



Child Protection Situation Analysis

Cox's Bazar Rohingya Response

October 2024



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Through focused group discussions and key informant interviews over the past nine months between January and September 2024. These agencies have gathered insights from 1,005 women, 1,734 men, 658 girls, and 728 boys. Their dedication and commitment to this effort have been instrumental in amplifying the voice of the communities they work with.

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Summary

This evidence-based report presents a comprehensive analysis of the child protection situation in the 33 Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar between January and September 2024.

Prominent monitoring tools led and implemented by the Child Protection Sub-Sector Partners, include the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS+) and Child Protection Situation Monitoring (CPSM). Evidence on the perceptions of children and adults was gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The report outlines key child protection concerns including child labor, child recruitment, child marriage, neglect, physical and emotional abuse, and psychosocial distress, all of which significantly threaten the safety and well-being of children in the camps.

Child Protection risks linked to the situation of violence such as child trafficking, recruitment into armed groups, and abduction are increasing, adding to the vulnerabilities faced by children, particularly those who are unaccompanied or separated from their families. The analysis highlights gaps in service delivery, such as insufficient access to psychosocial support, child protection specialized services, integration with livelihood intervention and children access to justice.

The Child Protection Situation Monitoring (CPSM) tool has identified critical trends, with caregivers expressing heightened concerns about the safety of their children amidst deteriorating living conditions. Adolescent girls are especially vulnerable to sexual violence and child marriage, while boys are more likely to be involved in the worst forms of child labor and child recruitment. These concerns, compounded by economic hardship and the pressure of societal expectation, require immediate and sustained intervention.

This report urges humanitarian actors and to prioritize child protection in the humanitarian response, and to strengthen systems for greater sustainability over time. Recommendations include scaling up child protection services, strengthening preventive measures against child recruitment, child labor, MHPSS and child marriage, and mainly enhancing security efforts to protect children from trafficking and recruitment. Coordinated action across sectors, including child protection, education, and gender-based violence, is essential to protect the rights and well-being of children in Cox's Bazar Rohingya Camps.

The Child Protection Context in the Cox's Bazar Rohingya Camps

Since the influx of Rohingya refugees into Cox's Bazar in August 2017, the district has faced immense challenges. Nearly 1 million refugees reside in 33 highly congested camps across Ukhiya and Teknaf, with children making up 52% of the refugee population. The high levels of poverty, limited access to basic services, and overcrowded living conditions exacerbate child protection risks. The Child Protection Sub-Sector (CPSS) continues to address these issues through targeted interventions.

Children in Cox's Bazar are exposed to all forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation, including child labor, child marriage, neglect, and psychosocial distress. Reports indicate that a greater number of boys



are engaged in hazardous labor, while girls are more vulnerable to child marriage and sexual violence. Family separation also heightens the risks of abuse and exploitation, with many children lacking adequate supervision and care.

As per the CPSS partners reports, CRMM and Joint Protection Monitoring Report (JPMR)¹ The main child protection issues in the camps during the first and second quarter of 2024 are child trafficking, child recruitment and use, and abduction, which are on the rise. Both boys and girls are at risk of being trafficked or recruited by armed groups. Community tensions, violence, and the presence of armed groups further expose children to harm. Parents and caregivers ongoing fears for their children's safety, reflect a deep-seated need for improved security and protection mechanisms across the camps.

Since February 2024, the escalation of the conflict between the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and the Arakan Army – as well as tension between the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and others - has severely impacted the protection of refugees, particularly women and girls, in the camps of Ukhiya and Teknaf and contributed to raising child protection incidents, such as child labor and exploitation, child marriage and missing children. The increased presence and activities of armed groups has created a hostile and dangerous environment in the camps. There have been reports of an increase in Yaba/drugs/substance usage and trading in camps by young boys and girls in addition to online gambling contributing to an escalation in domestic violence. Of great concern is the abduction and kidnapping of children and adolescents, primarily adolescent boys, who are coerced, intimidated, manipulated, or enticed into joining the armed groups. Some have been taken for military training and subsequently sent to Rakhine State in Myanmar to participate in the fighting. In early March, three children were killed, and one severely injured during gunfights between rival groups in one of the camps. The constant threat of violence and recruitment has forced many to remain in hiding or restrict their movement, limiting their access to essential services, including psychosocial support, WASH, education, and health care. As a result, fewer children and adolescents are joining facility-based interventions, including MPCs and LCs.

Project staff are also threatened by armed groups when conducting home visits and regular programmes.² The deteriorating security situation and increasing incidents of violence in the camps with the risk of staff and volunteers in the camps being killed, abducted, injured, or otherwise harmed are impacting programme delivery, resulting in the lack of proper education, and diminishing livelihood opportunities. UNICEF has taken the lead in developing the Child Rights Monitoring Mechanism (CRMM), an initiative of the United Nations in Bangladesh aimed at preventing and responding to serious Child Rights Violations (CRV) in situations of violence. The overall goal of the CRMM is to protect children in the Rohingya camps and border areas – as well as the Chittagong Hill Tracts - from violence, exploitation, and abuse by armed groups by enhancing the accountability of perpetrators, preventing violations, and

¹ [PS-Joint-Protection-Monitoring-Report-2024-Quarter-2](#)

² [Volunteers Risk Mapping – 30th May](#)

triggering a response to child rights violations through advocacy, policy development, and programmatic action.

Monitoring Tools and Methodology

Data collection for the report was done using a combination of methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of child protection concerns within the camps and surrounding host communities.

Child Protection Situation Monitoring (CPSM)³ involves monthly Key Informant Interviews (KII)⁴ and quarterly Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to gather qualitative insights. Regular reports generated from the monitoring activities provide ongoing insights into the evolving child protection dynamics within the camps and surrounding communities. These reports are vital for adapting responses to emerging trends and informing advocacy efforts.

The Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS+) is a digital platform for case management, incident monitoring, and family tracing and reunification. Developed in collaboration with United Nations agencies, international NGOs, and other stakeholders, the system is designed to support social service providers, provide an efficient and effective data management in the field, and ensure a confidential and secure platform for managing sensitive child protection cases.

Child Protection Situation Monitoring Sample Population (adults and children)

Age	Female	Male	Total
Children aged 10-14 years (FGDs)	348	378	726
Children aged 15-17+ years (FGDs)	310	350	660
Adults (KII)	1,005	1,734	2,739
Grand Total	1,663	2,462	4,152

³ [CPSM SOP](#)

⁴ [CPSM \(KII\) Dashboard](#)

Findings 5

Child Associated with Armed Groups, Child Abduction and Trafficking:

Recent months have seen a marked escalation of armed violence in Cox's Bazar. Armed groups linked with hostilities in Myanmar are increasingly active on the Bangladesh side of the border, including in the Rohingya refugee camps. While the actions of criminal gangs have been a concern for many years, the emergence of armed groups has a direct impact on children. The abduction, recruitment and use of children by those carrying arms, together with killing, injuring, and other serious violations have been reported. The activities of armed groups are an important consideration in the overall protection landscape of Cox's Bazar, with the hostile environment having the potential to destabilize the whole area.

Verified and unverified reports of child rights violations have been attributed to the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), and others. In the Rohingya camps, RSO and ARSA vie for control along with splinter groups and lesser-known entities: Islam Mahad, Munna Group, and Nabi Hossain Group. While the aims of these groups align loosely with political manifesto, they are also involved in smuggling *yaba* and crystal meth, protection rackets, extortion, taxation, and other illegal activity. Gangs in the host communities of Teknaf operate a wider range of activities including dacoity, human trafficking, kidnap, and extortion.⁶

The Joint Protection Monitoring Report⁷ indicates that although there was an overall decrease of 25% in the total number of reported protection incidents in comparison to 4th Quarter 2023, the intensification of fighting between the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and the Arakan Army in the Rakhine State of Myanmar has resulted in organized groups recruiting adults, youth and children from the camps to join the ongoing conflict in Myanmar. There have been reports from camps 9, 10, 18, and 19, of recruitment of young children, adolescent boys and adult males being forced, intimidated, manipulated, or enticed to join organized groups. Some were reported to be taken for military training and then to Rakhine State as soldiers. FGDs with the community indicate that the methods used to recruit children often involve community meetings and promises of financial incentives. Families or individuals are enticed with one-time payment of 15,000 taka or daily earnings of 800 taka, like protection rackets, to accompany them to join the fighting in Myanmar. Other recruitment strategies include promises of protection or being in their good book in exchange for their "services". Armed groups may also coerce children through threats, forcing them to commit crimes so that these actions could later be held against them. Some groups have been reported to manipulate refugees with false promises of preferential repatriation and citizenship.⁸

⁵ The following findings reflect the voices of community and children. The children's responses have not been edited or filtered for the purpose of the report.

⁶ UNDP CARU reports.

⁷ [PS-Joint-Protection-Monitoring-Report-2024-Quarter-1](#)

⁸ [PS-Joint-Protection-Monitoring-Report-2024-Quarter-1](#)



Armed groups also use children for nefarious purposes, such as child labor, drug trafficking, and as informants. With these incidents taking place in broad daylight and with the compromised situation lingering in the camps, children are terrified of going outside to avail services from the MPCs and LCs, as are the parents, as the children and adolescents are at high risk of being recruited by the armed groups. The Joint Protection Monitoring Report also reported the death of three children, with one severely injured when fighting broke out between two organized groups outside Camp 20 Ext in March. The CPIMS+ reports between Quarter 4 (2023) and Quarter 1 (2024), have also indicated a dramatic increase in child recruitment, and six children are reported to be receiving case management services following incidents with armed or criminal groups.

The Protection Monitoring Report for Quarter 2 confirmed the recruitment and use of children in almost all the refugee camps. Groups primarily target young boys aged 14 to 18 years old, who are sent to Myanmar for training. Families have reported threats, and some parents opt to send their children to the host communities at night for safety, or organize patrols. Some community members lost their lives trying to prevent the recruitment and abduction of their children, and families of recruited children lived in constant fear.

The increased recruitment of children is driven by economic hardship, fear, and false promises. While aware of the risks, the community often feels powerless to resist due to the threats or financial incentives. Addressing these issues requires bolstered community child protection systems, enhanced security patrols, and widespread awareness campaigns to counteract the manipulative tactics of the armed groups.

Violations perpetrated by armed groups is a new protection concern in Bangladesh, and there is no pre-existing mechanism to capture reports and screen them for veracity. The situation of violence in Cox's Bazar (and the Chittagong Hill Tracts) necessitated the immediate establishment of a Child Rights Monitoring Mechanism (CRMM), which was established in April 2024. Borrowing from the Global Monitoring & Reporting Mechanism, the CRMM aims to gather timely and accurate information on serious child rights violations perpetrated by armed groups, and to highlight the impact of the worsening hostilities on children, to improve targeted prevention and response, and provide grounds for advocacy.

The Country Working Group for Child Rights Monitoring, a heads-of-agency level committee co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator and UNICEF Representative, held its first meeting in May 2024. While the CRMM is an UN-wide responsibility, UNICEF is the lead agency and has been spearheading the roll-out since its inception.

Since June, training and orientation on child rights monitoring have taken precedence, with some 150 persons benefitting from knowledge-building sessions. The CRMM is now integrated with the Protection Monitoring Framework which means that the network of protection actors who already monitor and report on general protection can now access the CRMM notification form to report on cases involving children. CRMM data is incorporated in Protection Monitoring Reports and periodic flash reports. In 3rd Quarter 2024, UNICEF established partnerships with two INGOs to take the CRMM work forward.

However, generating a culture of reporting, independently verifying reports, and linking reporting to responses, remains a challenge. Limited knowledge, fear of reporting, and incomplete information required to verify reports, contribute to under-reporting from every camp. Humanitarian volunteers and community leaders in the camps have been threatened and harassed. Families are reluctant to report child rights violations for fear of reprisals. Children who have returned from fighting or from training are at

particular risk. Staff tasked with verifying cases, and the respondents they meet, are also exposed, and intimidation has resulted in volunteers being afraid to show up for work. In the 1st Quarter 2024, 229 CPSS volunteers (14%) were found to be absent from work due to fear of harassment by armed groups.

The CRMM is just one component of a much broader suite of activities implemented by the CPSS to prevent and respond to child rights violations, towards developing a plan of action at the Protection Sector level. Preparations for community engagement through billboards, posters and signage gathered momentum through June and July, however advocacy with government and/or armed groups has been very limited, especially at the local level.

The 2nd and 3rd Quarters 2024 saw more fighting in Myanmar, with reports of new unregistered arrivals co-habiting with other families in the camps. Concurrently, Despite rumors of a decrease in child recruitment by armed groups, CPSS partners have reported an increase in child abductions within the camps, particularly affecting children aged 14-17. Reports from Nayapara and Kutupalong indicate that kidnappings, often accompanied by ransom demands, have risen between June and September, with over 32 cases documented. While some children were released after ransoms were paid, others remain missing or have returned in poor health. It is suspected that armed groups are altering their recruitment tactics, contributing to this rise in abductions.⁹

Anti-Trafficking Working Group (ATWG) stated that Rohingya children in the camps face significant protection challenges, including risks of trafficking, child labor, and exploitation. The absence of formal education leaves many without access to schooling, and while the shift to the Myanmar curriculum offers some support for younger children, older children remain underserved. Challenges like low attendance, particularly among adolescent girls, persist due to the limited availability of female teachers and restricted access to higher education opportunities.

Driven by economic hardship, many families send their children to work in or outside the camps, which increases their vulnerability to abuse and trafficking. Rohingya children are exploited for labor and sex, both domestically and transnationally, with traffickers often luring them with false promises of jobs or marriage.

Children as young as 7 are engaged in domestic servitude, forced labor, and criminal activities as a means of survival, often under harsh conditions with little to no pay. Despite these risks, there are no specialized safe houses or reintegration programs for refugee child victims of trafficking in Cox's Bazar. From January to October 2024, 13 girls and 15 boys were identified as victims of forced labor, though this is likely a severe underrepresentation. While awareness efforts and community-based activities are ongoing, much more needs to be done to fully address the gravity of the situation.

⁹ Protection Monitoring Report, Quarter 3.

Child labor

Child labor remains a significant issue in the camps, driven by economic hardship, where families often rely on their children for household income. The CPIMS+ report from January to September 2024 reported 7.58% cases of child labor, with 97.5% aged 12-17. Of the 7.58%, only 0.34% were girls while 7.24% were boys: a stark gender disparity .

65.57% of adults participating in the CPSM KII , stated that child labor is a major barrier preventing children from attending school. Child-headed households are particularly affected, with 37.68% of respondents stating that such children take on adult responsibilities in the absence of parents. 51.59% of respondents of the KIIs highlighted that children in households with specific needs are engaged in labor, further exacerbating the vulnerabilities faced by these families.

On the type of child labor, 65.57% of respondents of the CPSM KIIs noted that boys are predominantly involved in hazardous work, such as carrying heavy loads and working in markets, while, 28.49% of KIIs reported that girls are more commonly engaged in domestic work and caregiving. Both types of labor expose children to severe health and safety risks, undermining their well-being and development.

Children's Voices on Child Labor: Insights from FGDs

The discussions with children highlighted how economic hardships, family dynamics, and the lack of educational opportunities are shaping their daily lives. Key themes emerging from the discussions are:

Economic Pressures and Inadequate Support

Daily needs such as food, clean water, and hygiene supplies are difficult to meet without a steady income. When there is no income-generating adult in the household, the burden often falls on boys. They are expected to work to provide essentials like clothes and medicine, which are not always covered by aid agencies. An adolescent boy explained, *“We need to earn money to buy material objects and medicines to survive.”* Many boys carry heavy loads of food and non-food items (NFIs) for small sums of money. As one girl remarked, *“Often my brother carries gas cylinders and rice sacks from the community.”*

Children in large families reported inadequate rations, making it necessary to find additional income. Nur Mohammad (pseudonym) noted, *“We don't get vegetables from WFP, so we need money to buy them.”* This economic pressure disproportionately affects boys, who are frequently sent to work while their sisters manage domestic chores. Girls, like Dil Kayas (pseudonym), explained, *“In our community, girls are often relieved of outside jobs, but this decreases as we reach puberty, while our brothers must work alongside going to school.”*

Household Vulnerabilities and Child Labor

For children without biological parents, or those from households where parents are physically disabled or elderly, the need to contribute to the family's survival is even greater. These children often work in restaurants, farms, or shops to support their families. *“Many of us don't have fathers, or they've left us, so we have to find jobs to survive,”* one boy shared.

Child-headed or women-headed families are especially vulnerable, with children stepping in to take on household responsibilities. These duties are not limited to daily survival; some children save money for future needs, like marriage expenses for themselves or their siblings.

Barriers to Education

The distance from Learning Centers (LCs), low-quality education, and the behavior of teachers are some of the barriers that discourage children from attending school. Boys, in particular, voiced dissatisfaction with the quality of education at the LCs, citing unqualified teachers and irrelevant courses. *“The courses they offer aren’t suited to us,”* said one adolescent boy. Another adolescent boy said, *“If you go to school, you need private tuition, but many of us can’t afford it, so we drop out.”* Teachers who do not allow children time to play also dissuade them from attending all classes.

Children with disabilities often opt out of school altogether, given their vulnerability and the lack of support for their specific needs. In addition, corporal punishment by teachers or religious leaders (such as Imams at Madrasahs) drives children away from school. *“Corporal punishment makes us not want to go back to school,”* said one child.

Girls face additional barriers, as domestic chores and caregiving responsibilities take up much of their time, preventing them from attending school regularly. Some adolescent girls prefer to work instead, as it allows them to earn money for things like salon or beauty services, to keep up with their peers/friends. *“Some of our friends go out to work as housemaids,”* one girl remarked, while another noted the growing trend of girls leaving for India or Malaysia in search of better opportunities.

Social Pressure

Adolescents are also influenced by peer and social pressures, with many expressing that having money gives them a sense of independence and social status. *“Having some money in our pockets makes us feel good,”* said a group of teenagers..

Children’s Recommendations to reduce child labor and encourage school attendance

Increase Cash-Based Support for Vulnerable Families: Children believe that financial support, particularly for the most vulnerable families, would reduce the need for them to work and allow them to focus on education, as financial pressures often push them into labor, and without adequate assistance, it is difficult to break this cycle.

Raise Community Awareness on Child Labor , Education and Freedom of Expression: Community-level awareness sessions, especially targeting Majhis, families, and children themselves should focus on the negative effects of child labor and the benefits of sending children to school, including recognizing children’s right to play. Adolescent girls stressed the importance of being able to express and communicate freely with their parents about important issues such as education and child marriage.

Expand Vocational and Income-Generating Programmes

Adolescents emphasized the need to expand skills training programmes like sewing, repairing gadgets and mobile phones, and working with solar panels. These trades would encourage children already involved in labor to return to Learning Centers (LCs) and Multi-Purpose Centers (MPCs). Additionally, they called for the inclusion of the Bengali curriculum, life skills, and livelihood training in their education.

Improve the Quality of Education

Children highlighted the need for better-quality education materials and books to enhance their learning

experience. They believe that improving the resources available at LCs and MPCs would make attending school more appealing and beneficial for their futures. They also recommend providing a certificate after completion of formal education.

Provide Recreational Activities and Outdoor Playgrounds

The availability of outdoor playgrounds at MPCs and LCs and organized school concerts, plays, and athletic events would encourage attendance. The children stated that recreational activities not only provide a break from studying but also make school more enjoyable.

Ensure Access to Meals, Hygiene Supplies, and Healthcare at Schools

Children expressed that the provision of meals, hygiene supplies, clean water, and healthcare at LCs and MPCs would help them concentrate better during lessons and motivate them to attend school regularly.

Introduce Incentives for Regular School Attendance

Children proposed rewarding regular attendance with sticker charts and small prizes, as such incentives would make school more enjoyable and encourage their peers to attend regularly, even when facing external pressures.

Child Marriage

Child marriage remains a significant protection concern within the Rohingya communities. Consultations with children, particularly adolescent boys and girls (10-17), revealed their perspectives on child marriage and its underlying causes. During the period January to September 2024, the CPIMS+ report recorded 4.53% cases of child marriage, with 4.08% affecting girls and 0.45% affecting boys. Understanding the evolving dynamics and root causes is crucial to addressing this issue.

According to CPSM KIIs, 33.95% of adult respondents were aware of child marriage incidents in their area. The reasons cited included cultural norms (18.69%), poverty (17.89%), romantic relationships (17.34%), social insecurity (13.13%), lack of accommodation (10.65%), food scarcity (7.28%), a pursuit of better life security (7.11%), and forced marriages involving members of armed groups (5.6%).

Children's Voices on Child Marriage: Insights from FGDs

The discussions with children revealed the pervasive impact of violence and neglect in their lives, often driven by financial struggles, cultural expectations, and inadequate parental care. Key themes emerging from the discussions are:

Awareness Gaps, Family Pressures, and Economic Motivations

A lack of child rights and national laws awareness among parents, foster parents, and caregivers is a primary driver of child marriage. Parents are often unaware of their children's rights, and religious beliefs or ignorance heavily influence these decisions. One adolescent remarked, *"Our parents don't understand that we are too young for marriage. They think it's best for us because that's what they learned from their own families."* The absence of parents or primary family members as in child-headed households leaves young people feeling pressured to marry, particularly where marriage is seen to establish stability. *"We have no one to care for us, so sometimes we think getting married will help us survive,"* explained a 16-year-old girl.

Cultural norms and beliefs also push young girls into marriage. Some girls fear gossip and dishonor if they are not married by a certain age, as the older a girl gets, the less desirable she is considered for marriage. *"In our community, child marriage is considered better,"* noted one adolescent, explaining how parents and grandparents often pressure children into marriage to fulfill their desire for grandchildren.

Beliefs around aging and looks increase these pressures. Families are concerned that older girls would face higher dowry demands or fewer prospects, and dark-skinned girls are often viewed as less desirable in the marriage market, and the family is eager to marry them off when the opportunity arises, to avoid the stigma associated with dark skin and increase their social standing.

Family honor plays a central role in the decision to marry girls off at a younger age. Parents worry that if their daughters remain unmarried, they might fall in love and elope, which could bring dishonor to the family. Adolescents pointed to romantic relationships as a frequent cause of child marriage. Some parents want to protect girl children from potentially harmful relationships or behavior from boys and arrange marriage for girls. *"If we fall in love with a boy, our parents will marry us to someone else quickly, to avoid shame,"* explained one girl. Sometimes couples elope. *"If families don't approve of the relationship, the couple often runs away to get married,"* shared one boy. If young girls are compromised

by older boys or men using talismans or amulets to manipulate them, the family is compelled to arrange a marriage to protect their honor.

Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable as families seek to marry them off as soon as possible to secure their futures. These marriages are arranged regardless of the child's age, as the family is relieved of the burden of caring for a child with special needs.

Economic motivation is another significant driver of child marriage, with families often seeking monetary gain, status, or security through dowries. One adolescent shared, *“Older adolescent girls worry that it will be hard for them to get married once they turn fifteen, as the dowry to be paid by the bride's family may be higher for older girls.”* For many families, especially those struggling financially, child marriage is a way to secure income or social status, particularly when the bridegroom's family is wealthy or powerful.

Household Responsibilities and Domestic Pressures

The inability to handle household chores, particularly when a caregiver is sick or elderly, drives families to encourage their young boys to marry so that their brides can take on domestic responsibilities such as cooking and caring for older family members.

Families with many daughters often marry them off early to ease the burden of overcrowded households, where up to 10 or 12 people might share one space. One adolescent girl explained, *“There are 12 people living in our house. My parents said it would be easier if I married and moved out.”* Many girls feel that marrying early offers them a chance at a better life and do not object to these arrangements.

Security Concerns

Security fears in the camps exacerbate the pressure on parents to marry off their daughters, especially as they enter puberty. Parents worry that their daughters may be targeted by armed groups or traffickers if they are left unmarried. One adolescent girl shared, *“My parents were scared I would be kidnapped, so they arranged my marriage,”* reflecting the anxiety felt by many families.

Migration Opportunities

Some families see child marriage as a path to better opportunities abroad, arranging marriages with prospective bridegrooms from other countries. However, child shared these marriages don't always work out in the girl's favor. Dil Kayas (pseudonym) shared, *“Recently we got news of a marriage, where the bride and groom were both under 18. After the marriage, the boy went to Malaysia and the girl stayed in the camps. Sometimes, the boy and girl leave the camp together and travel to India or Malaysia.”*

Several girls shared that forcing a young girl into marriage robs her of the chance to grow, learn, and enjoy her childhood. They emphasized that girls should have the opportunity to pursue education and dreams, just like anyone else. Child marriage, they feel, not only stifles potential but also places them in situations they're unprepared to handle. Girls, they believe, deserve the same opportunities to build their futures and make informed choices about their lives

Children's recommendations to decrease child marriage

Children strongly believe that educating parents about the harmful consequences of child marriage and informing them of children's rights could help change attitudes and reduce the pressure on children to marry young. They advocate for more awareness sessions for parents, caregivers, and the community.

Physical and Emotional Maltreatment

Physical and emotional maltreatment including neglect and domestic physical violence against children are significant protection concerns in the Rohingya camps as highlighted in the CPIMS+ data from January to September 2024. Child neglect represented 31.86% of all child protection concerns, making it the most frequently reported issue. It affected boys and girls almost equally, with 15.94% of boys and 15.92% of girls impacted. Domestic violence manifests in various forms, affecting both boys and girls and leads to severe long-term impacts on children's well-being. Physical and emotional maltreatment accounted for 7.84% of total reported cases, with 4.24% affecting girls and 3.60% affecting boys.

According to CPSM KIIs, 69.15% of adults reported incidents of child neglect, while 60.57% indicated cases of domestic physical violence against children. The leading causes of neglect included lack of awareness (20.4%), domestic violence (19.5%), caregiver joblessness (18.0%), lack of resources (15.3%), cultural beliefs (13.0%), and inadequate housing and food shortages.

The consequences of violence and neglect are profound. Among those exposed to violence, 24.6% of informants reported that children imitated violent behavior, 22.7% observed school absenteeism or diminished seriousness in studies, and 16.5% noted low self-esteem. Additionally, 12.1% reported children displaying signs of terror and fear in social settings, while 11.0% indicated that these children struggled to form friendships. Regarding child neglect, 28.9% of key informants highlighted emotional impact, 24.3% reported physical setback, 14.3% noted educational disruption, 13.7% reported behavioral issues, and 12.9% identified societal consequences, such as children migrating to other areas or becoming further marginalized.

Children's Voices on Physical and Emotional Maltreatment: Insights from FGDs

The discussions with children revealed the pervasive impact of violence and neglect in their lives, often driven by financial struggles, cultural expectations, and inadequate parental care. Key themes emerging from the discussions are:

Violence at Home

Children often face corporal punishment from their parents, particularly their fathers, due to financial stress or drug addiction. Boys, especially, are beaten when they do not bring in money, and girls face violence for not completing household chores or refusing arranged marriages. The girls shared their painful experiences and stated that they receive numerous punishments, particularly from their mothers whereas boys shared they are receiving punishment from their fathers. One adolescent stated, *"We get beaten even for the slightest mistake,"* highlighting the harsh discipline they endure for minor issues, such as failing to complete homework. Children also described how stepmothers mistreat them, with one child explaining that they are denied food or physically abused when a father remarries. Younger adolescents mentioned that they are punished when they deviate from community traditions, while older adolescent girls experience verbal and physical abuse from husbands or male family members. Some children highlighted how older siblings, particularly brothers, force younger boys into working and subject them to violence if they fail to do so. Young girls are concerned of being physically abused if they refuse a marriage arranged by the parents.

Violence in the Community and Religious Schools

Children reported experiencing violence at the community level, where adults frequently slap, kick, or beat them with sticks. Their opinions are often disregarded due to their age, with adults assuming that they lack wisdom. Adolescent girls explained that they are particularly vulnerable to scolding and punishment for talking to boys. One girl shared, *“Adolescent girls can be scolded by anyone in the community and receive corporal punishment from family members if they talk to boys.”* Additionally, children noted that they suffer severe physical abuse at religious schools (Maktabs/Madrashas), with some religious teachers (Imams) beating them with sticks or slapping them for not studying correctly. During playtime, boys often quarrel, leading to violent fights, especially if they gossip or cross paths with the host community outside the refugee camp.

Impact of Violence on Mental Health

Children shared that violence in their homes and communities has a profound impact on their mental and emotional well-being. Many of them struggle to focus on schoolwork or enjoy activities like sports due to the trauma they experience. One boy remarked, *“We hear yelling, scolding, and bullying every day,”* explaining how witnessing violence in the family, neighborhood, or community leaves them mentally distressed. Domestic violence where children observe their fathers abusing their mothers, especially after drinking alcohol or taking drugs, leaves them as indirect victims of the violence. Hearing about or witnessing terrifying incidents, such as kidnappings, conflict with Host and Rohingya communities or gang fights also impacts a child’s mind. One child recounted how a boy hired a criminal to abduct another boy, who was tortured for several days before being returned to his family. Such events frighten both children and parents, with parents resorting to corporal punishment to keep their children indoors, especially after dark when NGOs leave the camp. The children also explained that exposure to such violence increases their likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors, such as smoking, alcohol abuse, drug use, and even criminal activities, as well as suffering from long-term mental health issues like depression.

Neglect by Parents

Children feel neglected by their parents, who often prioritize work over spending time with them due to financial struggles, leaving children to handle household chores or fend for themselves. An adolescent girl highlighted the dangers of such neglect, stating, *“It is very important to give more attention towards the children because without it, children might face different types of problems like trafficking, rape, and eve teasing.”* Some children stated that their parents fail to take their health concerns seriously, particularly older boys. One boy remarked, *“Sometimes they don’t listen to our health issue as we are big boys. They think we are bluffing.”* Larger families, especially polygamous ones, create situations where children feel overlooked, as parents are unable to divide their attention equally. Children also shared that when a father marries another woman, he tends to care more for the children from the new marriage, neglecting the older children.

Girls shared that they are neglected more than boys. Parents frequently dismiss their opinions and do not involve them in decisions about their lives. *“Often, our parents overlook us, dismissing our understanding because of our age and gender”* explained one girl, sharing how parents decide on schooling or which relatives they visit without consulting them. Girls also shared that they are often burdened with additional responsibilities, such as caring for younger siblings, which does not allow them time for social activities with their friends. Teenage girls explained that when their parents neglect to

provide their basic needs, like clothing or hygiene products, they are forced to work in markets, sell vegetables or other items to support themselves.

Parents with mental health issues or addictions are even more likely to neglect the needs of the children, focusing on their own struggles instead. A girl explained that sometimes parents, especially mothers, hide serious illnesses, which leaves children without proper care. Children with disabilities shared that they receive the least attention and care from their families, as their needs are often overwhelming for parents. Children mentioned that most of the time, children with disabilities are left in a corner of the house without the opportunity to go outside. Families often lack the knowledge on how to properly care for children with disabilities. One adolescent girl summed up the experience of many, stating, “*Sometimes we feel like we’re just left to survive on our own.*” Children emphasized that this neglect makes them more vulnerable to trafficking, abuse, and other dangerous situations.

Neglect from Service Providers

Children expressed frustration with service providers who mistreat them, especially if they are judged by their appearance. One child mentioned being shamed for having unclean clothes. Service points often deny them assistance if they are unaccompanied by a parent.

Children’s Recommendations to reduce neglect and violence

Increase Awareness among Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers

Raise awareness among parents, caregivers, and teachers about the negative impacts of neglect and violence. Educating these groups would help them better understand the importance of addressing children's needs and avoiding harmful practices.

Initiate Parental Support Programs

Parental support programs to guide parents in providing appropriate care and support to their children would help parents balance their responsibilities and reduce the instances of neglect and violence.

Engage Community Leaders in Discussions

More frequent meetings among teachers, facilitators, Majhis, Imams, CICs and parents to discuss and advise parents about the harmful effects of neglect and violence on children.

Train Girls in Income-Generating Skills

Adolescent girls were particularly interested in more training in income-generating skills such as handicrafts, which could be done at home. This would pacify their parents and enable them to support their families financially, reducing discrimination and vulnerability to neglect.

Mental health and Psychosocial Distress of Children and caregivers

The CPIMS+ data from January to September 2024, reported psychological distress in 11.57% of all cases, with 6.20% of cases impacting girls and 5.36% impacting boys. This high rate of psychological distress highlights the ongoing mental health challenges children in the camps are facing.

The CPSM, KIIs with adults, indicated that 63.93% of children exhibited behavioral and psychological problems, and 44.98% were identified as having severe psychological issues. Additionally, 58.20% of KII participants reported that caregivers are unable to adequately care for their children, largely due to their own mental health challenges and the pressures of the humanitarian crisis.

Children in the camps are exposed to various stressors, including displacement, violence, and economic hardship, all of which exacerbate psychological distress. According to CPSM KIIs, 76% of the adult respondents stated that these issues are observed sometimes, 16.7% stated they occur often, and 4.3% stated they are very common. These challenges are compounded by a lack of accessible psychosocial services, with 8.3% of respondents citing the unavailability of psychosocial support as a significant service gap in their communities.

MHPSS working group emphasize the significant gap in addressing the mental health needs of Rohingya adolescents, particularly for those experiencing internalizing problems and symptoms of depression and anxiety due to the unavailability of psychological interventions and local capacity.

Children's Voices on Psychosocial Distress: Insights from FGDs

The discussions with adolescents revealed numerous challenges affecting their mental and emotional well-being, driven by the conditions in the camps and the pressures within their families. Key themes emerging from the discussions are:

Mental Health challenges linked to Child Marriage, Gender Inequality, and Family Pressures

Child marriage frequently occurs when families cannot meet their basic needs, with girls being married off due to being seen as financial burdens or to protect them from abuse. An adolescent girl shared, *“Sometimes we hear about girls our age getting married. This happens because our parents consider girls a burden in the family or when there is eve-teasing, or some kind of abuse or violence, children our age get married off forcefully.”* Gender inequality exacerbates emotional distress, with girls feeling particularly sad when their brothers receive gifts, such as beautiful clothes, while they do not. Furthermore, overcrowded households, with 10-12 people living in one space, lead parents to marry off their daughters early to ease the burden. Polygamy and neglect within families also lead to emotional suffering, with many adolescents feeling overlooked or mistreated. These practices, driven by cultural norms, family pressures, and economic motivations, take a toll on both boys and girls, who often feel neglected or mistreated within their own families.

Violence, Conflict between families, and Emotional Distress

Domestic violence is a recurring theme, with many adolescents witnessing or experiencing conflict within their families. The emotional burden of seeing their mothers being beaten or dealing with quarrels

between siblings over limited resources was significant. Family separation and the departure of a parent also caused distress. *“Girls feel distressed when they witness their mothers being beaten,”* one adolescent noted. Corporal punishment, both at home and in educational settings, also affects children deeply. Adolescents described feeling unloved when parents scold them or when teachers beat them for not being prepared for lessons. The general atmosphere of violence and conflict in their homes contributes to long-term emotional damage.

Harassment, Restrictions, and Mental Stress

Sexual harassment and movement restrictions significantly impact adolescent girls' mental well-being. Girls reported feeling uncomfortable and stressed due to nasty comments at water collection points or clinics, while movement restrictions, such as being forbidden to go to school, added to their frustration. Many girls are confined to their homes, denied the opportunity to attend learning centers, and compelled to do household work, leading to feelings of disheartenment and frustration. Adolescent boys face similar frustrations when unable to move freely within the camps. This sense of confinement, paired with constant harassment, causes immense mental stress for both boys and girls.

Lack of Educational and Recreational Opportunities

A lack of education and formal opportunities is another key source of frustration, especially for older adolescent boys. One boy stated, *“Due to lack of institutional education in the camps, we are not able to receive higher education like in Myanmar. An institutional education system like Bangladesh is necessary, to enable us to engage in development work.”* The absence of playgrounds and adequate facilities for recreation at the Multi-Purpose Centers (MPCs) further distresses both boys and girls, as they are often denied access to sports or kicked out of schools. Inadequate services and recreational materials in the camps further compound this frustration, leaving adolescents feeling hopeless about their future.

Insecurity, Social Isolation, and Depression

The general insecurity within the camps causes widespread anxiety among adolescents. Incidents such as gunfire, shooting, and threats from armed groups leave many children feeling unsafe. Older boys are especially concerned about being kidnapped or trafficked. As one adolescent reflected, *“When gunfire and shooting are heard, the older adolescent boys specially get worried and anxious.”* In addition to these security concerns, social isolation weighs heavily on the children. Girls feel isolated when there is a lack of trustworthy friends they can share secrets with. The loss of friendships or betrayals from family members also contributed to their sadness. One adolescent mentioned, *“When one of my friends misbehaves with me it makes me sad.”*

This emotional isolation is further exacerbated by bullying and insults by community members and children, which leave adolescents feeling small and unimportant. Persistent bullying can escalate into physical fights and lead to school dropouts. These pressures, combined with daily struggles such as long food collection queues, contribute to the rising levels of depression in the camps. One boy shared, *“Many children in Camp 11 are depressed due to family reasons. But we do not mention this to anyone out of fear or shame.”*

Forced Labor, Household Responsibilities, and Ill-Treatment

Many adolescents reported being forced to perform heavy physical labor or household chores, leading to emotional exhaustion and feelings of neglect. Nurjahan (pseudonym), a 10-year-old participant, said,

“When my parents ask me to do some housework and if I don’t do it my parents misbehave with me.” Ill-treatment such as being beaten or rebuked by their parents or elder family members contributes to their emotional strain, particularly when combined with limited recreational opportunities and the closing of local shops by the CIC and police, which further restricts their ability to enjoy simple pleasures like snacks or time with friends.

Importance of access to Psychological Support in dealing with stress

An adolescent girl shared, *“Sadness will ease if we are confident. We must be honest with ourselves and the people around us, we talk with someone whom we trust. We can do things that are good for us or we enjoy.”*

Children Recommendations on what makes them happy and less stressed

Children and adolescents shared that their joy often stems from positive relationships, education, and recreational activities.

Ensuring Rights and Positive Communication

Children are happiest when their rights are respected, and they are treated with kindness and respect by family members, friends, and the broader community. Asma Begum (a young adolescent girl) remarked, *“When I do any good work like if I help someone, I feel good.”* They value praise and appreciation, particularly when they contribute positively to others.

Freedom of Movement and Education

Adolescents enjoy the freedom to move within and outside the camps, visit new places, and travel with loved ones. Access to education is a source of pride and joy. They feel happy when they can attend the LC/MPC, participate in skills training and life skills sessions, and progress to a new class each year. Multipurpose centers, learning centers, and schools become genuine escapes, where they can chat with friends and confide in teachers, providing a sanctuary amid the challenges they face at home.

Living Peacefully and Feeling Safe

Adolescents feel content when they can live peacefully in their own shelters without discord or trouble around them. Being able to sleep without worry contributes to their sense of safety and well-being.

Family Time and Good Relations and receiving gifts

Knowing one is cared for, good family meals and spending quality time with family, good relationships with neighbors and service providers, are important sources of happiness. Gifts, such as clothes and essential items from organizations, are well-received. An adolescent boy mentioned, *“We feel good when our parents give us pocket money.”*

Recreational Activities and Play Spaces

Indoor and outdoor games provide joy. The availability of open spaces, such as large fields for football and other recreational activities, helps them forget their worries. Boys and girls like to engage in recreational activities and sports such as playing ludo, singing songs, and participating in sports,.

Cultural Activities and Celebrations

Cultural events such as traditional folk dance (TFD), art and quiz competitions, weddings, and day observances remind adolescents of home and foster a sense of belonging. Spending time with friends,

both old and new, also brings happiness, whether at the MPC, LC, or during shared activities such as picnics and applying henna together.

Spiritual Fulfillment

Adolescents who pray, recite and memorize the Holy Quran find happiness in this spiritual practice, just as they did in Myanmar. Some aim to become Hafez (one who memorizes the Quran), which brings them pride and fulfillment.

Increased Vocational Training

Children mentioned additional vocational training could keep them occupied and prevent psychological distress. Engaging in skills training can help them develop a sense of purpose and improve their prospects.

Improved Camp Conditions

Children highlighted the need for adequate essential items to meet their basic needs, along with improvements in camp conditions, particularly in water supply and toilet facilities. They noted that shorter queues and reduced conflicts over water contribute significantly to their overall well-being.

Access to Child Protection Services

CPSM KIIs with adults in the camps highlighted several service gaps for children. Among the respondents, 11.4% reported a lack of Early Childhood Development (ECD) activities, 11.1% identified insufficient life skills training, 9.7% mentioned the need for additional child-friendly spaces, 12.4% pointed to the absence of advanced vocational training opportunities, 8.4% noted the limited availability of MPCs in some camps, and 8.3% expressed concern over the inadequate provision of psychosocial support services.

Child Protection case management services were also reported as lacking by 8.1% of respondents, while 12.6% indicated a shortage of open spaces for children to play. Additionally, 7.6% mentioned that community-based child protection services were unavailable, and 7.8% identified gaps in health services.

Children's Voices on Access to CP Services: Insights from FGDs

Interviews with children reveal mixed experiences when it comes to accessing services. Key themes emerging from the discussions are:

Many adolescents, especially younger ones, face significant challenges. Child protection facilities are difficult to access due to limited availability and overcrowding, with older adolescent boys dominating these spaces. Younger adolescent girls reported difficulty accessing child-friendly spaces and programs, often due to limited availability and harassment from their male peers.

One girl expressed, *"I learned about my body boundaries here."* Another added, *"We've seen our older sisters stop coming to the center as they grew up, but we don't want that to happen to us. If there were a space just for females, we could continue learning and growing without interruption."*

Older adolescent boys also expressed frustration with the services, noting that many were intended for "adolescents" but lacked gender and age sensitive considerations. Similarly, older adolescent girls

highlighted issues like eve-teasing and harassment from boys in public spaces, which not only caused discomfort but also led to negative reactions from their communities, often resulting in resistance from parents, caregivers, and older siblings, to let them leave their shelters. Responsibilities at home, such as domestic chores and babysitting younger siblings, further limited their ability to access services.

The security situation in the camps deter both girls and boys, from leaving their homes to access services . During the monsoon season, heavy rainfall and waterlogging exacerbate these issues, making it even more difficult for children to reach child protection centers and learning centers. They added that not all facilities provide a disability-friendly environment for children, which is urgently needed.

Children's Recommendations to improve their access to CP services

They emphasized the need for more female teachers and staff in learning centers and CP facilities to create a safer and more supportive environment for girls.

Improved camp security, and enhanced safety measures would help alleviate their families' concerns about letting them leave home to access services.

Children expressed a desire for enhancing the quality of education, providing technical education and computer training to help them build essential skills for future opportunities, Establishment of home-based craft learning so they can continue to acquire valuable skills when they are unable to attend centers physically, and more age-gender tailored child-friendly spaces.

There is a need for more playgrounds and sports facilities to encourage physical activity and provide recreational opportunities.

Addressing limited access to CP facilities and spaces capacity, CP facilities should be equipped with more age-gender tailored play materials and reducing stigma, particularly gender-based and cultural norms that discourage girls from participating or seeking support.

Child Protection Recommendations to Enhance Rights and Well-Being in the Rohingya Camps

- Bolster security presence and remove arms from the camps to protect children from recruitment into armed groups, trafficking, and abductions. These security measures will create a safer environment, reduce risks, and allow children to access essential services, including child protection, without fear.
- Establish mechanisms to improve Rohingya children's access to justice, ensuring legal frameworks protect them from exploitation, trafficking, and abuse. Create child-friendly reporting systems, raise awareness of legal rights, and ensure children can access legal services without fear of retaliation or discrimination.
- Promote and expand livelihood programs within the camps, offering sustainable income opportunities for families, including small businesses, vocational training, and income-generating activities tailored to the camp's conditions. This will reduce reliance on child marriage, child recruitment, and child labor, enabling children to attend school.
- Prioritize resources for programs combining child protection and livelihood interventions to reduce child labor and recruitment by providing families with financial alternatives such as cash-based interventions and vocational training for adolescents.
- Expand and enhance mental health and psychosocial support services for children and caregivers to address psychological distress and improve children's well-being.
- Invest in continuous training for specialized child protection workers to respond effectively to complex issues like the worst forms of child labor, recruitment, and abuse.
- Develop policies and strategies promoting access to education for vulnerable children, including those involved in labor, children with disabilities, and girls facing cultural barriers.
- Expand government enforcement of laws against child labor, particularly in refugee camps, ensuring penalties for those exploiting children in hazardous environments.
- Lead community-based child protection awareness campaigns addressing child labor, recruitment, and child marriage, involving key community figures like Majhis and religious leaders to ensure broader acceptance and engagement.
- Implement robust vocational training programs for adolescents at risk of recruitment or labor, providing them with viable alternatives to exploitative activities.
- Integrate child protection services with other sectors, mainly health and education, to enhance service accessibility and reduce stigmatization.
- Create safe spaces for adolescent girls, ensuring access to education, recreational activities, and psychosocial support without fear of harassment or restrictions on their movement.
- Integrate trafficking prevention into education programs and training for children and youth, ensuring age-appropriate services for those affected.