

CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINING SUPPORT FOR THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE RESPONSE

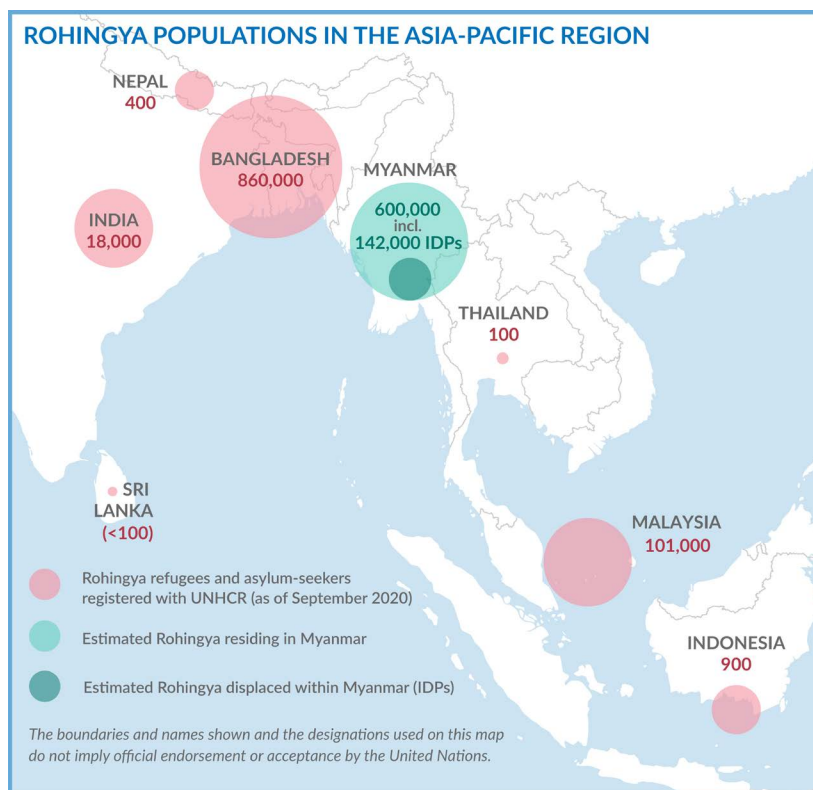
22 OCTOBER 2020

OVERVIEW OF SITUATION

Nearly one million Rohingya refugees and asylum-seekers from Myanmar are registered in Asia. Bangladesh has registered 860,000. In Malaysia there are 102,000 registered and in India 18,000. There are also some 600,000 Rohingya currently residing in Rakhine State, Myanmar, of whom 140,000 are internally displaced.

Since 2017, USD 2.2 billion has been raised for the humanitarian response for Rohingya in Bangladesh alone, not including USD 700 million in development commitments from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. Without sustainable solutions for the Rohingya, their situation may well continue as one of protracted displacement.

To advance solutions for the Rohingya, and so that they can meanwhile live in dignity wherever they are, a focus on more sustainable response planning and financing is needed, in particular in the following **four areas**:



1 Addressing the root causes

The solution to the Rohingya crisis lies in Myanmar, and the path to the solution is through Myanmar's full implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which would enable the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of Rohingya refugees.

2 Maintaining humanitarian assistance

Significant material support will be needed to maintain lifesaving assistance and uphold basic standards of living for Rohingya refugees in host countries and those internally displaced and stateless in Myanmar.

3 Expanding opportunities

Rohingya children and youth in particular need to have hope for a life with dignity. Education for Rohingya children and youth is an important factor in preparing them for a full role in their home society as well as allowing for personal growth and self-reliance. It will make them less vulnerable to exploitation, including smuggling and trafficking.

4 Investing in host communities

Development investment is also needed in host communities to help them mitigate the socioeconomic pressures of hosting refugees and ensure that, once solutions are found for Rohingya refugees, host communities are more resilient.

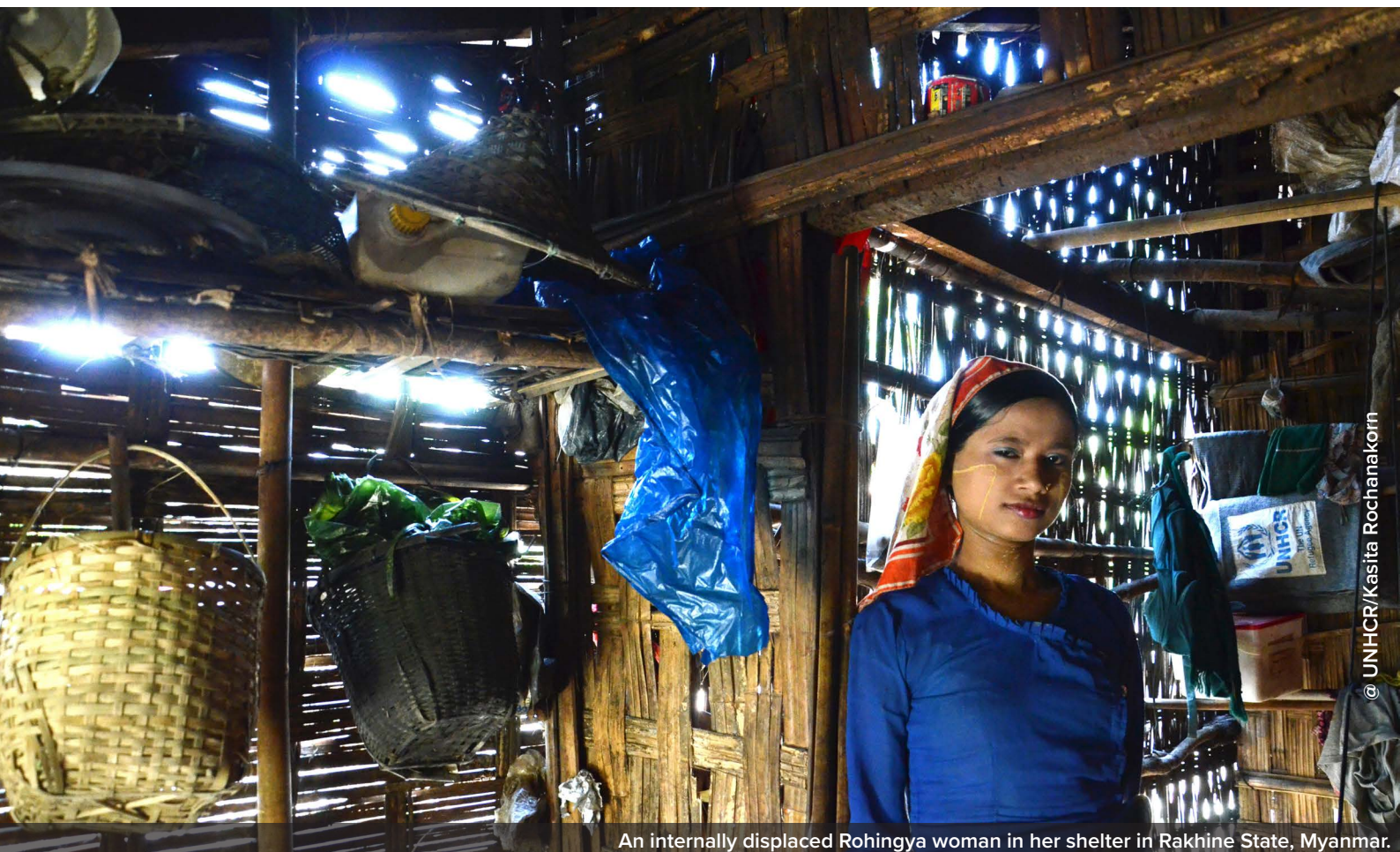
COUNTRY SITUATIONS AND NEEDS

MYANMAR

Since 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya fled their homes in Rakhine State, Myanmar, to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh and, so far, none have returned under the bilateral arrangements on voluntary repatriation between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Despite an expressed desire to return to Myanmar, Rohingya refugees say they are not yet confident that the environment in Rakhine State has improved sufficiently. Virtually all Rohingya continue to have restrictions on their movement and are unable to access basic services, while Rohingya internally displaced persons (IDPs) mostly remain in IDP camps. Rohingya IDPs are also not yet able to return to their places of origin or other places of their choosing. The armed conflict in Rakhine State has further displaced an estimated 90,000 other people across Rakhine and Chin States since 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic has also hit Rakhine State hard, reducing already-limited humanitarian access to Rohingya and other vulnerable communities. The pandemic has also delayed other initiatives to support the creation of conditions conducive to the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees.

The 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan for Myanmar originally appealed for USD 216 million, including USD 165 million for Rakhine State. The total amount has increased to USD 275 million to incorporate needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and is currently 43% funded. Increased humanitarian funding and development investment coupled with renewed efforts to de-escalate armed conflict would support the Government of Myanmar's efforts to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. Continued support from the international community would also enable:

- **Expanded activities in northern Rakhine State to create conditions conducive to the voluntary repatriation of refugees;**
- **More comprehensive humanitarian assistance to all vulnerable populations in Rakhine State;**
- **Greater access to higher quality education for all children and youth in Rakhine State; and,**
- **Enhanced support to the response and prevention of COVID-19.**



An internally displaced Rohingya woman in her shelter in Rakhine State, Myanmar.



Rohingya boys listen during a class at an adolescent club in Nayapara refugee camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

The Government and people of Bangladesh continue to shoulder the greatest burden for hosting Rohingya refugees, even as they seek to recover from nationwide flooding and contain the COVID-19 pandemic as well as mitigate its socioeconomic impact. The inclusion of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's COVID-19 response and a concerted prevention effort by the humanitarian community have thus far spared the refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar from the worst of the pandemic. Although COVID-19 restrictions have temporarily closed refugee learning centres, education actors have moved ahead with procuring learning materials and recruiting teachers for the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot approved by the Government of Bangladesh in January 2020.

Humanitarian and development investments in Cox's Bazar have helped to support the resilience of the Bangladeshi communities hosting Rohingya refugees. Roads, schools and hospitals in Cox's Bazar are being supported with additional investments. More support is needed to fortify local institutions, officials and businesses.

The 2020 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh originally appealed for USD 877 million. The total amount has increased to USD 1.06 billion to incorporate COVID-19 needs and is currently 49% funded. Continued robust humanitarian and development funding will be crucial to:

- **Enhance capacity to prevent and respond to COVID-19 and other health needs;**
- **Address the protection and other needs of refugees;**
- **Support learning and skills development for Rohingya children and youth; and,**
- **Alleviate the socioeconomic pressures facing host communities through additional and sustained investment in host communities and development efforts in Cox's Bazar.**

OTHER HOST COUNTRIES

As in Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees in other host countries do not have legal status. They often continue living on the margins of society and engage in informal work. Their access to public healthcare is limited, with NGOs facilitating access to medical facilities, with the support of the international community. In Malaysia, Rohingya communities have pooled their own resources to establish learning centres and, with support from civil society, have improved the standard of education to the point that some are now registered and licensed by the Ministry of Education.

A majority of Rohingya children, however, still do not attend any type of formal schooling, and the few that do are generally unable to certify or advance their studies. Some Rohingya refugees in India, Indonesia and Thailand have access to public education, but most are unable to find the means to pay for the costs or travel to schools, in addition to facing language and other barriers.

Additional regional humanitarian and development initiatives are needed to:

- **Supplement social safety nets currently self-funded by Rohingya communities;**
- **Create opportunities for self-reliance for Rohingya refugees, through formal schooling and work.**



Rohingya refugees receive meals following their disembarkation in Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia, in September 2020.

MARITIME MOVEMENTS

Despite difficult conditions for Rohingya refugees across the region, over 2,400 Rohingya have attempted to reach other countries by sea in 2020. While this is fewer than the annual number from 2012 to 2015, it is a significant increase compared to recent years. The urgent need for a predictable framework in the region to rescue and disembark Rohingya has been underlined by the loss of some 100 refugees dying or disappearing at sea in recent months, in addition to dozens of others who died in capsizing incidents earlier in the year. Such a framework is needed so that Rohingya refugees are less compelled to resort to risky onward movement and so that countries do not fear that disembarking refugees will leave them to shoulder the responsibility alone and indefinitely.

More than 2,200 Rohingya have disembarked in recent months, including some 700 allowed to disembark by Bangladesh and, most recently, nearly 400 who were rescued and welcomed by the people of Aceh, Indonesia, and brought to shore in an orderly and safe manner that mitigated public health risks. Advance preparation and coordination among local authorities and humanitarian agencies in Indonesia enabled the immediate screening of the refugees for COVID-19 as well as any specific needs, and timely contributions from the international community have ensured that these needs are met.

Additional regional humanitarian and development initiatives are needed to:

- **Share the costs of undertaking rescue, disembarkation and public health measures for Rohingya refugees in distress at sea, identifying and assisting those with specific needs and strengthening the capacity of governments in the region to carry out safe and humane disembarkation, while also countering smuggling networks.**