

Strategy to Enhance the Protection of Volunteers in the Camps

In response to the new wave of threats to refugee volunteers and their community engagement in the Rohingya refugee camps since the end of 2020, the below note outlines a short- and long-term intervention strategy to address protection concerns for refugee volunteers and ensure the continuation of the important services delivered through the refugee volunteer programmes.

The strategy rests on four pillars, with the aim of ensuring rights-based protection of women and girls and uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian services and assistance:

- 1. Constructive engagement with authorities, including advocacy for better safety considerations for refugees*
- 2. Expanded community-based engagement with community and religious leaders, alongside ongoing community and women's empowerment initiatives*
- 3. Evidence-based protection analysis and response mechanisms including interventions*
- 4. Enhanced Inter-Sector Coordination*

The strategy focuses primarily on the threat campaign and risks faced by female refugee volunteers and community leaders, as well as female humanitarian staff working in the camps and encompasses threats and violence against male volunteers.

BACKGROUND

In October 2018, protection partners began to report sporadic instances of verbal harassment by refugee community members against female staff (particularly national staff) and female refugee volunteers. At the beginning of January 2019, reports of men harassing and threatening volunteer women, and in some cases their relatives, resurfaced and have increased, as an effort to prevent their engagement in volunteer work. At the end of 2020, again messages against the engagement of female volunteers and their free movement in the camp were reported, coupled with extortion of money against female and male volunteers and cases of physical violence and kidnapping of male and female volunteers. Messages against women's engagement as volunteers were spread in the camps verbally or through audio clip messages, while lists of volunteers were being collected by *majhis* and organized criminal groups.

These recurring threats have impacted service delivery in the camps, with refugee male and female teachers, health and community outreach volunteers refraining from pursuing volunteer activities due to safety concerns. The threats add to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the camps, which has further exacerbated the gendered perception of female activities perceived as "dishonorable" and therefore a reason for the spread of the pandemic in the camps, leading to increased policing, violence and discrimination against women.¹ Moreover, this impacts services for children and adolescents seeking protection as in most cases this is gendered support.

The threats further built on a reported steady growth in violent confrontations in the camps in 2020, with a particular escalation in violence between criminal groups since July 2020, amid reduced presence of humanitarian actors in the camps due to COVID-19 mitigation measures, transitions in camp administration and the handover of security management to the Armed Police Battalion (APBn). There is therefore an urgent need to address safety and security concerns with the government authorities as severe forms of violence are reported. Women leaders and volunteers are being blamed and scrutinized for not being "good Muslim women".² This strategy aims at tackling the safety concerns faced by the refugee volunteers which include harassment and threats.

¹ Gender Hub, UN Women, OXFAM and CARE (2020) "Rapid Gender Analysis on the Impact of COVID- 19".

² https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/un_women_advocacy_brief_on_unscr_1325_wps_in_cxb_final_21_october_2020_.pdf

Overall Considerations and Recommendations

Camp diversity: actors to recognize the diverse camp dynamics within and between camps and the host community.

Cultural Awareness: actors to be mindful of various socio-cultural, religious, political, and historical aspects of the community, and engage refugees in a manner that does not heighten risk/harm; to ensure works/activities are available/adapted for the women volunteers and ensure proper women friendly spaces at the distribution points. For further guidance, material has been developed by the Protection Sector to ensure the respect of the principles of “do no harm”, inclusion and accessibility here: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/bangladesh/protection>

Zero Tolerance: Actors to make clear, at all levels, that women should enjoy free mobility in the camps and access to education, personal development, and volunteer opportunities. Any harassment, threats, or violence against women or their families will not be tolerated and will be raised with the relevant authorities to take appropriate measures including legal remedy.

Continued support of community-based mechanisms and women volunteers: Actors should not substitute absent women volunteers with men volunteers. Women volunteers should receive support from the organizations to which they are attached. For example, reassurances that her post will not be cut and that, if and when she feels comfortable and safe enough to come back, she will be welcomed to do so. Women volunteers should also be informed of their options. In cases involving violence, women volunteers should receive adequate legal support for access to justice if needed.

Do No Harm: The safety and security of women volunteers and their families should be prioritized, and a woman's decision to work should be free and informed. Actors should not approach a female volunteer's family regarding permission for her to go to work, as this may place the woman, as well as her family, at risk. Moreover, women reporting security incidents should be protected against retaliation through appropriate safeguards as per minimum protection standards. This may include special measures including confidentiality, anonymous reporting, witness and whistle-blower protection, last resort relocation.

Protection assessments have been conducted to inform tailored interventions in the camps and an advocacy note on women's security was developed.³ Initial analysis of available information suggests that a complex combination of factors has contributed to the present trend of increased threats against volunteers and restrictions on women's activities in refugee camps.⁴ In response to the escalating challenges faced by refugee volunteers in the camps, this Strategy has been developed to outline short and long-term interventions on broader elements of safety conditions, community engagement and prevention/response mechanisms.

While the present situation varies from camp to camp, it poses risks to the safety and security of refugee volunteers, women and men, their empowerment, and their freedom of movement. It likewise could jeopardize the community-based mechanisms through which services are provided, negatively impacting the community as a whole.

THE KEY INTERVENTIONS

PILLAR 1: ENGAGING WITH AUTHORITIES:

The Government of Bangladesh is primarily responsible for ensuring safety and security in the camps for both refugees and humanitarian workers. As such, the prioritized risk mitigating, and responsive actions are:

Immediate Actions:

➤ **Imminent threats:** Cases of imminent physical threat should be immediately reported by volunteers to the relevant Camp in Charge (CiC) —as the lead civilian authority—for rapid response, alongside reporting to the designated protection focal point for the camp (list available [here](#)) or the Protection Sector, bearing in mind the risk of putting the victims at further risk of harm because of possible retaliation.⁵ Safeguarding measures should be put in place and the response should always put people's safety first. The protection focal points will extend support for legal referral to CiC, if needed, while CiCs and law enforcement authorities should enable and assist refugees who wish to seek legal remedy.

³ IOM and UN Women (2020), “Honor in transition: Gender Norms Among the Rohingya”; UNDP and UN Women (2020); Gender Hub, UN Women, OXFAM and CARE (2020) “Rapid Gender Analysis on the Impact of COVID-19”. And UNHCR, AAB and CARE (2020), “Intersectional Analysis of Gender”; GBVIMS monthly reports; UNWOMEN (2020) “Action Brief: Promoting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh”.

⁴ UNSW, UNHCR (2020), Addressing SGBV And Empowering Refugee Women in Cox's Bazar.

⁵ Threats and related incidents involving an imminent life-threatening situation should be reported by any actor to the CiC. Alternatively, any actor can report anonymously, if preferred, to the camp protection focal points who will then report to the CiC.

Ongoing Actions:

- **Advocacy** with the authorities to enhance access to justice for the Rohingya should continue, whilst awareness on existing legal remedies should be made available and pursued as appropriate. Government's efforts must also be encouraged to fight impunity through the enforcement of law while promoting community-based protection mechanisms, including community-policing, to support positive long-term outcomes and encourage camp authorities and security actors to engage with groups that are threatening volunteers in order to address security risks they face. Advocacy for Self-Reliance activity approvals (RRRC/CiC) should be highlighted as contributing solutions for enhancing resilience and thus alleviating protection concerns.
- **Continuous engagement:** Building on the work already done by the Sectors and protection partners on training, efforts should continue to share capacity on protection principles and standards and to set up trusted, open and transparent channels of communication and reporting with local authorities, in particular law enforcement authorities, and effective and accessible PSEA mechanisms should be further strengthened. Capacity sharing initiatives on gender equality, GBV, PSEA, anti-trafficking and protection for all criminal justice actors (police, prosecution, judiciary, etc.), CiCs and camp administration staff and other security personnel must be continued and expanded. Deployment of female staff among law enforcement agencies has started and should be further strengthened and women and children police help desks set up across all camps. Collaboration should be accelerated with law enforcement (APBn), and other security actors including through civil-military coordination to promote gender responsive policing and security management, for example night patrolling at block-level and securing shelters at night-time, establishing working protocols around survivors of GBV.
- **Routine dialogue:** Concurrently, consultations and support between Rohingya female and male community representatives, civilian authorities and law enforcement actors aimed at addressing and mitigating threats to women should continue. The Protection Sector and GIHA WG have initiated discussions with RRRC, CiCs, APBn and Rohingya women and men among the refugee community. Such efforts should be scaled up in the next three months to ensure regular meetings and dialogue involving humanitarian actors from all sectors, as relevant and required. Law enforcement authorities have a vital role in fighting against impunity, bringing perpetrators to justice and ensuring access to justice for survivors who are willing to pursue legal remedy.

PILLAR 2: EXPANDED ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY

Both the short-term interventions aiming at mitigation of present threats, and the long-term strategy for the development of sustainable community support for women volunteers, should be rooted in a multi-sector community-based approach, taking into consideration socio-cultural norms; age, gender, and diversity (AGD); and the diverse roles and viewpoints of key leaders and influencers, both women and men. Such efforts should involve all sectors as relevant, and should include:

Immediate Actions:

- **Referral pathways via camp protection, GBV and child protection focal points:** Actors should use existing camp Protection and GBV Focal Points who can help refer cases, queries, or concerns relating to threats to female and male volunteers from the humanitarian actors or community members to the CiC and other law enforcement authorities. Camp Protection focal points will be fully supported with capacity building and coaching by the PWG Coordination Team, on safe referrals, survivor centered approaches, and informed consent in order to increase their capacity to respond to these specific protection cases. GBV cases will be addressed through the existing referral pathways in the camps. As threats can have a particular impact on children, including cases of imminent threats to children and other gendered child protection issues, actors can rely on existing child protection referral pathways, case workers and volunteers.

Ongoing Actions:

- **Strengthened existing community-based protection structures:** Protection, humanitarian actors and service providers should continue to expand engagement with the refugee community—particularly women, girls, men, boys, *majhis* and elected community representatives, and religious leaders—and regularly engage in dialogues tailored to questions on women's roles and contributions to the community. Capacity building initiatives need to be identified and actions need to be taken to strengthen existing community-based structures and to promote gender balance by including women in community-based leadership structures. Consultations with Rohingya women volunteers, including women community leaders, elected representatives, women and female youth groups should be strengthened. Context specific measures should be adopted to encourage meaningful participation, including through sex-segregated meetings. This will allow for an understanding of existing challenges as well as proposed solutions, help identify the most vulnerable areas/households and allow for the provision of targeted support. Psychosocial support activities, anger management and affect regulation should be further integrated into community engagement efforts to build refugee capacity to handle stress and lower rates of violence. At the same time, consultations should continue at the community level where men and women are engaged separately on safety audits on risk factors and gaps in community safety, including on gender specific security risks. Consultations must be done in a sensitive manner to avoid reprisals against anyone seen as an informant, and data confidentiality standards must be maintained. A holistic and formalized approach for consulting Rohingya women's rights organizations, CBOs, and volunteers, including by creating a formal platform, for systematic engagement as an accountability mechanism should be developed.
- **Increased transparency:** Concurrently, information sharing about the aims and concrete benefits of programs and interventions across all sectors should increase, including through engagement of designated protection focal points (as well as GBV and child protection focal points) with the community, CiCs, religious leaders, and other relevant actors. The community needs to be made aware of the best ways to approach camp-level sector-focal points, in line with Accountability to Affected Population principles.
- **Advocacy for women's rights:** While acknowledging community concerns, actors should also reiterate that threats or violence against women volunteers and their families or female NGO staff will not be tolerated, and that women should remain free to access education, healthcare, volunteering opportunities, justice and representation in the community as this benefits the community as a whole. Girls should similarly have free access to child protection and youth activities. Increased community engagement should be carried out with refugee women and girls, with the purpose of enhancing awareness of their right to safety and security, including when they are carrying out their functions as refugee volunteers. It is important to note that not all Imams, *majhis* and religious leaders have the same views and positions on the role of women in society. Imams have also been targeted by other individuals as a result of their female family members volunteering. Children and adolescents should also be engaged as advocates as they have unique views on the need for volunteers and staff to be gendered, particularly for adolescent girls to be empowered.

PILLAR 3: EVIDENCE-BASED PROTECTION ANALYSIS AND INTERVENTION

As each camp is characterized by its own social and power dynamics, the influence of refugee leaders, community attitudes, and threats to women can vary. Consequently, effective short- and long-term interventions require a tailored, cross-sector response on a camp-by-camp basis, involving:

Immediate Actions:

- **Tailored data collection:** To systematically collect data on security-related threats to women, the Protection Sector recommends the concerned agency or organization to report incidents to the following channels in order to collect data and evidence to shape the advocacy. The information gathered is anonymous and respects the privacy of persons affected by the incidents. The reporting options are not for case management (for case management see referral pathways as described in section 2) but to collect data for advocacy. Organizations can report incidents through the specific reporting channels developed in this strategy (link available [here](#)) or through the Protection Focal Points (updated list per camp available on the [Protection Sector webpage](#)).



- **Safe Reporting:** Continuously consult Rohingya women and community representatives to help identify gaps and safety concerns of reporting modalities and practical ways to record incidents of such crimes while safeguarding the privacy and security of those affected.
- **Camp-specific interventions:** Finally, guided by evidence-based analysis, actors from all sectors and Working Groups can develop camp-specific interventions that are directly responsive to the identified issues and which can most efficiently and effectively promote short-term mitigation of threats and long-term sustainable changes in behavior.

Ongoing Actions:

- **Evidence-based analysis:** Based on the data collected through the incident form, in combination with all other relevant information gathered and shared by actors, including findings from protection monitoring (including GBV and Child Protection), the Protection Sector will conduct micro-macro analysis of security-related trends by camp, taking into account multi-sectoral concerns and triangulating reporting to identify drivers, hotspots, and related data points.
- **Inter-agency information sharing mechanism:** Strengthen inter-agency information sharing mechanisms, including through the form in annex below, to allow response wide analysis of such assaults. This would better enable the development of mitigating measures by UN agencies and strengthen advocacy tools for security matters directly under the control of the Government of Bangladesh.

Pillar 4: ENHANCED INTER-SECTOR COORDINATION

In line with the laws and policies of the Government of Bangladesh that assure women's empowerment, it is the position of the humanitarian community and of the Protection Sector, including its Gender-based Violence and Child Protection Sub-sectors, the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group and the Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Network, that there should be zero tolerance for threats made against women refugee volunteers and humanitarian workers. Concurrently, any approach must take into consideration the socio-cultural norms and needs of the community. The 2021 Joint Response Plan calls for cross-sector protection and gender mainstreaming, and the proposed response incorporates multi-sector, short- and long-term interventions to engage at the government, community, service providers and individual levels. As appropriate and considering developments on the ground advocacy at appropriate levels will also be necessary (local, national, etc.).

Immediate Actions:

- Urgently draw up an inter-sector action plan aimed at providing immediate safeguarding mechanisms for women and girls in the most vulnerable camps, particularly relating to night-time safety. This should include plans to provide more secure shelters and night patrolling by security personnel, as well as ensuring standard operating procedures for recording reports of crimes by informal organized groups against women and girls. Sectors should also take a look at the specific threats their volunteers (esp. female volunteers) face and coordinate with other actors on approaches.

Ongoing Actions:

- Strengthen coordination between the Protection Sector, PSEA Network, GBV and CP Sub Sector, GiHA WG and Sectors engaging volunteers on gender related security issues to allow monitoring and oversight of the response and wide collection and collation of information relating to past and present gang related attacks on women, girls, men and boys. This would underpin advocacy and mitigation measures while allowing ongoing data collection and would also help address the barriers preventing women and community members reporting these attacks.

ANNEX ONE: Volunteers safety concern reporting form

To systematically collect data on security-related threats to volunteers or staff, this Strategy recommends that **concerned organizations** report incidents affecting refugee volunteers or staff engaged by the organization through this KOBO form in order to collect data and evidence to shape stakeholder advocacy with clear information on incidents, geographical scope, and frequency. These specific channels are not for case management. For case management, please use the referral pathways mentioned in the Pillar 2 of the Strategy (accessible [here](#)). It is recommended that the form is filled by the organization whose staff or volunteer has faced any form of threat, pressure or violence, but any organization to whom an affected individual has disclosed information of threats or violence can also report. The consent to report about the case should be sought from the individual by the organization filling the form, even though data are collected in an anonymous way. While the form focuses on threats and violence against female staff or volunteers, it is open to incidents faced by men as well.

Please note that:

- The form should be filled by the organization whose female staff or volunteer has been affected
- The information collected is anonymous and respect the privacy of the persons affected by the incidents. Consent of the affected individual is to be sought by the organization filling this form.
- This KOBO form is strictly to document the incidences of threats against female volunteers and NGO workers. It is not a tool to collect any GBV data, for GBV case management or PSEA reporting.
- Anyone who has experienced GBV and wishes to seek assistance should use the referral pathways, accessible [here](#).
- Cases of PSEA should be reported through the PSEA Focal Point (the list of the PSEA Focal Points is available [here](#)).
- This form does not substitute the existing Complaint and Feedbacks Reporting Mechanisms.

Organizations are to access the kobo link to report incidents [here](#). The link works on Chrome/Mozilla browsers only, do not use Internet Explorer.

Date of reporting: (yyyy- mm)*

Date of incident: (yyyy-mm-dd) *

Location of the incident:*

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 1E | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 1W | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 2E |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 2W | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 4 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 4 Ex | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 6 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 8E | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 8W |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 9 | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 11 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 13 | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 16 | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 17 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 19 | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 20 Extension | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 21 (Chakmarkul) | <input type="checkbox"/> Choukhali |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 22 (Unchiprang) | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 23 (Shamlapur) | Host Community (drop down menu with list of union): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 24 (Leda) | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 25 (Alikhali) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 26 (Nayapara) | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp 27 (Jadimura) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kutupalong Rc | <input type="checkbox"/> Nayapara Rc | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transit Centre | | |

Block (If available):

Specific location: single choice*

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unspecified location | <input type="checkbox"/> At the mosque |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On the road | <input type="checkbox"/> In a community center/NGO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> At home | <input type="checkbox"/> At distribution points |
| <input type="checkbox"/> At relatives' home | <input type="checkbox"/> At hospital/clinic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> At school | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) : _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> At work | |

Type of incident:* (Single choice, identify the main one)

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Verbal threat / verbal harassment | <input type="checkbox"/> Killing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beating, Physical harassment / assault / harm | <input type="checkbox"/> Kidnapping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual harassment | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extortion | |

Alleged perpetrator (Multiple choice):*

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown | <input type="checkbox"/> Humanitarian staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Majhi | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Male member(s) of the community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Imam | <input type="checkbox"/> Other female member(s) of the community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal organized group | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify more details in the comment section below) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Humanitarian volunteer | |

Gender of the Primary Victim (single choice):*

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female | <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Role of the Primary Victim (single choice):*

- Refugee volunteer
- Refugee engaged in cash-for-work activities (CfW)
- Humanitarian staff (UN/INGO/NGO)

Age of the primary victim: (Age breakdown allocated under the kobo link)*

- 12-17 18-59 60+

Action/s taken:



- Yes
 No

If yes, what action(s) have been taken: (multiple choice)

- Reporting to CiC/authorities
- Reporting to NGO management
- Case management assistance (reporting to Protection/GBV/CP Focal Point)
- Reported to ISCG
- Reported to Community leaders
- Other: _____ Pls specify : **text box**

Additional comments: _____

Reported by (name of the Organization): * _____

Sector / Working Group : (Dropdown menu)*