



DEBATE PACK

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

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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](#) in its weekly update for 9-15 October that the cumulative totals for confirmed COVID-19 cases are 277 cases in the refugee camps, and 4,635 cases in the host community.

To date there have been 8 Rohingya refugee fatalities due to COVID-19, and 70 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.

A [press release](#) from 21 October from the ICSG and other humanitarian partners announced that they had distributed of over 2,855,850 million reusable masks in all 34 Rohingya refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar and to the local host communities in the District. The reusable masks have been produced through an initiative engaging more than 2,480 skilled tailors in both the refugee camps and in the host community, allowing them to generate income.

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.

On 22 October, the UK co-hosted an [international summit](#) on the Rohingya crisis, along with the US, EU and UNHCR, to bring together the international community to raise funds for the humanitarian response.

At the summit the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, [announced](#) £47.5million in new UK aid to support Rohingya refugees and help Bangladesh deal with coronavirus and natural disasters.

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: 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

[Sustaining Support for the Rohingya Refugee Response conference: closing statement](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
22 October 2020

Statement from the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

We are grateful to all who have participated in today's conference, including those who have announced or pledged funding for the international humanitarian response, those who are supporting members of the Rohingya communities in other ways—not least by hosting them—and most importantly, representatives of Rohingya communities themselves.

The situation in the region remains an acute humanitarian and human rights crisis more than three years after the August 2017 violence, which caused hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people to flee their homes in Myanmar to seek safety in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. There are currently 860,000 Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar district. There are an estimated 600,000 Rohingya people in Myanmar's Rakhine State who face ongoing violence and discrimination, and Malaysia, India, Indonesia, and other countries in the region are together hosting nearly 150,000 Rohingya refugees.

The voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees and others internally displaced to their places of origin or of their own choosing in Myanmar is the comprehensive solution that we seek along with Rohingya people themselves. To that end, we underscore the Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire and the cessation of fighting to enable safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all communities in need of assistance. To resolve the crisis in Myanmar, the Government of Myanmar must take steps to address the root causes of the violence and displacement in Rakhine State and create the conditions for voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable returns. This includes providing a pathway to citizenship and freedom of movement for Rohingya, guided by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State's recommendations and encouraged and supported by countries in the region. Myanmar must provide justice for the victims of human rights abuses and ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

We are grateful to the government and the people of Bangladesh and other countries in the region for their continued support and hosting of Rohingya refugees. We acknowledge the responsibility they have undertaken and we assure them of our continued donor commitment to support the humanitarian needs of Rohingya refugees throughout the region, especially in Bangladesh. This support needs to go hand-in-hand with increased support to host communities. While we continue efforts to secure long-term solutions, a focus on more sustainable response planning and financing in Bangladesh could more effectively support the government's management of the response and maximize limited resources to benefit both Bangladeshi and refugee communities.

The crisis is having a devastating effect on vulnerable members of Rohingya communities, particularly women and children who require gender and age-sensitive interventions. The crisis is also affecting the wider region, with refugees, mainly women and children, desperately attempting to reach other countries in the region. We greatly appreciate the efforts of those governments that have allowed the safe disembarkation of Rohingya refugees in distress at sea. We assure governments hosting Rohingya that donors are committed to supporting these refugees.

We will continue to provide strong support for displaced and stateless Rohingya people, wherever they are in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and other countries in the region. The international community has demonstrated its strong commitment to the humanitarian response with the announcement of funding today totaling some USD 600 million, which significantly expands the nearly USD 636 million in humanitarian assistance already committed so far in 2020 under the Bangladesh Joint Response Plan and the Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan. Since the outbreak of violence in August 2017, a total of nearly USD 2.8 billion has been provided to the Rohingya crisis response in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and the region. This is in addition to USD 700 million in development commitments to Bangladesh from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

We remain steadfast in our engagement with countries concerned towards finding solutions to the crisis. We will continue to work together to maintain international attention on the Rohingya crisis and to shift from short-term critical interventions to a more sustained and stable support.

Background

The co-hosts, the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), recognize the following countries and agencies for their participation in the conference:

Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam; the Asian Development Bank (ADB); the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), BRAC, InterAction, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN-Habitat, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Bank.

[Dominic Raab urges world "not to turn away from Rohingya's suffering" as the UK pledges life-saving support](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

22 October 2020

The UK will today pledge £47.5 million to provide life-saving support for Rohingya refugees and to help Bangladesh with its response to the coronavirus pandemic and natural disasters.

This announcement comes as the UK co-hosts a major international summit on the Rohingya crisis, along with the US, EU and UNHCR, to bring together the international community to raise much-needed funds for the humanitarian response.

Some 860,000 Rohingya live in overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, without formal education or work opportunities. Coronavirus has made the situation in the packed and unsanitary camps even more desperate.

This new funding announced by the Foreign Secretary will provide hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people with food, healthcare, water and sanitation, as well as care and counselling for those traumatised by the violence they have experienced. It will also improve access to education for 50,000 young people, as well as create isolation and treatment centres for people suffering from coronavirus.

Alongside this, the UK aid package will support communities in Bangladesh, as the country hosting the highest number of Rohingya refugees. It will strengthen its health system to respond to COVID-19 and continue the UK's support to help Bangladesh become more resilient to natural disasters such as flooding.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

The people living in Cox's Bazar face unimaginable hardship and many have been victims of violence. We have imposed sanctions on the perpetrators of this brutality, and this new funding will save lives in the camp and help Bangladesh become more resilient to disasters such as coronavirus.

Today I urge the world not to turn away from the Rohingya's suffering and to take the action necessary to allow them to safely return to the homes they fled in terror.

Today's summit will bring countries together to show solidarity for the Rohingya people, express support for nations hosting them as refugees and urge countries to pledge funds to the humanitarian crisis which this year is critically underfunded. The UN has estimated it needs \$1 billion this year to help Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh but so far less than half of that has been raised.

At the conference, FCDO Minister for South Asia and the Commonwealth Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon will reiterate that steps must be taken to work towards the voluntary, safe and dignified return of the Rohingya to their homes in Myanmar. In August 2017, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya left the country to escape brutal and systematic violence. Since then, the UK has sanctioned 2 generals in the Myanmar military, as recommended by a UN independent investigation, which found them responsible for atrocities which amount to ethnic cleansing.

In addition to the Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh, up to 150,000 are living in other countries in the region and an estimated 600,000 live in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

Background

- today's announcement brings the total UK aid commitment to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, which began in 2017, to close to £300 million. It includes £37.5 million to provide humanitarian assistance in Cox's Bazar and £10 million in support for Bangladesh to help the country respond to coronavirus and natural disasters like flooding
- this new funding will provide food, shelter, health, protection, water and sanitation, and support for traumatised and vulnerable women and girls, including:
 - food for over 290,000 Rohingya refugees for 4 months
 - support for isolation and treatment centres for severe COVID-19 cases

- support, especially for Rohingya women and girls, against violence, exploitation and abuse. This includes for child survivors of trafficking
- improved education for over 50,000 children and adolescents from the refugee and surrounding host community
- cooking gas for over 40,000 families for five months, helping prevent further deforestation
- funds raised at the conference will go to international organisations and non-governmental organisations working to alleviate the crisis on the ground in Myanmar, throughout the region, and as specified by the UN-led Joint Response Plan (JRP) in Bangladesh

[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.

High Commissioner,

What steps should Myanmar take to ensure the Rohingya have equitable access to healthcare during this global pandemic?

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.

High Commissioner,

What concrete steps should Myanmar take to ensure Rohingya have freedom of movement and equitable access to healthcare, education and livelihoods?

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. Parliamentary material

4.1 PQs

[South East Asia: Refugees](#)

27 Oct 2020 | HL9120

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Coventry

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the governments of (1) Indonesia, (2) Malaysia, and (3) Thailand, (a) to permit entry to additional refugees from, and (b) to refrain from repatriating refugees to, Myanmar.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK is committed to protecting the Rohingya community and encourage a regional response to the refugee crisis. We have made official representations to the Governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and other Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states on the Rohingya, including at Ministerial level. We are clear that Rohingya refugees should be granted the appropriate protection status and humanitarian assistance within these countries.

[South East Asia: Rohingya](#)

27 Oct 2020 | HL9118

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Coventry

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to work with the governments of (1) Indonesia, (2) Malaysia, and (3) Thailand, and appropriate UN agencies, to provide (a) financial assistance, and (b) humanitarian support, for Rohingya communities in those countries.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK co-hosted a virtual donor conference on "Sustaining Support for the Rohingya Refugee Response" on 22 October, in conjunction with the US, EU and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). The conference brought together governments from across the world, including Association of South East Asian Nations member states, to support the humanitarian response for Rohingya displaced across the region. In total, countries announced \$600 million in new and existing funding. The UK pledged £47.5 million of new funding at the conference, which included £10 million of support for Bangladesh to help the country respond to coronavirus and natural disasters.

[Bangladesh: Rohingya](#)

25 Sep 2020 | 92640

Asked by: Theresa Villiers

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to prevent an outbreak of covid-19 in the Rohingya Refugee Camps in Bangladesh.

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

The UK has committed £11 million to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Cox's Bazar and prevent further outbreaks.

UK aid has created treatment facilities, including more than 600 beds for refugees and host communities suffering from severe respiratory infections. UK aid is also adding more than 2,400 handwashing facilities in the camps and raising public health awareness. This includes reaching Rohingya refugees with information and support to reduce rumours, myths, fear and panic about COVID-19, through the Communications with Communities Working Group. In addition, we have supported surge deployments from the UK Emergency Medical Team.

**[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 to 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 Kinnoch

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 Bazaar. 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 Bazaar, 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.

4.2 Statements

[Rohingya Donor Conference and Funding Announcement](#)

22 Oct 2020 | House of Commons | HCWS532

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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