



Empowering Rohingya women through skills and knowledge – UN Women's Rohingya Refugee Crisis Response

25 August 2018



A year has passed since the Rohingya refugees fleeing violence in Myanmar started to arrive in Cox's Bazar in masses. More than 700,000 have crossed the border by now, and 52% of the refugees are women and girls. UN Women's response for Rohingya refugees aims at meeting specific needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized women and girls: female-headed households, elderly women and adolescent girls. UN Women works in partnership with other humanitarian agencies to ensure protection and equitable access of refugee women to humanitarian assistance and information, in order to enhance their self-reliance and decision making and mitigate their risks of being exploited.

Empowering women in safe spaces

Amidst all the challenges that women are facing in the congested camps that still lack adequate WASH facilities and health services, UN Women works towards empowering Rohingya women and girls through life-skills training and supportive services. The services are being provided through the Multi-Purpose Women's Centres in Camp 18 in Balukhali since January 2018. Close to **70 women and girls visit the center daily** to receive various services, or just to get away from their crowded living quarters and find peace and comfort. So far, the center has supported **over 15,000 women and girls** of all ages through various services. Women and girls receive information and referral services for health and psychosocial support, learn about nutrition, health and sanitation, and other essential life-saving matters.

Life-skills training

The Women's Centre also serves as a skills training centre. Over **420 women and adolescent girls have completed the two-month tailoring training course** taught by an experienced Rohingya instructor since February 2018. Although there are challenges in terms of finding steady customers, about half of the women and girls who learned tailoring at the Women's Centre have started to

earn some money to support their families through orders from friends and neighbours. The Women's Centre has sewing machines available for women who have completed the training to come and use for free for their income-generation activities.



Photo: UN Women

Nur Kaida is an adolescent Rohingya girl who has completed the tailoring course at the Women's Centre. Besides stitching clothes for herself and her family, currently she takes orders from her neighbours. From never having earned any money, Nur Kaida has made up to two thousand Takas (approximately \$24) in a month. She aspires to support herself and her family through the skill she has acquired, and fill up the void that her lack of education has left.

Psycho-social support

At the Women's Centre, women can bring forward their problems related to gender-based violence and receive general counseling. They are referred to a more specialized gender-based violence consultation offered by other organizations if needed. So far **867 women and adolescent girls have been helped** by the health counselor at the Women's Centre.

Supporting women's participation and leadership

The Women's Centre supports Rohingya women and girls voice their needs and concerns and help them be heard by the camp leaders and humanitarian agencies. There

are **21 Community Outreach Volunteers**, who reach out to women in areas surrounding the Women's Centre through door-to-door visits. They make them aware of services available to them, and also listen to problems that they are facing. Some of the commonly heard concerns are insufficient food and shelter, shortage of safe drinking water, and need for items such as umbrellas and burqas, etc.

Monsoon rains

June to August is monsoon season in Cox's Bazar. Thanks to the mitigation and preparedness measures of the humanitarian community with the Government of Bangladesh, casualties from landslides and flooding that were feared have been minimal. But many facilities still faced challenges due to the heavier than usual rain. The Women's Centre also could not avoid being impacted. The floor of some parts of the centre have caved in due to soil erosion, and urgent repairs are underway to keep the centre open for the women and girls. Still women continued to come to the centre to join the tailoring training and use the sewing machines in particular. Some of the awareness raising activities had to be suspended. Construction of the 2nd Women's Centre was also held back due rain and completion will be in early September.



*Women's Centre during the monsoon rain
(Photo: UN Women)*

World Refugee Day

To commemorate World Refugee Day on 20 June, an interactive art session was hosted by UN Women titled "Awareness through Art" at the Women's Centre, for the

women and girls. The event gave Rohingya women and girls the rare opportunity to express their feelings and aspiration in visual form. For most participants, holding a brush was a firsthand transformative journey which not only allowed them self-expression but also provided a safe platform to voice out the myriad of challenges they face daily as a refugee in a foreign land.



Rohingya women putting their thoughts to paper at the Women's Centre (Photo: UN Women)

Inter-Sector Coordination and Gender Mainstreaming

The Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group that UN Women and UNHCR co-chair has produced two more issue briefs.

- [Gender in Humanitarian Action Brief No. 4](#) - Interconnectedness of Gender, Age and Disability Issues in Rohingya Refugee Response
- [Gender in Humanitarian Action Brief No. 5](#) - Gender Equality Interventions with Adolescent Rohingya Girls and Boys

Shortage of safe spaces for women

UN Women appealed earlier this year for funding to establish 7 new Women's Centres but we are nowhere near that number. So far only 25% of the funds have been mobilized. Please help us by donating [here](#).

UN Women's Rohingya Refugee Crisis Response is made possible with support from: UN Women National Committee Australia, UN Women National Committee Japan, UN Women National Committee Sweden, Government of Sweden