

COVID-19 Response 1-30 September 2020



Mobile cash payments will be made in Cox's Bazar to vulnerable local families living in proximity of the camps who have been impacted economically by the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo: ©UNHCR/A. Rahman

Overview

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports over 4,760 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Cox's Bazar since the first case was detected in the district. Among the confirmed cases, there have been 261 cases among refugees living in the 34 Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. Some 68 host community members and 8 refugees have sadly died to date. Testing rates for refugees averaged over 185 tests a day in September. There is a need to further increase testing especially among the older population who are at an increased risk of developing severe forms of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 treatment services put in place by the authorities and humanitarian agencies in Cox's Bazar continue to have sufficient capacity to support patients with required medical assistance. In UNHCR-supported facilities, nearly 400 people from both refugee and host communities have so far received treatment in two Severe Acute Respiratory Infection Isolation and Treatment Centres (SARI ITCs) in Ukhiya and Kutupalong and also through care being provided in an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) that UNHCR was instrumental in establishing at Sadar Hospital, the District's principal healthcare facility.

UNHCR continues to exercise caution in conducting humanitarian activities in the camps in line with the public health directions given by Bangladesh's authorities and WHO.

Operational Update on Key Sectors

HEALTH HIGHLIGHTS

Supported with medical care

- Some 400 cases (refugees and host community) provided with care and assistance to date

Treated and discharged patients

- Nearly 300 patients successfully treated and discharged

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has increased in the camps in Cox's Bazar in the reporting period. From 1-30 September, over 150 new cases of COVID-19 were detected. Detection and tracing continue to be a high priority, and UNHCR and other agencies are working with Community Health Volunteers (CHW) from the camps to help identify further cases. The CHW volunteers provide targeted counselling on testing to refugees identified with COVID-like symptoms and support referrals. On average, during the reporting period, over 185 tests were conducted on a daily basis in the camps.

UNHCR-supported SARI ITCs in Ukhiya and Kutupalong as well as an ICU in Sadar District hospital have provided some 400 patients from the camps and the host community with support and care to date. As of 30 September, nearly 300 patients were successfully treated and discharged. During September, the SARI ITCs were also provided with five portable ventilators to enable safe referral of critical patients to the ICU in the District hospital.



Five portable ventilators provided to partners working with UNHCR in two SARI ITCs in Ukhiya and Kutupalong. Photo: ©UNHCR, Bangladesh

In September, UNHCR provided support for the expansion of a ward in the local Sadar District hospital to ensure it has an additional capacity for COVID-19. The ward will specifically provide for an additional 20 oxygenation beds for severe cases of COVID-19 and decrease demands on ICU beds that may be required for more critical cases. The ward has opened initially for moderate COVID-19 patients.

An approval has been provided by the Civil Surgeons' office in Cox's Bazar for home-based care in a high transmission scenario which can be used if 70% of SARI ITC beds are occupied at any time.

COMMUNICATION WITH REFUGEES HIGHLIGHTS

Community outreach ongoing

- 178,000 refugees reached with messages on COVID-19

UNHCR and community-based protection partners continue to work with the refugee community to conduct awareness-raising sessions on COVID-19 prevention and response in the camps. Cumulatively since March, UNHCR-supported Community Outreach Members (COMs) have reached some 178,000 refugees with messages on COVID-19, complementing the ongoing camp-wide communication efforts to impart accurate information to refugees about the virus. COMs have focussed in particular on the elderly and other refugees identified as vulnerable. The restoration of internet services in the camps is offering more opportunities to spread information through audio messages and facilitate updates and communication with volunteers. UNHCR is working with BBC Media Action to tailor selected messages on COVID-19 and other issues based on contextual developments within the camps.



LIVELIHOODS & HOST COMMUNITY SUPPORT

HIGHLIGHTS

Livelihoods and host community support

- Inauguration of cash-based support for more than 35,800 households in host communities

On 15 September, UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh inaugurated a new Cash Based Intervention (CBI) programme to support vulnerable Bangladeshi families in the Cox's Bazar District. Over the course of a year, more than 35,887 families will benefit from cash support in monthly instalments or one-off payments in both Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts as part of UNHCR's wider support to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19.

The programme aims to support 16,887 families as part of the existing social protection programme of the Government of Bangladesh through cash from the Bangladesh Post Office. Also, 19,000 targeted families have been selected for emergency cash assistance through a mobile money modality. The target households were identified following assessments conducted in early 2020 using a combination of socio-economic criteria. More than 5,600 families have already received their first instalments.

The scheme is also part of UNHCR's efforts to promote social cohesion and interaction between the refugees and the local population of Bangladesh.

CONTACTS

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