



The influx of Rohingya refugees has strained local health services like this neonatal unit in the town of Cox's Bazar where premature babies from both communities are treated.

Around 919,000 Rohingya refugees live in southern Bangladesh, most of them in the vast and teeming camps and settlements that have sprung up in Cox's Bazar district, close to the border with Myanmar. A smaller number live in the neighbouring host communities of Teknaf and Ukhia.

The majority -- around 700,000 -- have arrived since August 2017, when the most recent (and by far the largest) exodus of people fleeing violence in Myanmar got under way. The rest had arrived in previous cross-border influxes.

In the camps, the Rohingyas' daily challenge of survival is compounded by uncertainty over their future. The refugees want to return home, but say they will not do so until the necessary conditions for their return are in place, and until their basic rights in Myanmar have been secured.

In the meantime, they remain trapped in limbo, a stateless minority powerless to influence their own future.

With few opportunities to earn money, and no land on which to grow even a few vegetables, they are dependent on aid handouts and their own slender resources.

Living conditions in the camps are always difficult, and sometimes dangerous, especially in Bangladesh's long monsoon and cyclone seasons, which last until the end of the year.

In recent months, heavy rainfall has flooded toilets and contaminated water points, posing obvious risks to people's health. Learning centres and health clinics have been hit too; some have been relocated but there is not enough safe land for all of them. Additional plastic and bamboo helps to some extent, but it is bricks and mortar that are needed to strengthen homes and community.

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Since the chaotic early phase of the crisis, basic services provided by UNICEF and a host of NGOs and humanitarian partners have expanded and scaled up massively. But they are still far outstripped by the needs of the refugees.

The immediate task of accommodating the massive influx of Rohingya refugees last year fell on the host communities and local authorities of Cox's Bazar. A district that already suffered from some of Bangladesh's worst indicators for children's health and education, and where one third of inhabitants live below the poverty line, saw its population quadruple in a matter of months. Public services were placed under enormous pressure. The impact of the crisis exacerbated low wage and high commodity prices. The risk of tension between refugees and host communities has emerged as a key concern.

"The host community has been the first responder to this crisis, but has paid a heavy price for doing so," says Jean Metenier, Chief of UNICEF Cox's Bazar Field Office. "This is why, across all UNICEF programmes, we are now redoubling our efforts to ensure that as a minimum, Bangladeshi children are not negatively affected as a result of the generosity they have shown."