



Background

ATWG: The Anti-Trafficking Working Group (ATWG), consisting of 15 organizations from UN Agencies and non-governmental organizations (local and international), continue providing services and activities in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar to ensure the prevention of and responses in human trafficking cases involving Rohingya refugees. The main activities include:

- Case management for victims of human trafficking (VoTs).
- Awareness raising on risks and consequences of human trafficking through information sessions and tailored messaging.
- Community-level coordination meetings within protection and anti-trafficking actors.
- Data collection and situational analysis on the situation of human trafficking in the refugee camps.
- Skill development projects for VoTs.
- Capacity building of humanitarian actors on identification and screening of VoTs, and
- Advocacy efforts for inclusion of refugees in the national anti-trafficking framework.

Trafficking in Persons (TiP) in Cox's Bazar affects both the Rohingya refugee population and the host community. For the Rohingya, who lack legal status and access to formal employment, promises of better opportunities often lead to exploitation, including forced labour, sexual exploitation, and even trafficking to other countries. The proximity of Cox's Bazar to maritime routes further facilitates the trafficking of individuals, particularly via sea routes to destinations in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. It has been observed that irregular migration of Bangladeshi migrants and onward movement of refugees during the sailing season has led to increased opportunities for trafficking and exploitative practices. Addressing this issue requires a coordinated response that includes better-resourced law enforcement, awareness campaigns, and sustainable livelihood programs for both the host and Rohingya communities. As of March 2026, Cox's Bazar courts are handling **535 TiP cases** involving individuals from both the Rohingya and host communities. These cases underscore the persistent trafficking challenges faced by populations in Cox's Bazar district.

The following report focuses on the trafficking situation in 2025 amongst the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Situational Analysis

Analysis on the Trafficking Situation in 2025 amongst the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

In 2025, ATWG organizations have identified **407 trafficking incidents** involving 248 men, 88 women, 41 boys, 29 girls, and 1 other gender identification. The demographic pattern shows that **adult men make up the majority of identified victims** (61%), followed by women (22%), boys (10%), and girls (7%). In terms of age group, more than half of the victims were adults aged 25–49 (54%). Children under 18 years old accounted for 21% of all the victims. **Nearly one in five victims is a child, highlighting the need for specialised child protection interventions.**

As mentioned in each report, this data does not necessarily indicate the full extent of trafficking in the camps due to underreporting of cases. The underreporting of cases is attributed to various reasons including unwillingness to disclose a trafficking case to humanitarian actors due to shame and fear of legal repercussions, potential stigmatization of the victims among the communities, fear of retaliation by human traffickers after reporting cases, as well as mistrust towards the authorities. Gaps remain in refugees' awareness of reporting mechanisms and available services for victims of human trafficking, and additional efforts may be needed to address this.

According to reported data, the types of exploitation victims were forced into differ between male and female: men and boys are mainly involved in physical labour such as agriculture, livestock raising, fishing, and forestry (102 cases, 35% of all male cases), as well as construction work (75 cases, 26%). In contrast, women and girls are mostly involved in factory work (45 cases, 38% of all female cases), domestic work (26 cases, 22%), and forced sex work (15 cases, 13%). Cases of forced sex work signal significant gender-based risks, often involving coercion, movement restrictions, or sexual violence. In addition, four cases of forced marriage were also reported. Collectively, these patterns reinforce that labour exploitation is the dominant form of trafficking being documented, driven by economic desperation, deceptive recruitment, and the very limited number of safe livelihood options.

The top three recruiters were host community members (30% of all cases), neighbours (22%), and strangers (22%). It is worth highlighting that **40% of all cases were recruited by those whom victims are familiar with** (neighbours, acquaintances, and family members), and this tendency is even more so within female victims (44% for females, 37% for males).

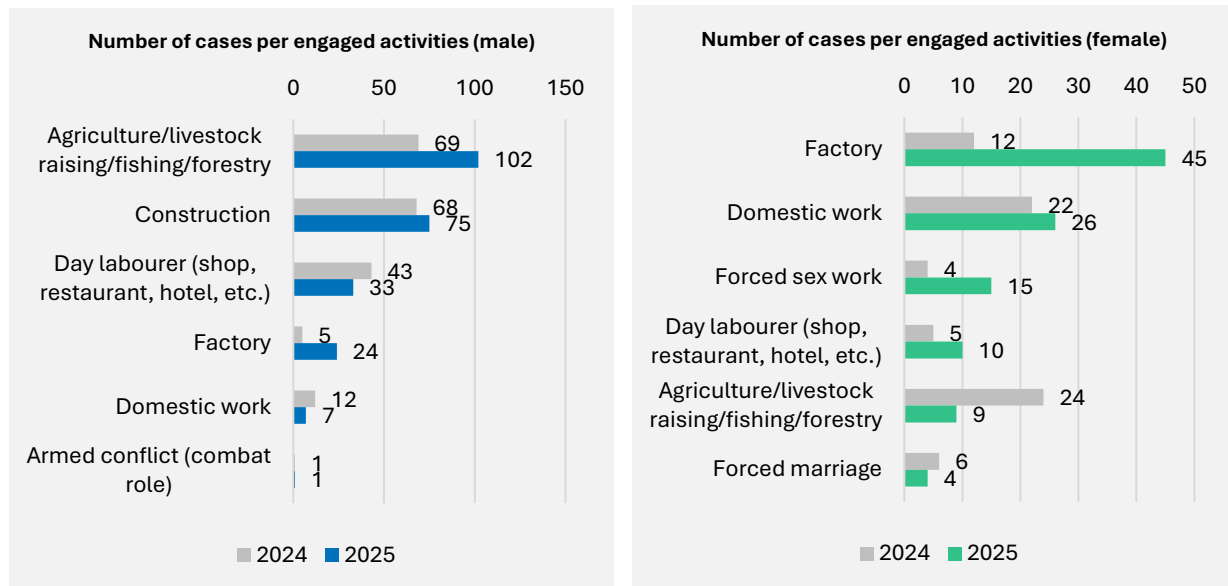
The transportation modality used was mainly by land, with 360 cases (88%) involving land-based movement, compared to 46 cases (11%) by water and only one case by air. Additionally, **most intended destinations were domestic (346 cases, 85%)**, often into neighbouring host community areas where exploitation occurs under the guise of employment.

2024 Trend Comparison Compared to the Previous Years

The cases identified in 2025 show a **28% increase compared to 2024** (316). While shifts in detection and identification practices may partly explain this trend, the magnitude of the increase, together with rising vulnerabilities and increased irregular maritime movements, **raises concern that underlying risks have intensified.** All demographic categories saw increases, but **the number of children affected was particularly notable, marking a 61% increase** from 44 cases in 2024 to 71

cases in 2025. The majority of children affected were boys trafficked into exploitative labour outside the camps. The percentage of female victims remained constant (28% in 2024 and 29% in 2025).

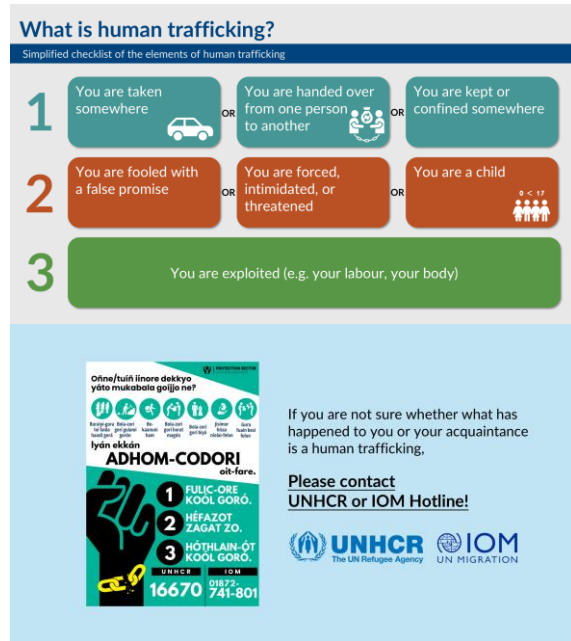
In terms of activities that victims were engaged, a stark increase was observed in **factory work**, a 380% increase in males (from 5 cases in 2024 to 24 in 2025) and a 275% increase in females (from 12 cases in 2024 to 45 in 2025). It is also worth noting that that the number of cases for **forced sex work** saw an increase by more than three times (4 cases in 2024 to 15 in 2025).



In 2025, one out of three male trafficking victims and one out of four female trafficking victims were recruited by **host community members**, which emphasizes that trafficking often occurs in communities where refugee and host communities overlap. Furthermore, 44% of female victims and 37% of male victims were recruited by someone who is known to the victim (neighbours, acquaintances, or family members).

ATWG Activity Highlights in 2025

- World Day against Trafficking in Persons (10 July 2025):** This year’s theme “Human Trafficking is organized crime: End the exploitation” emphasized the complexity of human trafficking as a part of larger transnational organized crime schemes. In Cox’s Bazar and Bhasan Char, 10 ATWG partners organized various activities, reaching approximately 5,185 refugees (1,813 men, 1,200 women, 1,160 boys, and 1,012 girls), including 176 persons with disabilities, through community dramas, workshops, training, and art-based events. In addition, the radio broadcasting was estimated to have reached out to around 378,260 individuals.
- ATWG harmonized awareness raising material on human trafficking and onward movement of refugees and irregular migration of Bangladeshi migrants from Bangladesh:** The material can be used by any humanitarian actors intending to conduct community awareness raising sessions on the dangers of human trafficking amongst refugees or Bangladeshi nationals. This aims at providing the same easy-to-understand information regarding these issues regardless of which organization is conducting awareness raising activities.



- **Training to child protection (CP) actors on child trafficking and child labour:** ATWG conducted an information session at the Child Protection Sub-Sector Case Management Technical Group to sensitize child protection actors about risks and consequences of child trafficking as well as its possible ways of identification.

Stories from Partners

Case management - the case of Alisha (BNWLA)

Alisha (alias), a young Rohingya woman living in the refugee camps, faced immense hardship after her husband abandoned her, leaving her solely responsible for her family and burdened with debt. Despite emotional and financial struggles, she remained determined to support her family. She earned approximately USD 40 per month by fetching water and cleaning drains, which was not enough to meet their basic needs. In 2023, hoping for a better future, Alisha accepted a garment factory job in Chattogram after being promised a monthly salary of USD 120. However, instead of improving her life, she faced exploitation, including unpaid wages, forced overtime, and denial of rest. After enduring abuse for over a year, she returned to her camp in 2024, physically and emotionally distressed.

Her life took a positive turn when a BNWLA staff identified her as a victim of trafficking during an awareness session. She received specialized case management including psychosocial support.

With this support, Alisha started a vegetable garden beside her shelter, improving her family's nutrition.

Today, Alisha feels more empowered. She actively participates in community awareness sessions, educates others about trafficking risks, and inspires her community. With BNWLA support, she is rebuilding her life with dignity, resilience, and renewed hope for a brighter future.



Awareness raising and prevention - the case of Aman Ullah (Action Aid Bangladesh)

Mohammad (alias), a young Rohingya man living in the Rohingya refugee camp, struggled without stable income sources. He felt helpless and pressured to find a solution. This financial hardship pushed him toward a risky decision when he was offered an opportunity to travel irregularly to Malaysia by boat, with payment promised after arrival. Encouraged by his mother, who was unaware of the dangers, Mohammad began considering the option.

During a monsoon preparedness session, a Community Outreach Member from Action Aid Bangladesh noticed Mohammad's distress and later organized a trafficking awareness session in his block.

During the session, he learned about serious risks of irregular onward movement by sea towards Malaysia including the risk of human trafficking. He shared this information with his family, and after a discussion with his family members, they decided against the dangerous journey.

Today, Mohammad actively supports awareness activities, inspiring other youth to choose safe and informed paths toward hope and resilience.



ATWG Member Organizations

Co-Chairs: International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Member organizations: Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers' Association (BNWLA), BRAC, Caritas Bangladesh, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Good Neighbours Bangladesh (GNB), Handicap International Federation – Humanity & Inclusion (HI), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), Winrock International, Young Power in Social Action (YPSA).