



IN BRIEF

ROHINGYA RESPONSE

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Photo : UN Women/Mahmudul Karim

THE ISSUE

The year 2023 marks the sixth year since extreme armed violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state prompted a massive influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh. Close to half a million Rohingya women and girls currently live in refugee camps near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The speed and scale of this mass displacement invoked a critical humanitarian emergency and prompted urgency in delivering a gender-responsive humanitarian response to this cross-border crisis. During the last five years, Rohingya refugees have shown resilience, and the government and people of Bangladesh have generously hosted them. However, pre-existing gender inequalities, gender-based violence (GBV), and discrimination continue to be perpetuated and

exacerbated in the Rohingya camps and within host communities as the humanitarian crisis becomes more protracted. The ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic also disproportionately impacted women and girls, entrenching existing inequalities. In the camps, women, girls, and other most-vulnerable groups have limited livelihood options and access to basic services, information, education, and decision-making processes. Women in host communities are also affected by disrupted social relations and face barriers to accessing scarce and overstretched social services and livelihood options.

STRATEGY

The humanitarian-development nexus programme of UN Women is in line with the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, which acknowledges the protection needs of women and girls, as outlined in the UN Women Bangladesh Strategic Note (2022-2026). The overall objective of the programme is to ensure that, by 2026, Rohingya and host community women and girls benefit from an environment in which they are empowered to exercise their agency and decision-making power, with improved access to protection, education, and socioeconomic opportunities.

APPROACH

The UN Women Rohingya Response programme focuses on three components in its approach. Firstly, it works to enhance the capacities of Rohingya and host community women and girls so they can participate in decision-making and increase their access to multisectoral services, especially protection, education, and socioeconomic opportunities. Secondly, it focuses on increasing the

advocacy and leadership capacities of Rohingya and host community women-led organizations (WLOs) to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, GBV prevention and response, and social cohesion. Finally, the programme works to increase the capacities of humanitarian actors, including WLOs, so they can operate through enhanced coordination mechanisms and play a

leadership role in facilitating gender-responsive humanitarian response and programming. Together with UNHCR, UN Women Bangladesh co-chairs the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GIHA WG), which coordinates gender-responsive programming among humanitarian actors. UN Women has been implementing the Rohingya Refugee Response programme with generous contributions from the Governments of Australia, Canada, Japan, Sweden, and Switzerland, the Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and UN Women National Committees. The programme is built on lessons learned and good practices for ensuring

localization, ownership, and sustainability of interventions. UN Women puts national and local women's rights organizations, especially WLOs, networks, and self-organized groups, at the centre of its programming. UN Women collaborates with members of the GIHA WG and other sectors, particularly the Protection Sector, GBV Sub-Sector, Livelihoods and Skills Development Sector and the Education Sector. UN Women has Multipurpose Women's Centres in five camps (Camp-3, 4, 4 Extension, 5 and 8) and three host communities (Cox's Bazar, Teknaf and Ukhia). UN Women Gender Field Officers (GFOs) work in six camps, i.e., 1 East, 1 West, 4, 5, 9, 18.

RESULTS

(2020-2022)

Rohingya and host community women and girls have increased voice and agency in the camps and host communities through socioeconomic empowerment:

Eight Multipurpose Women's Centres (MPWCs) were established (five in Rohingya camps and three in host communities) to ensure one-stop multisectoral service delivery. As of September 2022, the eight MPWCs have provided the following benefits:

- **153,668** women and adolescent girls from the Rohingya and host communities have **accessed life-saving information**.
- **9,797** women and adolescent girls from the Rohingya and host communities have **enhanced their economic capabilities** through participation in livelihood skills development trainings.
- **1,943** women and adolescent girls from the Rohingya and host communities have **accessed education** through the second chance education programme.
- **5 self-organized women leaders' networks** have been established with **80 Rohingya and host community women leaders** as a result of improved leadership capacities. These five networks, one representing Rohingya women of Camp 3 and the other four representing the host community across Ukhiya Upazilla, work together to advance social cohesion.

Rohingya women and girls have greater access to gender-responsive services, including gender-responsive governance and policing:

- **10 Women and Children Police Help Desks** have been established, and **259** (113 female and 146 male) **police officers** have been trained to ensure **gender-responsive policing**.
- **60 volunteers** among the Rohingya women and girls work with the five UN Women Gender Field Officers to support the Camp-in-Charges (CiCs) in implementing **gender-responsive governance principles** in six camps. The Gender Field Officers and volunteers have sensitized **248,430 Rohingya community members** through outreach and engagement.

Coordination for gender-responsive humanitarian response across sectors has been strengthened:

- **UN Women co-chairs the GIHA WG**, which plays a key role in ensuring gender issues are mainstreamed across the Joint Response Plan each year and provides technical assistance to different sectors contributing to the humanitarian response.
- UN Women supported humanitarian actors to ensure gender issues are integrated into their project proposals using the **Gender with Age Marker Tool**. In 2022, all projects in nine sectors incorporated at least **one gender-sensitive indicator**.
- By 2021, UN Women was supporting **9 out of the 11 key sectors** to develop and secure resources for their **Gender and Inclusion Action Plans**. Compared to five sectors in 2020, this was an increase of four. The nine sectors are health, nutrition, protection, child protection, food security, shelter, water sanitation and hygiene, site management, and education.

IMPACT STORY

AFRUZA BEGUM

Afruz Begum, 32, is a Rohingya refugee and a survivor of the conflict in Myanmar. She fled to Bangladesh with her family in 2017. As a Community Outreach Volunteer in Cox's Bazar, she is part of a UN Women programme that mobilizes and empowers refugee women to lead and participate in decision-making processes in refugee camps.



Photo: UN Women/Mahmudul Karim

"When I was in Myanmar, I didn't know much about women's rights or protection from sexual exploitation, abuse, and gender-based violence (GBV). In the refugee camps here in Bangladesh, we [Community Outreach Volunteers] have received training from UN Women, UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, the Centre for Peace and Justice, and other non-governmental organizations. Now, we know about gender equality and women's rights. During the pandemic, we visited refugee communities and provided vital information about how to keep safe from COVID-19. We also provided information about the risk of sexual exploitation, abuse, and GBV. In Rohingya camps, GBV occurs every day. We inform community members about the referral process for GBV cases, and we also refer some cases to UN Women Gender Field Officers. In the beginning, we faced challenges while working in the community.

People did not respect us; they did not want to listen to us. But now they are changing. People have started respecting us and paying attention to our sessions. The pandemic brought many challenges to our work. We could not arrange large sessions due to restrictions. However, we were providing one-on-one sessions in households while wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and following hygiene rules. Women have been the most impacted by this pandemic. Their domestic work increased, and GBV became a shadow pandemic. I feel proud and lucky that I received training and could share my knowledge with refugee communities. Without our support, they wouldn't have known about their rights, sexual exploitation, abuse, GBV, child marriage and many other issues we informed them about.