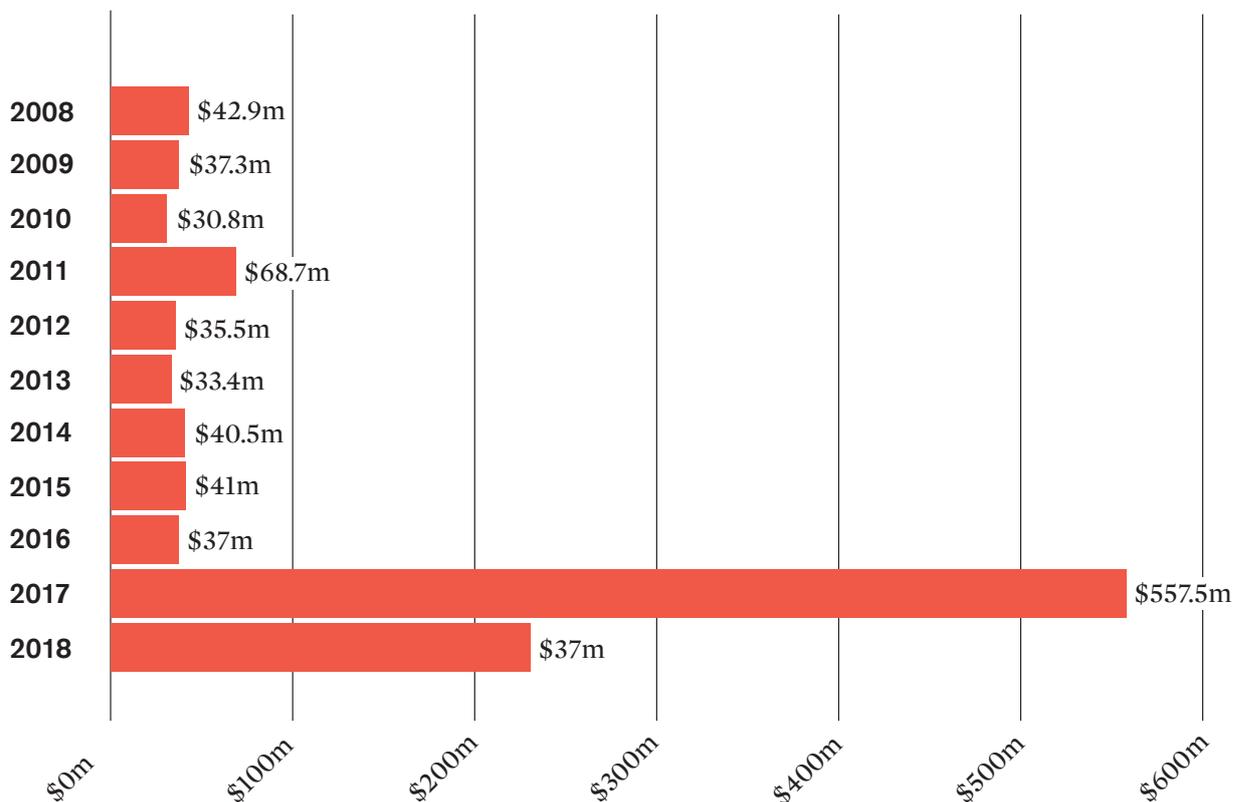
The response in Bangladesh is larger than ever in terms of financial and human resources, and the number of aid actors around the country. The camps are safe working areas for humanitarian actors in comparison with other countries affected by conflicts and/or terrorism, and the fact that there has been extensive media coverage has encouraged a lot of high-profile visitors to come and visit the camps. Humanitarian actors have access to camps, settlements and host communities, and could easily consult beneficiaries, although they do not necessarily consider it a priority and have not made the most of these conducive factors.

In December 2017, more than 130 organisations were working under the response plan. These included 12 UN agencies, 69 international NGOs, around 45 national NGOs, 13 local NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. There are also many civil society actors, including faith-based organisations, and various government-to-government support programmes.

The sufficiency of the response (the number of beneficiaries assisted and the quantity of assistance provided to each beneficiary) is directly related to changes in funding over time. However, the interviewees voiced concern that the months following the peak arrivals will not be as easily funded as earlier phases of the response. The Joint Response Plan for March to December 2018 was launched on 16 March.

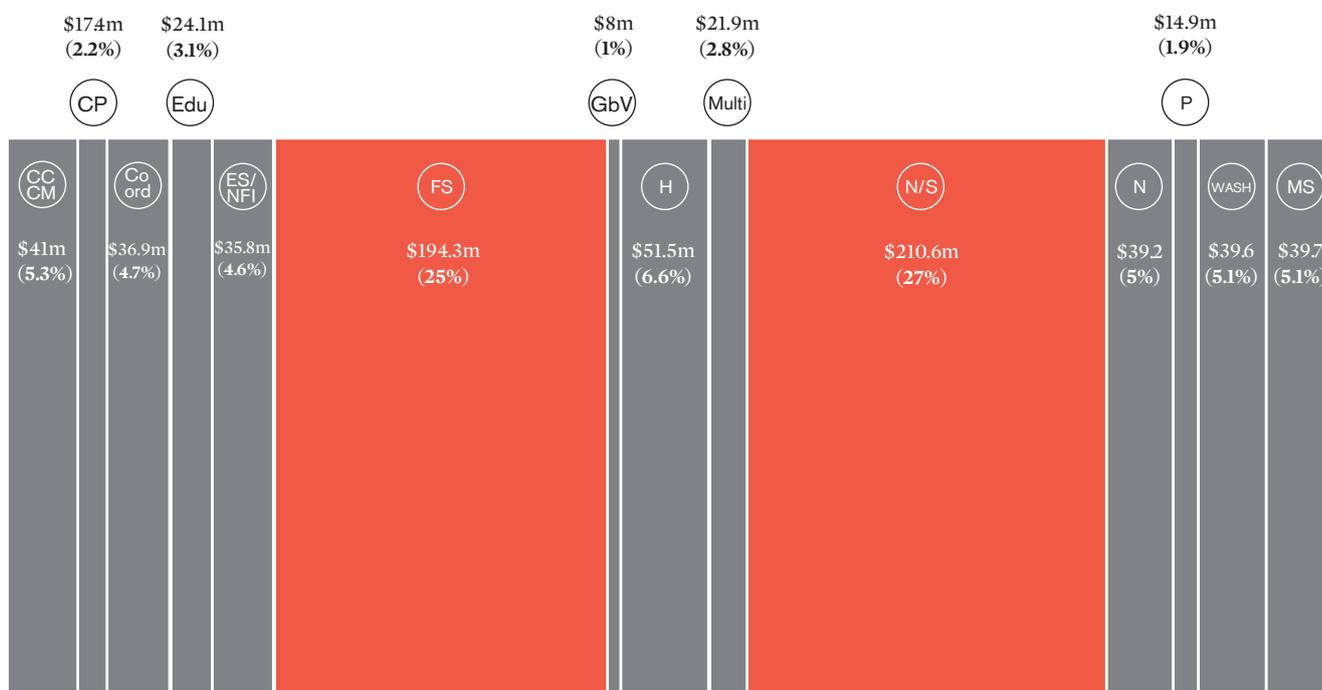
Figure 2 shows funding per sector (coverage rate according to the funding required and the funding finally spent). Essential sectors such as Food Security and Nutrition have been very well covered. WASH (36.6%) and protection (30.9%) are broadly and relatively well covered but, unfortunately, the funds obtained in 2017 for the Education sector were only 5.9% of the total requested and less than 30% was obtained for the Shelter/Non-Food Items and Health plans.

Figure 2 / Trends in reporting funding in USD



Source: OCHA, 2018.

Figure 3 / Funding per sector 2015–2018



- CC CM** Camp coordination and camp management
- CP** Child protection
- Co ord** Coordination and support services
- Edu** Education
- ES/NFI** Emergency shelter and non-food items
- FS** Food security
- GbV** Gender-based violence
- H** Health
- Multi** Multi-sector
- N/S** Not specified
- N** Nutrition
- P** Protection
- WASH** Water, sanitation and hygiene
- MS** Multiple sectors (shared)

Source: OCHA, 2018.

Notes: The share for Agriculture, Early Recovery, Emergency Telecommunications and Logistics have not been visualised as they only account for 0.1% each

2.3.2 Geographic coverage: a facilitated access

Compared to Myanmar, where access is a huge problem, the Bangladesh government opened its borders and allowed most humanitarian agencies to carry out their activities. Coverage is relatively good with most people in need receiving assistance.

The refugees are concentrated within extremely congested sites in the Ukhia and Teknaf Upazilas sub-districts of Cox’s Bazar. Kutupalong, a refugee camp in Ukhia, has now become the biggest camp in the world. As of February 2018, there were 10 camps and settlements, ranging in size from 9,900 refugees in Shamlapur, to more than 602,400 refugees in the Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion Site. To the south of the expansion site, Jamtoli, Hakimpara and Potibonia are indistinguishable, housing 101,400 refugees between them.

Around Nayapara Refugee Camp and Leda in Teknaf, settlements have joined to form a third sprawling concentration of more than 88,300 refugees, which continues to expand and spread into surrounding villages. The 336,000 members of the host community are also considered to be in need. It is worth noting that a number of new arrivals have also been absorbed into the local community. A total of more than 110,000 Rohingya refugees are currently estimated to be living among host communities. However, assistance to the host communities remains a sensitive topic and few agencies are working outside the camps because this is problematic in terms of access and authorisations.

After some confusion during distributions in the first weeks of the intervention, some organisations put in place separate lines for vulnerable people, and also for women, children and older people.

In most response plans, aid actors are targeting not only Rohingyas but also host communities. According to the interviewees, supporting host communities is a necessity rather than an option. Many host communities have been surrounded by refugee camps and the Bangladeshi government and various international actors, including the European Union, have emphasised the importance of supporting host communities. However, some people remain out of reach and neglected. Two groups in particular are difficult to reach: the Rohingyas who have stayed in the 'no man's land'⁷ and the Rohingyas living in the urban areas of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. As they are invisible, it is difficult to assess their number, their living conditions and their needs. The protection working group plan included them, but this is a very sensitive issue as they are not authorised to stay in the city.

2017–2018 UNICEF Programme targets⁸

Nutrition:

- 7,500 children under five with severe acute malnutrition treated
- 43,000 pregnant and lactating women received Infant and Young Children Feeding counselling
- 335,000 children under five and pregnant and lactating women provided with micronutrient supplementation

Health:

- 237,500 children immunised against measles and rubella
- 900,000 doses of oral cholera vaccine administered in two rounds (650,000 affected people vaccinated against cholera)

Education:

- 201,765 children (4–14 years) reached with emergency non-formal education, including early learning

Child Protection:

- 180,000 children received psychosocial support
- 3,500 unaccompanied and separated children identified and registered
- 35,000 of most at-risk adolescents received life skills training and information on gender-based violence referral services

WASH:

- 450,000 people provided with access to safe drinking water, culturally appropriate latrines, and key messages on hygiene

2.4 Relevance and appropriateness of aid modalities

The Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh is a protracted refugee crisis and therefore involves a multiplicity of needs on a very large scale. There were no major concerns about the relevance of the aid provided in the first weeks and months of the response. However, there were misgivings about the targeting and quantity of aid provided to all households, with very little, if any, consultation of the population and about sectors and needs that should have been prioritised. The beneficiaries who were interviewed said that they received general packages of basic foods quite regularly, but that the package was the same for all households. Most of them thought that this practice needed to be reviewed as larger households regularly faced food shortages.

“ What she explained earlier is that when she goes to the community, she discusses it sometimes, and the very interesting thing is that the people are getting the relief package ... [it] is similar for all families. Like, if there is rice, they are getting 25 kg of rice. If there are 10 members, they are also getting that 25 kg of rice, which is not really according to their needs. That is one issue. The other issue is that people are asking not to give the materials, but to give cash. Because that will give them more flexibility to choose the things, and to buy the right things. As they cannot give the cash, what they have done is that, instead of giving the pulses, or some other things, they go for the spices, like onions, more salt, some sugar. So, they have repackaged the thing, but they're confined in packaging. ”

Focus group discussion with women in Balukali Camp

They also mentioned that they wanted to receive cash rather than goods, and they wanted to be able to sell their labour in exchange for money. They are not consulted about non-food items and receive the same items continuously. Providing them with cash would be a solution but cash assistance and livelihoods activities were totally prohibited until 2018 and were extremely sensitive topics as the Bangladeshi government was concerned that if refugees engaged in economic activities, they would be more integrated into the country. However, agencies started implementing these activities in an indirect or hidden way. This situation was considered unsustainable and unacceptable by agencies and the operational framework started shifting.

Many consulted beneficiaries said that religious leaders (called moulanas) come into the camp and distribute cash, but that the flow of cash is getting lower every day.⁹ Some refugee youths are employed by INGOs and NGOs to do some camp-based work, which is another source of cash.

There is a lot of demand among refugees for opportunities to earn income. As mentioned previously, local inhabitants have been very helpful to the refugees. Some people in the area are themselves former refugees from previous influxes and are therefore very sensitive to the situation they are going through. But the labour issue is highly sensitive as it is one of the main sources of tension between refugees and the host community. The latter accuse the Rohingya of 'stealing' their jobs and contributing to a decrease in salaries. This consequently increases negative coping strategies such as child labour and illegal jobs.

Tension between the communities has also been observed as more and more mixed marriages have taken place. It is common for Bangladeshi men to take a second spouse within Rohingya camps, which is an issue among Bangladeshi women.

2.4.1 Challenges to the assessment and relevance of aid assistance

International NGOs, and even national organisations receiving foreign funds, have had to deal with long and demanding bureaucratic processes. Foreign donations forms have to be submitted, providing details of projects receiving foreign funds. The huge number of applications due to the scale of the crisis led to delays in obtaining authorisations to start projects. Often, by the time the authorisation was finally received, much of the authorised implementation period had already passed.

2.4.2 Challenges to coverage

One of the main challenges is gaining access to the population to implement humanitarian aid. There are multiple humanitarian responses and many actors with completely different approaches, intentions and mandates, so the quality and effectiveness of the response varies a great deal.

A full picture of who is doing what and where is difficult to establish because of the large range of organisations that are operating. There is a certain amount of confusion in coordination, mainly because of the level of congestion in camps, the number of actors involved and the multiple contradictions in successive leading roles; this makes it very challenging to verify whether all needs are being covered.

“ What is a challenge, and that’s across every sector, is the congestion. Which, obviously, from looking at Bangladesh and the density and the landscapes that are here, there are no easy fixes. When it comes to dealing with having physical space, child-friendly spaces or learning spaces or, you know, women’s spaces, not to talk about just health and WASH and so on. The congestion is a big challenge.”

Representative from an international organisation

The extremely high level of needs means that organisations are unable to cover them in all sectors. The food security, nutrition and WASH responses have been fairly satisfying, but some important issues that are not immediately visible, such as protection, psychological care and social support, are not sufficiently covered. As a result, people who arrived in the country traumatised by the violence inflicted in Myanmar, the loss of family members, and exhausted by a gruelling journey across the border, are at risk.

The need for psychological support among the Rohingya refugees has not yet been addressed. Many women and girls were exposed to severe forms of sexual violence in Myanmar before and during the exodus. There is a huge risk of increased domestic violence within camps and communities, as well as human trafficking.

“ Some of the needs are in areas where you don’t have the capacity, within Bangladesh, to respond. In particular when it comes to trauma counselling and social counselling and dealing with ... the aftermath of the violence that the Rohingyas have experienced. Including the grave sexual violence that women, in particular, have gone through. So, those skills and really dealing with these issues, that’s obviously a gap there. The international community has not decided on what would be a justice mechanism for what has taken place.”

Representative from an International Organisation

Protection needs are huge, and the identification and case management of separated and unaccompanied children is a major concern.

The Rohingya refugee crisis cannot be solved through humanitarian assistance alone. As is often the case in migratory crises, there are crucial political issues to be dealt with regarding repatriation of the refugees. Since November 2017, there have been attempts to find an arrangement between the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar for a future repatriation plan. However, the conditions for a safe return of the refugees have not yet been met. For instance, the UN does not have full access to the three northern townships of Rakhine state in Myanmar. The UN continues to advocate for unfettered access to Rakhine to ensure that development and humanitarian assistance reaches all people in need.

“ We need to be present and provide protection, but it is not a lack of money or understanding or resources of the state – it is purely a lack of willingness of the state to protect and assist these people. ”

Representative from an INGO – Interviewee from Myanmar

2.5 Accountability and engagement

2.5.1 Limited accountability to affected people and communities

Access to and appropriateness of services for all ages, genders, vulnerable people and abilities is still limited. The Rohingya population's limited understanding of the humanitarian system reduces uptake of services and makes them more vulnerable to abuse of power. It also poses a significant barrier to holding the humanitarian community to account.

The engagement of the Rohingya population in the response is still minimal. Most of them do not receive any information about the progress or decisions made regarding the response to their needs, their relocation or repatriation or even about their next ration supply. Beneficiary engagement is limited to relations with the *majhis*.

Among agencies, there is an increasing sense of the importance of accountability, with different approaches emerging. With this comes an increasing need for improved coordination, such as establishing referral pathways for individual case-based complaints and ensuring data feeds into meta-analysis that informs response-wide interventions and advocacy. To engage the refugees themselves as agents of their own protection, a Community Outreach Programme has been launched in which refugees are empowered as first responders to support their peers.

However, the Rohingya response in Bangladesh is currently failing to achieve mandated accountability standards. The refugee population is not systematically involved in needs assessments and programming activities even though there have been some efforts to engage with the host community. Most actors explained that so many life-saving activities were needed in the first months that they did not have time to engage with the population.

Communication is a challenge because of language barriers. The Bangladeshis do not understand the Rohingya language, which is spoken by the vast majority of the refugees, and communication with international staff is limited. This means that three-way translation is sometimes needed, which can lead to miscommunication.¹⁰ Some humanitarian agencies that were present in Northern Rakhine, already working with Rohingyas there, have been recruiting staff who used to work for them in Myanmar. Literacy is very low among the Rohingyas. However, most signs in the camps were either in English or Bangla. The use of pictograms would have facilitated their access to information.

The low levels of literacy mean the effectiveness of approaches such as complaints boxes is unclear. The Bangladeshi government does not allow refugees to have Bangladeshi SIM cards and mobile phones, making it hard for beneficiaries to call agency hotlines. As a result, beneficiaries do not like phone/SMS hotlines, which are consequently ineffective. In addition, cultural norms that restrict the involvement of women in many activities are a major challenge for accountability mechanisms.

Focus group discussions and surveys do take place increasingly, but mostly remain limited to needs assessments. One actor referred to monitoring and evaluation, where they have direct interaction with local committees in every district they work in. They take note of people's feedback and apply it in future interventions. Some help desks have been established, but coverage is incomplete and there is not enough time and skilled staff for proper feedback to be provided. Focus group conversations with refugees pointed to significant gaps in their information. While some refugees knew about the different types of assistance provided by different organisations, others knew little of the organisations' backgrounds, the extent and duration of the services they provided, or what they could expect to receive in the future. An even more prominent gap was the lack of information for refugees regarding relevant scenarios for the near future (e.g. on repatriation).

Not all actors who have set up feedback and complaints mechanisms have staff who are trained in handling sensitive complaints including regarding gender-based violence. Complaints data is stored by a variety of humanitarian actors, with varying levels of data protection, including unencrypted emails and storage devices. Formal and systematised referral mechanisms are not in place for individual case-based complaints between project or agency-specific complaints mechanisms and multi-sectoral mechanisms. Verbal and face-to-face mechanisms are preferred. These mechanisms are not really accessible and are not used a great deal in Bangladesh.

Meta-data is not systematically collected about the complaints received. Community committees, including sectoral committees, are being established. Efforts are under way to improve community participation and establish more representative governance mechanisms, to facilitate feedback and the response to community concerns. Assessments by the Communication with Communities Working Group (CwC WG) – coordinated by IOM – have revealed that many refugees and host communities reported not having enough information or sufficient access to feedback or complaints mechanisms. For example, Community Radio Naf is not accessible in the Kutupalong/Balukhali camps; only 50% of the Teknaf area is covered.

Although progress is being made, very limited information was given to the beneficiaries at the beginning of the response. Only 16% of women and 25% of men are aware of accountability mechanisms, while only 27% of women and 17% of men say that they understand their rights related to humanitarian assistance (Christian Aid and GUK, 2018). There is an overwhelming preference for vocal and face-to-face mechanisms that reduce barriers such as illiteracy. Confidentiality is highly valued.

The *majhis*' leadership in the camps

The Bangladeshi army is in charge of crisis management and camp organisation. In order to communicate with the refugees, the army asked them to designate a *majhi* (traditional leader) for groups of approximately 50 to 200 households. This system of informal leadership in the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh was established at the time of the 1991–1992 refugee influx. The *majhis* are notably asked to communicate the families' lists to organise food distribution.

In 2007, the system changed following numerous complaints about abuse of power and corruption (UNHCR, 2017) but was reactivated in 2017.

The *majhis* represent the lowest level of political organisation in the camps. They participate in dispute resolutions and are the interface between refugees, aid agencies and the Bangladeshi authorities. Above them are two other levels: head *majhis*, representing large camp blocks, and chairmen, representing entire camps. Aid workers mostly consider the *majhis* system to be corrupt, although they acknowledge that some of them are really helpful. They reportedly exploited refugees, confiscated their distribution cards, and asked for money in exchange for being registered for distribution. UNHCR wanted to change the system and implement a fairer and more representative one, but now that it is in place it seems very difficult to transform it; refugees who have arrived since August 2017 have immediately reproduced the former system.

A Rohingya adolescent girls' group mentioned during discussions that they were not consulted about their needs and choices. They received information about distribution dates and locations from male members of their family and majhis. Information about the location and time of distributions and about public health goes through the majhis. At the time of the field visit, participation was limited to sharing information. Majhis attend meetings organised by the camp authority and sometimes by agencies, mostly to provide information. Some of the majhis said that they also informed actors about the refugees' immediate needs, with little feedback from the humanitarian workers.

2.6 Coherence, complementarity and connectedness

During the study, international and local actors who were interviewed often had good knowledge of humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law. However, the fact that this is a protracted refugee crisis, with major political constraints, in a congested environment where land is limited, means that there are specific challenges for coherence, complementarity and connectedness.

2.6.1 Refugees' lack of status poses problems

Bangladesh only considers around 33,600 Rohingya people living on the official camps of Kutupalong and Nayapara as refugees, having obtained this status in the past. The rest of them are not recognised as such by the Government of Bangladesh, and are instead labelled as 'undocumented Myanmar nationals', giving them no legal status in the country (ECHO, 2018).

The authorities' refusal to register Rohingya refugees at birth and to provide any other civil documentation prevents the humanitarian actors from assessing the scale of the humanitarian needs of these people. This makes any effort towards ensuring legal protection more difficult, if not impossible. Undocumented people are some of the most vulnerable and at-risk populations on earth.

Another challenge facing Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh is the lack of recognised legal status, which puts them on a precarious legal footing under domestic law. All the new arrivals are officially registered as 'Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals', a designation that denies their refugee status and any rights attached to that status. This makes them more vulnerable to denial of freedom of movement, access to public services, education and livelihoods, as well as to arrest and exploitation. However, as a party to core international human rights treaties, Bangladesh is nevertheless obligated to ensure all persons within its jurisdiction, including refugees, retain access to fundamental rights.¹¹

The Rohingyas are unable to pursue education and formal employment opportunities, and remain vulnerable to exploitation and protection risks. Aid actors and donors mentioned advocating for authorisation to implement cash transfer programmes, education programmes. However, the lack of status for the Rohingyas in Bangladesh prevents improvements and prevents the humanitarian response from being able to rely solely on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

However, it is important to recognise that Bangladesh has so far respected the principle of non-refoulement, especially praiseworthy at a time when many other countries are building walls, pushing asylum seekers back at borders, and deporting people without adequately considering their protection claims.

2.6.2 A difficult path towards complementarity

After the 2012 riots in Rakhine, subsequent violence inflicted upon the Rohingyas by the Myanmar authorities led to a new wave of refugees. Pressure then mounted to introduce a new system to address the needs of unregistered refugees in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi government's subsequent National Strategy on Myanmar Refugees and Undocumented Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh suggested a three-stage coordination mechanism at national level, comprising:

- a) a National Coordination Committee under the leadership of the Foreign Minister;
- b) a National Taskforce under the Chair of the Foreign Secretary; and
- c) local taskforces at district and sub-district levels.

On the government side, a National TaskForce, established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has been leading the coordination of the Rohingya crisis.

In the current response, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief was assigned to coordinate the Rohingya response with support from the Bangladesh Army and Border Guard Bangladesh. In addition, the Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) and the Deputy Commissioner of Cox's Bazar district are involved in day-to-day coordination. The army's role was often praised during the interviews with stakeholders, as they were sent in rapidly to help manage and organise the camps. Its professionalism and capacity to deal with affected people is explained in part by its significant experience of taking part in peacekeeping forces.

“ Really, it’s a burden for us, for Bangladesh, to provide for them for a long time. So we are, we’ll be very happy if they go to their own country and we hope that the repatriation process will start very soon. ”

Local authority staff

However, politically, Bangladesh is pushing strongly for a rapid repatriation plan and accordingly is selecting humanitarian projects that are not likely to prolong the situation. The authorities expect increased tensions caused by the presence of the refugees, particularly due to the pressure on natural resources (wood and water primarily), and available jobs and services.

According to the bilateral agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh, the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar was supposed to start in 2018. However, there is concern and apprehension, and a certain degree of danger surrounding the repatriation process. At least four critical issues need close attention: non-refoulement, safety and security, identity and citizenship. In addition, the Rohingya themselves refuse to consider repatriation unless their conditions are met by the Myanmar authorities.

What future for the refugees?

On 13 April 2018, UNHCR, represented by Filippo Grandi, and Bangladesh, represented by Bangladesh’s Foreign Minister Shahidul Haque, signed an agreement on the voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees when conditions for return are more favourable in Myanmar. This agreement establishes a framework for cooperation between the UN agency and Dhaka on the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. At present, UNHCR believes that conditions in Myanmar are not conducive to safe, dignified and sustainable returns.

UNHCR has reiterated its call to the Government of Myanmar to take concrete measures to address the root causes of displacement, in accordance with the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission.

However, in the absence of a tripartite agreement between UNHCR, Myanmar and Bangladesh, UNHCR was continuing its consultations with the two governments by negotiating two separate memorandums aimed at ensuring that future returns met international standards.

Furthermore, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNHCR are

in negotiations with the Government of Myanmar on a tripartite agreement to define the scope of cooperation between those agencies and the Government of Myanmar in Rakhine State. The agreement would aim to establish a framework for the voluntary repatriation of refugees in accordance with international standards, create conditions for voluntary repatriation and provide humanitarian assistance to all inhabitants of Rakhine State.

2.6.3 Dim prospects for connectedness

This is a major concern in the current response. As mentioned above, the Bangladeshi government refuses to consider a future for the refugees in the country and therefore only authorises life-saving activities. It is highly reticent when permitting development-type activities that allow refugees to improve their situation for the future by establishing income-generating activities, permanent and resilient constructions (shelters, WASH infrastructures) or even education or training activities.

The only development-focused activities allowed by the government are oriented towards host communities and the natural environment, though there is a need for more of these activities in refugee communities.

The Government of Bangladesh opened its borders and accepted hundreds of thousands of refugees onto its territory. This was a generous decision, but its firm refusal to approve any activities that are not temporary services for the refugees limits the relevance and quality of the humanitarian response and the access of humanitarian actors.

... the first couple of weeks it was the host community who were the first responders, and they were very generous, they went out of their way, they gave them all the support necessary. They fed them, they gave them space to sleep, even though some of them were so poor that they [had] difficulty meeting their ends. However, if this continues for very long then there will be a compassion fatigue. It's bound to happen. So, it's the role of the government, the local administration, all the humanitarian responders and actors, to work and talk with the host community, to engage them. So, in recent times, recent months, you will see a lot of the projects have a component for refugees and host communities.

Humanitarian worker, INGO

Since 2015, the government has repeatedly expressed the idea of turning an uninhabited

and inhospitable Bay of Bengal island, Bhasan Char, into a location for 100,000 Rohingya refugees. Humanitarian stakeholders are seriously concerned at this prospect, considering that this island is prone to frequent cyclones and cannot sustain livelihoods for thousands of people. What is more, the government is not necessarily considering voluntary displacement to this island, but rather would impose this location on a number of refugees.

Since the 2017 influx, there have been debates and concerns around the constantly growing Kutupalong and Balukhali camp which is not a sustainable option. UN agencies did not advocate against it when it became the best solution to provide the refugees with assistance. However, more and more actors have advocated in favour of alternative solutions. ECHO (Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission) notably wants to focus its funds on interventions outside the camps. There is also an increasing presence of development agencies and donors such as UNDP and the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) for instance, which are thinking in terms of integration within host communities and social cohesion. Development activities will become possible when they target both communities equally, if the government allows that transition to take place.

In the Education sector, it seems the government is reluctant to allow any teaching in Bangla, as they fear that the refugees will then be able to be integrated into the society more easily. They only allow teaching in the Rakhine language.

2.7 Wider impact: bleak prospects

The 2018 rainy season with its cyclone risks is a huge concern for all stakeholders in the area. The density of shelters in very limited spaces, sometimes located on hilly treeless slopes, makes the refugees vulnerable to any extreme weather.

The rainy season in Bangladesh usually starts in May or June and ends in September or October, with specific cyclone risks during the first and last months of the season. Contingency and preparedness activities started very late,¹² only a few weeks before the season was expected to begin; they remain very limited, with the possibility of moving to a safer place reserved only for the most exposed households. Refugees mentioned that they did not feel at all respected by aid agencies and felt that it was their right to be involved in decision-making. There is a great deal of anxiety among refugees and aid actors regarding the rainy season, which is potentially a large-scale emergency in itself, as the camps are located in areas at risk of floods with no other land made available.

Environmental impact and degradation

The need for large quantities of shelter material has a strong impact on natural resources. Many trees have been cut down, which is affecting the local environment and biodiversity (90% of Teknaf forest has disappeared since the 1990s). Similarly, the need for wood fuel has a severe impact on a fragile ecosystem, and few alternatives to the use of wood fuel or charcoal have been implemented.

The Ukhia sub-district is partly a natural reserve, notably home to wild elephants that have used the same corridor for decades, but it is where shelters have now been built (UNHCR and IUCN, 2018). Some refugees were recently trampled to death by elephants passing through the camps.

At the time of the field visits, there were no plans at the Department of the Environment to address this environmental degradation.

The government has been very clear on not wanting development activities. So, it's a little bit unfair to ask that question. I mean, as if the permission, who operates with what activities, has been quite humanitarian-focused, with much less space for development, then that's the reality. What I would assume will happen under the Joint Response Plan is there will be activities on environment and those are recognised as urgent and something that has to happen. Both in terms of forests, in terms of land, in terms of agricultural land and in terms of water. Water, obviously, is absolutely key, because it greatly impacts women's lives and livelihoods and just hardship, both in the camp, as well as in the host communities. The same for fuel and cooking fuel. So, the environment piece, if you want to call that, development will definitely need to be strengthened. So does the support to the host communities.

”

UN worker

Socioeconomic impact on the district and the country

Mixed feelings are expressed around the impact of the refugees' presence in Bangladesh. On the one hand, the economic impact the crisis has had on Cox's Bazar district, and the fact that there is a need for goods and services, is seen in a positive light.

It has generated income for people, to make the drains and the slabs, as a huge number of latrines have been set up. Engineering and construction companies are working: bamboo, plastic sheets, all these vendors, they have benefited from it. Then there are all the hotels, guest houses in Cox's Bazar, they have seen a boom in the business off-season which they never would have anticipated. Rent-a-cars, transport companies, they've had a boost, airlines, the domestic airlines, they're doing amazing business.

”

INGO worker

On the other hand, stakeholders are worried that competition and tension might grow between the refugee and host communities as the refugees are sometimes employed for lower rates than the local workers (although they are not officially allowed to work in the country) and increased prices have had a negative impact on local purchasing power. This has also led to conflicts and safety issues for aid workers who have been accused by the local community of focusing on refugees alone. It is also partly the responsibility of NGOs that hire refugees in a hidden or indirect way using the status of volunteers instead of taking volunteers from both communities.

The large number of different aid agencies working on the ground has been a major source of jobs, improving the unemployment situation in this poor area of Bangladesh. However, some concerns were voiced about the fact that some young people have dropped out of school without graduating because they have been attracted by these employment opportunities. This can allow young people to learn an interesting job, although they do not necessarily have the appropriate skills, and this boom is most likely to be temporary, as the funding will probably be reduced in the coming months.

Now we started understanding [that] there is already a tension coming out

“because, obviously, the cost of the commodities is going up, because of them [the refugees], and that is where WFP is trying to now come up with a multi-wallet voucher, instead of giving the food. So that giving the vouchers to the people, that they could go and buy in the market, and stabilise the prices on the market. Also, the jobs are going down, as well, because there are no jobs. The Cox’s Bazar itself is the least developed district in Bangladesh, that’s why there’s been always an issue of the jobs and job security. Now, with the cost of the commodities going up, to some extent, we are feeling that we are very close to having some tensions between the two – host communities and Rohingyas. So, we have to be careful of how to address it.

”

UN worker

The massive influx of refugees in 2017 received an enormous amount of media attention internationally, leading to a huge amount of funds. Despite the situation in Bangladesh proving to be similar to that of Haiti after the earthquake in 2010 and Southeast Asia following the tsunami in 2004, it seems that, unfortunately, the international community has learned few lessons. Several different monitoring and coordination mechanisms headed by different stakeholders (Bangladeshi District administrations, Relief Commissioner, Army, and the UN) caused misunderstandings and numerous errors, gaps and overlaps in the sector-wide response.

Donors and aid actors have been advocating for longer-term approaches to be allowed in the refugee camps and with host communities. More generally, they know that the Rohingyas’ future depends on investment in the Cox’s Bazar district and Bangladesh as a whole. In order to achieve a sustainable solution, a major shift in policy will be required, easing pressure on Bangladesh, enhancing refugee self-reliance, expanding access to third-country solutions and supporting conditions in the country of origin to allow a safe and dignified return.

What we want to press or the message we want to get through is that it’s time to do long-term planning and collectively. No one should be seen as an adversary ... it’s a multi-stakeholder long-term planning that is required, not the ad hoc-ism that we are seeing. Because, realistically, even if the Myanmar government opens its door, they’re not going away tomorrow. The repatriation, done formally, will take longer ... When we are repatriating, it’s over a longer duration. This confusion, this lack of understanding is creating the problem.

”

INGO worker

Endnotes

1. The host communities in the area are very vulnerable, so the present influx of refugees may have consequences on their livelihoods. Their needs are now integrated into the 2018 JRP, notably page 16 of the following document: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/JRP%20for%20Rohingya%20Humanitarian%20Crisis%20-%20FOR%20DISTRIBUTION.PDF>
2. In January 2018, at the time of the researchers' field visit, no effective site planning, relocation or contingency activities had really started.
3. (Needs and Population Monitoring) Round 8, IOM Bangladesh. (https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/npm-r8-sa-report_2018-02-05.pdf).
4. Instead, the following sectors were designed: 1. Cash Working Group (CWG); 2. Camp coordination and camp management group (CCCM); 3. Child Protection; 4. Communications with Communities Working Group (CwC WG); 5. Education; 6. Food Security; 7. Gender-based Violence (GBV); 8. Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA WG); 9. Health; 10. Host Community Working Group; 11. Inter-Sector Coordination; 12. Logistics; 13. Nutrition; 14. Protection; 15. Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA); 16. Shelter; 17. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene.
5. However, the health sector functioned as a cluster would have, with the Bangladeshi Department of Health involved in meetings.
6. ISCG. (2018) Monthly Situation Reports: Rohingya Refugee Crisis, Cox's Bazar. Dhaka: Inter Sector Coordination Group.
7. Although not marked on map, 'no man's land' is an area around the Naf river that marks the border between the two countries.
8. According to ISCG situation update of December 2017. Information related via the 2018 Humanitarian Action for Children of UNICEF in Bangladesh.
9. Since the research, the national government and the local authorities stepped in to prevent these activities.
10. This is despite the fact that the Rohingya language is very close to the Chittagonian language in Bangladesh and many aid workers are hired in Chittagong district because of the communication possibilities this offers.
11. From Human Rights Watch; see: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/08/05/bangladesh-not-my-country/plight-rohingya-refugees-myanmar#>
12. In January 2018, at the time of the researchers' field visit, no effective site planning, relocation or contingency activities had really started.

Bibliography

Christian Aid and GUK. (2018) *Accountability Assessment Rohingya Response Bangladesh*. London: Christian Aid. (<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/about-us/accountability-assessment-rohingya-response-bangladesh>)

Cox's Bazaar Cash Working Group. (2017) *Delivery Mechanism Mapping for Cash Based Interventions (CBI) in Cox's Bazaar*. Dhaka: Inter Sector Coordination Group. (<http://www.cashlearning.org/downloads/deliverymechanismmappingcoxsbazaarreportjan2017.pdf>)

ECHO. (2018) 'The Rohingya crisis', ECHO Factsheet. (http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/rohingya_en.pdf)

HERE. (2018) *Real-Time Response Review of the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) Emergency Appeal for People Fleeing Myanmar. Responding to The Needs of Refugees and Host Communities: Review of The Dec Phase 1 Responses*, Geneva: HERE. (https://www.dec.org.uk/sites/default/files/PDFS/dec_rohingya_crisis_appeal_response_review_report270318.pdf)

Huang, C. (2018) *A Bangladesh Compact: Beyond Aid Solutions for Rohingya Refugees and Host Communities*. Washington DC: Center for Global Development. (<https://www.cgdev.org/publication/bangladesh-compact-beyond-aid-solutions-rohingya-refugees-and-host-communities>)

Human Rights Watch. (2000) *Burma/Bangladesh, Burmese Refugees in Bangladesh: Still No Durable Solution*. New York: Human Rights Watch. (<https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/burm005.PDF>)

Human Rights Watch. (2017) *Massacre by the River, Burmese Army Crimes against Humanity in Tula Toli*. New York: Human Rights Watch. (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/12/19/massacre-river/burmese-army-crimes-against-humanity-tula-toli#>)

IOM. (2018) *Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, IOM Appeal, March – December 2018*. Geneva: IOM. (https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/IOM-Appeal-Rohingya-Humanitarian-Crisis-Response.pdf)

Internews. (2017) *The Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh: Still Left in the Dark*, Washington DC: Internews. (<https://www.internews.org/updates/rohingya-crisis-bangladesh-still-left-dark>)

ISCG. (n.d.) *Standard Operating Procedure Cash For Work Programming*, Cox's Bazar: Cash Working Group, Inter Sector Coordination Group (https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/cwg_sop.pdf)

ISCG. (2017a) *Monthly Situation Reports: Rohingya Refugee Crisis, Cox's Bazar*. Dhaka: Inter Sector Coordination Group.

ISCG. (2017b) *Preliminary Response Plan, Influx into Cox's Bazar*, Dhaka: Inter Sector Coordination Group. (<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ISCG-Preliminary-response-plan-Influx-into-Coxs-Bazar-7-September-2017.pdf>)

ISCG. (2017c) *Rohingya refugee crisis response plan, 2017 Monitoring report*. Dhaka: Inter Sector Coordination Group. (<https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/2017-monitoring-report-rohingya-refugee-crisis-response-plan>)

ISCG. (2018) *Monthly Situation Reports: Rohingya Refugee Crisis, Cox's Bazar*. Dhaka: Inter Sector Coordination Group.

Médecins Sans Frontières. (2018) *'No One Was Left': Death and Violence Against the Rohingya in Rakhine State, Myanmar*. Paris: Médecins Sans Frontières. (<https://www.msf.org/myanmarbangladesh-no-one-was-left-death-and-violence-against-rohingya>)

UNHCR. (2017) *Refugee Consultations Bangladesh*. Geneva: UNHCR. (<http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/46f0ec002.pdf>)

UNHCR. (2018) *Myanmar Refugee Emergency Response in Bangladesh, Supplementary Appeal, March – December 2018*. Geneva: UNHCR. (http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%202018%20Supplementary%20Appeal%20Bangladesh_1.pdf)

UNHCR and IUCN. (2018) *Survey Report on Elephant Movement, Human-Elephant Conflict Situation, and Possible Intervention Sites in and around Kutupalong Camp, Cox's Bazar*. Dhaka: IUCN Bangladesh Country Office. (<http://www.unhcr.org/5a9946a34.pdf>)

UNHCR, IOM and United Nations. (2018) *Joint Response Plan (JRP) for Rohingya Humanitarian Response, March – December 2018*. Geneva: UNHCR. (https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2018_jrp_mid_term_review_v28.pdf)

UNICEF. (2017) *Humanitarian action for children, Bangladesh: Rohingya influx*. New York: UNICEF.

UNICEF. (2018) *Humanitarian action for children, Bangladesh: Rohingya influx*. New York: UNICEF.

UNOCHA. (2018) Financial tracking services. Bangladesh: Rohingya Refugee Crisis Joint Response Plan 2018 (<https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/656/summary>)

Wake, C. and Yu, B. (2018) *The Rohingya crisis: Making the transition from emergency to longer-term development*. Humanitarian Policy Group, Policy Brief n°71. London: Overseas Development Institute. (<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12134.pdf>)

WFP. (2017) *Refugee Influx Emergency Vulnerability Assessment (REVA)*, Rome: WFP. (<https://www.wfp.org/content/rohingya-emergency-vulnerability-assessment>)

