

Publishing information:

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Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh

Rohingya influx

The Rohingya refugee crisis has resulted in a large influx of refugees to Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh. Since the onset of the crisis in August 2017, more than 745,000 Rohingya refugees have crossed the border from Myanmar, increasing the refugee population in the area to about one million people. Most of the Rohingya refugees settled in Ukhiya and Teknaf Upazilas of Cox's Bazar, a district bordering with Myanmar. 91% of the refugees live in highly congested makeshift settlements and camps. The humanitarian community has launched a large-scale response to provide urgent basic needs such as emergency food, health, and shelter to the refugees.

Return to Myanmar?

Despite the interest to repatriate Rohingya to Myanmar and agreements between the two countries, Rohingya are unwilling to return without guarantees that their security and rights will be protected, accountability ensured, and compensation provided for the destruction of their villages, homes, and property. The international community is insisting that a return can only take place voluntarily. With this constellation, it is very likely that the big majority of Rohingya will continue staying in the camps for several years, despite the efforts of the Bangladesh Government to negotiate a return of the Rohingya as soon as possible. The Bangladesh government communicates very clearly that they will not integrate the Rohingya into the Bangladeshi society.

Life in the Camps

The Rohingya live in shelters from bamboo and tarpaulins on tiny plots leading to an exceptional population density in an environment that used to be one of the sparsely populated parts of the countries. The presence of Rohingya completely transformed the landscape. Forests on hills were cleared and terraces were cut into the slopes allowing construction of shelters. In the absence of sustainable livelihoods and the right to move and work in Bangladesh, the Rohingya are dependent on support from the international community in the camps. With acknowledging that the Rohingya presence is not a short-term phenomenon, the early emergency installations for WASH, camp infrastructure, and shelters were improved by humanitarian actors to ensure acceptable living conditions within the framework of Government restrictions on construction designs and materials.

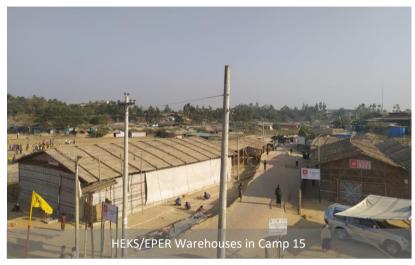
Host Community

The rapid arrival of Rohingya refugees has been a significant shock to the host community which already experienced underemployment, under-investment and poor access to services. Already before the 2017 influx, Ukhiya, where Rohingya outnumber the local Bangladeshi population by a factor of 10, belonged to the 10% most socially deprived Upazilas of Bangladesh. While some host community households can benefit from increased income opportunities like jobs with NGOs or trade, the big group of households living from agricultural day labour can hardly compete with Rohingya for jobs. Coupled with increased food costs, the host community's situation has become difficult, and tensions between the two communities are increasing.

Covid-19

Covid-19 affects the camps and the host community strongly. In the camps, the population density hardly allowing social distancing, which is the key strategy for containing the virus. That the official confirmed infections rates were below the national average in 2020 is no guaranty that a next wave will not lead to a big health emergency in the camps. Covid-19 had already a significant impact on the incomes of people and their capacity to fulfil basic needs. The proportion of households with an acceptable diet tremendously decreased between 2019 and 2020 from 54% to 35% for Rohingya and from 72% to 43% in the host community.











HEKS/EPER in Bangladesh and Humanitarian Strategy

HEKS/EPER implements projects in Bangladesh since 1971 and is registered by the NGO Affairs Bureau. Its development cooperation department mostly focusses on projects for ethnic minorities (Dalits and Adivasi) in Northern Bangladesh. Humanitarian aid interventions in the Rohingya response are managed directly by the Humanitarian Aid Department from an own office in Cox's Bazar and a field office in Ukhiya.

A dedicated HEKS/EPER team manages about 3-5 Million USD annual budget. The biggest interventions are implemented in the construction-related sectors Shelter, WASH, and Site Improvement. Additionally, the office is also engaged in Environment and Livelihoods programming, as well as Communications with Communities. After the outbreak of COVID-19, HEKS/EPER has also initiated projects as a response to the pandemic. Cox's Bazar, being a highly congested area both in camps and in the host community. HEKS/EPER's central logistic warehouse, field office, and training facility are located in camp 15, from where neighbouring camp 14, 16 and 8e are also supported. The HEKS/EPER implementation approach in the Rohingya Response gives strong emphasis on the following elements:

Needs-based assistance

HEKS/EPER closely analyses the situation in cooperation with the beneficiaries in the camps and the host community to develop tailor-made interventions. Projects are closely monitored by a dedicated team and beneficiary feedback is used to optimize implementation approaches.

Quality

HEKS/EPER ensures project implementation following very high-quality standards, which are achieved by (1) intensive strategic planning before starting any project. Standardized procedures allow minimizing implementation delays. (2) Systematic monitoring is implemented by the management team with regular verification visits and comprehensive real-time online tools. (3) Support is provided to beneficiaries beyond the delivery of material but also by intensive training and technical support during construction in the shelter sector. (4) A dedicated engineering team develops customized designs for drains and stairways and other infrastructure, based on the specific location, rather than replicating the same design everywhere. (5) beneficiary feedback is collected by various means and incorporated in project development.

Coordination

HEKS/EPER actively participates in various clusters and coordinates with respective government departments to ensure alignment of projects with coordinated implementation decisions. During coordination with stakeholders, HEKS/EPER always puts the benefit of beneficiaries before the interests of the organization. As a member of the Strategy Advisory Board for Shelter, HEKS/EPER strongly influences the conceptual development of Shelter Strategies in the camps.

Innovation

With creativity, the team designs and pilots new project approaches, which includes portable vegetable gardens, narrowcasting information in absence of radio, and a capacity-building project for WASH in Health facilities in the camps.

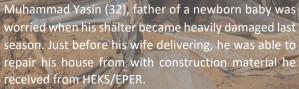
Future strategy

HEKS/EPER supports beneficiaries throughout an emergency and envisages to continue supporting the Rohingya until an international solution is found, which would enable the Rohingya to live in safety and dignity with enough economic opportunities and ensured rights. As a solution is not at sight, HEKS/EPER is prepared to continue operations during the coming years.













HEKS/EPER's contribution to Shelter and NFI

Needs of the refugees

The Bangladesh Government imposed restrictions for shelter construction in the camps, which need to be understood also in the light of Bangladesh's political agenda to maintain the temporary character of the camps, to underline their objective to repatriate all Rohingya back to Myanmar. The approved design for shelters is tarpaulin-covered bamboo frames. Longer-lasting materials like brick masonry and CGI are not allowed. These shelters need to be repaired regularly as the sun deteriorates the tarpaulins over time, and the bamboo structures are damaged by moisture and insects. In 2019 and 2020 under the label Transitional Shelter Assistance I (TSA I) the shelters of all families were repaired. Additionally, the shelters were improved by installing steel or RCC foundations. Treating bamboo in TSA I will substantially extend the lifetime of the shelters. Since late 2020, the sector partners implement with TSA II, the next phase of repair and shelter improvements.

Achievement till 2020 (Camps)

11,229 Tarpaulins distributed

21,026 Blankets distributed

13,636 Transitional shelter assistance

NFI 2,225 NFI kits distributed

52 community kitchens constructed

629 Households received emergency shelter assistance

5,550 Tie-down kits distributed

The camps are highly overpopulated, which is a consequence of the allocation of land by the Bangladesh Government. In most camps, less than half of the SPHERE Standard recommended 45m² land per person are available. Only in camps with a very low density like new extension areas the construction of larger Mid-Term-Shelters is possible.

HEKS/EPER's response

As an implementing partner of IOM, HEKS/EPER provided TSA I in entire camp 15 (Jamtoli) in 2019 and 2020. 11'500 households benefited from this intervention in the largest single camp in Bangladesh. Households received not only shelter material but were also trained and technically supervised during construction. HEKS/EPER managed to complete all shelters before the start of the rainy season 2020.

Since late 2020, HEKS/EPER implements TSA II and strongly expanded its working area and covers now the entire camps 14, 15, and 16 as well as parts of camp 8E. With the responsibility of managing 24'500 Shelters, HEKS/EPER is the NGO with the biggest caseload in the overall response.

As the Shelter/NFI sector catchment focal point for camp 14,15 and 16 HEKS/EPER immediately addresses all small-scale shelter emergencies like if shelters have collapsed or damaged during heavy rains, landslides or flooding, as well as when shelter have to be relocated e.g. when roads are widened. HEKS/EPER immediately provides all shelter material and technical support to rehabilitate the shelters within maximum 3 days after an emergency. HEKS/EPER also manages contingency shelter stocks which in case of an emergency like a cyclone will allow supporting about 30% of households in the camps with essential emergency shelter material.

In February 2020, HEKS/EPER was elected as an INGO member to the Strategy Advisory Group (SAG) for Shelter/NFI, allowing the organization to contribute to the conceptual development of the overall shelter response.













HEKS/EPER's contribution to Site Development

Needs of the Refugees and host communities

The Rohingya influx had a massive impact on the

environment. Forests on hills were cleared and terraces were cut into the slopes to construct shelters. During the first two years, planned and spontaneous paths were stabilized mostly by sandbags which prevent paths to turn into mud after rains. These solutions are short-term, many paths and stairways, which were built for the 2018 monsoon, turned back into muddy slopes and paths during the 2019 monsoon, which limits the movement of Rohingya and is a serious hazard. Living on the slopes of the hills is especially problematic during the monsoon season, as the water needs to drain from the hills. With the transformation of the landscape, the slopes are subject to landslides and erosion. Propper drainage infrastructure is required to minimizes damages on shelters and settlement infrastructure as well as to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases resulting from stagnant water. In the host community, the situation is equally problematic. Camp surrounding host communities are impacted by rapid environmental degradation and the loss of forest resources that was caused by the influx. Overconsumption of natural resources in the Rohingya camps and adjacent host communities are becoming susceptible to natural disasters from

Achievement till 2020 (Camps)

4,201 meters road constructed

3,065 meters canal re-excavated

2,575 meters stairways constructed

3,790 meters slopes stabilized

30 bamboo bridge constructed

24,145 person days generated through cash for work.

7,657 meters RCC drain constructed

To prevent any further degradation, the Government of Bangladesh emphasized the need for mitigation measures such as slope stabilization, and reforestation.

HEKS/EPER's response

HEKS/EPER implements large scale programmes to improve the settlement infrastructure in the camp. Pathways and stairways are constructed mostly from brick and concrete. This infrastructure is sustainable and will remain functional for several years and with minimal maintenance will sustain the heavy use and forces during the monsoon season.

HEKS/EPER is highly specialized construction of drainage infrastructure and implements various designs after a clear assessment of the situation. Between the shelters, drains are constructed mostly with bricks and concrete plastering. Where required, the drains are covered and are used as footpaths. Larger drains that collect the water of smaller drains and are constructed partially with RCC elements. To ensure that water is safely leaving the camps, the canals around the camp are re-excavated and stabilized with sandbags.

To protect slopes, HEKS/EPER uses bamboo structures and Geo-bags.

The host community benefits from the interventions, as HEKS/EPER ensures the proper discharge of the water from the camps through large rehabilitated canals, which protects the fields of the Bangladeshi farmers from contamination. Like in the camps, HEKS/EPER constructs pathways and stairways in the host community. Additionally, earthen and brick soled roads are repaired.

All infrastructure projects are implemented with a cash-for-work component that economically benefits Rohingya and the host community.

Achievement till 2020 (Host Community) 1,035 meters roads constructed 184 meters stairways constructed

2,645 meters slope stabilized











HEKS/EPER's contribution to WASH and Environment

Needs of the Refugees and host communities

The humanitarian actors constructed mostly shallow tube wells in the initial phase of the response, which allowed them to quickly provide access to water. However, the extreme population density coupled with open defecation and emergency latrines without proper treatment of faecal matters led to contamination of the aquifers that were used for human consumption. These installations had to be improved. New latrines and faecal sludge management plants replaced the emergency latrines, and shallow tube wells were replaced by deep tube wells and partially also by chlorinated network water supply. However, in the WASH Sector, many challenges remain, including 12% of households in the Camps reported not having enough water to meet domestic needs. With 23% of households in the host community, the situation is even more problematic. One in four households in the camps and one in 10 households in the host community reports visible waste in the vicinity of their accommodation.

HEKS/EPER specifically assessed the WASH situation in the host community which was highly problematic. People were partially consuming untreated surface water, open defecation was widely practised, and the infrastructure existing was often of low quality and not systematically managed by the local community.

HEKS/EPER's response

In 2018, HEKS/EPER constructed latrines and bathing cubicles in the Rohingva camps and realised later in the same year that a major challenge in the camp was that constantly new latrines were constructed, but the old dysfunctional and filled emergency latrines remained and posed a serious health hazard in the camp. Rather than further constructing new latrines, HEKS/EPER took the responsibility to dismantle the damaged latrines and to disinfect the soil. Additionally, investments were made into faecal sludge management. Hvaiene promotion was implemented throughout the response. To ensure environmental hygiene, drainage infrastructure does not only need to exist but needs to be functional. Therefore HEKS/EPER conducts environmental hygiene training and campaigns to clean the drains by cash for work especially before every rainy season.

In 2019, HEKS/EPER expanded WASH implementation to the host community, where HEKS/EPER implemented a comprehensive WASH program which included owner-driven construction of improved latrines, provision of deep tube wells, hygiene promotion and community mobilization for management of WASH infrastructure and moving towards an open defecation free neighbourhood.

Achievement till 2020 (Camps)	Achievement till 2020 (Host Community)
NFI 4,225 hygiene kits distributed	441 hand washing stations installed
25 sanitary latrines constructed 800 old latrines dismantled	221 twin offset pit latrines constructed
20 bathing corners constructed	21 bathing corners constructed
2,500 waste bins placed at household level	21 Deep tube wells installed
12,000 people received hygiene awareness messages	2,000 people received hygiene awareness messages











HEKS/EPER's contribution to Food Security and Livelihoods

Needs of the Refugees and host communities

Even though many Rohingya are seeking working opportunities in the areas around the camps despite that they are officially not allowed, their income is by far not enough to cover their basic needs. For their nutrition, they are mostly dependant on food aid provided mostly by WFP. Following the food security cluster, the majority of Rohingya faces a problem to access diversified nutrition. 78% of households consuming only 3 food groups or less. 99% of households report spending money for additional food. The sale of assistance items to purchase complementary food items remains widespread.

The presence of the Rohingya significantly impacts also the livelihoods of the host community, especially of the day labourers. They have to compete with the massive Rohingya workforce, which is willing to work for very low rates. The Bangladeshi labourers have fewer employment opportunities and if they still manage to work, they are paid less than they were used to be paid before the latest Rohingya influx.

Achievement till 2020 (Camps)



3,000 Portable vegetable gardens installed



2,600 Micro gardens installed



25,168 Fruit trees planted



20,000 People received gardening training

HEKS/EPER's response

Despite that land is scarce in the camps. HEKS/EPER has promoted the cultivation of vegetables in the camp since early 2018. Households were supported to cultivate mainly climbing vegetables like pumpkin on their roofs. An innovative project in 2019 further developed this approach by introducing bag gardens, which allow households that have no cultivatable land around their shelters to plant climbing vegetables also in densely populated areas. In 2021 HEKS/EPER strongly scaled the Vegetable interventions and supports 7'000 households during three seasons. This project serves multiple purposes. It allows Rohingya to diversify their food intake by consuming more vegetables. As the vegetables grow on the roofs, the temperatures inside the shelters significantly decrease and improve the people's thermal comfort. Finally, the project allows the Rohingya to engage in some forms of agriculture, hence, something they were used to do back home in Myanmar. In an environment where Rohingya are fully dependent on external support, producing vegetables on their own is a small contribution to people's dignity.

In order to address the difficult income opportunities of the Rohingya and the host community, HEKS/EPER implements construction related projects as much as possible through cash for work approaches employing vulnerable households.

Achievement till 2020 (Host Community)



150 households supported to produce vegetable for the market













HEKS/EPER's contribution to WASH in the Health Sector

WASH needs in Health Facilities

The big influx of Rohingya in 2017, put massive pressure on health services, and the cramped living conditions represent a significant public health risk. For health care, the Rohingya are dependent on the Bangladesh completely government and specialized humanitarian agencies. The Health Sector has registered around 250 health care facilities in different Rohingya camps, mostly run by various NGOs. A baseline assessment of 140 health care facilities by WHO identified gaps in WASH and health care waste management. Many facilities do not fully comply with WHO standards. Also, some 200 governmentoperated health facilities in the host community suffer from underinvestment. Dysfunctional water supply and hygiene infrastructure and gaps in waste management pose a serious health risk to staff and patients.

COVID-19 has further highlighted the urgency of improving hygiene and infection prevention and control in health facilities, not only to contain the spread of the virus among patients but to also by creating a safe environment for health care workers, which is crucial to maintain health facilities operational not only for COVID-19 but also for the regular health support provided in these facilities.

HEKS/EPER's response

Since 2019, hence, before the begin of the COVID-19 Pandemic, HEKS/EPER implemented the WASH FIT approach developed by UNICEF and WHO in the Rohingya camps. This comprehensive process optimizes water supply, toilets, sewage, and waste disposal, including medical waste.

The project focuses on improving infrastructure management and hygiene practices and Infrastructure.

The project has been piloted in the Rohingya camps and scaled in late 2019 and covers now all 439 primary and secondary healthcare facilities in entire Cox's Bazar District. After the COVID-19 outbreak, a construction component was added to the project. The following activities are carried out:

1. Capacity Building:

- Training of facility managers doctors, and nurses that are working in health facilities in the Rohingya camps on WASH, infection prevention and control as well as health care waste management.
- Training of Health and Wash Coordinators of INGOs and GOs on the WASH Fit Methodology.

2. Supporting Facilities:

- Rapid facility improvement assessments in each health facility to extract the key achievements, challenges and identifying the bottlenecks. Routine supervision, on the job coaching and mentoring, to improve day-today management directly in the health facilities.
- A technical advisory group counsels health facility on context-specific engineering and managerial solutions for waste and medical waste management, latrines, water supply, as well as on water and greywater treatment.
- Government facilities are supported to construct relevant infrastructures like latrines, handwashing stations, and waste management systems. Quarantine centres were provided with washing machines.

Achievement till 2020 (Camps)



1 action research and publication for policy advocacy installed



333 medical staffs trained

Achievement till 2020 (Host Community)



240 Government health facilities received advocacy support



459 medical staffs trained



221 water system upgraded



318 Sanitary latrines upgraded















HEKS/EPER's contribution to Communications with Communities

Communication needs of the Rohingya Camps and the Host Community

This massive influx of people has required a large-scale humanitarian response which is sometimes lacking effectiveness in communicating with affected populations. Timely and credible information in crisis situations can be the difference between life and death by helping people make good decisions, dispelling rumours, and calming tensions. Receiving feedback from affected populations also plays a key role for humanitarian actors in better defining priorities and relief efforts and mitigating tensions including the ones between the Rohingya and the Host Communities, whose everyday life including their livelihood opportunities have been strongly impacted by the presence of the Rohingya.

HEKS/EPER's response

With technical and financial support from the Swiss non-profit organization 'Foundation Hirondelle – media for peace & human dignity', HEKS/EPER works in the camps and with host communities. The project aims to improve the access to important and practical information for nearly 10'000 listeners a week living in the camps and in communities nearby. The project is also an accountability tool and seeks to improve access to information about the refugees' needs and the situation in the camps for the humanitarian organizations active there. The project lastly aims to contribute to increased social cohesion

between refugees and host populations through shared media programming.

The project includes the production of an audio program in 4 refugee camps (8E, 14, 15, and 16) by a group of refugees with oversight and support by HEKS/EPER producers. The programs offer information on camp life, important information and awareness messages from NGOs working in the camp, and the government. Since the Covid-19 outbreak, the programs have focused on the direct impact of the pandemic on refugees, as well as on mitigating its secondary impacts. The broadcasting of the audio programs is implemented through a narrowcasting network of loudspeakers set up in places where the population gathers. To ensure feedback from affected populations and increased accountability, the project also includes the compilation of important information from audio program content from refugees, shared with producers, camp managers, the government and other humanitarian actors.

A weekly program is likewise produced for host communities with information about services and advice that could improve their food security, livelihoods and knowledge about health and rights. This is broadcast in small listening groups and on the local radio station Bangladesh Betar. Lastly, the project aims to increase social cohesion between refugees and local populations through an audio program that brings the host and refugee populations together through radio.

Achievement till 2020 (Camps)



101,749 individuals received awareness messages



10,304 radio program narrow casted

Achievement till 2020 (Host Community)



27,007 individuals received awareness messages



3,103 radio program narrow casted













HEKS/EPER's community response to COVID-19

COVID-19 Situation in the Rohingya Camps and the Host Community

The Rohingya are living in conditions of hardship. Crammed together in tiny makeshift shelters of 17m² per family made from bamboo and plastic. With a population density of up to 70'000 people per square kilometre, the virus is difficult to be contained. However, despite the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in a Rohingya camp in May 2020, official figures in the camps remained among the lowest in the whole country. A seroprevalence study conducted by WHO will reveal in early 2021 the real infection rate, which might be significantly higher, as Rohingya with symptoms are hesitant to get tested.

Since late March 2020, the Bangladesh government implements measures of social distancing which include movement restrictions. These restrictions have a significant impact on people's incomes especially also for the host community that does not receive regular food support as the Rohingya.

HEKS/EPER's Response

Besides mainstreaming COVID-19 messaging in our CwC projects and improving infection prevention and control in all health facilities in Bangladesh as elaborated above, HEKS/EPER constantly analysis the situation in the camps and the host community and provides adequate community.

To prevent the spread of COVID 19, HEKS/EPER has pro-actively provided hygiene promotion in the host

community and distributed hygiene kits. 3,500 Elderly Rohingya received masks and shelter material allowing families to construct a protected sleeping place for the elderly (own sleeping mat, separation wall with tarpaulins). HEKS/EPER constructed temperature measurement checkpoints at the entry of three camps, and rigidly follows protocols to minimise the spread of the virus through HEKS/EPER projects like during the big distributions of shelter material.

The economic impact of Covid-19 is mainly addressed in the host community, as people are not receiving general food support like the Rohingya and are therefore stronger affected by the adverse impacts on the local economy. The largest HEKS/EPER support programmes are unconditional cash assistance and cash for work focussing mainly on the rehabilitation of community infrastructure.

Achievement till 2020 (Host Community)



300 individuals received hygiene KIT



370 paddle bin and **23** colour coded bin distributed



300 families received handwashing demonstration session



878 families received unconditional cash assistance



1,500 families received food package



100 pound bio-hazard poly bag distributed



6 hospital laundry system developed in isolation centres

Achievement till 2020 (Camps)



3,714 NFI packages distributed for elders



Partnerships

HEKS/EPER projects are funded by the Swiss public and Swiss foundations as well as the following institutional donors.

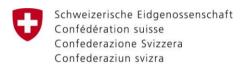
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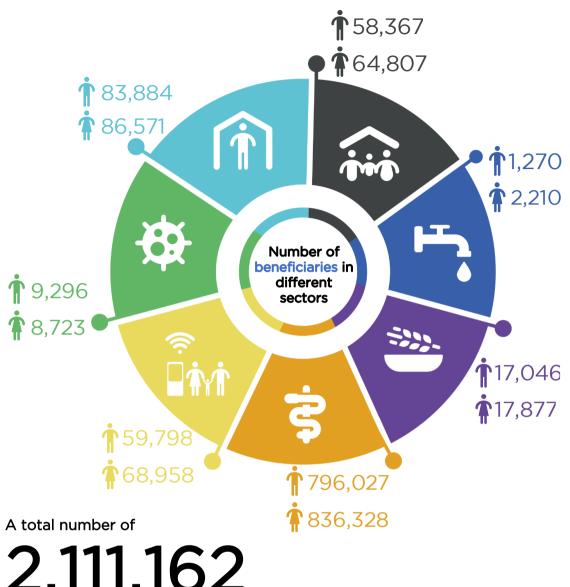




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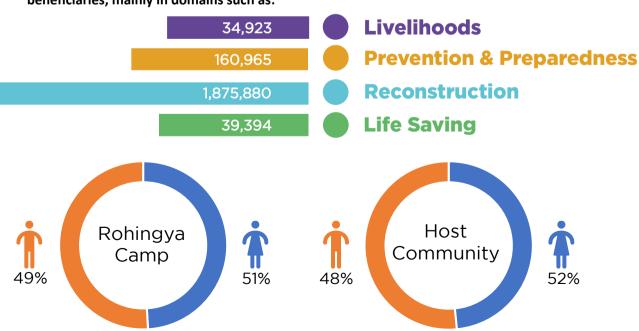






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beneficiaries, mainly in domains such as:







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HEKS/EPER - Swiss Church Aid

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