



BANGLADESH



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Cox's Bazar: Ration Cuts Alert

February 2023

Rations will be slashed for Rohingya refugees starting from March, as funding struggles to keep pace with needs.

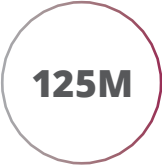
Six years into the Rohingya refugee crisis, a dire funding shortfall is forcing WFP to cut back its life-saving food assistance for the first time. Without an urgent injection of funds by March, WFP will have to take the first of many drastic measures - and cut its ration value (from US\$12 to US\$10 per person per month).¹ The current funding outlook indicates that this could be just the first of many such cuts.

The repercussions on food security and nutrition will be immense and long-lasting. Food insecurity and malnutrition in the camps are already at concerning levels. Many families have already experienced serious levels of acute malnutrition in recent years, despite the best efforts of humanitarian agencies. The loss of even a single dollar of assistance could threaten to drive many families into even deeper food insecurity and malnutrition.

WFP is urgently appealing for US\$125 million to avoid any ration cuts - or at a minimum, US\$80 million, to limit the ration cuts to one in 2023. Without sufficient fresh funding by April 2023, additional rounds of ration cuts may entail a reduction of US\$4 - or more. Each cut would be devastating, as refugees remain nearly fully dependent on this assistance to get by.



915K
PEOPLE WILL BE AFFECTED BY RATION CUTS



125M
US\$ URGENTLY REQUIRED TO AVOID THIS DRASTIC MEASURE

ANTICIPATED CONSEQUENCES ON THE POPULATION



Widespread decline in food security and nutrition outcomes, such as food consumption, dietary diversity, wasting, and stunting.



Sharp reduction in micronutrient-rich food consumption, and a worsening of micronutrient deficiencies.



Adoption of dangerous coping strategies (e.g., selling possessions, and accepting risky, exploitative jobs).



Increased violence and insecurity in the camps, and increased risks of bartering food assistance.

These ration cuts would strike amid an already tumultuous context. The ripple effects of the global food crisis, a fragile economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and creeping inflation have all threatened to wreak havoc on food systems. In December 2022, food basket costs in Cox's Bazar were substantially higher than the previous year, pushing food out of many families' reach.² Bangladesh's annual inflation rate also skyrocketed to 8.9 percent in November - the highest rate seen since May 2014.

For everyday families, the ration cuts would also exacerbate years of uncertainty. Alarmingly high levels of overall vulnerability among Rohingya households have persisted since 2019, with nearly all Rohingya households (94 percent) consuming below the monthly expenditure basket for food.³

The nutrition situation has remained at serious levels in recent years, despite concerted efforts of humanitarian organizations. Global acute malnutrition rates in Cox's Bazar stand at 12.3 percent.⁴ Chronic malnutrition is already pervasive in the camps. Over one-third of children are stunted and underweight for their age. Anaemia has also risen in recent years; rates reached 51 percent among children and 40 percent among women of reproductive age.

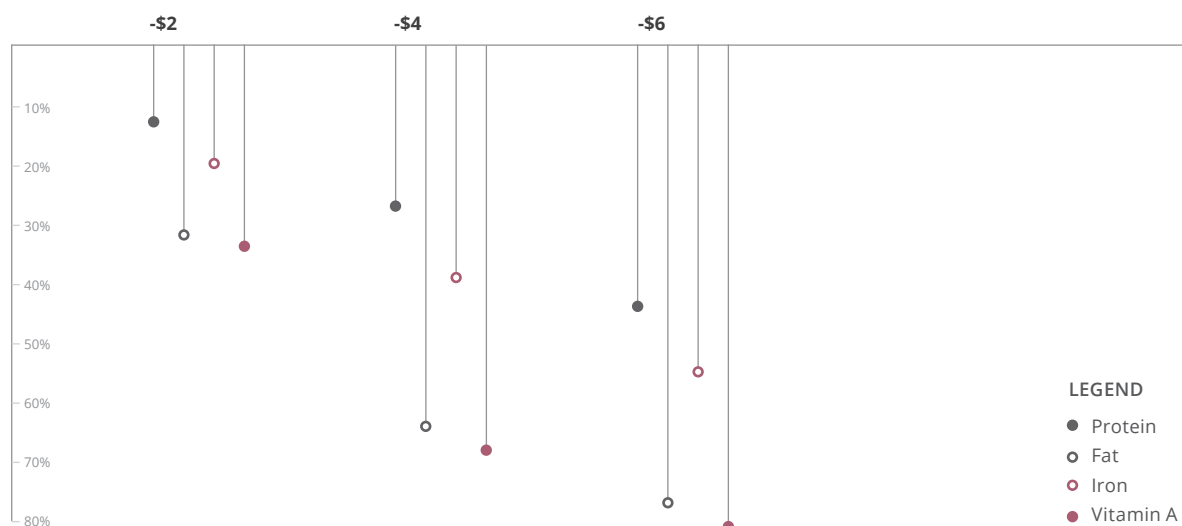
Cuts in assistance today could drive up the need for assistance tomorrow. Ration cuts are likely to worsen malnutrition. These consequences will not be felt evenly across the population; children under 5, adolescent girls, and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers will be particularly exposed. If global acute malnutrition rates increase above the emergency threshold of 15 percent, along with other aggravating factors and cuts in other sectors, WFP could be compelled to reintroduce the in-kind blanket supplementary feeding programme for all children under 5 and pregnant and lactating women. This would mean spending more on needs that could have been avoided in the first place.

These ration cuts are a last resort. WFP has already made substantial gains in cutting costs. This includes shrinking the staff headcount by 20 percent in 2022 and implementing cost-efficiency measures to cut the cost per beneficiary by 4 percent since 2018. But even these measures cannot counteract the inadequate funding.

It is imperative to understand the gravity of the repercussions of these actions. Nutrition, security dynamics, and safety in the camps will be severely curtailed. Once rations are cut, they are historically difficult to raise back up. **Collective action must be taken today to avoid long-lasting, generational consequences on food security and nutrition.**

With every dollar slashed, nutrition could plunge

PERCENTAGE DECREASE IN FOOD PURCHASES WITH REDUCTIONS IN TRANSFERS⁵



1. Ration cuts refer to the transfer value for general food assistance programme.

2. WFP market monitoring <<https://dataviz.vam.wfp.org/version2/reports/bangladesh>>

3. The Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) for Rohingya refugees, established in 2018, is an estimated cost of food and non-food items required by an average household. The transfer value of WFP's General Food Assistance (GFA) is based on the food portion of the MEB, with the assumption that a proportion of a household's food needs are met by other sources, such as cash for work. The MEB is updated frequently to reflect changes in household affordability of food items due to shocks.

4. Standardized Expanded Nutrition Survey (SENS) November 2021

5. This is a simulation of impacts of general food assistance transfer value reductions only, and does not estimate expected reductions in other targeted and/or conditional programmes. The simulation also assumes that Rohingya refugees will continue to purchase the same amount of rice US\$12 to US\$8, regardless of the transfer value, at the expense of micronutrient-rich foods. However, at transfer values equal to or less than US\$7, they would have to be purchasing a reduced quantity of rice.

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