

# JOINT PROTECTION MONITORING REPORT

**1,067**

Focus Group Discussion (persons reached)

**396**

Home Visits

**651**

Key Informant Interviews (persons reached)

<b>54%</b> Men	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>46%</b> Women	<b>Children (0-17)</b> 1%	1%
<b>7%</b> People with disabilities	<b>Adult (18-59)</b> 37%	38%
	<b>Elderly (60+)</b> 9%	14%

The Joint Protection Monitoring framework is implemented by the Protection Sector since 2022 to promote the systematic and regular collection, verification, and analysis of protection risks and incidents for the Rohingya refugee population in Cox's Bazar.

The Joint Protection Monitoring reports serve to inform protection programming and advocacy through a common and standardized evidence-based information collection. This document offers a better understanding of the protection situation in the camps through a joint analysis of risks, threats, vulnerabilities, and protection incidents.

Six organizations (UNHCR, IOM, IRC, DRC, OXFAM and HI) conduct protection monitoring as part of core programming, covering 33 camps and an estimate of 939,344\* refugees. This report also reflects the contributions of the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Child Protection (CP) Sub-Sectors as well as of the Anti-Trafficking Working Group and the House, Land and Property Technical Advisor.

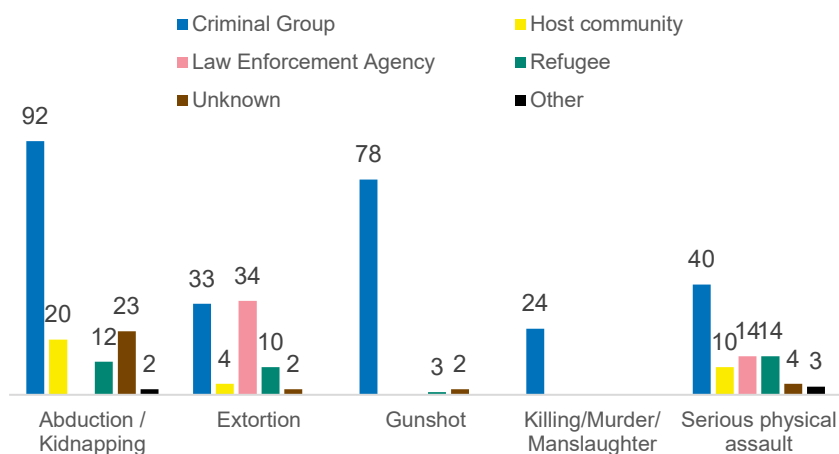
**Executive Summary:** The number of killings for the last quarter of 2023 remained high with a total of 24 reported cases. Heightened risks for Majhi's, volunteers and community leaders have resulted in many resignation in several camps (9, 15, 18) indicating a breakdown in community leadership. There was an overall increase of 10% in the total number of reported protection incidents as allegations of suspected use of firearms and abductions/kidnapping increased significantly in comparison to the third quarter (July-September) of 2023. The increase in security incidents is a contributor to refugees intending to be relocated and to dangerous onward journeys by boat. The killing of a former Majhi in Camp 19 on November 25, and of the head Majhi of Camp 4-Ext allegedly by an organized criminal group created a sense of fear within the camp as families feared potential reprisals from criminal groups and investigations by Law Enforcement Agencies. Risks for children and youth remain high as criminal groups continue to coerce them into their activities.

## SAFETY AND SECURITY

A total of 424 serious protection incidents<sup>1</sup> affecting 1,087 Rohingya refugees have been recorded across the camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf during the last quarter of 2023. Major safety and security incidents include – abduction/kidnapping (149), extortion (83), gunshots/suspected use of firearms (83), killing/ murder/ manslaughter (24) and serious physical assault (85).

There was an overall increase of 10% in the total number of reported protection incidents in comparison to quarter 3. Fighting between opposing criminal groups, targeted killings and reported threats to refugees remained a major concern during the last quarter of 2023. Since November, the security situation in certain areas of Ukhiya (camp 3, 4, 4 Ext and 5) significantly deteriorated due to the continuous disputes and attacks between rival criminal groups contesting control over the

**Alleged perpetrator per category by incident**



<sup>1</sup> For this report, the serious incidents collected are related to the following categories only: abduction, extortion, killing/murder/manslaughter, serious physical assault, and gunshot.

\*UNHCR Data portal link available [here](#)

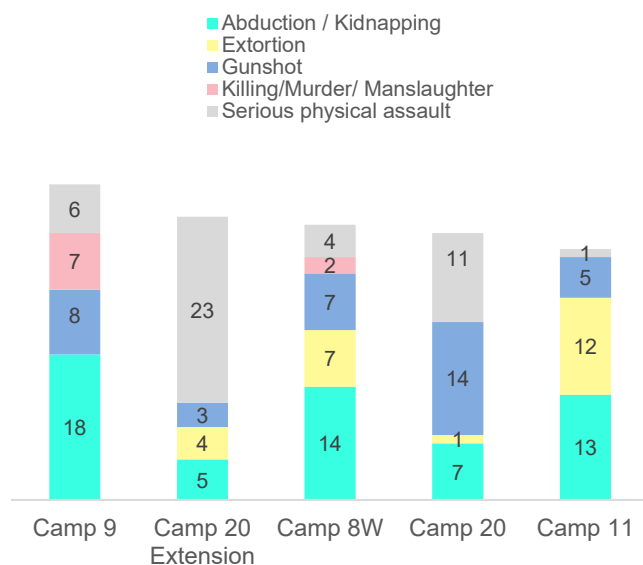
territory. To avoid arrest, several leaders and key criminal group members have left the camps and are hiding in the surrounding hilly areas. The geographical location of the Teknaf area continues to pose particular security challenges given its location at an entry point for drug trafficking and smuggling.

Most protection incidents were reported in camps: 8W, 9, 10, 11, 18, 19, 20 and 20 Ext. The number of killings remained almost the same as those reported during quarter 3 with a total of 24 refugees killed. Abduction and kidnappings by criminal groups -accounting for 62% of alleged perpetrators- increased by 6% during the reported period. Young people, mainly boys, continued to be disproportionately targeted; those who resist joining criminal groups are allegedly abducted and tortured. Some refugees, including volunteers, were reportedly approached, and threatened by criminal groups on suspicion of being informants for Law Enforcement Agencies'. Volunteers reported not feeling safe to move around the camps with criminal groups checking their cell phone record. Reports from different camps (3, 4, 4 Ext, 5, 8W and 17) have been received of criminal groups demanding refugees to support their activities either with food or money. Criminal groups are also reported to generate material support by collecting money from shop owners and robbing from refugees' shelters in camps 9, 17, 18 and 20.

Reports of suspected use of firearms (gunshots) rose by 84% in comparison to last quarter. Law Enforcement Agencies conducted joint security operations throughout the quarter in Ukhiya area. While refugees recognized the positive impact of these operations, concerns were raised about the continued involvement of refugees in the night patrolling and in gathering the information about the location and movement of criminal group members that might expose them to further risks.

Extortion incidents showed an 11% decrease compared to quarter 3. Allegations of harassment, beating, and verbal abuse towards refugees decreased by 24% in comparison to quarter 3 with most of alleged perpetrators being criminal groups (47%). Refugees searching for employment face high risks of extortion and violence inside and outside the camps: in one of the camps, an unknown individual collected 1000 BDT from 18 people promising a job opportunity. The deteriorating security situation, and lack of livelihood opportunities to meet additional requirements combined with a desire to make the living conditions better, continue to drive people to seek opportunities outside the camp, making them vulnerable to traps set by criminal groups demanding money. Young male refugees account for most of the victims being extorted and physically assaulted. Volunteers and Majhi's still remain at high risk of being threatened and assaulted as they are perceived to be actively cooperating with Law Enforcement Agencies. Refugees continue to raise safety and security concerns for children as they are more likely to be coerced into joining criminal groups and engage in illegal activities. Women expressed fear of boys being exploited by criminal groups.

Top 5 camps by incidents reported



During this quarter, 85 cases of human trafficking of refugees within Bangladesh were recorded. The profile of victims, type of trafficking and modus operandi of traffickers remained largely the same. Most human trafficking victims were male (69%), trafficked under the promise of paid labor and ended up in forced labor. In addition, 10 children were identified as victims of trafficking. Refugees' homes/shelters were indicated as the main place for initial engagement with the traffickers and the majority remained in Cox's Bazar (52%) or were reportedly taken to Myanmar (23%).

More details in the quarterly Dashboard produced by the Anti-Trafficking Working Group (AT WG), available [here](#).

**85**  
Refugees Identified

**59**  
Men

**16**  
Women

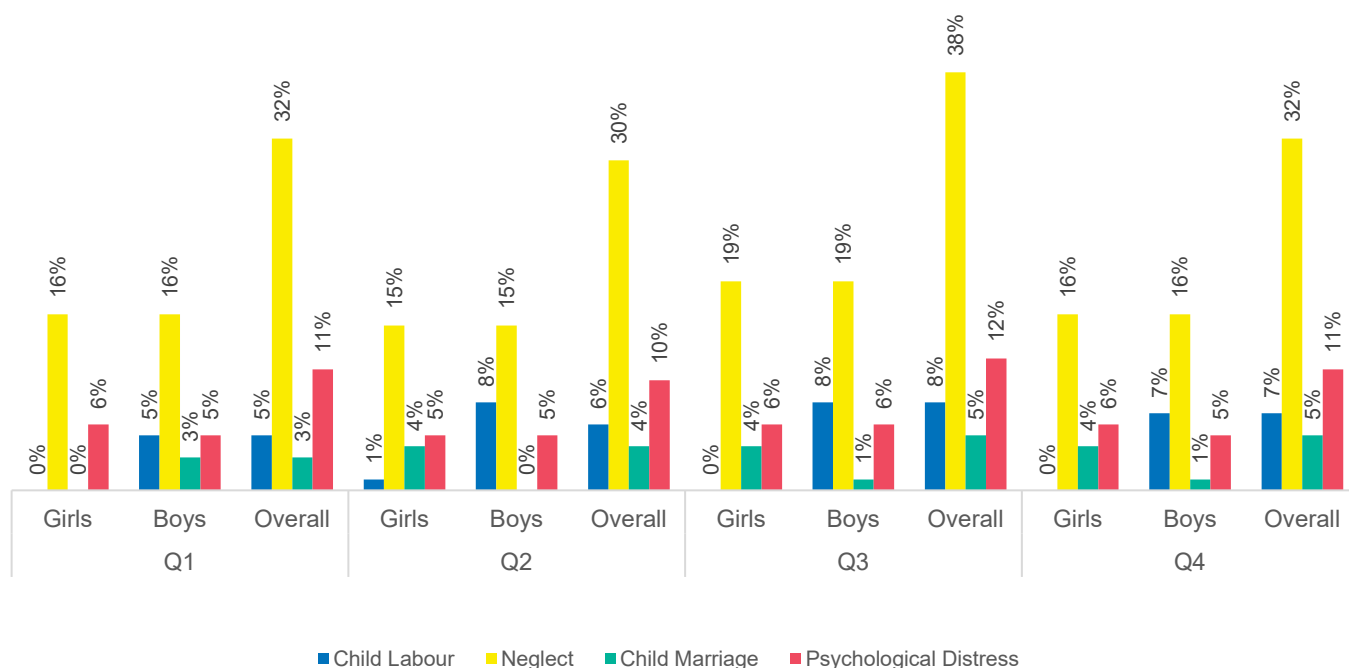
**9**  
Boys

**1**  
Girls

## CHILD PROTECTION

During the last quarter of 2023, the child protection situation remained challenging for both girls and boys across the 33 camps. Child labor persisted as a significant concern affecting 7% of the overall child population. The situation of children driven to work highlights the financial challenges families face inside the camps. Child marriage was also reported as a concern during the reporting period, representing a 5% of child protection incidents. Girls accounted for 4% of cases, while boys' involvement was lower at 1%. The normalization of child marriage within the community remains a barrier to reporting, emphasizing the need for awareness and prevention efforts. Neglect continued to be a serious child protection challenge, impacting 32% of children overall, with the same rates among girls (16%) and boys (16%). The strain on refugee families, coupled with limited resources, contributed to this ongoing issue. Additionally, psychological distress remained a critical concern, affecting 11% of children overall, with both girls and boys affected equally.

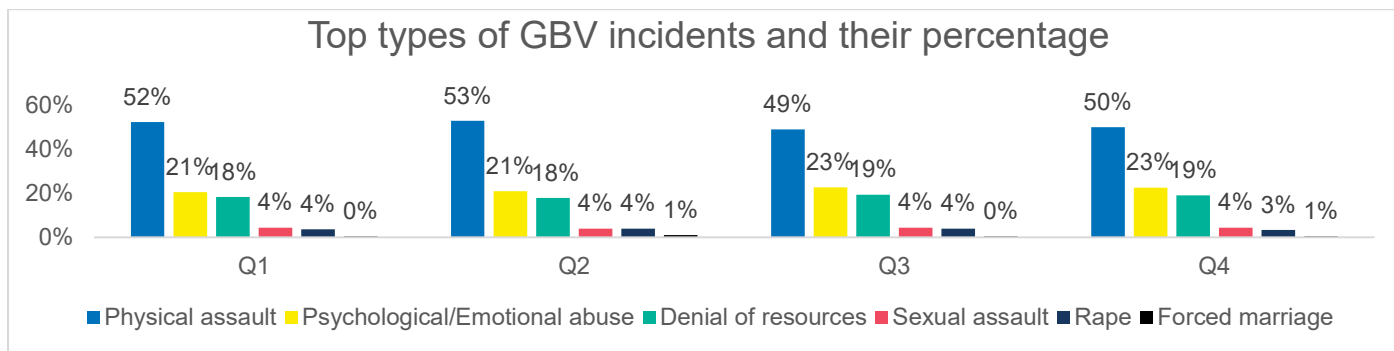
### Top 4 Child Protection Incidents Reported by Quarter



The deteriorating security environment in the camps, coupled with exposure to criminal activities, continued to impact the mental and emotional well-being of children. The cases of child protection concerns were distributed relatively evenly across different age groups, with 0-5-year-olds representing 14% for girls and 12% for boys, 6-11-year-olds at 15% for girls and 17% for boys, and 12-17-year-olds at 20% for girls and 22% for boys. This distribution highlights that child protection challenges cut across various age groups and affect both girls and boys, with slightly higher rates among adolescents.

## GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Girls and women were reported to be targeted by criminal groups for forced marriage, trafficking, or sexual violence. This situation, coupled with ration cuts, congestion, and disasters, continue to pose serious risks of GBV. A reduction in services and safe mobility in the camps has led to increased confinement of women and girls and continues to put them at further risk of intimate partner violence (IPV). Adolescent girls, single women, widows, and people with disabilities were identified by GBV camp focal points as those most at risk.



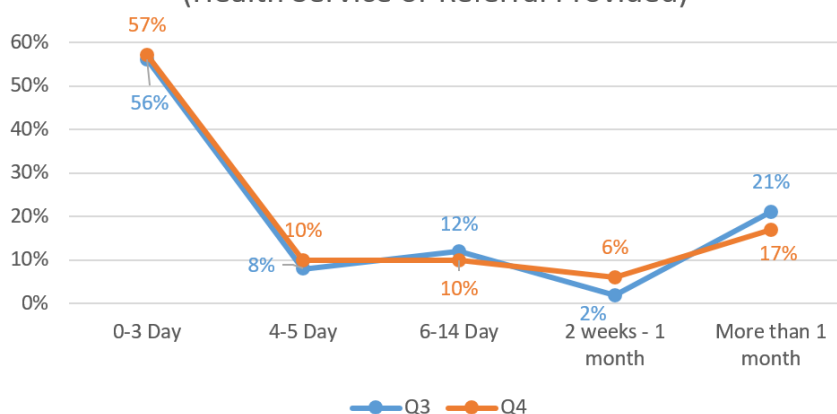
Physical assault was reported as the most common type of GBV for the last quarter of 2023, accounting for 50% of the incidents, followed by psychological and emotional abuse (23%) and denial of resources (19%). Sexual violence accounted for 8% of the reported overall cases, rape for 3% and sexual assault for 4% of GBV. Yet, according to the GBV camp focal points, these particular types of GBV as well as child marriage remained severely under-reported due notably to fear.

Women and girls continue to report on the impacts of food and ration adjustments. Reduction of humanitarian assistance had impacted household dynamics as it worsened the existing challenge of income-generating opportunities, leading to debt accrual, child marriage, polygamy as a means of supporting livelihoods, and other negative coping mechanisms to meet essential needs. Divorce or rejection by IPV perpetrators, mostly the male partner in marriages, is flagged by the camp focal points to be an area of continued concern for GBV survivors.

Challenges to accessing timely lifesaving services including lengthy legal processes required for cases, obstacles in seeking shelter referral, and lack of childcare needed to access services were reported during quarter 4. Additional challenges affecting prevention and service uptake included limited male engagement and a lack of GBV awareness and sensitization from community and religious leaders and non-GBV community actors often tasked with receiving complaints or providing service referral.

Important areas of improvement include the reduction in the severity of physical assault, increased awareness of rights to be protected from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and an overall reported reduction in child marriage as continued livelihoods and skills building activities are being provided by GBV Sub-Sector partners. Reported time elapsed between rape incidence and lifesaving health service referral remained steady in the first 72 hours and favourably decreased in the worst metric of over 1 month between incident and service referral.

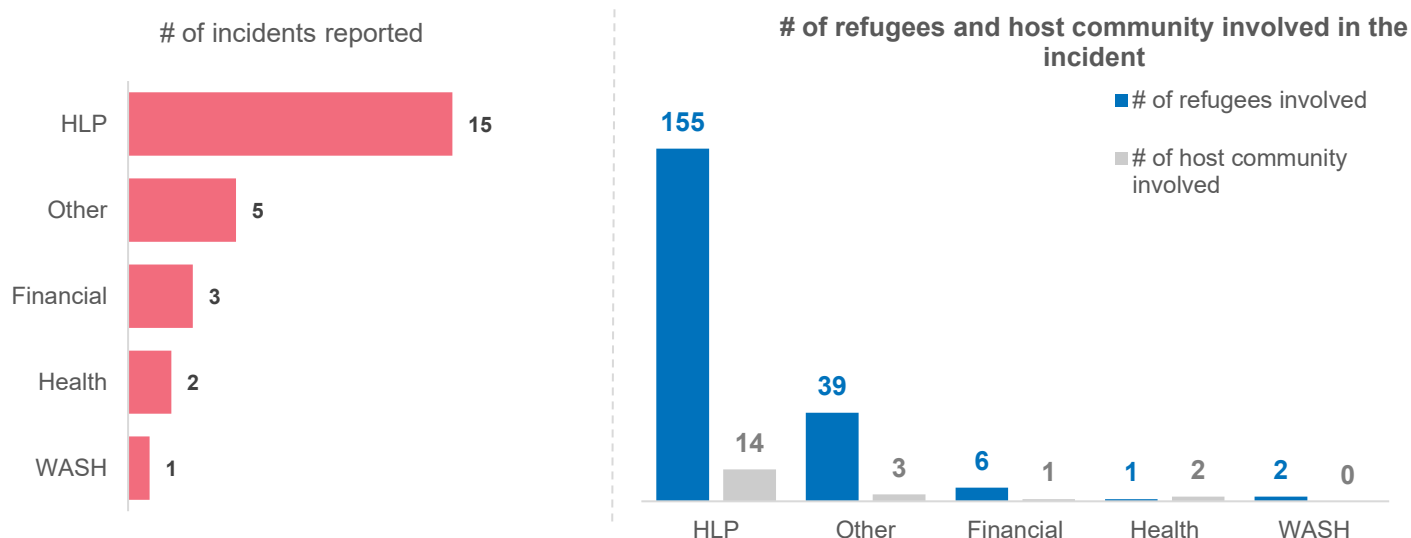
Figure 2. Incidents of Rape, Time Elapsed (Health Service or Referral Provided)



## **SOCIAL COHESION AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE**

A total of 26 incidents were reported during quarter 4 showing a sharp decrease of 72% on the total number of overall incidents reported in relation to quarter 3. Incidents involved 223 individuals, with 91% of these incidents relating to refugees and the rest to host communities. House, Land and Property (HLP) related issues, however, continue to increase and remain the main challenge faced by refugees and host communities with a total of 15 reported incidents followed by “others” which include disputes over the sale of counterfeit gold, disagreements regarding the division of earnings from joint business ventures, conflicts arising from borrowed money retrieval, and quarrels related to loan

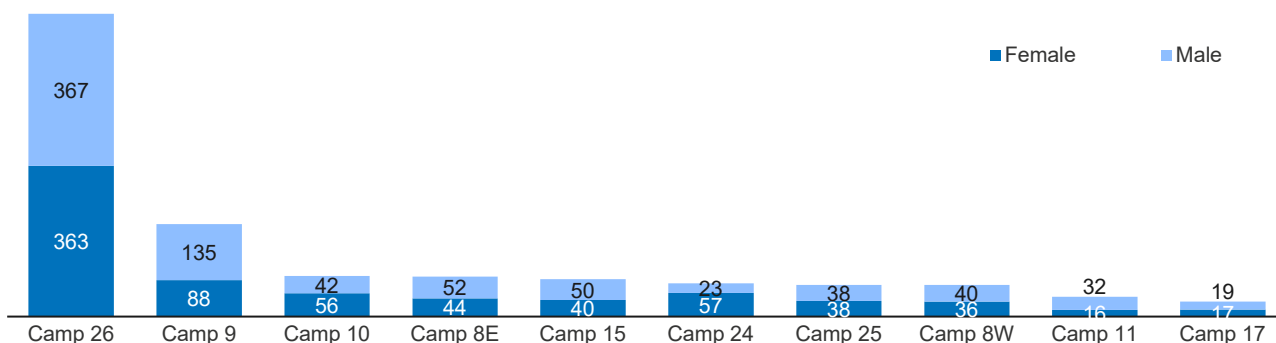
repayments. There were 3 incidents related to financial conflicts, and lack of resources amongst the population including accessing livelihood opportunities, 2 incidents linked to accessing health facilities and 1 linked to WASH.



Land-related disputes between the host and refugee communities – mainly linked to the payment of rent – also led to increased physical assault incidents, particularly in the areas around camps 1E, 1W, 9, 14, 16 and 24. A total of 1,763 HLP cases were recorded during the reporting period, (with 923 males and 840 females), highlighting the ongoing struggles within the community. Notably, 40% of the cases were related to rental issues, such as high rent and rental disagreements while 29% of the cases involved disputes over shared resources like pathways, encroachments, and boundary disputes, frequently occurring between neighbors. Moreover, 20% of these cases were linked to individuals being forced to vacate their shelter due to eviction threats.

A notable trend this quarter was the increase in people relocating to different camps due to safety concerns, significantly affecting families in various camps. Most of the cases were reported from Camps 26, 9, 8E, 8W, and 24. There was an overall increase of 18% of HLP cases for this quarter in comparison to quarter 4. Amongst these cases, 4% involved individuals who were forced to leave their shelters due to eviction threats, underscoring the ongoing issues related to housing security.

**Top 10 Refugee Camps with highest HLP cases**



**ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

Between October to December 2023, 5,523 (52% women and girls) refugees benefited from legal services provided by legal actors. The services included legal counselling, assistance to file cases with the police and in courts, representation in court, and release from detention after intervention by legal actors. Among these, 49 refugees were assisted with filing legal complaints in police stations and courts, as well as obtaining the camp exit permits from CiCs; 94 refugees were represented in legal proceedings in courts.

Legal assistance was provided mostly in cases where refugees were victims of killing, physical assault, sexual violence, and abduction/kidnapping. As refugees don't have access to the formal civil justice system (civil and family courts), mediation support as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism was provided to them. During the reporting period, 890 cases were referred to legal partners for mediation, 73% of which were successfully resolved, predominantly addressing family and financial issues among refugees.

During the reporting period, refugees continued to express concern over the engagement and intimidation posed by criminal groups in resolving crimes and disputes, including sexual violence and severe physical assault. This fear hinders refugees from reporting such cases to authorities and humanitarian organizations working in the camps. In some camps in Teknaf, host community members were reportedly involved in the mediation and resolution of disputes among refugees.

Additionally, 8,295 refugees were reached through legal awareness sessions during quarter 4 including legal counselling, mediation of disputes, assistance to filing cases to the police and/or in courts, legal representation in court, legal support for victims of trafficking and release from detention after intervention by legal actors. Most frequent serious crimes brought before the court through the legal partners includes (attempted) murder, serious physical harm, and (attempted) rape, which were also the major crimes brought before the court during the earlier quarter.

Informal or traditional justice mechanisms prevailed over the formal justice system in the camps during quarter 4 with varying degrees of effectiveness while solving disputes and offenses amongst the community. Lack of confidentiality when processing cases if reported to Majhi's and/or community leaders (such as Imams or teachers) was raised during the last months of 2023; most refugees reported feeling reluctant to report protection incidents as survivors/victims hesitate to share their experiences to camp authorities or service providers. Women and girls facing GBV, fear revictimization and potential damage to their family's honour. If female survivor report GBV issue to community leaders, they face challenges to access justice as they are often asked to identify specific perpetrator or provide evidence. Some Majhi's exploit the situation by demanding money from the victims to resolve the problem.

## **ACCESS TO SERVICES**

During quarter 4, there was a slight decrease of 9% of accessing barriers for refugees with a total of 486 refugees that reported facing challenges when accessing essential services. The impact of the reduction of food assistance coupled with increasing concerns over the community's safety limited refugees' overall access to services.

Families with specific needs reported not receiving porter support regularly to carry the provided ration and fresh food items and were forced to sell some ration items to cover the transportation costs. At some of the fresh food distribution points in the camps, reported not having separate queues for individuals with specific needs, such as older people and people with disabilities. This has resulted in significant difficulties for them, as they are forced to wait for long periods in the same queue as the rest of the community. Moreover, lack of proper crowd management at some distribution points was also reported.

Community leaders, Imams, teachers, caregivers, and women leaders raised concerns related to the issuance of new registration cards, registration related to newborns, separation when a member of a family gets married, relocation from one block to another within the camp or relocation to and from another camp. Other concerns included shortages of solar streetlight, presence of criminal groups and increased robberies, extortion, unlawful arrests, and sudden raids by Law Enforcement Agencies.

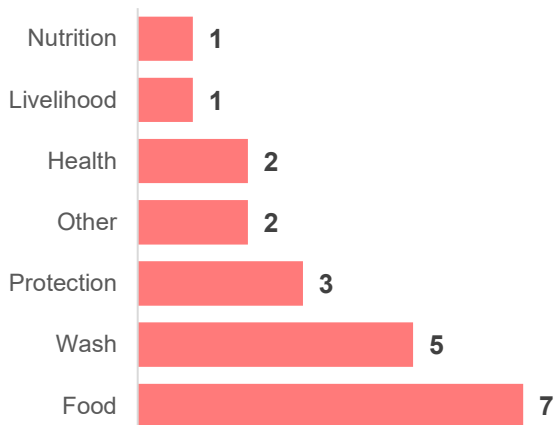
Lack of documentation and irregular distribution of soap was reported by some women in Camp 9. Some of them did not receive the soap for three distribution cycles. The others reported that their husbands relocated to Bhasan Char and the family members who remained in the camp face problems updating their documentation due to the CiC restrictions. Issuance of new/updated documents with the registration team is still perceived as slow although the newly introduced process of registration is seen positively with the teams regularly visiting the camps on a weekly basis.

Documentation on barriers to accessing essential services within the refugee camps over the reporting period highlighted concerns relating to the denial of access to services relating to wash facilities in camp 10 and 11 due to the unavailability of the service providers and conflict within refugee family to use the communal facilities. These incidents also resulted in violent altercations and posed health and security risks to the community.

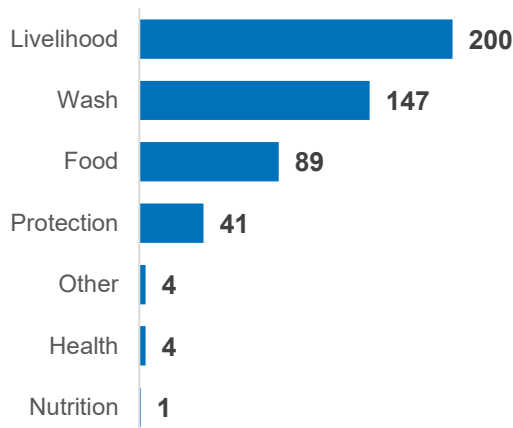
Following WASH and protection incidents, there were reports of some refugees allegedly receiving preferential treatment, while others faced long waiting times and arbitrary costs, including bribes to access services such as shelter kits. Refugees reported gender-sensitive services being scarce in some camps, with a shortage of female doctors,

leading to discomfort and dissatisfaction among female patients. Refugees were reported to fall victims to scams, losing money to fraudulent promises of resettlement.

**Denial of Services**  
(# of Incidents by Sector)



**Denial of Services**  
(# of Refugees affected by Sector)



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Continue to monitor and advocate to ensure Law Enforcement Agencies - including investigative bodies such as district police- effectively prevent and reduce safety and security risk, , maintain standard of treatment against refugees, and counter threats posed by rival criminal groups, and mitigates the escalation of violence.
- Enhance the quality of protection risk analysis (the prevalence, nature, and scope of risks, but also drivers, reasons, and actors) to understand root causes, identify solutions and adopt prevention and response mechanisms to reduce violence.
- Strengthen investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of crimes in the camps -particularly for abductions and killings- to reduce impunity and threats to refugee and ensure protection and assistance for refugee victims and witnesses.
- Reinforce mechanisms to prevent and address instances of police misconduct while promoting a supportive environment for law and order.
- Agree on workable approach consultatively with refugees on developing the prevention and response strategies in relation to creating safe and secure environment for refugees in the camps.
- Advocate with camp and Law Enforcement Authorities to promote and support access of refugees to formal justice mechanisms, as well as to ensure timely investigation and prosecution of crimes to fight against impunity and deter criminal activities in the camps.
- Continue training programs with law enforcement authorities to mitigate impact on refugees' security during law enforcement operations in the camps.
- Advocate with camp authorities to ensure a uniform and formal approach to participation of refugees in night patrols and avoid exploitation or coercion of refugees by influential actors in the camps.



- Advocate for more livelihood and skill development opportunities to prevent and address harmful coping mechanisms such as child marriage, child labor, and other protection concerns and to empower communities in particular the young people.
- Continue strengthening self-reliance and capacity building within the refugee community. Intensify an integrated protection and community-based approach by working meaningfully with the refugee community in order to prioritize critical services and activities addressing needs.
- Food, WASH, Shelter/NFI, Health and other non-protection actors to mainstream protection in their intervention and respond in a way that reduces social tensions, prevents harm, and knows basic about risk profiles and referral process, within the refugee community and between host and refugees.
- Address extortion practices -in particular- through Majhis and block leaders asking them to help mediating disputes, seeking justice and preventing violence and abuse. Provide training to Mahjis and other community leaders on their roles and responsibilities as community leaders, emphasizing integrity, impartiality, community mediation skills/capacity and adherence to human rights as well as identify and work with “community champions” on developing the risk mitigation mechanism within the preview of community-based protection.
- Provide sufficient educational support for adolescent boys and youth to reduce the risk of drug addiction and involvement in other illegal activities. This can include expanding access to quality schooling, vocational or skill development training, recreational activities including Sports for Protection, meaningful community engagement opportunities, and mentorship programs.
- Strengthen and enhance gender-based violence prevention strategies amongst women and men in the community, particularly about the challenges faced by widowed women, women headed household, youth and adolescent girls and boys to promote gender equality. Provide safe spaces, meaningful engagement opportunities, women and girls targeted sports for protection activities, support groups, and counselling services. Encourage women participation in training, meetings, and accessing service facilities and support for women empowerment and leadership developments.
- Intensify the use of effective awareness-raising strategies on identified risks, negative coping trends, deeply rooted harmful social norms and on onward movements to prevent loss of lives and to mitigate the possibility of trafficking in person and smuggling.

**END**