“When our husbands go out to work and we face issues with lights and solar, we need to wait and stay in darkness,” she said.

Today, the 19-year-old is wearing a hard hat over her pink headscarf and using a screwdriver to attach a power switch to a wall. She and a group of other young Rohingya refugees, about half of them women, are learning how to install and maintain solar systems. It is one of 10 different, government-approved, vocational training courses offered to young people in the camps in Cox’s Bazar by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. Other courses include plumbing, sewing machine operation, community health work and agriculture.

After several months of training totaling 360 hours, the refugees have the possibility to earn an authorized qualification which they can use to apply for skilled volunteer roles in the camps. The qualification is also recognized in Myanmar, where many of them hope to return one day.

“I feel good that if the solar doesn’t work, I could fix it myself,” said Samuda. “We could use this to get a job inside the camps and help our families.”

**Creating opportunities**

Since 2022, some 8,000 young people living in the Cox’s Bazar camps have taken part in such trainings, which are among the few opportunities for growth available to youth in these sprawling camps, home to some 1 million Rohingya refugees.

“We’re targeting youths because they don’t have many opportunities,” explained Partha Protim Mazumder, who is part of UNHCR’s livelihoods team in Cox’s Bazar. “Without meaningful engagement, they have little else to occupy them, which can lead to frustration and other challenges.”

The lack of prospects in the camps has contributed to a rise in violence and crime in recent years. The insecurity poses particular threats to young women, already confined to their shelters for much of the time due to their community’s conservative culture. The training can open new horizons for them.

“It’s a safe space to meet other girls like them, so they can share their challenges,” said Mazumder. “Many of the women, after completing the training course, are working in their communities, including fixing solar lights for their neighbours.”

**Aid freezes threaten progress**

Since Kutupalong camp sprang up in 2017, when over 750,000 Rohingya crossed into Bangladesh, fleeing a wave of violence and discrimination in Myanmar’s western Rakhine State, refugees living there have been largely reliant on humanitarian aid. Eight years on, that assistance has started to dry up, and progress made in improving conditions, equipping the camp to better withstand extreme weather and helping refugees to be self-reliant is under threat.

During a visit to Kutupalong over the weekend, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi visited a skills training centre and stressed the need to create more such opportunities.

“Recent freezes of aid resources by donors have made all this work much more difficult,” he said. “I just met young refugees who are trying to acquire skills, to get an education. If international assistance dwindles, it will be really tragic, especially for the hundreds of thousands of youth living in this very challenging place who will have no prospects for their future.”

As refugees continue to arrive in the camps fleeing ongoing violence and insecurity in Myanmar, Grandi called for stepped up efforts to promote peace and to create conditions for the Rohingya to eventually be able to return safely and voluntarily to their home country. In the meantime, he appealed to donors not to forget Rohingya refugees, or the communities in Bangladesh that have been hosting them and sharing their scarce resources over the past eight years.