



Refugee influx Emergency Vulnerability Assessment (REVA-4)

Summary Report

April 2021

Data collection supported by:



Key highlights

- Overall vulnerability levels have reached an all-time high in the refugee camps since the influx, with latest findings showing that 96 percent of all refugees are moderate to highly vulnerable and remain entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance. These results reflect the impact of COVID-19 and forced adjustments in humanitarian operations on an already fragile and low resilient population with no income sources nor livelihood opportunities.
- Overall vulnerability in the host community also increased, with 51 percent of the population being moderate to highly vulnerable in 2020 compared to 41 percent in 2019. This increase is also reflected nationally where poverty rates were found to have increased in 2020. The economic contraction and decline in economic activity across most sectors during the COVID-19 lockdown in a population highly dependent on daily wage labour was the main driver.
- Compared to 2019, food consumption among Rohingya and host communities has deteriorated. Unacceptable food consumption has increased from 42 percent to 50 percent among Rohingya and from 21 to 33 percent among host communities. For the host, residual effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on the local economy led to substantial reduction in household incomes affecting their economic ability to acquire food from markets.
- Rohingya households allocate 77 percent of their monthly budget on food; an average above the severe economic vulnerability threshold of 75 percent.¹
- Despite the current level of humanitarian assistance, 49 percent of Rohingya households cannot afford the minimum expenditure basket (MEB). Compared to 2019, economic vulnerability has slightly increased among Rohingya (3 percent) and host communities (7 percent).
- Discounting the value of assistance (a simulated scenario), economic vulnerability would significantly increase to 96 percent of Rohingya households consuming below the MEB, reflecting the fragility of the camp economy and its fully dependence on aid to cover the essential needs of almost all households.
- Two thirds of Rohingya and one third of host community households are engaged in crisis or emergency livelihood coping strategies to cover food and/or their basic needs compromising their resilience and future productivity. Among Rohingya households, 36 percent reported no ways to cover any unforeseen future emergency expense.
- One out of three income sources in the camps come from negative coping methods such as selling assistance, borrowing money or help from relatives and friends. For Rohingya households with an income source, monthly earnings are on average ~75 percent lower than host community households and are equivalent to 37 percent of the Minimum Expenditure Basket², barely covering for basic needs.
- There is no evidence of asset accumulation or self-sufficiency among the Rohingya community in meeting basic needs. Food and other complimentary assistance only allow refugees to complement their consumption needs.
- The proportion of Rohingya households selling part of their food assistance has reduced from 53 percent in 2019 to 32 percent in 2020, mostly driven by the shift from the in-kind to e-voucher food assistance modality associated with lower rates when it comes to selling of assistance. Households receiving e-vouchers increased from about 70 percent in November 2019 to 97 percent one year later. Oil, rice, pulses, dry fish and potatoes are frequently sold to mainly buy food items of their preference.
- COVID 19 and preventive measures has resulted in an increase in Multi-Dimensional Deprivation or multi-dimensional poverty: driven by deprivation in education due to school closures, deprivation on health, income and food access. The disruption on livelihoods and self-reliance activities, combined with increased food prices, have reduced household purchasing power and capacity to cover their basic needs.

¹ Consolidated Approach to Reporting Indicators of Food Security (CARI)- 2015. Technical Guidance Note. WFP.

² Household Minimum Expenditure Basket is at BDT 8681 while the Minimum Food Expenditure Basket is at BDT 5691.

Introduction

Bangladesh continues to accommodate Rohingya refugees who've been fleeing political persecution in Myanmar since the 1970s. The last influx occurred in August 2017, when an estimated 726,000³ Rohingyas arrived in Cox's Bazar and settled in camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts, joining the other group of Rohingyas who arrived earlier.

The Covid-19 pandemic added another layer of crisis to the Rohingya refugee crisis that was beginning to stabilize and take a protracted nature: it altered the landscape and modality of providing humanitarian assistance besides disrupting lives and livelihoods in both host and camp economies.

This technical summary report highlights findings from the fourth round of the Refugee Influx Emergency Vulnerability Assessment (REVA-4) conducted in November-December 2020, by the World Food Programme (WFP), in collaboration with partner organizations. The main objectives of this assessment were to:

- Assess the current situation and trends in severity of food insecurity, livelihoods and other essential needs of the Rohingya and host communities adjacent to the camps.
- Understand the experienced and sustained impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns and regulations on the Rohingya and surrounding host communities.

REVA-4 constitutes a panel survey of REVA-3 households (interviewed in December 2019).

Overall Vulnerability

Compared to 2019, overall vulnerability⁴ increased in 2020 among the Rohingya and host communities. For Rohingya households, 96 percent were found to be highly to moderately vulnerable, a 2 percent increase from 2019, and the highest since the influx (Figure 1). The high vulnerability among Rohingya likely reflects the limited economic and livelihoods opportunities as well as work restrictions, further compounded by the COVID-19 crisis. The lockdowns and government directive to scale down humanitarian services to critical ones only resulted in reduction in some activities that were essential in supporting refugees' consumption needs, like self-reliance activities.

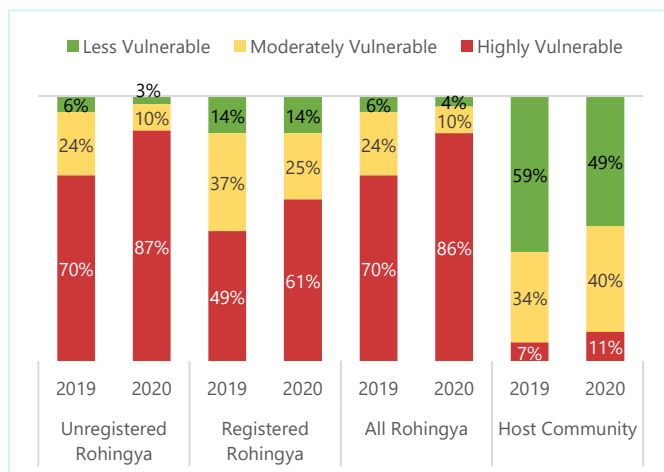


Figure 1: Overall vulnerability levels in 2019 and 2020

Household characteristics	Rohingya	Host Community
Demographics		
Women-led households		X
Households with a disabled person	X	
Households with children under 5 years of age	X	
Households with 1 to 5 children	X	
Households with more than 5 children		X
Household with adolescent girls	X	
Household with children aged 5 – 14 years	X	
Households with 8+ members	X	
High dependency ratio	X	X
Presence of chronic ill member	X	
Economic		
Absence of an active working member	X	X
No male member of working age	X	
Women breadwinner		X
Involvement in irregular works	X	

Table 1: Characteristics of the most vulnerable households

In the host communities, the increase in levels of vulnerability was also the highest since the influx, reflecting the economic hardships the community went through due to lockdowns and contraction of economic activities. The informal sector, which absorbs most of the labour force, was the most affected. Whilst the survey was conducted at a time when the economy was in a recovery phase, the residual impacts of the contraction on the economy continued to be felt, with many poor households still struggling to actively re-integrate back to the economy.

³ https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar_refugees

⁴ Overall vulnerability is a composite index based on food consumption score (FCS), economic capacity to meet essential needs (ECMEN) and livelihood coping strategies (LCS).

Examining the determinants of vulnerability at household level reveal a continuation of patterns observed in 2019 (Table 1). Persistent lack of economic opportunities drove Rohingya households into high vulnerability at a significantly faster rate than other socio-demographic attributes. Women-led households in the host community remain among the poorest and most vulnerable. Their economic conditions varied depending on marital status, the social context of women leadership, access to productive resources and the ability to generate income. Other observable vulnerability characteristics included households with more than five children, those with high-dependency ratio and households with a woman as the main breadwinner.

Food consumption score (FCS)

Compared to 2019, food consumption deteriorated in Rohingya and host communities (Figure 2). Despite the reduction of poor food consumption in Rohingya households from four to one percent, households with food consumption below acceptable levels increased from 42 to 50 percent. In host communities, it increased from 21 percent to 33 percent mainly driven by reduced frequency in consumption of more nutritious foods (pulses, vegetables, animal proteins like fish, meat, eggs) due to lower purchasing power.

Household dietary diversity scores among Rohingya refugees remain comparable to 2019 levels (at 5.1 food groups) but decreased in the host community from 5.4 to 5.1. Consumption frequency⁵ fell for both population groups, especially for pulses, sugar and vegetables. Animal protein consumption also decreased in the host community who experienced a greater general drop in consumption frequency compared to the Rohingya population. Nevertheless, the dietary patterns exhibited by the two communities were similar to 2019 findings, with higher consumption frequency of pulses among Rohingya households and more frequent consumption of vegetables, animal protein (meat/fish/eggs), and fruits in the host community. Women and male-led households in the Rohingya community had no significant differences in terms of consumption, since they all received the same assistance. In the host community, men headed households had better consumption outcomes than the female headed households, possibly drawn from differences in their access to economic opportunities.

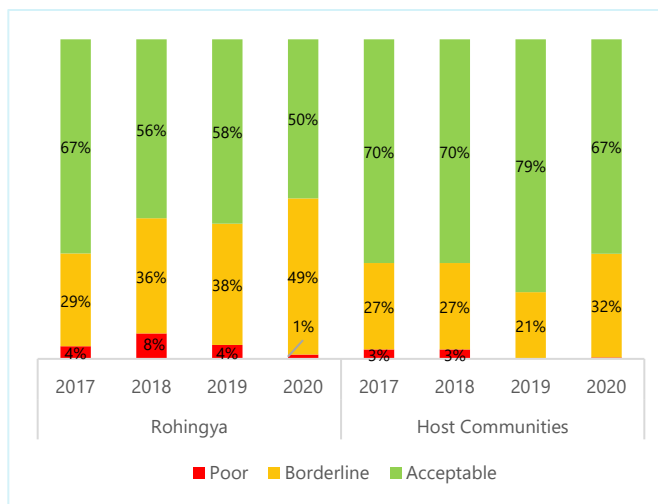


Figure 2: Food consumption score trends (2017-2020)



⁵ Consumption frequency is defined as the average number of days each food group is consumed at the household level in the seven days preceding the survey. Food groups considered: staples, pulses, meat/fish/eggs, dairy, vegetables, fruits, oil and sugar.

Coping mechanisms

Consumption-based coping: Trends in adoption of consumption-based coping strategies remained similar to 2019: eight out of ten Rohingya households and four out of ten host community households were adopting consumption based coping strategies. Relying on less preferred food was reported to have increased in camps, possibly due to perceptions around shift to the commodity voucher modality in 2020⁶. For host community, consumption-based coping continued its steady trend of reduction across all strategies.

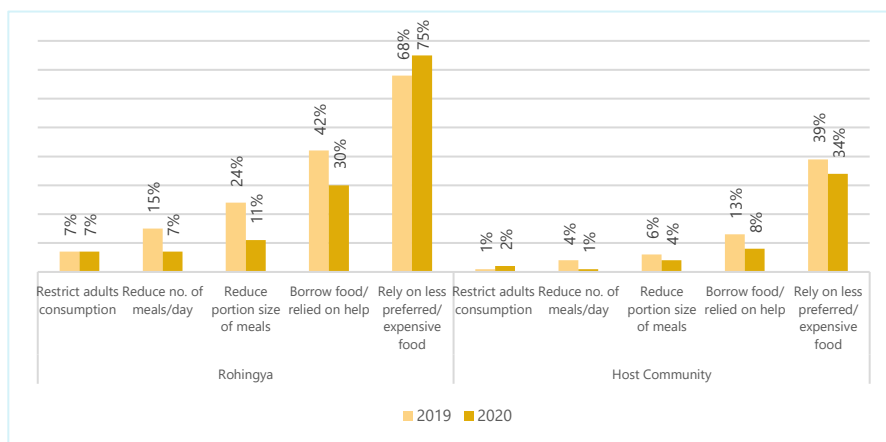


Figure 3: Adopted consumption based coping strategies

Livelihoods-based coping: The pattern of adoption of livelihoods-based coping strategies was comparable to 2019: most refugee households applied crisis coping strategies, though at a lower rate than in 2019 (Figure 4), driven by reductions in sale of assistance and reliance on friends or relatives. Reduction in sale of food assistance is attributed to transition to the e-voucher modality from in-kind assistance in 2020⁷.

Livelihood coping strategies were mainly adopted to support food access -98 and 84 percent among Rohingya and host community households respectively. Health care access was the second most reported reason, relatively more important in the host community (8 percent) than in refugee camps.

Coping with a future emergency⁸: More than a third (36 percent) of Rohingya households reported not having any means of coping with an emergency expense while only 8 percent of host community households reported the same. Host community households also demonstrated higher self-sufficiency in being able to draw from current earnings (34 percent) and own savings (23 percent) among the top five methods reported for coping with unforeseen emergencies.

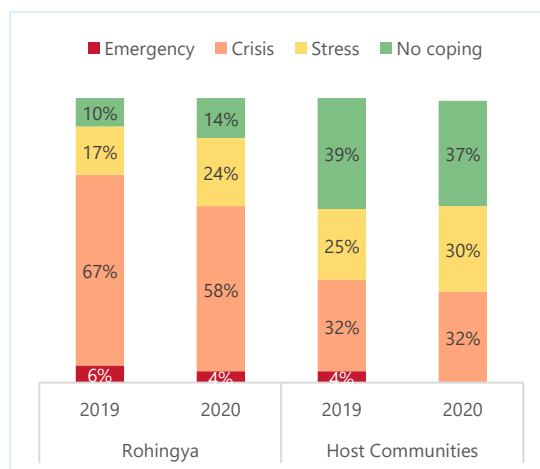


Figure 4: Scale of adoption of livelihoods coping strategies

Credit-dependency: Credit dependency⁹ among Rohingya households persisted at previously high levels (63 percent), while among host community households the rate of debt contraction increased from 41 percent to 53 percent, driven by the strain on incomes during the lockdowns. Food was the main reason for incurring debts (55 percent) among refugees, followed by health (36 percent). In host community, it was mainly for health expenses (38 percent) and food (31 percent). Compared to 2019, credit taken to cover food expenses decreased while debts to cover health expenditure increased 8 percent points among Rohingya households and 17 percent among host community households.

⁶ The REVA 4 data collection was conducted from 7 November to 3 December 2020. Camps had begun to transition back to value voucher modality starting in December. At the time of survey almost all households were still receiving the fixed food baskets under commodity vouchers.

⁷ REVA 3 reported that e-voucher allowed refugees more flexibility in purchase of preferred item types and volumes, thus reducing the need to sell. Households under e-voucher food assistance modality increased from about 70 percent in December 2019 to 97 percent in November 2020.

⁸ The emergency expense thresholds set for refugees and hosts were BDT 10,000 and BDT 25,000 respectively in order to contextualize the question to income levels and poverty lines for the two populations.

⁹ Credit dependency was measured based on whether households had borrowed money in the 3 months prior to the survey.

Expenditure patterns and economic vulnerability

Average expenditure levels: Considering only actual cash purchases, Rohingya households spent significantly less per month (BDT 735) per capita or (USD 9) compared to host community households (BDT 2,378) per capita or (USD 28). Including the imputed value of food assistance, aggregate expenditures for Rohingya households rise to about BDT 1,908 per capita per month (USD 23), underscoring the criticality of humanitarian assistance in supporting their consumption needs.

Expenditure patterns: Expenditure patterns across both populations remained comparable to previous years, with food disproportionately taking a larger share of the monthly expenditure. Including the value of assistance, the share of monthly budget on food among Rohingya households rose from 72 percent in 2019 to 77 percent in 2020, which is higher than the severe economic vulnerability threshold of 75 percent¹⁰. Cereals, mainly rice, continued to dominate diets of both Rohingya and host community households (Figure 5 and 6).

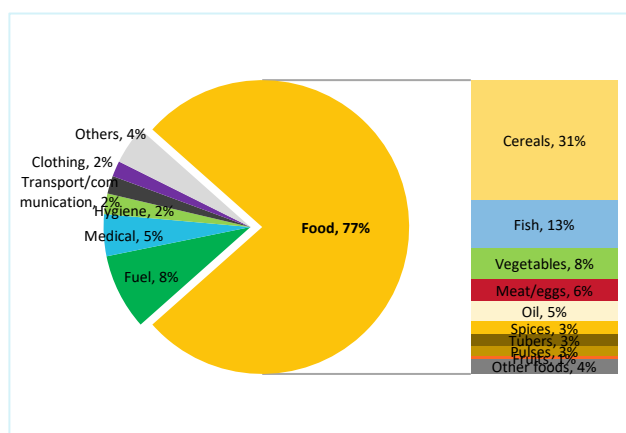


Figure 5: Breakdown of expenditure in Rohingya households (including assistance)

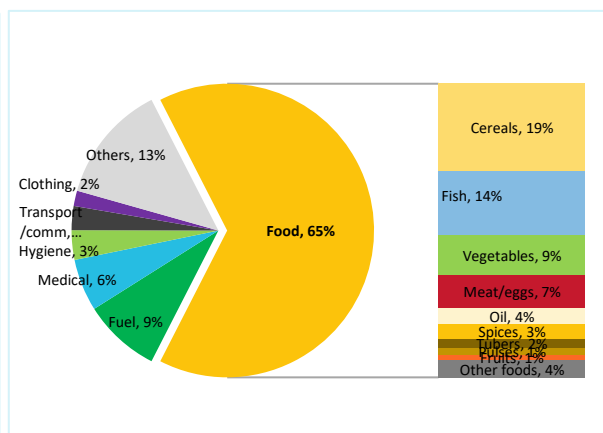


Figure 6: Breakdown of expenditure in host households

Economic Vulnerability: Economic vulnerability¹¹ remains high in the camps despite the current levels of humanitarian assistance: 49 percent of Rohingya households still have consumption below the minimum expenditure basket (MEB), a 3 percent point increase from 2019. Unregistered refugees remain the most economically vulnerable population, likely due to their limited access to economic opportunities in the camps. When the value of assistance is discounted, economic vulnerability increases significantly, resulting in 96 percent of Rohingya households consuming below the MEB (simulated scenario). Humanitarian aid is the pillar of this economy,

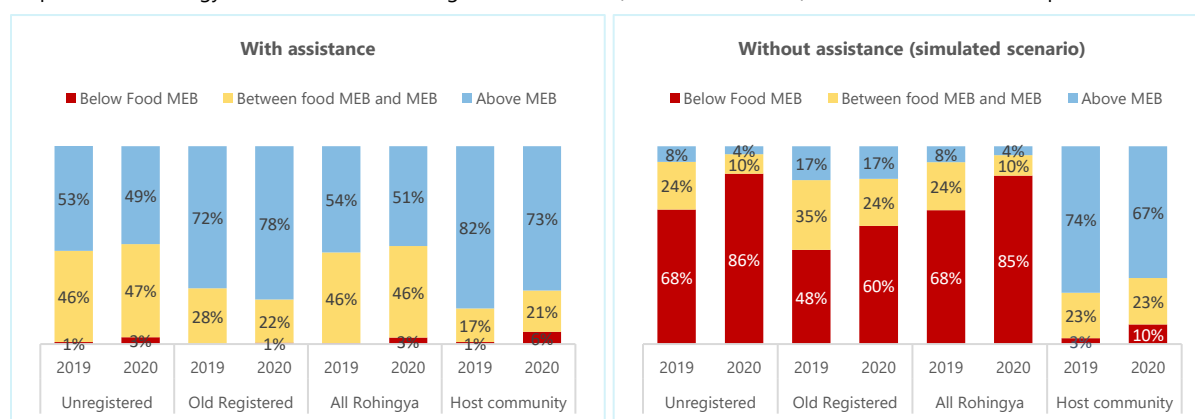


Figure 7: Economic vulnerability levels with and without assistance

¹⁰ Consolidated Approach to Reporting Indicators of Food Security (CARI)- 2015. Technical Guidance Note. WFP

¹¹ Households economic capacity to meet essential needs (ECMEN) was determined by estimating the proportion of households having consumption above and below the minimum expenditure basket (MEB). MEB is what a household requires in order to meet their essential needs, on a regular or seasonal basis, and its average cost

without it, almost all households would not be able to meet their basic consumption needs. Increased economic vulnerability was also evident in the host community, where 33 percent of households had consumption below the MEB compared to 26 percent in 2019. The increase may have been driven by temporary employment or income losses experienced during the lockdown, the effects of which continue to be felt during the economic recovery phase.

Livelihoods and self-reliance

Labor force participation¹² in the camps increased, though characterized by significantly higher unemployment compared to 2019 rates¹³. One in every five people in the camps were engaged in some form of income earning activity at the time of the survey¹⁴. Forty-two percent of the Rohingya labor force aged 15-65 years were not engaged in any income earning activity, while for the host community, this was 14 percent (Table 2). However, compared to 2019, unemployment in both Rohingya and host communities had increased.

		Rohingya	Hosts
Labour force participation		38%	42%
% of labour force	Employment	58%	86%
	Unemployment	42%	14%
% of overall population	Employment	22%	36%
	Unemployment	16%	6%

Table 2: Labour force indicators in 2020

Main income generating activities: One third of income sources in camps came from negative coping activities such as selling assistance or help from friends and family. For the non-negative coping income sources (work-based), the bulk of it came from wage income/salaries followed by non-agriculture trade and services (Figure 8). In contrast, 88 percent of income sources in the host community were work-based with wage or salaried income accounting for half of this, farming, livestock rearing and fishing for one fifth and trade another fifth.

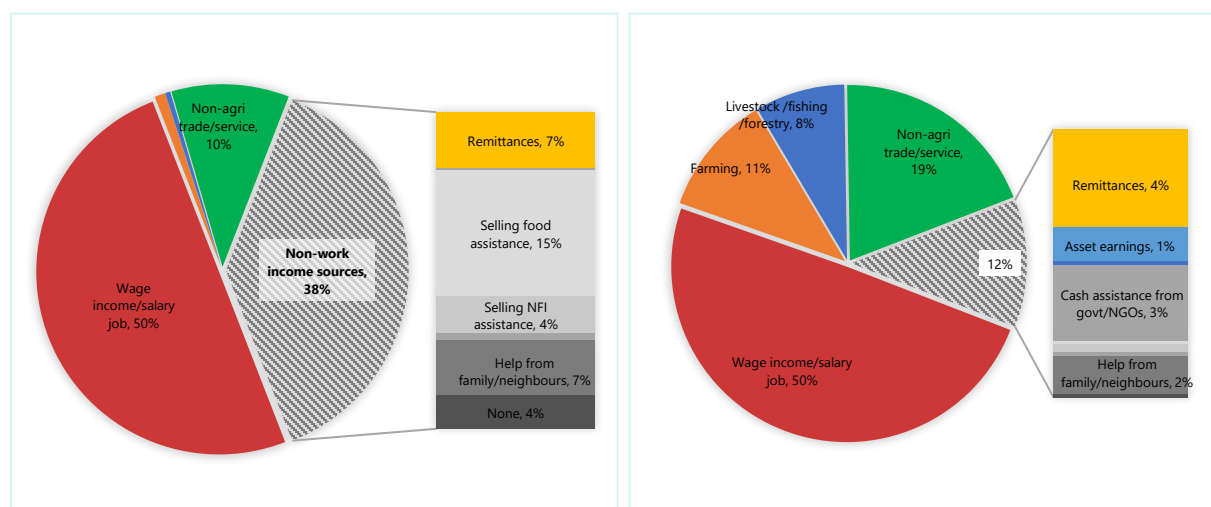


Figure 8: Types of income sources reported in Rohingya and host communities

Rohingya households reported earning BDT 3,404 per month on average. Within camps, registered refugees reported twice the income levels at BDT 6,959 per month. Host community households reported more than three times higher average household income at BDT 13,662 per month. Rohingya communities earned less than host communities due to the combined effect of lower days of work available and lower wage rates (Table 3).

¹² Labour force participation is defined as the share of the population aged 15 years or older that is working (employed) or actively looking for work (unemployed).

¹³ World Bank 2019. Insights from the labor module on work and wages in Cox's Bazar. Overall labour force participation in camps was 33 percent and in hosts in the Ukhiya-Teknaf region was 42 percent.

¹⁴ Labor force indicators were collected based on status of engagement in the 7 days prior to the survey. It is important to note that activities in camps are assigned on a rotational basis. The statistics present the maximum level of active participation that the camp economy and regulations allow at any given point in time.

	Rohingya			Host Communities		
	Days worked/ month	Daily rate (BDT)	Monthly earnings (BDT)	Days worked/ month	Daily rate (BDT)	Monthly earnings (BDT)
Daily labour	9	350	2,770	19	450	8,610
Monthly salaried work	26	-	5,610	26	-	14,611
Self-employed traders & service workers	19	-	3,000	24	-	12,000

Table 3: Days worked, wage rates and monthly earnings for different types of main income generating activities

Livelihoods and vulnerability levels: Overall household vulnerability was significantly correlated with household income and the nature of the main income activity. Eighty-six percent of Rohingya households who were highly vulnerable had the lowest average household income levels (BDT 2,736), while the same for highly vulnerable host community households (11 percent) is BDT 6,822. The patterns based on types of income activity highlight the important differences between the two groups: high vulnerability is associated with higher share of daily laborers in both economies, but income activities associated with low vulnerability are different. Low vulnerability is associated with monthly salaried jobs in camps, whereas in host communities, it is associated with self-employed work.

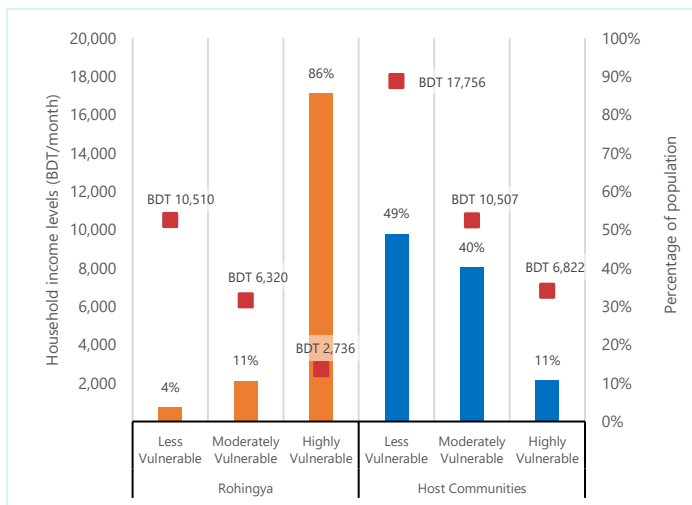
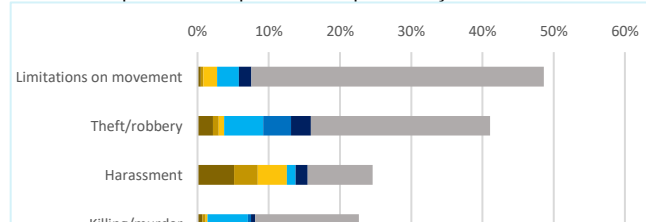


Figure 9: Household incomes levels for different vulnerability categories

Protection

Protection concerns increased in the refugee camps. About 33 percent of refugees reported experiencing insecurity incidents in 2020, compared to 15 percent in 2019. In the host community, episodes of insecurity appeared to have reduced: only 13 percent of households reporting having directly or indirectly faced insecurities, compared to 29 percent the previous year. This could be due to less movement during the lockdowns.

Rohingya households reported high levels of insecurity related to limitations on movement, discrimination, harassment, and physical violence pervading in camps. Theft, robbery, killing/murders continued to be major concerns across the entire locality. Even though these



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