



## IN BRIEF



# COX'S BAZAR UPDATE OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2022

Photo: UNICEF

## UN Women celebrates volunteers

International Volunteers Day (5 Dec) was marked with an event in the refugee camps to acknowledge Rohingya volunteers' contribution to UN Women and their community.

UN Women relies on its 60 volunteers (both women and men), who work closely with UN Women's Gender Field Officers, to coordinate outreach groups and awareness activities on gender equality and women empowerment issues that contribute positive changes in the lives of women and girls and their communities.

Speaking at the event, Silja Rajander, head of the Cox's Bazar sub office, said UN Women volunteers are helping to end violence against women and girls by increasing awareness in the community and referring survivors to where they can seek safety and justice.

"Being a volunteer shows compassion, respect and solidarity with the community. You are helping to ensure that the most vulnerable voices are heard and paid attention to," Silja said.

Monowara, a volunteer and women's network leader, is living proof of this. "I joined UN Women to do work for my fellow community women, to strengthen their leadership and empowerment," Monowara said.



Photo: UN Women/Liz Pick

UN Women volunteers and staff on International Volunteers Day

Monowara is proud of the changes she has seen so far. "When we came here, women in my Rohingya community could not access an education and they were not even allowed to leave their homes. Now, the women of my block feel confident to join meetings at the Camp-in-Charge (CiC) office and express their opinion in front of decision-makers."

## UN Women achieves full IASC membership

UN Women became a full member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in October 2022. Created by the United Nations General Assembly in 1991, the IASC is the UN system's longest-standing and highest-level humanitarian coordination forum. Membership in the IASC strengthens UN Women's ability to ensure effectiveness in addressing gender needs across the humanitarian–development–peace continuum.



Photo: UN Women/Liz pick

UN Women Rohingya volunteers enjoy International Volunteers Day





## Activists join together against gender-based violence

Highlights of the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE campaign and 16 Days of Activism in Cox's Bazar

### Public rally unites GBV actors

Hundreds of people marched through the streets of Cox's Bazar to mark the start of the 16 Days of Activism campaign uniting government, development and humanitarian actors, civil society, women's organizations, and the entire UN system in calling for an end to gender based violence.

This year, in the spirit of the UN Secretary General's UNiTE campaign, the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA WG), co-chaired by UN Women and UNHCR, partnered with the Gender Based Violence Sub Sector, chaired by UNFPA, to organise a united launch event bringing together partners from across all sectors of the Rohingya response.

Speaking at the rally, Additional RRRC Khalid Hossain said, "If we work together, we can reduce, or even eradicate gender-based violence for good. If we all present here today follow the awareness messages written on the placards around us in our personal life, family life, and social life and stop doing violence, then along with our family and relatives we will be able to have an impact on our society, country, even worldwide."

**"The single most important driver of policy change is a strong and autonomous women's movement — making feminist action, literally, a matter of life and death."**

Silja Rajander, head of UN Women sub office in Cox's Bazar drew attention to the activism of women leaders and women's movements working to end violence against women and girls. "Supporting and investing in women's rights organizations is the key to ending violence against women and girls. Evidence shows that the single most important driver of policy change is a strong and autonomous women's movement—making feminist action, literally, a matter of life and death. To end violence against women and girls, it is essential that funds are directed to the experts: women's organizations and grassroots groups. Mobilizing support to these organizations is urgent and must be part of the localization agenda in Cox's Bazar."

GiHA WG member organisations supported almost 400 local events to raise awareness of GBV in the Rohingya refugee camps and host community throughout the campaign. UN Women partners ActionAid, BRAC, DCA Bangladesh and Oxfam organised a wide range of activities in the Rohingya camps and host community including a women's football match, bicycle rally, markets and handicrafts fair, cultural performances and a documentary contest.



Photo: UNICEF

*The Cox's Bazar District Commissioner addressed the crowd at the 16 Days of Activism rally, showing his support for ending GBV*



Photo: ActionAid Bangladesh

*Rickshaw drivers showed their support for ending gender-based violence by joining the 16 Days of Activism bicycle rally*



Photo: ActionAid Bangladesh

*UN Women's partner, ActionAid, organized a bicycle rally as part of the 16 Days of Activism campaign in Cox's Bazar*

## Men and boys play key role to end gender-based violence

The annual UNiTE! and 16 Days of Activism campaigns call on everyone, regardless of gender, to take an active role in ending violence against women and girls.

As trusted members of their community, UN Women volunteers play an important part in outreach and supporting referrals for gender-based violence (GBV) in the Rohingya refugee camps. Sixty volunteers – both women and men – work under the guidance of six UN Women Gender Field Officers. Each volunteer coordinates small groups of women, girls, men and boys, using these networks to spread awareness messages about GBV and how and where to seek help when needed.

Junaid, a 22-year-old Rohingya man, fled Myanmar with his family when he was just 17 years old. As the oldest son, he is now the head of his family of nine, a responsibility he takes seriously. For the last year he has been working as a UN Women volunteer, a role he says helps him support his family and set a good example for his sisters and brothers.

Volunteers are trained on gender equality and preventing and responding to GBV. Thanks to this training Junaid now recognises that women have equal rights to men but says it was not always this way.

“Before joining UN Women I did not understand what gender equality means,” Junaid said. “Most people in our community do not prioritise women. I thought women should always be behind men. But this is not fair; this is not gender equality.”

“After fleeing to Bangladesh in 2017, most of the women in our community were facing difficulties – women were forbidden to come out of their homes or work. This was normal for us, but I learned that these social norms are very harmful to women.”



Photo: UN Women/Mahmudul Karim

*UN Women volunteer, Junaid works with other Rohingya men and boys to prevent violence against women and girls.*

Informing survivors about referral pathways is one aspect of volunteers' work but this alone cannot put an end to GBV. This is where male volunteers like Junaid play an important role in reaching other men to prevent violence from occurring.

“In our community most women face GBV cases. I teach everyone how GBV happens in the community. We teach men not to beat women, not to use violence. I can see that some men do not understand this straight away. It takes time to change their thinking,” Junaid said.

“Since 2019 the situation is changing because people are realising that women also have human rights, women should stand in the same positions as men, and women have the same right to work and earn money as men. After working with different organisations like UN Women, our community now understands this better. This is a big change.”

### TAKE 5 STORY: “I am also your child, and you should treat me equally”

“I heard that one of the parents in my neighbourhood was going to arrange a marriage ceremony for their adolescent daughter without her consent. I went there and discussed with the parents the drawbacks of early marriage and government laws to prevent early marriage. I was able to stop that adolescent girl's marriage by convincing her parents.”

Take five minutes out of your day to hear from an inspiring young activist working to end violence against women and girls in Cox's Bazar.

Read more: [bit.ly/3YgqFui](https://bit.ly/3YgqFui)



Photo: UN Women Australia

*This intrepid group of women did a four-day trek to Cradle Mountain in Tasmania, Australia to raise money for Rohingya women and girls living in Cox's Bazar refugee camp. Thank you for supporting Rohingya women and taking action for gender equality and women's empowerment. @UN Women Australia*



## Strengthening gender-responsive policing for Rohingya women and girls

During displacement and times of crises, the threat of gender-based violence (GBV) increases for women and girls. In fact, estimates suggest that the majority of the near 500,000 Rohingya women and girls living in Cox's Bazar refugee camps have either witnessed or are survivors of GBV.

Recognising the complexities of policing in a humanitarian situation, UN Women supports the Bangladesh Armed Police Battalion (ABPN) to improve the availability, accessibility, and quality of police services for women and girls in Cox's Bazar as part of its strategy to address the high rates of violence against women and girls in the camps.

Forty-eight police (24 women, 24 men) completed capacity building on gender-responsive policing this quarter, bringing the total to 454 police officers (165 women and 289 men). The capacity building workshops emphasize how to deliver gender-sensitive prevention, response, and investigation services to survivors.

---

### *I was afraid of coming to this meeting, but today's discussion changed my perception*

---

Cultural norms generally prevent Rohingya women and children from communicating with men outside their families. For this reason, UN Women provides monitoring support to five police help desks specifically for women and children in the camps. The help desks are staffed 24 hours per day by 60 women police trained to support women and children. Those reporting gender-based violence can also be referred to medical services, psychosocial counselling, sexual and reproductive healthcare, and other essential services. An additional three help desks for women and children are being established with support from the Australian Government.



Photo: UN Women/Liz Pick

*Police officers joined UN Women staff members for a photo at the 16 Days of Activism rally in Cox's Bazar, 24 November 2022*

While UN Women supports the APBN to transform police culture through better policies, structures, and practices, another partner, Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) is working to raise camp residents' trust in the police through better communication. A dialogue session in October between the Camp-in-Charge, women police from the APBN and women leaders from the Maitree women's group discussed GBV issues and better collaboration.

"I was afraid of coming to this meeting, but today's discussion changed my perception," said Dhiluara Begum, a Maitree group member. "Now we understand about the roles and responsibilities of women police in the camp, our group members will be able to receive better support from the police."

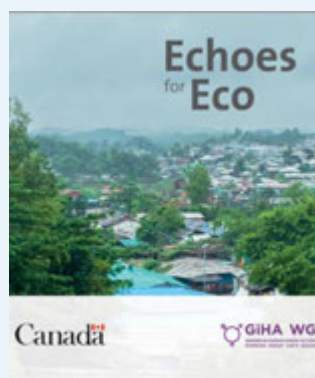
The Maitree project is funded by the governments of Sweden and Switzerland and the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

---

### Gender in Humanitarian Action news

The Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA WG), which UN Women co-chairs with UNHCR, had a busy year providing support to humanitarian actors across all sectors to ensure gender aspects are integrated into the Rohingya refugee response.

Read about the working group's successes and challenges over the last year in the latest GiHA WG newsletter: [bit.ly/3XiZeP6](https://bit.ly/3XiZeP6).



### ECHOES FOR ECO

The [GiHA WG Climate Action Photobook 2022: Echoes for Eco](#) highlights the contributions of Rohingya and host community women and girls to climate change adaptation initiatives.

## Gender-sensitive journalism workshop

The media can be instrumental in creating space for discussions that help defy gender stereotypes, challenge negative cultural norms and shape attitudes towards women. Ethical media coverage of women's empowerment and rights can make a significant contribution towards achieving gender equality and eliminating violence against women and girls.

Recognising that it can be challenging for journalists to work on these topics, UN Women has been working since 2020 to build the capacity of local journalists on gender-sensitive reporting and increase positive media narratives that promote social cohesion, gender equality, and women's empowerment in humanitarian response.

---

**“Journalists need to choose their words carefully to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes about women and gender equality”**

---

Fifteen journalists (seven women, eight men) joined a two-day workshop in November, run in partnership with Deutsche Welle Akademie and supported by the Government of Switzerland. Participants were introduced to the concept of gender-sensitive reporting, promoting women's voices in the media, using gender-sensitive language, and how to interview survivors and report on gender-based violence.

“Journalists need to choose their words carefully to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes about women and gender equality,” said one male participant. “When making reports about women, we don't need to portray them as *vulnerable*,” said another. A woman journalist summed it up as, “We need to consider both men and women firstly as a *human being*.”

These workshops form part of UN Women's approach to countering misinformation and harmful rhetoric in the media about the Rohingya and negative portrayals of Bangladeshi women humanitarian staff and volunteers working for the refugee response.



Photo: UN Women/Mahmudul Karim

Journalists at the interactive gender-sensitive reporting workshop

## New video resources online

UN Women Bangladesh regularly publishes new videos. View them on the [East Asia and Pacific Region YouTube](#) page or check out some recent highlights below.



A vegetable garden at a UN Women multipurpose women's centres, run by our partner ActionAid Bangladesh, gives women an chance to learn farming techniques and get their hands in the soil  
[Watch it at youtu.be/wfxBfZ-Qlnk](https://youtu.be/wfxBfZ-Qlnk)



UN Women Volunteers in the Rohingya refugee camps speak up to end violence against women and girls as part of the 16 Days of Activism and UNITE! Campaigns: [Watch it at youtu.be/YTIFm1B0tTc](https://youtu.be/YTIFm1B0tTc)



This video series highlights [Good Practices in Gender Mainstreaming](#) across sectors in the Rohingya refugee and host communities in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The series was produced with technical support from UN Women and the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA WG) in Cox's Bazar and supported by Canada and GIZ.



## Supporting gender-diverse people to speak out against violence

Gender-diverse or Trans people living in the Rohingya camps, often referred to as *Hijras* in Bangladesh, are regularly subjected to verbal abuse, bullying and violence because of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

Two UN Women multipurpose women's centres offer gender diverse people access to livelihoods training, such as tailoring classes, and a safe space to express themselves, but getting to the centres can be distressing or even dangerous. UN Women and its partners work to advocate for the safety and empowerment of this marginalised and overlooked group.

In October, UN Women and ActionAid facilitated a meeting between gender-diverse people, camp managers, and community and religious leaders to build understanding and respect for gender-diverse people and reduce gender-based violence against them.

## Camp managers and community leaders vowed to take action to sensitise the community about the rights of gender diverse people and Hijras

Gender-diverse participants described harassment and humiliation that they routinely experience from people of all ages in the community which can make them reluctant to leave their homes whether to go to the shops or take advantage of humanitarian services and training opportunities offered in the camps. They also reported being physically assaulted when assigned to night patrol duty.

After hearing their stories, camp managers and community leaders vowed to take action to sensitise the community about the rights of gender diverse people and Hijras.

"We didn't know how many gender-diverse people were living in the camp," said Camp Manager, Md Istiaq. "Now we know, we will work on this, and I will share this message with everyone in our community."

Some concrete actions were agreed to including assigning responsibility for responding to reports of harassment and violence, raising the issue for further discussion at the monthly block meeting for mahjis, conducting awareness sessions at the local mosque and using the mosque PA system to make announcements, and releasing Hijras from the obligation to do night patrol duty, which has to-date made them more vulnerable to violence.

## Volunteers prepare for Cyclone Sitrang

October 2022: As Cyclone Sitrang – the first major cyclone of the season – headed towards Bangladesh, volunteers like Sajeda sprang into action.

Rohingya volunteers are trained in disaster preparedness and risk reduction to help their communities stay safe in an emergency. When the cyclone warning reached level 3, Sajeda put her training into practice alerting her neighbours about how to prepare themselves and their homes.

"We go home to home and tell them to bury their important documents like identification and ration cards in a waterproof container under the soil so they don't lose them. We also tell them to preserve dry food and drinking water under the soil to use after the cyclone," Sajeda said.

"If there is flooding after the cyclone and you can't stay in your home, you can come to the multipurpose women's centre for temporary shelter and food. We have been using this as a shelter for four years now so people know it's a safe place to come. The floods earlier this year were devastating – 45 families took shelter here afterwards."



Photo: UN Women/Mahmudul Karim

Sajeda (centre) facilitates an awareness session on cyclone preparedness at a UN Women multipurpose women's centre

Sajeda focuses on supporting the most vulnerable members of her community – single mothers, pregnant women, older women and people with disabilities – and getting help for those who need it to make their homes more secure.

"The cyclones are worse in Myanmar, but we didn't know any of this there. When we came here, we were trained; now we know how to prepare ourselves. It has really helped me and my community. Now we know what to do during disasters – how the water should be handled, how we can help other women."

UN Women's Programme in Cox's Bazar is supported by: