

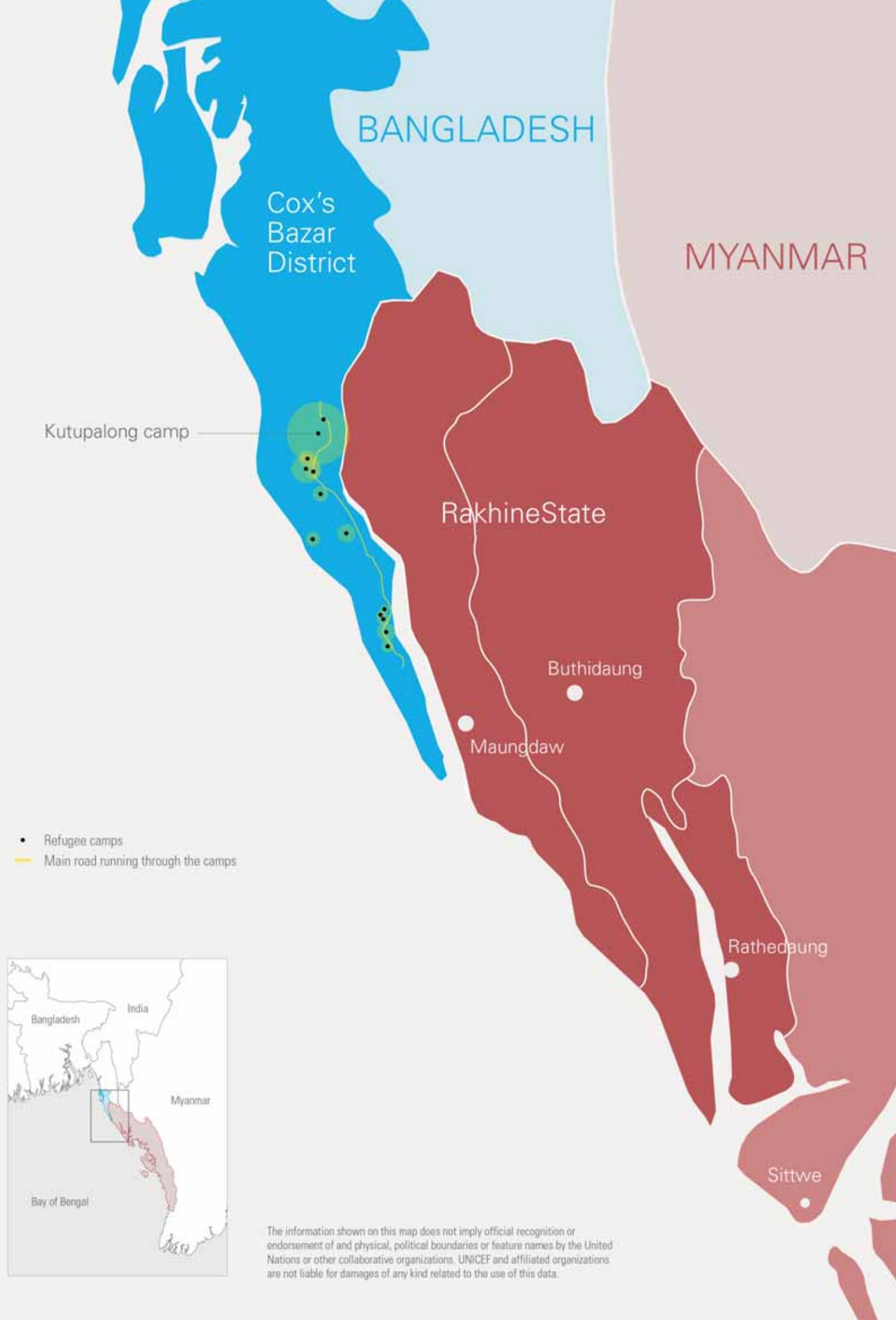
# FUTURES IN THE BALANCE

BUILDING HOPE FOR A GENERATION  
OF ROHINGYA CHILDREN



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BUILDING HOPE FOR A GENERATION OF ROHINGYA CHILDREN



- Refugee camps
- Main road running through the camps



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A boy carries sacks of rice from an aid distribution

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## FOREWORD

by Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF Director of Emergency Operations

**One year ago this week, a startled international community watched a dramatic humanitarian crisis unfold on the north-eastern edge of the Bay of Bengal. In a matter of weeks, hundreds of thousands of desperate and terrorized people – 60 per cent of them children – poured across the border from Myanmar into Bangladesh, bringing with them accounts of the unspeakable violence and brutality that had forced them to flee.**

Twelve months on, memories of those experiences remain raw among the roughly one million Rohingya refugees – including many from previous cross-border influxes – who live in cramped and primitive shelters inside the congested and often insanitary camps of Cox's Bazar.

The unstinting support of local Bangladeshi communities, and a multi-national aid effort led by the Government, has averted the more dire fears for the Rohingyas' safety and well-being.

Disease outbreaks have been largely kept at bay and famine has been averted. Safe water, sanitation, nutrition and other basic services have been installed, even if large gaps remain. For about one third of children up to the age of 14, a network of learning centres and child-friendly spaces offer a chance to begin healing, and a respite from their harsh surroundings.

A semblance of normality has descended on the camps and the neighbouring communities, but it's a normality that cannot last indefinitely. The refugees live on a knife-edge, gripped by uncertainty about their future, and still traumatized by their experiences in Myanmar. Their homes – many built on precarious hillsides – risk being washed away by the monsoon rain, or destroyed by a cyclone. A cholera or measles epidemic remains a real possibility.

With no end in sight to their bleak exile, despair and hopelessness are growing among the refugees, alongside a fatalism about what the future has in store. Older children and adolescents who are deprived of opportunities to learn or

make a living, are at real risk of becoming a "lost generation", ready prey to traffickers and those who would exploit them for political or other ends.

This UNICEF Child Alert calls for a concerted effort to build a new foundation for the rights and opportunities of Rohingya children over the longer term. By taking resolute action together, we – the international community as well as the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar – can give Rohingya children's lives a stability and sense of hope that is currently absent. At the same time, we can strengthen the solidarity between Rohingya children and those living in host communities (whose situation is often not much better than that of the refugees).

Central to our call is the promise of a quality, multi-lingual education, built around the acquisition of essential life-skills, and competencies in literacy, language and numeracy.

Of course, a lasting solution to the plight of the Rohingya requires tackling the root causes of the Rohingya crisis inside Myanmar itself. The refugees cannot and will not agree to return home until the discrimination and violence that they have experienced for decades are ended, until their basic rights – to citizenship, free movement, health, education, and jobs – have been established, and their property restored.

But it is not only in Myanmar that difficult choices are needed. As our Call to Action makes clear, Bangladesh and the international community have critical responsibilities to address. This is a crisis that will require a complex, multi-layered approach underpinned by long-term financial resources and infrastructural development, and bold political will.

Given the untenable situation in which the refugees find themselves, and its implications for both countries, this is a challenge that must be addressed, and rapidly. The Rohingya – and their children especially – demand and deserve nothing less.





Monsoon downpours like this one in Balukhali refugee camp rapidly turn paths into streams.

# ONE YEAR ON THE ROHINGYA CRISIS IN BANGLADESH



## FACING UP TO THE MONSOON -- AND AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

**Hakimpara camp:** Outside the simple bamboo-and-plastic shelter that 60 year-old Dulu, her husband Salamat and their family call home, there is nothing more than a narrow ledge, less than a metre wide. After that, the ground drops away precipitously into a gully some 50 metres below where shelters belonging to other families have been erected.

Like many of the camps accommodating Rohingya refugees, Hakimpara (population 30,480) sprawls across a series of sandy ridges from which most of the vegetation has been stripped. In the current monsoon season, shelters like Dulu's – perched

on crumbling soil – are highly vulnerable to landslide.

Not that Dulu seems concerned at the prospect – despite the thin crack that opened in the shelter's floor during heavy rains in June. While thousands of refugees living in locations deemed to be susceptible to flood and landslip have been relocated to safer ground, Dulu insists that she and her family - including two young grand-children - are staying put.

"We won't go, we will stay here," says Dulu firmly. "If we are going to die (in Bangladesh), we will die in this place," she adds.



Early monsoon rain sweeps Balukhali, part of the vast refugee camp now sheltering over 900,000 Rohingya refugees.

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Dulu and her husband Salamat outside their home in Hakimpara camp.

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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.

*Living conditions in the camp are always difficult, and sometimes dangerous.*

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.





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.

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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.

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."

### Facing up to an uncertain future

Jomtoli refugee camp occupies one of the higher vantage points from which the hills of Myanmar's Rakhine State are clearly visible. Early evening finds groups of Rohingya gathering at this spot, mobile phones in hand, hoping for a signal strong enough to gather news from relatives still on the other side of the border.

For youngsters like 18 year-old Nurul Amin, without a job and with no school to attend, the sight of his home country so close at hand is tantalizing but also frustrating.

"We are always thinking when will we go back?" he says. "When will we study again? But for now, I want to gain skills so I can find work and make money."



"Learning is the most important thing. Even food is not so important." Rohingya refugee Nurul Amin, 18.

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Child Protection

A DANGEROUS PLACE FOR A CHILD



Rohingya refugees wait for an aid distribution in Unchiprang camp.

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“They provided a secure space where children could be children again, and allowed parents to concentrate on other issues in their lives,” says UNICEF’s Child Protection Programme Manager in Cox’s Bazar, William Kollie. “The spaces are still playing that role today, for older children and young ones alike.”

Twelve months on, providing psychosocial support to children still struggling with the mental consequences of the horror they went through in Myanmar remains as vital as ever. At the same time, other protection concerns have grown.



Carrying home a bamboo pole used to reinforce fragile family shelters ahead of the monsoon season.

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