



**OXFAM**  
The future is equal

Menu

🏠 > Latest > Blogs

## Refugee Volunteers Fight Covid-19: The new face of humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar refugee camps



Oxfam volunteer Zahid Hossain, age 20, talking to Abdul Malek\*, age 80, about the precautions elderly people should take to prevent Covid-19. Cox's Bazar refugee camp, Bangladesh. Photo: Fabeha Monir

**Cookie  
Settings**

**Author:** Dipankar Datta

**Published:** 19th Aug 2020

---

Around the world, the Coronavirus pandemic has upended lives and forced communities to adapt to new ways of working. The situation is no different for humanitarian contexts like Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh—where refugees are taking on innovative new approaches to combat the virus.

Cox's Bazar is home to almost a million Rohingya refugees, living in 34 crowded camps built across a hilly landscape. Conditions in the camps make refugees highly vulnerable to Covid-19—population density is more than 1.5 times that of New York City and communal water taps and toilet facilities mean that social distancing is virtually impossible.

Last April, in order to prevent the spread of the virus, Bangladeshi authorities reduced the number of humanitarian workers in the camps. Thousands of refugee volunteers have taken on the work that was left behind. Across the camps, volunteers strive to promote health and safety. Their roles range from disinfecting communal areas to teaching their neighbors about handwashing and physical distancing.

"Every day we are helping the community with soap, water and by providing valuable information," says twenty-year-old Zahid Hossain, an Oxfam volunteer working in the camps. Zahid travels door to door in his camp block explaining the virus and its symptoms. He advises residents about where to seek care and outlines specific precautions for the elderly.

"I'm happy to provide support for my community. If we don't spread messages about how to fight Coronavirus there will be more cases in the camps and more people will die. This is why I am working in the field," Zahid says.

In Cox's Bazar, Oxfam works with almost 400 camp-based volunteers to monitor conditions and promote women's rights and public health. Female volunteers play a vital role in reaching women and girls, who often receive less direct and accurate information about Covid-19 than men. This targeted outreach can encourage healthier behavior.

Rehana Begum, a Rohingya volunteer working with Oxfam's Gender team, told Oxfam that three women in her camp block became sick but were afraid to go to the hospital. "They were scared that they would be tested for Covid-19. They feared that if they were found to be positive, people from the hospital would take them away from their homes," Rehana explained. "But I convinced them to go to the hospital." All three women tested negative for Covid-19 and were instead suffering from a seasonal fever. They recovered soon after receiving treatment.

In addition to providing essential humanitarian services, volunteer roles enable refugees to gain new skills and standing in their communities—this is particularly true for women.

"Before this, I had no idea about working," Rehana said. "People used to think that working is a bad thing for a woman, but now, I think it is a good thing. When we work, we can learn

many new things. When we work, people respect us.”

#### Tagged with

[oxfam bangladesh](#)[bangladesh](#)[Cox's bazar](#)[Rohingya crisis](#)[Rohingya refugees](#)

#### Blog topic

[Work](#)[Press Release](#)[Media contacts](#)[Policy & Practice](#)[Stories](#)[Blogs](#)[Facebook](#)[Twitter](#)[Oxfam Affiliates](#) 

[Contact](#) | [Privacy](#)

Copyright © 2024 Oxfam International. All rights reserved.

