



## DEBATE PACK

CDP-0088 (2020) | 22 September 2020

# The Rohingya humanitarian crisis and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic

Main Chamber

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Backbench Business Committee

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

# 1. Background

Since August 2017 Muslim Rohingya refugees have fled violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar, into Bangladesh. Over [850,000 refugees](#) are now living in highly congested conditions in 34 refugee camps around Cox's Bazar the [world's largest refugee settlement](#).

Alongside the refugees are the host communities, which [number around 440,000 people](#).

There are also large numbers of international [aid workers](#) living there.

The Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) brings together the main humanitarian actors who work with Bangladeshi and Rohingya communities. They provide [regular updates](#) on the situation in Cox's Bazar district.

The ISCG [reported](#) that at the beginning of September that the cumulative totals for confirmed COVID-19 cases are 123 cases in the refugee camps, and 4,012 cases in the host community.

To date there have been 6 Rohingya refugee fatalities due to COVID-19, and 64 fatalities of host community members.

It has been [suggested that](#) the prevalence of the disease may be higher, but that Rohingya refugees with symptoms are not coming forward to get tested because of fears of the disease and the associated stigma. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, are [working to tackle such fears](#) and encourage testing.

Humanitarian groups like the International Rescue Committee are concerned that [people in refugee camps face a heightened risk of Covid-19](#). One medical doctor, working with the IRC in Cox's Bazar, [explained the dangers](#): "they live in very congested camp conditions, also their hygiene and sanitation facilities are not adequate. It is really difficult for them to practice social distancing."

The UN [has warned](#) that, given the conditions in the camps in Bangladesh and the high levels of vulnerability among the population, "the severity of the possible impact of the virus on refugees is of major concern".

As well as COVID-19, refugees are [at risk from flooding and landslides](#) caused by the monsoon rains. Thousands of refugees have already [been affected](#) by severe weather.

The Government is a major aid donor for existing programmes operating in Bangladesh to improve health and tackle poverty. The UK's [planned bilateral aid budget for 2019/20](#) is £192 million.

In July the Government set out in a [response to a Parliamentary Question](#) the resources it has directed to tackle the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh:

To date the UK has allocated £21 million to support the Government of Bangladesh's Preparedness and Response Plan objectives. This includes more than £7 million for testing and treatment by the national health system and £3 million through UNDP to reach more than 2 million of the poorest people living in urban slums. In the Rohingya refugee camps, over £11 million has been allocated to UN and NGO partners to prepare for COVID-19 and to provide critical humanitarian services, including testing, isolation and treatment.

## 2. Press articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

### [Rohingya refugees allege sexual assault on Bangladeshi island](#)

The Guardian  
Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Shaikh Azizur Rahman  
22 September 2020

### [Justice and the Rohingya people are the losers in Asia's new cold war](#)

The Guardian  
Simon Tisdall  
20 September 2020

### [Rohingya: The Perils Of The Boat People](#)

The ASEAN Post  
Anna Malindog-Uy  
16 September 2020

### [Rakhine: Where the military is more feared than the coronavirus](#)

Al-Jazeera  
Emily Fishbein and Kyaw Hsan Hlaing  
14 September 2020

### [Three years since the Rohingya crisis, the coronavirus is robbing refugees of hope for a brighter future](#)

The Independent  
Yasmin Qureshi MP  
25 August 2020

### [Three years after exodus, Rohingya refugees 'more vulnerable than ever'](#)

UN News  
25 August 2020

### [Rohingya crisis needs lasting solutions, renewed commitment amid COVID-19 pandemic, UN refugee agency](#)

UN News  
21 August 2020

### [COVID-19 fuels tensions between Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi hosts](#)

The New Humanitarian  
A. Z. M. Anas  
27 July 2020

**[First Rohingya refugee dies from coronavirus in Bangladesh](#)**

Al-Jazeera  
2 June 2020

**[Inside the world's largest refugee camp, as coronavirus takes hold among Rohingya refugees](#)**

Daily Telegraph  
Nicola Smith and Suza Uddin  
22 May 2020

**[Fears Rohingya refugees face disaster after Covid-19 reaches Cox's Bazar](#)**

The Guardian  
Rebecca Ratcliffe and Redwan Ahmed  
15 May 2020

**[Coronavirus: Two Rohingya test positive in refugee camp](#)**

BBC News Online  
14 May 2020

**[COVID-19 no excuse to sacrifice Rohingya lives at sea](#)**

Amnesty International  
17 April 2020

**[Rohingya brace for coronavirus pandemic](#)**

Financial Times  
Susannah Savage  
6 April 2020

**[Coronavirus and Rohingya Refugee Camps](#)**

The Diplomat  
Ana Salvá  
30 March 2020

**[COVID-19 and the Rohingya refugee crisis](#)**

Thomson Reuters Foundation News  
Athena Rayburn  
24 March 2020

## 3. Press releases

### [UN Human Rights Council 45: statement for the interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

**Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

**14 September 2020**

UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French's statement during the Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

Thank you, Madam President,

Thank you, High Commissioner for your update. The systemic discrimination facing the Rohingya in Myanmar prevents them from living safe and dignified lives.

The UK is deeply concerned by the restrictions Rohingya face in accessing healthcare. To combat the growing COVID-19 outbreak in Rakhine effectively, every person needs to be able to access medical facilities, treatment, and COVID-19 testing, regardless of documentation status, religion, nationality or race.

The majority of Rohingya cannot access township hospitals where treatment for COVID-19 takes place. Instead, they often seek treatment in Station hospitals or clinics, however many of those are now closing. We urge Myanmar to allow mobile clinics so Rohingya can safely access medical services for any urgent condition.

It is essential that camp based staff and volunteers have permission to continue life-saving activities. We encourage Myanmar to restore international humanitarian agencies' access on completion of quarantine, including in conflict affected areas.

The UK also calls on the Government of Myanmar to restore 3G/4G internet services to all of Rakhine and Chin, allowing populations access to lifesaving information including on transmission prevention.

### [Rohingya crisis: Three years on](#)

**British High Commission Dhaka**

**25 August 2020**

Today, we pay tribute to the extraordinary generosity of the people and Government of Bangladesh in hosting Rohingya refugees, especially over the last three years. We also acknowledge the incredible resilience, courage and tenacity of Rohingya people in the face of adversity. We will continue advocating for accountability on the part of Myanmar for crimes committed against the Rohingya population, and push for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of the Rohingya people to their homes in Rakhine state.

Since the beginning of the current crisis in 2017, the UK has been supporting Rohingya refugees with emergency lifesaving and life

sustaining support and prioritising our assistance to reduce pressure on the host community.

Over the last three years, the UK has contributed more than £256 million in response to the Rohingya refugee crisis. We will continue to work together with the Government of Bangladesh, the UN, international partners and host communities to assess evolving needs and respond promptly.

**UN Human Rights Council 44: interactive dialogue on the situation of human rights of Rohingya people**

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
30 June 2020**

The UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, delivered this statement during the Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's oral update on the situation of human rights of Rohingya people:

Thank you, Madam President.

Thank you, High Commissioner for your update. The systematic discrimination facing the Rohingya in Myanmar prevents them from living safe and dignified lives.

The UK is deeply concerned by the restrictions Rohingya face on their freedom of movement. In recent months restrictions have increased. Noting that Covid-19 creates legitimate, albeit limited, reasons for restrictions, these are disproportionately affecting Rohingya. Systematic barriers to movement prevent most from accessing adequate healthcare. Bureaucratic processes frequently delay their access to medical care causing lasting harm or death.

We welcome Myanmar's commitment to complying with the ICJ's provisional measures, and we call on the Government to demonstrate that by significantly easing restrictions, reforming documentation and permission requirements in line with recommendations 18-23 of the Rakhine Advisory Commission and recommendation 16 of the Independent Commission of Enquiry.

The UK welcomes the valuable work of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar in collecting evidence of the most serious international crimes and violations of international law. The Government of Myanmar must cooperate with its mandate. Accountability for atrocities is essential for Myanmar to move towards peace and stability.

**UK International Development Secretary gives strong commitment to help Bangladesh and Rohingya through the coronavirus crisis**

**Department for International Development  
24 June 2020**

The Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan saw today how UK aid is working with the Government of Bangladesh to tackle coronavirus in the country.

On a 'virtual visit' to Bangladesh, a first for a UK Minister, Trevelyan met with Bangladesh's Foreign Minister and also saw how UK-backed isolation and treatment centres will help protect Bangladeshi and Rohingya communities in Cox's Bazar from the pandemic.

The UK has dedicated at least £21 million to tackle coronavirus in Bangladesh, where 120,000 cases have been reported.

Its support will save lives by slowing the rapid spread of the disease and boosting struggling health services. During the virtual visit, Ms Trevelyan talked to the staff of BRAC, an NGO which has mobilised 50,000 community health workers with UK aid support to reach more than five million Bangladeshi people in remote, deprived communities, giving them public health information about how to prevent the spread of coronavirus and stay safe.

Ms Trevelyan visited, via a video call, the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, where social distancing is near impossible due to the cramped conditions. UK aid is supporting the construction of vital isolation and treatment centres (ITCs) in Cox's Bazar, making available over 600 beds for treating both Rohingya refugees and people from Bangladeshi communities, who develop severe acute respiratory infections due to contracting coronavirus.

UK International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

Coronavirus is the biggest public health emergency in a generation. UK aid is committed to helping Bangladesh and the Rohingya people through this devastating crisis.

I saw the incredible international work across the country and in Cox's Bazar to stop the spread of coronavirus and improve healthcare. The UK is proud to play our role, so we can help save lives and protect those in need.

I am grateful to the Government and people of Bangladesh for their extraordinary generosity and support for the Rohingya refugees. The UK will continue to work with the Government of Bangladesh, international partners and the UN Security Council to enable the Rohingyas to return home to Rakhine in a safe, dignified and voluntary manner, and to support them until that is possible.



The International Development Secretary spoke with Sarah Collis, the team leader of the UK Emergency Medical Team, which is working alongside Bangladeshi medics and the International Organisation for Migration to setup the ITCs and respond to cases in the camps.

She also saw the World Food Programme's emergency food response to the pandemic, backed by UK aid, which is helping to meet the basic food needs of 100,000 Rohingya refugees and helping 53,000 of the most vulnerable Bangladeshis living around the camps to cope with the crippling economic impact of the pandemic.

Ms Trevelyan met with Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, MP and committed to continue UK support to Bangladesh for the fight against coronavirus.

The British High Commissioner Robert Chatterton Dickson said:

The coronavirus outbreak has had an unprecedented impact on people's health, livelihoods, and mobility in Bangladesh.

The virtual visit allowed the Secretary of State to see the breadth and depth of UK support for the country, and underlined the UK's strong commitment to Bangladesh in the face of the coronavirus challenge.

### **More Information**

The UK has dedicated at least £21 million to tackle coronavirus in Bangladesh, including to:

- increase testing capacity in the country by supporting the hiring of 60 additional technicians in Government of Bangladesh labs;
- reach more than 7 million Bangladeshi people in remote, deprived communities with public health information about how to prevent the spread of coronavirus and stay safe, working with BRAC and the UN Development Programme.
- set up isolation and treatment centres, train staff to help treat severe and critical coronavirus cases, and support mobile medical units to deliver home-based healthcare and monitoring. This healthcare is helping both refugees and host communities.
- build an additional 2,400 handwashing centres across the country
- meet the basic food needs of 100,000 Rohingya refugees for a whole year and helping 55,000 of the most vulnerable Bangladeshis living around the camps to cope with the crippling economic impact of the pandemic

The UK, the second largest donor to the international response to the Rohingya refugee crisis, is providing life-sustaining humanitarian aid to almost one million Rohingya refugees and vulnerable host communities in Cox's Bazar. Since the last refugee influx in 2017, the UK has contributed more than £261 million. The UK is the third largest bilateral donor overall in Bangladesh, providing more than £350 million in aid since 2018.

**Myanmar: UK national statement after Security Council closed VTC**

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
14 May 2020**

Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener briefed Security Council members today on the situation in Myanmar:

The UK welcomes the briefing on the situation in Myanmar that Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener provided Security Council members today. The UK requested this meeting because we are concerned by the recent escalation of conflict between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army in Rakhine and Chin States, and the heavy toll this is taking on civilians at the time of a global Covid-19 crisis.

The conflict has already led to a spike in internal displacement, additional restrictions on humanitarian access, and an increased number of civilian casualties, including the killing of World Health Organisation employee U Pyae Sone Win Maung on 20 April. All this comes at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic puts vulnerable populations at risk of a humanitarian emergency, especially refugees, IDPs, and the Rohingya community who face additional restrictions.

The UK recognises that Myanmar is taking steps to address the pandemic. These include measures to slow the spread of the virus; a public awareness campaign led by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi; a Covid-19 Economic Relief Plan to alleviate some of the economic hardships; and a joint commission between the Government of Myanmar and ethnic armed organisations to coordinate efforts against Covid-19 across the whole country.

The UK supports these initial positive steps. However, while conflict continues in Rakhine and Chin States, vulnerable people there are at even greater risk than elsewhere from Covid-19. The conflict also makes it more challenging to address the long-term underlying causes of conflict in Rakhine and to create conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation of Rohingya refugees, which remains an important and urgent priority. In this light, the UK expresses concern about refugees risking perilous boat journeys in the Bay of Bengal where a regional solution is essential.

Therefore:

1. Noting the Tatmadaw's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire on 9 May, the UK urges the Tatmadaw to extend this to include an immediate cessation of hostilities in Rakhine and Chin States.
2. The UK encourages the Myanmar authorities and all other actors to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to allow for safe and independent delivery of humanitarian supplies to all parts of Rakhine and Chin States, including IDP camps.
3. Noting the steps taken across Myanmar to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK urges the lifting of restrictions on internet access and action to ensure freedom of movement and equitable access to

healthcare for all communities in Rakhine State, including conflict-affected populations, IDPs, and the Rohingya community.

4. Noting the National Strategy on Resettlement of IDPs and Closure of IDP Camps and recognising the challenges to its implementation created by Covid-19, the UK encourages Myanmar to ensure that any work to find durable and dignified solutions for IDPs is carried out in consistency with international best practice and the standards set out in the national strategy including on consultation.

The UK continues to appreciate the efforts of the UN, ASEAN and many donor countries in the support they are giving to Myanmar at this time, and underscores also its appreciation towards Bangladesh for its efforts providing protection and assistance to refugees until they are able to return to Myanmar.

## 4. PQs

### [Bangladesh: Rohingya](#)

16 Sep 2020 | 86621

**Asked by: Yasmin Qureshi**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has received representations on the resumption of the Government of Bangladesh pilot of the Myanmar curriculum in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps; and whether steps towards the resumption of that curriculum have been agreed.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The Government of Bangladesh agreed earlier this year to ensure Rohingya children have access to the Myanmar curriculum. Since then the COVID-19 crisis has forced the closure of all learning centres in the camps. Education partners have tried to ensure continuity of learning; for example, by providing caregivers with learning materials. We hope learning centres will re-open soon, with measures in place to ensure the safety of pupils and teachers. This includes piloting the Myanmar curriculum. The Foreign Secretary has stressed the importance of this in his communication with the Government of Bangladesh. FCDO officials regularly engage on education for Rohingya refugees, including through the Myanmar curriculum, with stakeholders in Cox's Bazar, Dhaka and London.

### [Developing Countries: Coronavirus](#)

09 Sep 2020 | 82263

**Asked by: Preet Kaur Gill**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps he has taken to support small, medium and large UK-based international development charities working to tackle the covid19 pandemic in the global south.

**Answering member: Wendy Morton | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

Civil society organisations based in the UK and in developing countries are playing a very valuable role in the global response to COVID-19. There are a number of channels through which we are providing funding directly to civil society organisations (CSOs) to support vulnerable people around the world during this crisis.

We have allocated £18 million to charities through the Rapid Response Facility and over £24 million through our partnership with Unilever. In May, a new UK Aid Direct funding round was launched to support small and medium CSOs who can help us meet the challenges posed by COVID-19. In addition, we announced that we will match up to £10 million of donations from the British public to the Disasters Emergency Committee's (DEC) new Coronavirus Appeal which will fund the work of 14 UK aid agencies to tackle the pandemic among displaced people in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, DRC, Syria, Afghanistan, as well as

the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. We have also made a contribution of £3.3 million to the Start Network providing rapid, short-term funding for humanitarian responses through its network of over 50 members. It has already funded 35 projects in 22 countries through its COVID-19 window.

**[Bangladesh: Coronavirus](#)**

**27 Jul 2020 | 76908**

**Asked by: Apsana Begum**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether she plans to allocate additional funding to help tackle the covid-19 outbreak in Bangladesh.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development**

The UK has major health, humanitarian and extreme poverty programmes in Bangladesh. These have re-prioritised funding and interventions to tackle the immediate health needs and the broader social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on the poorest and most vulnerable. To date the UK has allocated £21 million to support the Government of Bangladesh's Preparedness and Response Plan objectives. This includes more than £7 million for testing and treatment by the national health system and £3 million through UNDP to reach more than 2 million of the poorest people living in urban slums. In the Rohingya refugee camps, over £11 million has been allocated to UN and NGO partners to prepare for COVID-19 and to provide critical humanitarian services, including testing, isolation and treatment. DFID is collaborating with Unilever on a mass global handwashing media campaign, which will run across Africa and Asia, including in Bangladesh.

**[Bangladesh: Migrant Camps](#)**

**14 Jul 2020 | 71782**

**Asked by: Stephen Kinnock**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant the Answer of 20 May 2020 to Question HL 4066 on Overseas Aid: Coronavirus, what assessment she has made of the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on the provision of and access to essential health and humanitarian services in (a) Cox's Bazar and (b) Dhaka.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development**

The UK has major health and humanitarian programmes in Cox's Bazar and across Bangladesh, including in Dhaka. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of essential health and humanitarian services. UK Aid has re-prioritised activities to tackle the immediate health impacts and the broader socio-economic effects on the poorest and most vulnerable. This includes the Rohingya refugees and surrounding communities in Cox's Bazar, where the UK has committed £256 million since 2017. Rapid humanitarian responses will remain a priority given Bangladesh's vulnerability to climate and man-made

disasters. Any increases will depend on the outcome of the current ODA reprioritisation review.

The UK has allocated £21 million so far to support the priorities set out in the Government of Bangladesh's Preparedness and Response plan. This includes more than £7 million to support national health systems and £3 million through UNDP to reach more than 2 million of the poorest people. More than £11 million has been allocated to existing UN and NGO partners to prepare for COVID-19 and maintain critical humanitarian services in the Rohingya refugee camps.

DFID and Unilever are collaborating on a mass global handwashing campaign, which will run across TV, radio, print and social media to help change people's behaviour in countries across Africa and Asia, including Bangladesh.

### **Bangladesh: Migrant Camps**

**14 Jul 2020 | 71778**

#### **Asked by: Stephen Kinnock**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what recent assessment she has made of the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on the population of (a) Cox's Bazar and (b) Dhaka.

#### **Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development**

High population density, overcrowded housing, underlying illnesses and poverty make Bangladesh, and Dhaka in particular, vulnerable to COVID-19. Bangladesh is trying to address the challenges of COVID-19 with a weak healthcare system and limited financial resources.

Bangladesh's capacity to test for COVID-19 and to isolate and treat patients remains very limited. UK aid is preparing and strengthening the health system to reach the poorest and most vulnerable communities with access to water and sanitation, awareness raising information, and food assistance to support them during the prolonged lockdown.

The Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 due to underlying illnesses and overcrowded camps. Any disruption to essential services as a result of restrictions on agencies' access to the camps increases health and protection risks, particularly for women and girls. The impact of the virus on the livelihoods of host communities could result in increasing hostility to refugees and humanitarian agencies. UK aid is being used to establish treatment centres, distribute soap, and improve access to clean water. Our support is helping to raise awareness about personal hygiene, share information and reach out to the most vulnerable people with advice on social distancing and other prevention measures.

**[Rohingya: Refugees](#)**

**02 Jul 2020 | 64930**

**Asked by: Sarah Champion**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment her Department has made of the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on her Department's support for the Rohingya refugees.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Rohingya refugee camps. From the start of the crisis, DFID has worked with partners to help mitigate the impact of the virus on the Rohingya refugees and host communities in Cox's Bazar. Our existing work has been adapted to respond to the crisis. UK funding has helped to establish isolation and treatment centres, such as a 60-bed facility, to treat severe and critical cases, as well as the delivery of home-based healthcare and monitoring. We are supporting WHO to coordinate the health response with the Government. Our funding is also distributing soap and building more handwashing structures; and producing and rolling out a range of communication tools to share vital information.

While we have prioritised budget and activities to focus on the immediate impact of COVID-19, we continue to deliver our routine support comprising providing food and nutrition, shelter, health, protection, water and sanitation, targeted support for women and girls, and the elderly. We also fund the education sector which – while learning centres are closed - is supporting caregivers for learning at home and preparing for the Myanmar curriculum pilot rollout.

Whilst every effort is being made to minimise transmission in the camps, the highly congested conditions and vulnerability of the population will pose major challenges when cases reach peak levels. We will continue to work closely with our implementing partners and the humanitarian community in Cox's Bazar to respond as best as possible.

We remain committed in our support of Rohingya refugees in both Bangladesh and Myanmar. The Development Secretary has recently undertaken a virtual visit to Bangladesh and had the opportunity to see the continued humanitarian needs of the Rohingya. She stressed the UK's continued commitment to helping Bangladesh and the refugees the country is hosting.

**[Bangladesh: Migrant Camps](#)**

**22 Jun 2020 | 59720**

**Asked by: Yasmin Qureshi**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what additional funding her Department has allocated to programmes in Cox's Bazar Bangladesh to (a) support the covid-19 response and (b) maintain and expand gender-based violence services in response to the prevalence of that violence in those camps.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development**

The UK has provided an initial £11 million to support COVID-19 preparedness and response efforts in the Rohingya camps and surrounding host communities. This has been allocated to existing UN and Non-Governmental Organisation UK partners. It is also maintaining essential humanitarian services in the camps, such as shelter, food, registration and civil documentation, healthcare, water and sanitation, and hygiene.

Part of this funding is focused on ensuring critical gender-based violence and child protection services keep operating for all those who need them. For example, the UK has provided additional funding to UNFPA for gender-based violence (GBV) services, including activities disseminating anti-GBV messaging and anti-GBV role modelling activities with adolescent boys and girls.

The Rohingya Refugee response in Cox's Bazar district has been reduced to only critical services since 8 April. While women and girls' safe spaces are not functioning as normal (to prevent the spread of the virus), all protection services including GBV services have continued throughout. DFID officials are collaborating with UN agencies on the provision and continuity of GBV services. UN agencies have worked closely with the Bangladesh government to prepare and respond to COVID-19 in the refugee camps and ensure vital and lifesaving operations are not jeopardised.

**[Bangladesh: Rohingya](#)  
02 Jun 2020 | 49028**

**Asked by: Dr Lisa Cameron**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of effect of the Bangladeshi Government's internet restrictions in Rohingya refugee camps on the ability of human rights organisations to respond to the covid-19 pandemic.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development**

Good communications are critical for all aspects of the COVID-19 preparedness and response in the camps. Human rights organisations are working to provide legal guidance, monitor and advocate for the safety and wellbeing of refugees in line with international standards, and support the efforts of the protection sector overall, particularly to respond to violence against women and girls.

The internet and access restrictions limit the ability of agencies to share information with the refugees and with each other; and of the Rohingya to communicate among themselves. However, despite the decreased presence of humanitarian personnel in the camps, and internet and sim card restrictions, Rohingya are still able to communicate on a limited scale with human rights organisations. Protection services are among the critical services continuing in the camps and information sharing structures between organisations are functional. We continue to emphasise the importance of telecommunication access in the Cox's



Bazar refugee camps in our senior meetings with the Government of Bangladesh. We have requested the lifting of restrictions and allowing full communication access in the camps.

### **Rohingya: Coronavirus**

**20 May 2020 | HL4172**

#### **Asked by: Baroness Tonge**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 5 May 2020 (HL 3447), how UK health workers disseminate public health messages on COVID-19 in Rohingya refugee camps.

#### **Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department for International Development**

The UK is reaching refugees with information and support to reduce rumours, myths, fear and panic about COVID-19, through the Communications with Communities Working Group. This includes a large array of methods to disseminate messages to refugees and the host community including community meetings where possible; radio, posters and leaflets; videos, loudspeakers and information service centres. Messages are being endorsed by the Cox's Bazar Civil Surgeon, translated into the Rohingya language and Bangla, and are being developed in consultation with Rohingya people, including religious leaders, to ensure they are effective. We are reaching out to vulnerable older people directly and child-friendly messaging is also being used.

We continue to make representations to the Government of Bangladesh to lift internet restrictions so public health messages can be shared more easily.

### **Myanmar: Refugees**

**20 May 2020 | 47494**

#### **Asked by: Nadia Whittome**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the need for humanitarian aid to support refugees in refugee camps in Myanmar.

#### **Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development**

There are around 400,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in Myanmar, most of whom were displaced by conflict. This includes 130,000 Rohingya IDPs in Rakhine State, around 77,000 Rakhine IDPs in Rakhine and Chin State, around 110,000 IDPs in Kachin and Northern Shan and around 90,000 IDPs South East/Thai border. In addition to conflict, Myanmar is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. In recent years it has experienced displacement as a result of extreme weather events.

Humanitarian need across Myanmar remains high, especially amongst vulnerable IDP populations. The UN Humanitarian Response Plan 2020 estimates total needs in Myanmar at one million people and \$262

million. Key needs include health care, food, shelter, water and sanitation, and protection. Conflict and travel restrictions limit access to IDPs for international agencies in many areas.

The UK is concerned about the potential impact of COVID-19 on displaced people and on wider conflict affected communities. A serious outbreak of COVID-19 could increase pressure on, and even overwhelm, the already stretched humanitarian system and could reduce access further. The UK has one of the biggest humanitarian programmes in Myanmar working through the UN, International Committee of the Red Cross, international organisations and civil society to respond to needs.

### **Bangladesh: Migrant Camps**

**20 May 2020 | 46660**

#### **Asked by: Rushanara Ali**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what representations she has made to her Bangladeshi counterpart on the internet ban in Rohingya refugee camps.

#### **Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development**

Ministers and the British High Commission in Dhaka continue to raise the issue of telecommunications restrictions in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps in Bangladesh with representatives of the Government of Bangladesh. The Minister of State for South Asia Lord Ahmad has raised this recently with the Bangladesh High Commissioner.

Restrictions on 3G and 4G communications in the Rohingya camps are hindering COVID-19 preparedness. The first case of a refugee with COVID-19 was confirmed within the refugee camps on May 14th. These restrictions limit the ability of agencies to share information with the refugees and with each other; and for the Rohingya to self-organise. Good communications are critical for preparedness, surveillance, response, delivering critical services, and for maintaining stability in the camps.

### **Rohingya: Contraceptives and Maternity Services**

**19 May 2020 | HL3848**

#### **Asked by: Baroness Tonge**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the supply of contraceptive and maternity services in the Rohingya refugee camps.

#### **Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department for International Development**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Rohingya refugee camps, however, the humanitarian response has had time to prepare to the extent possible for an outbreak. Health facilities remain open, delivering comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, stocked with contraceptive options; and staff providing these critical services are accessing the camps. With the support of the UK, the UN

Populations Fund has adapted its regular activities to better respond to COVID-19. They are working to ensure infection prevention and control measures are in place at all health facilities, including 22 DFID-supported health facilities. Isolation units are being equipped with maternity units and safe transport will be provided for infected pregnant mothers and women of reproductive age. However, fear and uncertainty about COVID-19 have seen a significant reduction in people visiting health facilities. The UK is working with all our humanitarian partners to ensure the specific needs of women and girls are taken into account in the COVID-19 response.

**[Bangladesh: Migrant Camps](#)**

**18 May 2020 | 45218**

**Asked by: Rushanara Ali**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to support the establishment of covid-19 testing and quarantining arrangements for the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development**

From the start of the COVID-19 crisis, DFID has engaged with the Government of Bangladesh and the humanitarian operation in Cox's Bazar to support preparedness activities, including the capacity to test, isolate and treat COVID-19 patients. There is now a field laboratory operating in Cox's Bazar Medical College, though the number of daily tests remains limited.

The UK has provided funds to UN agencies that are responsible for quarantining arrangements. There is a system in place for newly arrived refugees who are required to stay for a period of 14 days in a designated quarantine facility, following a full medical screening.

UK funding will help establish isolation and treatment centres, that are equipped to treat severe and critical cases, and capacity to deliver home-based healthcare and monitoring.

**[Bangladesh: Migrant Camps](#)**

**18 May 2020 | 45217**

**Asked by: Rushanara Ali**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the provision of (a) treatment, (b) beds and (c) medical facilities in Cox's Bazaar for people with covid-19.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development**

From the start of the crisis, DFID has worked with partners to help mitigate the impact of the virus on the Rohingya refugees and host communities in Cox's Bazar. UK funding is helping to establish isolation and treatment centres to treat severe and critical cases, as well as the

delivery of home-based healthcare and monitoring. We are also assisting with the provision of oxygen supplies for the isolation and treatment facilities; and supporting WHO to coordinate the health response with the Government, including surveillance, diagnosis, infection prevention and control, triage, referral, case management, and logistics.

Whilst every effort is being made to prevent transmission in the camps and scale up the health care system, the highly congested conditions and vulnerability of the population will pose major challenges when cases appear and reach peak levels.

### **[Bangladesh: Rohingya](#)**

**18 May 2020 | 45216**

#### **Asked by: Rushanara Ali**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what recent steps her Department has taken to ensure the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

#### **Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development**

DFID is working closely with our partners to ensure the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. As the second largest donor to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, with £256 million provided since August 2017, the UK is committed to protecting the Rohingya community, among the world's most vulnerable people. We ensure consistent, in-depth monitoring, including regular field visits, though these are now restricted due to the COVID-19 crisis. We are also actively involved in UN and development partner coordination processes to identify and address issues which are affecting the effectiveness of the response. This includes active engagement with the Government of Bangladesh Inter-sector Coordination Group and individual sectors of the response working on, for example, shelter, nutrition, and reproductive health services.

We work closely with the UN Office for Project Services to maintain oversight of our support on the ground. We recently assisted them to establish an office in Cox's Bazar, including staff funded by UK aid, to enhance coordination and routine monitoring.

### **[Rohingya: Humanitarian Aid](#)**

**12 May 2020 | HL3633**

#### **Asked by: Baroness Sheehan**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the availability of aid workers in the Kutupalong refugee camp; and what action, if any, they are taking as a result.

#### **Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department for International Development**

Cox's Bazar District, where the Rohingya refugee camps are located, is subject to lockdown measures to help prevent the transmission of

COVID-19. In addition, on World Health Organization advice, the Bangladeshi Government has instructed a reduction in humanitarian activity to an agreed list of critical (lifesaving) services. This means that fewer aid workers than normal are entering the refugee camps. For example, essential site management activities continue, but staff are reduced to 20% of their usual number. There are no education facilities open at the moment. However, critical UKAid funded services such as food and medical aid continue to be delivered to support the daily needs of refugees, including by refugee volunteers themselves. We consider this temporary reduction in staff accessing the camp a challenging, but important measure to try to prevent or at least delay the transmission of the virus in the camps. Social distancing arrangements have been put in place to prevent the possible spread of COVID-19 between humanitarian workers, and to provide medical care for those on the humanitarian frontline, coordinated by IOM. We are closely monitoring the situation, including access issues, and working with our humanitarian partners to best protect and prepare the Rohingya and host communities for an outbreak and to maintain critical services and assistance.

#### [Rohingya: Coronavirus](#)

**12 May 2020 | HL3631**

##### **Asked by: Baroness Sheehan**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have, if any to provide additional support to Rohingya children in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

##### **Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department for International Development**

The UK is working with partners to support and protect Rohingya children whose parents or care-givers become sick or die from COVID-19. This includes identifying temporary carers within the same camp block for children at risk of being left alone. These efforts are building on existing foster and child protection systems and will increase the number of Child Protection Volunteers within the Rohingya community in the camps. Although schools in the camps are closed, every effort will be made to get them up and running again as quickly as possible, and to ensure children return to education.

#### [Malaysia and Thailand: Coronavirus](#)

**06 May 2020 | HL3632**

##### **Asked by: Baroness Sheehan**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the governments of Malaysia and Thailand about access to healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic for Rohingya refugees.

##### **Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We remain concerned by the plight of Rohingya refugees and urge regional governments to engage on this issue.

Officials from the British Embassy in Bangkok have discussed with the Thai government the importance of the provision of humanitarian assistance to Rohingyas aboard vessels that enter Thai waters, including in the last week. The Foreign Secretary raised our concerns about the situation of the Rohingya community with the former Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah on 11 February. Our High Commission in Kuala Lumpur has subsequently continued to raise our concerns on the issue with the Malaysian Government.

**Rohingya: Genito-urinary Medicine**

**05 May 2020 | HL3447**

**Asked by: Baroness Tonge**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the government of Bangladesh about the access of Rohingya refugees to sexual and reproductive health and rights services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department for International Development**

In May 2019, DFID undertook a gender review of the Rohingya response. This indicated that sexual and reproductive health and rights services have been accessible and effective in the camps. The Government of Bangladesh decided early in the crisis to deliver the national Essential Service Package to the refugees. This includes contraceptive options, ante- and post-natal care, midwifery services, and menstruation products. These are currently designated as critical services, alongside distribution of hygiene kits, during the COVID-19 period.

We are making representations to government about restrictions on telecommunications. This is needed to improve public health information about coronavirus and sexual and reproductive health and rights services.

## 5. Further reading

### Library Briefing Papers

#### [Coronavirus: Fears for the Rohingya](#)

Commons Briefing Paper  
9 April 2020

### Committee reports

#### [Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya](#)

First Report of Session 2019–21  
House of Commons International Development Committee  
22 May 2020  
HC 259

### Other reports

#### [COVID-19 Response Plan: Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis \(April-December 2020\)](#)

Reliefweb  
5 July 2020

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