



VITAL EMERGENCY SUPPORT FOR ROHINGYA REFUGEES

CRS and its local Catholic partners respond with urgent humanitarian relief for displaced families in Bangladesh

INDIA

BANGLADESH

Cox's Bazar

MYANMAR



Recently arrived Rohingya refugees shelter in drainage pipes at a reception area in southern Bangladesh. Photo courtesy of Tommy Trenchard/Caritas

OVERVIEW

Bangladesh is experiencing one of the worst humanitarian crises in its history due to the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Myanmar. Between August and December 2017, escalating tension and violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State forced an estimated 655,000 Rohingya from their homes. They joined the more than 200,000 who had already fled. Their needs for the most basic human essentials are tremendous and include shelter, food, clean water, living supplies, protection and child safety. CRS is supporting Caritas Bangladesh to meet these diverse and urgent needs with food assistance, shelter repair, water and sanitation infrastructure, site development, and child protection activities. CRS aims to reach 60,000 families, or 360,000 people.

Boats bring families, including children and the elderly, across the Naf river. They arrive in Bangladesh hungry, exhausted and depleted of any resources, having spent significant funds to pay for the crossing. By the time they reach the informal settlements, families have used most of their savings, and resort to building shelters out of no more than bamboo and recycled plastic sheets. The shelters have no partitions for privacy and lack ventilation. Many have cooking stoves that affect breathing, increase heat and create a fire hazard.

In the crowded and unsanitary settlements, people are completely dependent on aid. More than half of the refugees are children. Most have experienced the trauma of seeing or experiencing abuse and violence.

The return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar seems unlikely in the short term. There is an urgent need to prepare for a protracted displacement as most refugees fear for their safety if they return. In what is one of Bangladesh's poorest and most vulnerable areas, the influx of refugees puts an immense strain on infrastructure, services and host communities. Without help, this crisis could further affect the local community.

CRS RESPONSE

Having provided food and living supplies to 40,000 families, CRS and Caritas Bangladesh have widened their focus, as food assistance is now covered by the United Nations World Food Programme. Working in concert with other humanitarian actors, and closely involving the community in program discussions for greater efficiency and social cohesion, our emergency response priorities include:

Essential living supplies

- Distributing blankets, sleeping mats, kitchen sets and other supplies.

Camp improvement and disaster risk reduction

- Building key infrastructure and coordinating provision of basic services to improve safety, ease congestion and ensure durability.
- Improving sanitation and drainage, and building or reinforcing infrastructure to reduce landslide risk.
- Teaching communities about disaster risk and how to plan for disaster-resilience.
- Creating Child Friendly Spaces and community centers.

Safe shelter

- Helping improve the safety, dignity and resilience of shelters with materials and tool kits, and with input from local carpenters.
- Demonstrating simple, safe and disaster-resilient building improvements.
- Supporting families that cannot build shelters themselves with labor, materials and technical assistance.
- Offering additional support to families with specific needs, such as family members with disabilities.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

- Constructing gender-segregated sanitation and bathing facilities, using labor from refugee and host communities.
- Building 100 tube wells with solar-powered pumps, to provide drinking and washing water, and conducting regular water quality tests.
- Training WASH volunteers and developing messages to promote sanitation and hygiene at the household level.



Children face the threats of trafficking, early marriage and child labor.
Photo by Mahmud Raman for CRS/Caritas Bangladesh

SPECIAL NEEDS FACING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Child trafficking makes young people—especially girls, and unaccompanied or separated children—vulnerable. With poor or absent lighting, lack of privacy, limited clothing, and mixed bathing areas and latrines, women and girls face threats to their safety. More than 4,000 incidents of gender-based violence have been reported since August 2017.

As there are limited legal livelihood opportunities, women are at risk of exploitative labor, trafficking or resorting to transactional sex. Distress from trauma is compounded by limited counseling support, and poor living and livelihood options. Children may face the additional threats of early marriage and child labor.

- Facilitating the maintenance of WASH infrastructure.
- Providing appropriate female hygiene solutions.
- Distributing hygiene kits to 10,000 families.

Protecting women and children from trafficking and violence

- Supporting refugee arrivals with protection and anti-trafficking messaging.
- Training community members to counsel and provide referrals for more advanced counselling as needed.
- Identifying men in the community who can influence attitudes about gender and violence, and sensitizing men, women and youth on gender concerns related to bathing and sanitation.
- Enhancing or creating new Child Friendly Spaces, enabling children to play in a safe environment and receive life skills education.

ABOUT THE CONFLICT

The Rohingya are a Muslim minority from Rakhine State in western Myanmar. Before the 2016–2017 unrest, their population exceeded 1.1 million in Rakhine. A 1982 law stripped them of their citizenship and contributed to widespread discrimination. Conflict involving the military and the Muslim minority has led to more than 60 percent of the population of northern Rakhine State fleeing their country—and the numbers continue to rise. The violence they have endured, reportedly by Myanmar government forces, is described by the United Nations as “textbook ethnic cleansing.” Tens of thousands are internally displaced and are reportedly trying to flee. At least 120,000 Rohingya people are in camps in central Rakhine State, where they have been since 2012. They are dependent on humanitarian aid and are unable to leave due to government restrictions. According to the UN, more than 1,000 people have been killed.