



COVID19 SITREP #9

17 June 2020



UNITED NATIONS
BANGLADESH

1. GLOBAL OVERVIEW

Huge gains made towards ending child labor over the last 20 years risk being reversed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN said on 12 June, in an appeal for governments to continue investing in measures that have helped reduce the number of children working, by 94 million, since 2000.¹ According to the brief [COVID-19 and child labor: A time of crisis, a time to act](#) jointly produced by ILO and UNICEF, COVID-19 could result in a rise in poverty and, therefore, an increase in child labor. Some studies show that a one percentage point rise in poverty leads to at least a 0.7 per cent increase in child labor in certain countries.²

Managing the digital divide better has become a matter of life and death for people unable to access essential healthcare information during the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN Secretary General told a virtual high-level meeting on rapid technological changes on 11 June.³ Noting that the digital technology is central to almost every aspect of an effective pandemic response – including vaccine research, online learning models, e-commerce, and work-from-home tools – he pointed out that the digital divide between those on and offline, is threatening to become the new face of inequality, reinforcing the social and economic disadvantages suffered by women and girls, people with disabilities and minorities of all kinds. During the launch of UN's [Roadmap for Digital Cooperation](#), he called for closing the digital divide by growing human and institutional capacity for today's digital age; upholding human rights in digital contexts; building cyber trust and security; and agreeing on a new global architecture for digital cooperation.⁴

With nearly 1.2 billion children out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic, inherent inequalities in accessing the internet and other tools threaten to deepen the global crisis in learning, the UNICEF warned on 5 June.⁵ UNICEF data reveals that in 71 countries worldwide, less than half the population has internet access. Yet, nearly three-quarters of governments in 127 reporting countries are using online platforms to deliver education during the pandemic.⁶

¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1066172>

² https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_747583/lang--en/index.htm

³ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1066132>

⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/>

⁵ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1065672>

⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unequal-access-remote-schooling-amid-covid-19-threatens-deepen-global-learning>

On 9 June 2020, the Secretary General launched the [Policy Brief on the Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition](#), which articulates three clear findings – (a) we must mobilize to save lives and livelihoods, designating food and nutrition services as essential, while implementing appropriate protections for food workers; (b) we must strengthen social protection systems for nutrition where countries need to safeguard access to safe, nutritious foods, particularly for young children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, older people and other at-risk groups; and (c) we must invest in the future to build a more inclusive and sustainable world.⁷ The Secretary General has called for building food systems that better address the needs of food producers and workers, providing more inclusive access to healthy and nutritious food so we can eradicate hunger, and rebalancing the relationship between food systems and the natural environment by transforming them to work better with nature and for the climate.⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic will shrink the global economy by 5.2% this year, representing the deepest recession since World War II, and triggering a dramatic rise in extreme poverty, the World Bank said on 8 June in its latest [Global Economic Prospects](#) report. Emerging market and developing economies are due to shrink by 2.5% – their first contraction as a group in at least 60 years, while per capita incomes are forecast to fall by 3.6% – tipping millions into extreme poverty.⁹ The report projected that East Asia and the Pacific will grow by a scant 0.5%, while South Asia will contract by 2.7%. It placed Bangladesh’s growth prospects at 1.6% in the current fiscal year. The recession could reverse years of progress toward the SDGs and push tens of millions of people back into extreme poverty.¹⁰

The Secretary-General, in his remarks on the Global Vaccine Summit held on 4 June and chaired by the UK, appealed for three main commitments – (a) to find safe ways to continue delivering vaccinations, even as COVID-19 spreads; (b) to use vaccine-delivery networks to deliver a range of other primary health services, and (c) to ensure that when the COVID-19 vaccine does become available, it reaches everyone.¹¹ He called for global solidarity to ensure that every person, everywhere, has access to vaccine which is a global public good.¹² The Prime Minister of Bangladesh H.E Sheikh Hasina virtually joined the summit and called for rapid invention of newer vaccines to protect mankind from pandemics like coronavirus as vaccination had proved to be one of the most important means to combat contagious diseases.¹³ She has also lauded GAVI’s partnership for innovation in immunization, from which Bangladesh had become the pioneer in the region for digitizing and strengthening digital health information system.

On 3 June 2020, the Secretary General released a [policy brief on the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people on the move](#), which presents three interlocking crises, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities – a health crisis, a socio-economic crisis and a protection crisis.¹⁴ The brief offers four basic tenets to guide our collective response – (a) exclusion is costly in the long-run whereas inclusion pays off for everyone, (b) the response to COVID-19 and protecting the human rights of people on the move are not mutually exclusive, (c) no-one is safe until everyone is safe, and (d) people on the move are part of the solution.¹⁵ On June 4, Bangladesh Permanent Representative to the UN H.E Rabab Fatima joined the group of Friends of Migration meeting on ‘Migration in the time of COVID-19: Migrant health

⁷ https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_food_security.pdf

⁸ <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/we-need-act-now-avoid-worst-impacts-our-efforts-control-pandemic>

⁹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1065902>

¹⁰ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/08/the-global-economic-outlook-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-changed-world>

¹¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1065622>

¹² <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-06-04/secretary-generals-video-message-global-vaccine-summit>

¹³ <https://tbsnews.net/coronavirus-chronicle/pm-speaks-global-vaccine-summit-calls-rapid-invention-fight-covid-19-88804>

¹⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/covid-19-crisis-opportunity-reimagine-human-mobility>

¹⁵ https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_on_people_on_the_move.pdf

and emittances’ and called for support from UN and other international development partners and stakeholders on national efforts to overcome this unprecedented crisis.¹⁶

As COVID-19 has halted economic activity and threatens social wellbeing across the globe, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) held a wide-ranging policy discussion on June 2, exploring financing options to address the pandemic and mobilize the resources needed for a proactive recovery.¹⁷ This informal meeting of the Financing for Development Forum discussed concrete financing solutions in response to the pandemic in the framework of the Addis Agenda, paying particular attention to the needs of countries in special situations that face specific challenges in tackling the crisis.¹⁸ The Deputy Secretary-General, on her remarks, noted that financing on an unprecedented scale is essential to an effective COVID-19 response. She informed the forum that the UN Development System is now in “emergency mode”, adjusting its US\$17.8 billion portfolio to support the response, tailored to each country context.¹⁹ The forum brought together representatives from banks, funds and international financial institutions to expedite the flow of funds to countries in need.²⁰

On 10 June, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Dainius Puras, called on States to focus on the quality and the non-discriminatory access to health services and facilities. On the broader social response in the fight against COVID-19, he stated that ‘physical distancing and other measures [...] are inadequate if other crucial elements such as adequate housing, safe drinking water and sanitation, food, social security, and protection from violence are ignored.’ He noted that the participation of communities supports equitable responses and targets interventions that respects rights and expressed concerns over the interruption of regular services, including sexual and reproductive health care, anti-retrovirals for people living with HIV, immunization campaigns, and community-based support, incl. mental health.²¹

The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, David Boyd, stated on the occasion of World Environment Day on 5 June that transformative actions are required to address the drivers of climate disruption, biodiversity loss, toxic pollution and zoonotic diseases. ‘The global COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the direct and severe impacts of environmental degradation on [...] the rights to life, health, food, water and culture. At least 70 per cent of emerging infectious diseases like COVID-19 are jumping from wildlife into humans. We need to address the root causes of these inter-related environmental disasters. [...] As we shift into the recovery phase, States should implement a human rights-based approach to new and amended laws and policies as well as investments. Treating the symptoms of the crisis—with closed borders, lockdowns and hopefully a vaccine soon—is necessary, but a preventive approach would save millions of lives and trillions of dollars.’²²

In her remarks to the US Chamber of Commerce, the IMF Managing Director noted that 90 per cent of the countries in the world will face lower per capita income this year, and that calling the USD nine trillion fiscal response by governments will be a bridge to recovery.²³ In a separate remarks on 11 June, she warned the pandemic could lead to a significant rise in income inequality, as recent [research](#) finds that

¹⁶ <https://bdun.org/2020/06/04/remarks-by-h-e-ambassador-ms-rabab-fatima-permanent-representative-of-bangladesh-to-the-un-at-the-group-of-friends-of-migration-meeting-on-migration-in-the-time-of-covid-19-migrant-health/>

¹⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1065332>

¹⁸ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/financing/events/forum-financing-development-meeting-financing-sustainable-recovery-covid-19>

¹⁹ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/dsg/statement/2020-06-02/deputy-secretary-generals-remarks-the-virtual-meeting-of-the-ffd-forum-financing-and-policy-solutions-respond-covid-19-prepared-for-delivery>

²⁰ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/financing/un-meeting-to-help-developing-economies-tap-emergency-relief-resources.html>

²¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25945&LangID=E>

²² <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25925&LangID=E>

²³ <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/06/09/sp060920-from-great-lockdown-to-great-transformation>

COVID-19 has disproportionately hurt disadvantaged groups and could leave permanent scars on income distribution, amid uneven access to opportunities and persistent income gaps in many economies.²⁴

The World Bank has published a [study](#) that outlines potential policy responses and trade-offs in addressing the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. It highlights several themes, including protecting the poor and the vulnerable and preserving human capital investments while buffering firms; safeguarding the financial system; and stimulating economic recovery. Similarly, UNICEF published a [study](#) to inform policy, assessing evidence on the nature and effects of economic policy and social protection responses to previous crises on families and children.²⁵ The UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research published a [report](#) on 12 June that suggests that the pandemic could result in an additional 395 million people falling into extreme poverty; according to the authors this would mark the first absolute rise in the global poverty count since 1999.²⁶ UNCTAD reports in the [Global Trade Update](#) that merchandise trade fell by five per cent in the first quarter of the year, and is expected to decline by 27 per cent in the second quarter. Assuming persisting uncertainty, UNCTAD expects a decline of around 20 per cent for the year 2020.

As of 14 June 2020, the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) has received USD 1.33 billion against the total requirement of USD 7.27 billion, which is 18.3% of the appeal. Another USD 1.15 billion received outside the plan brought humanitarian funding for the COVID-19 response to USD 2.48 billion.²⁷ The largest contributors were the United States of America (USD 258.7 million), Japan (USD 163.3 million), the United Kingdom (USD 148.8 million), and Germany (USD 138.3 million). As of 12 June 2020, WHO's Solidarity Response Fund has mobilized USD 220.9 million from more than 479,000 donations.²⁸ WHO reported USD 4.86 billion in total support committed or disbursed for the COVID-19 response.²⁹

The Finance Minister of the Government of Bangladesh announced the national budget for fiscal year 2020-21 on 11 June at the parliament.³⁰ The Government has allocated around BDT 292.5 billion to the health sector, which is a 14% increase over the last year, and 5.2% of the declared budget.³¹ The Government has also proposed an amount of BDT 100 billion to meet emergency requirements to address the pandemic.³² Bangladesh government had already declared a total stimulus package exceeding BDT 1 trillion (3.7% of GDP) to address the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19.³³

2. HEALTH EMERGENCY RESPONSE

This sitrep complements the WHO sitreps, which provide detailed information on the COVID-19 Health Emergency Response including on case management and infection control, surveillance and laboratory support, contact tracing and points of entry. WHO sitreps are accessible [here](#). Separate sitreps are issued by the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) on the COVID-19 response in the Rohingya settlement and host communities in Cox's Bazar district. ISCG sitreps are available [here](#).

²⁴ <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/06/11/the-global-economic-reset-promoting-a-more-inclusive-recovery/>

²⁵ <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1095-rapid-review-economic-policy-social-protection-responses-to-health-and-economic-crises.html>

²⁶ <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/precarity-and-pandemic>

²⁷ <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/952/summary>

²⁸ <https://covid19responsefund.org/en/>

²⁹ <https://covid-19-response.org/donor-overview>

³⁰ https://mof.gov.bd/site/view/budget_mof/%E0%A7%A8%E0%A7%A6%E0%A7%A8%E0%A7%A6-%E0%A7%A8%E0%A7%A7/

³¹ <https://cpd.org.bd/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CPD-Budget-Analysis-FY2021.pdf>

³² <http://unb.com.bd/category/Bangladesh/covid-19-tk-10000-cr-proposed-to-meet-emergencies/52878>

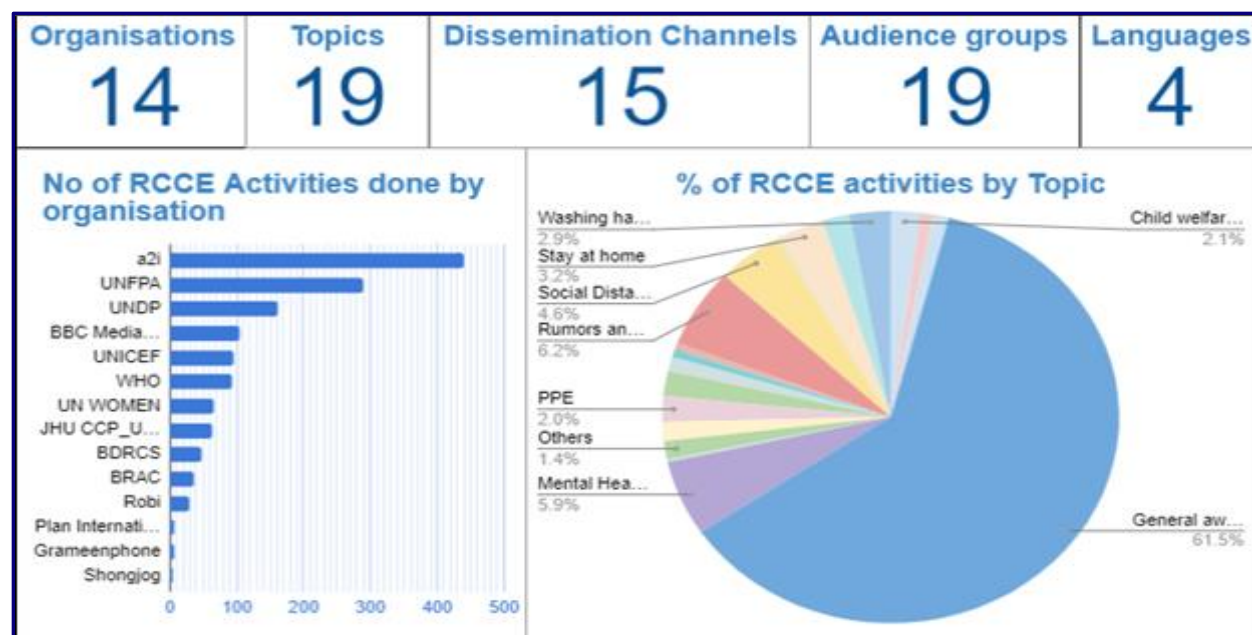
³³ https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/b29661b6_927f_4012_9f83_5ac47dbd6ebd/Budge%20Speech%202020-21_English_Final%20Print.pdf

2.1 Risk communication/awareness and community engagement (RCCE) Pillar -----

Risk Communication and Community Engagement	Number of people reached on COVID-19 through messaging on prevention and access to services	76,000,000
	Number of people engaged on COVID-19 through RCCE actions	50,312,083
	Number of people sharing their concerns and asking questions/clarifications for available support services to address their needs through established feedback mechanisms	3,167,359

2.1.1. RCCE 4Ws monitoring matrix

The 4Ws Monitoring Matrix enables RCCE partners to update their 4Ws data and consult a real-time visual dashboard on Google Drive at any time. As of 14 June, the visual dashboard shows RCCE activities by Topic, Dissemination Channel, Audience and Language (see [link](#)).



In the wake of the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions, RCCE activities have been intensified over the last two weeks with the aim to promote messages on hand washing, social distancing and compulsory mask wearing. Additionally, as children, girls and women have been particularly affected by the secondary impacts of the outbreak, many RCCE activities implemented by UN Women, Plan International, and UNICEF focused on domestic violence and child protection. When it comes to dissemination channels, community radios were also used to send out critical messages during the Amphan cyclone, in addition to the usual social media. An analysis of the messages' audience revealed an increase in the proportion of adolescents, parents/caregivers, pregnant and lactating women, resulting from the fact that many RCCE activities were implemented to address the secondary impacts of COVID-19, such as child protection, domestic violence and mental health.

2.1.2. Evidence

Bangladesh Health Watch, the University of Sussex and the Center for Critical and Qualitative Studies conducted a rapid research on the incidences and the sources of fear, stigma and rumours. The data was collected through online-based observations including social media content analysis, netnography, telephonic interviews and shadow ethnography. A set of recommendations on culturally informed and socially relevant interventions at macro, meso and micro levels to control and reduce COVID-19 related fear and stigma in Bangladesh were included in the study.

UNICEF, together with RCCE pillar partners, conducted a second online survey on COVID-19 communication and community engagement with respondents having access to the internet. The key findings were:

- Approximately 98.4% of respondents knew that the Coronavirus is a virus that can cause a disease;
- The majority of the respondents were well aware of the symptoms i.e., fever (97%), shortness of breath (96%), cough (95%), and sore throat (94%);
- More than two-thirds of respondents knew that 14 days is the maximum incubation period of the Coronavirus;
- Television (83%), social media (82%) and newspapers (59%) are the top three sources of information on the virus followed by miking (30%), family members (25%), posters (23%), and radio (14%);
- Respondents will call hotline numbers (91%) followed by IEDCR (63%) and access corona.gov.bd website for supplementary information on COVID-19, if required in the future;
- Respondents expressed their trust in doctors/nurses (76%), hospitals (49%), and IEDCR (38%);
- Close to two-thirds of respondents would like to know more about testing procedures, designated locations, and the cost of tests;
- Two-thirds of respondents mentioned that they prayed during the lockdown;
- About 62% of respondents worried about their job or financial security;
- Nearly half of the respondents (45%) expressed their happiness and satisfaction with the overall actions taken by the Government during the outbreak.

BRAC conducted a quick assessment on practices and bottlenecks of masks-wearing through interviews with 40 people (i.e. BRAC head office cleaners, guards, drivers, visitors, restaurant workers) during the week of 7 June. Key observations resulting from the assessments were:

- The usage of masks has not been communicated well;
- People find that masks are very uncomfortable during the heat of summer;
- Masks are expensive in the long run;
- Some level of skepticism about the effectiveness of masks for the prevention of COVID-19.

2.1.3. Communication material and dissemination

Based on the findings from the series of community feedback [surveys](#), the RCCE pillar, in collaboration with DGHS, proposed to intensify the social and behaviour change communication interventions conducted by the partners as a consolidated strategic communication in view of the ease in lockdown measures. A social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) [concept note](#) was developed and shared with partners. RCCE partners explored multiple campaign ideas and approaches and selected five strategic approaches for pre-testing: positive reinforcement, patriotic appeal, individual responsibility and ownership, social solidarity, and fear. BRAC conducted a small scale qualitative [survey](#) through its own network to find out [insights](#) on why people are not complying with the key recommended behaviours, i. e., use of mask, hand washing, physical distancing, and will share the findings shortly.

The group on mask design that consists of representatives from DGHS, WHO, IOM, FAO, WFP, UNICEF, BRAC, BGMEA, Mohammadi and Urmi groups from the ready-made garment (RMG) sector developed a standard operating procedure (SOP) on how to make masks, both domestic and professional ones. UNICEF on behalf of the RCCE pillar is in the process of developing a set of communication materials such as infographics and instructional videos on how to sew and use masks.

2.1.4. Misinformation and rumour tracking

The main misinformation narratives observed during the reporting period were:

OBJECTIVE	MAJOR NARRATIVES	% OF TOTAL POSTS
Fake remedies & dangerous treatments/cures	Clinically tested homeopathic “vaccines” and medicines can cure COVID-19; unani doctor claims black cumin seeds and honey as cure, promotes business; religious leader promotes eating onion	66.7%
	Pushing OTC purchase of ivermectin and other pharmaceutical drugs	
	Dissection of lungs – MP video continues to be viral	
	Hot fume inhalation, excessively drinking hot water	
Downplaying the risk	Duas can treat illnesses and claims that no virus can kill a person, manipulating religious sentiments	16.7%
	Foods being promoted as cures for COVID-19 as well as other highly contagious and life-threatening diseases such as Nipah, Dengue, Zika, and Chikunguniya as opposed to what they are (immunity boosters)	
Spreading fear/panic/fake news	China has invented the vaccine for COVID-19 but are not sharing it	16.7%
	Bangladesh scientists have invented medicines to cure COVID-19	
	Avifavir being misleadingly promoted as a clinically tested cure for COVID-19	

The growth measured among the top accurate information channels was as follows:

ORGANIZATION	PLATFORM	FOLLOWERS	INCREASE IN 1 WEEK
UNICEF Bangladesh	Facebook	8.5 million	+0.4%
Directorate General of Health Services	Facebook	1.3 million	+3.2%
a2i	Facebook	1.2 million	+0.1%
BRAC	Facebook	1.14 million	-
UNDP Bangladesh	Facebook	765 k	+1.1%

Through partnerships with NGO networks (ADAB, BCRA, BNNRC, ELNAH, NAHAB, NIRAPAD, and Shongjog) the RCCE pillar ensures outreach and community engagement at the sub-national level. A Community Support Team (CST) initiative is about to be implemented in Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Chattogram this month following a pilot in April.

2.2 Logistics and Procurement Pillar -----

During the reporting period, the supply coordinators together with the support from the Logistics and Procurement Pillar have successfully completed the orientation to the Director General of Health Services on COVID-19 Supply Chain System and the mechanism of the supply portal including the advantages and benefits to stakeholders. The supply coordinators have also organized orientation session for requesters from 17 entities (UN agencies and INGOs) to explain the roles and responsibilities of the “requestor” and the procedure to submit the request to the Global Supply Portal including the way forward. As of 14 June, Supply Coordinators have received a total of five requests. An orientation session on the Global Supply Portal will be organized in the upcoming week for the newly appointed Director of the Central Medical Storage Depot and MoHFW’s Additional Secretary responsible for procurement.

2.3 Preserving stability and addressing social tensions pillar -----

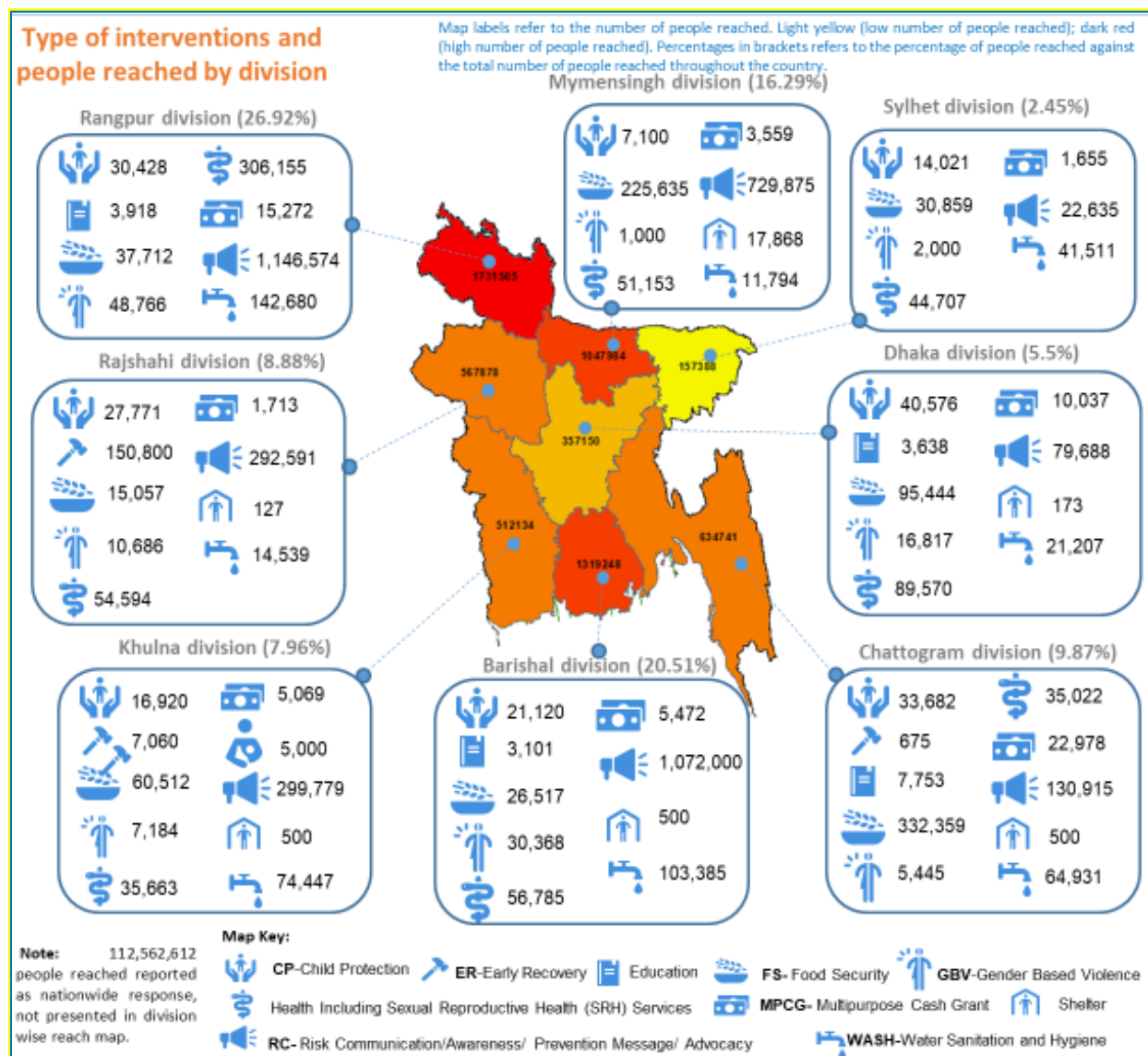
Asiatic EXP and the Australian Non-Profit Organization LISTEN FOR INC partnered with UNDP on the organization of a global fund-raising online concert, which will take place on 20 June at 8pm. The funds raised will be disbursed through UNDP’s COVID-19 response activities to help most vulnerable people.

The UNDP Efficient and Accountable Local Governance project (EALG) started distributing PPEs including safety gowns, masks, hand sanitizers, gumboots, hand gloves, protective goggles and soap to its over 30,000 stakeholders. The project’s response initiative also includes awareness-raising activities and installation of handwash facilities in 251 unions of nine districts, benefiting around half a million people.

Since March 2020, a total of 922 migrants were traced by IOM through ten reintegration service centres. Out of them, 841 migrants returned from Europe and the remaining 81 from other countries, for a total of 18 countries of origin. The migrants (771 men, 147 women and four children) range in age from eight to 57 years-old and returned to 13 different districts in Bangladesh. Migrant workers returning from EU countries and approved transit countries will receive an emergency cash grant of BDT 5,000, tele-counselling support and referrals to medical services if required. Targeted assistance and long-term reintegration support will be provided to the most vulnerable returnees.

3. COMPLEMENTARY SUPPORT TO THE HEALTH EMERGENCY RESPONSE

During the past two weeks, the Humanitarian Coordination Task Team (HCTT) continued to provide complementary support to the Health Emergency Response. On 14 June, the Needs Assessment Working Group released the updated report on HCTT partners' assistance. The full report is available [here](#). Below is a snapshot of on-going interventions implemented by 136 partners.



In parallel, the humanitarian community is implementing the [Humanitarian Response Plan for Cyclone Amphan](#). It produced a [4Ws report](#) and a [Monitoring Dashboard report](#) to strengthen accountability mechanisms, to support decision-making processes including those related to funding and to report on progress in the implementation of the Localization Agenda.

Furthermore, in line with the [HCTT Contingency Plan for Climate-related disasters in the context of COVID-19](#) and the related [Humanitarian Response and Preparedness Plan \(HPRP\)](#), the humanitarian community is preparing for a possible response to the monsoon floods.

As per the [HCTT 2020 workplan](#), the preparation includes significant steps undertaken by the BDRCS-led Forecast-based Action working group launched in 2019 under the auspices of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR). These steps, which are in line with the “preparedness pays-off” initiative, include the development of a plan to be triggered in anticipation of a disaster for reducing the need of a traditional humanitarian interventions. It involves UN and non-UN organizations including the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (RCRC) and is undertaken with the support from OCHA and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

3.1. Child Protection Cluster -----

3.1.1 Access to Justice

After the permission was granted in May to initiate virtual court proceedings for all the Children’s Courts across the country, to date more than 400 children were granted bail by these virtual means with the support of UNICEF. More than 350 of these children were reunified with their families with a UNICEF supported reintegration package.

A consultation with 50 Children’s Court Judges was held with the Supreme Court and UNICEF to discuss the procedure to convene the virtual courts in the context of COVID-19 and to expedite the trials of the children in conflict with the law. A practice guideline was developed for the virtual courts to maintain child friendly procedures in a uniform manner. UNICEF continues working with the Supreme Court Committee on Child Rights and the Ministry of Law to look at possible avenues within the law for a higher number of children in detention to be released and reunified with their families.

3.1.2 Social service workforce

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) granted a special permission for government social / case workers to be considered as essential and continue their work amid the pandemic. Having continuously advocated for such development, UNICEF started a virtual capacity building programme for this workforce. An online training was conducted with over 60 social workers using newly adapted materials and guidelines. Currently referral pathways are being expanded and adapted at the local level to ensure quick and effective referrals of case load to needed services.

3.1.3 Child Helpline 1098

More than 25,000 calls were received by the helpline last month. On average more than 70 per cent of the calls were for psychosocial support (PSS), mental health, abuse and exploitation concerns. More than 60 per cent of calls were from boys, which may suggest a gender discrepancy on access to technology. The number of calls spiked mid-month due to worries and fears from children related to cyclone Amphan. UNICEF is directly supporting the strengthening of this line with an increase in call agents as well as a virtual training with call agents on how to respond to COVID-19 and referral pathways.

3.2. Food Security Cluster -----

Until 11 June, MoDMR allocated 211,017 MT of rice and 122.97 crore BDT in cash for purchasing non-food items (NFIs) and baby food as part of COVID-19 relief distribution. The food security situation further deteriorated as a consequence of cyclone Amphan and the recurring COVID-19 pandemic, especially in coastal districts. As schools are closed, children are being provided by WFP with take-home rations since May. Distribution are ongoing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) where, as of 10 June, a total of 11,780

children of schools and para centres received high energy biscuits (HEB). Still in CHT, cooperating partners are delivering 40.855 MT of HEB at the houses of school children in compliance with safety measures (e.g. wearing face masks and hand gloves, maintaining physical distance while delivering).

3.3. Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) working group -----

UNFPA has rolled out two batches of a four-day virtual pilot training for health service providers and health managers on the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP), which constitutes a series of actions that need to be implemented to respond to the immediate SRH needs of crisis-affected populations. In addition to the MISP training objectives, COVID-19 components were incorporated into the training schedule. The participants will learn how COVID-19 impacts SRH and maternal health in Bangladesh as well as during its natural disaster seasons. Participants will also be trained on WHO/UNFPA COVID-19 guidelines and recommendations for SRH and maternal health care including triage, screening and PPE use.

As a direct result of the COVID-19 lockdown, the vulnerability of the most vulnerable groups, which include pregnant women and girls with substance addiction, increases. To help pregnant women and girls with substance addiction, CARE Bangladesh is providing psychosocial counselling and medical support in addition to food. To date, 236,355 pregnant women and girls with substance addiction received family planning counselling and antenatal care services as well as gave birth in health facilities in six districts (Patuakhali, Sirajganj, Sunamganj, Netrakona, Kurigram and Barguna). In Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Rajshahi and Chapanawabganj, programmes have been put up to distribute new needles and syringes to people who inject drugs (PWID), including pregnant women and girls, to mitigate the risk of spreading blood borne diseases such as HIV. During the reporting period, Save the Children provided 788 mothers in Dhaka with health awareness text messages on COVID-19, and referred 17 pregnant mothers in need of health care to higher level facilities. Additionally, a total of 3,680 pregnant mothers living in rural areas across the country followed-up upon over phone.

3.4. Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster -----

The Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) and WASH Cluster members continue to work on ensuring the continuity of the water supply and to enhance hygiene practices at personal and community levels across the country. CARE Bangladesh reached 336,475 women, girls, men and boys directly through hand washing stations, risk communication and hygiene awareness during the reporting period. A total of 203 Hand Washing stations were installed in eight districts (Kurigram, Gaibandha, Sirajganj, Jamalpur, Netrakona, Habiganj, Kishoreganj, Sunamganj) as well as in Gazipur, Savar and Mymensingh. In Rangpur, Nilphamari, Khulna, Narail, Satkhira District, Sunamganj and Netrakona, awareness campaigns on hygiene practices, distribution of soaps, disinfection actions and demonstration on good hand-washing practice were organized.

Oxfam Bangladesh and its partners reached 6,390 poor people from rural and urban areas through essential hygiene packages and awareness messages in Mymensingh city corporation and in Batiaghata, Khulna. Urban volunteers, rural community volunteers, ward Disaster Management Councils (DMCs) and city corporations were engaged in the whole process. World Vision Bangladesh reached more than half a million people through mobile messaging, virtual meeting/session in Sunamganj, Dhaka, Sherpur, Sylhet, Dinajpur, Naogaon, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Chattogram, Nilphamari, Gazipur, Rajshahi, Thakurgaon, Netrakona, Bagerhat district. It distributed minimum hygiene kits to 477 households in the districts of Sunamganj, Sherpur, Sylhet, Naogaon, Mymensingh, Chattogram, Nilphamari and Netrakona. It also distributed 1,070 handwashing devices in Sherpur, Mymensingh, Netrakona, Tangail, Nilphamari, Rajshahi

and Bagerhat districts. Cluster members also established 256 hand washing stations and supported the disinfection of public places and communal WASH facilities³⁴.

4. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

4.1. Gender -----

UNFPA hosted a webinar consultation on the “*Concerted National Response to Stop Child Marriage and Prevent Gender Based Violence in the Context of COVID-19*” on 9 June. The consultation focused on the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown on the rates of child marriage and GBV. The aim was to solicit recommendations from the government and NGO representatives present and to strengthen GBV response initiatives. In her remarks, the Resident Coordinator highlighted the importance of increasing women’s representation in COVID-19 response planning and decision-making; of ensuring that schools and public spaces are safe from GBV so that girls can return to, and remain in school; and of designating GBV response services, including justice services, as essential and keeping them running while also making sure they are accessible to survivors.

4.2. Leaving No One Behind through respect for human rights -----

On 4 June, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet expressed alarm at the clampdown on freedom of expression in parts of Asia-Pacific, including Bangladesh, during the COVID-19 crisis. She noted that any taken measure should adhere to the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, serve a legitimate public health objective and follow the “least intrusive” approach. She recognized the need to restrict harmful misinformation or disinformation to protect public health as well as any incitement of hatred towards minority groups. She warned, however, that this should not result in purposeful or unintentional censorship, which undermines trust. On that regard, Bangladesh was mentioned along with Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam. The statement notes that dozens of people in the country are reported to have had cases filed or have been arrested under the Digital Security Act (DSA) in the last three months for allegedly spreading misinformation or criticizing the Government response. Local journalists, human rights defenders, some health professionals as well as some members of the general public have been reporting harassment or reprisals for complaining about the denial of health care, inadequate facilities or irregularities in relief distribution. In some cases, journalists or other observers have been physically attacked for seeking to document alleged malpractices.³⁵

Six independent eminent citizens, lawyers, journalists and human rights defenders issued a second “COVID 19: Human Rights in Bangladesh” report covering the period between 11 April to 31 May 2020.³⁶ Through the analysis of various data sources, the report notes discrepancies between official figures, research and media reports, and the severe impact of COVID-19 on various minorities, i.e. indigenous people (including in Chittagong Hill Tracts), Rohingya, transport workers, the expatriate labour force, sexual minority populations. It warns that labour rights are challenged amid the reopening of garment industries and that the reduction in the workforce of 25 thousand workers, who are waiting for the

³⁴ Human interest stories: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hbs2sDmWHgOADS_uUBmtbargnyblh3R/view?usp=sharing
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=3144463648994220&set=pcb.3012463592202393&type=3&theater&ifg=1>
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=3987442591296887&set=pcb.3406999759334523&type=3&theater&ifg=1>

³⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25920&LangID=E>

³⁶ <https://independentresearcherbd.wordpress.com/2020/06/13/%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8B%E0%A8%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%B2%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%82%E0%A6%B2%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A6%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B6%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%AC/>

payment of their salary, is causing unrest. The report notes an increase in domestic violence and that victims are reporting on the malfunctioning of the helpline numbers. The report adds that to ensure the lockdown, cruel and degrading treatment, excessive use of power and “exceptional punishments” have been used by law enforcement authorities. It further states that there were 80 cases brought under the DSA between 8 March and 31 May, 35 of which against journalists which resulted in the arrest of at least a third of them. Moreover, four RMG workers, two lawyers, two writers, and a cartoonist were sent to prison. From 11 April to 31 May, at least four primary school teachers were suspended while two private universities issued orders to regulate freedom of expression. Still according to the report, official instructions were also issued to constrain freedom of speech of doctors and health workers who were raising concerns about PPE availability or mismanagement in hospitals. The report discusses the situation in prisons and the effectiveness of the recently introduced “digital court” promulgated on 9 May 2020 per presidential ordinance. In this process, in 10 days more than 33 thousand bail petition were heard and almost 21 thousand bails were granted. The report accuses national institutions and government organizations, e.g. Information Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, National Human Rights Commission, Drug Administration etc. for their underperformance in upholding human rights during the pandemic.

Recent assessments conducted by UNAIDS highlighted the delicate situation of sex workers during the pandemic. The community has been observed reducing or skipping meals, as well as searching for relief provision in order to ensure livelihoods to their family members. For the transgender community, the practice of “baby blessing”, a traditional income source, is also temporarily on hold. For these communities, GoB and NGO relief is often the only source of food currently, which however risks being insufficient in case of multiple family members. Many resort to borrowing money, falling into dangerous debt schemes. Sex workers’ children are also highly impacted by the above.

Other useful updates and sources

- Human rights in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/COVID-19.aspx>
- BRAC: <http://www.brac.net/covid19/index-en.html>
- Bangladesh Peace Observatory: [BPO Covid19graphics](https://www.bpo.gov.bd/covid19/)
- Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS): <http://www.bdracs.org/news/coronavirus-covid-19-situation-update>

