

The Rohingya community wants more information about COVID-19 testing and treatment

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## Members of the Rohingya community, notably those living in Camp 14, are facing financial hardship

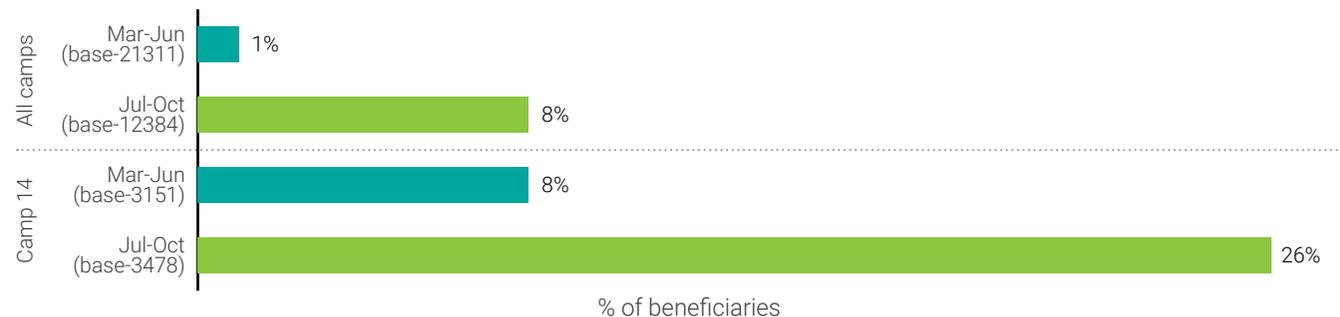
From March to October 2020 major concerns related to the availability of various relief items and living conditions. These included the need for personal documentation, shelter or shelter materials, food and non-food items and site development. Since July, concerns about finances and specifically the need for ways to generate cash have increased. From July to October, 8% of the community feedback was about the need for ways to generate cash compared to only 1% in the four preceding months from March to June.

Source: Community feedback was collected from 34 camps from March to October 2020 by CARE Bangladesh, The Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Save the Children International and UNHCR. (Base: 33,695 60% were from men, 40% were from women.) An analysis of the community feedback data indicates that members of the Rohingya community, especially those living in Camp 14, have increased financial and work-related concerns. To understand more about these concerns, BBC Media Action conducted 10 telephone interviews in Camp 14 on 30 November and 01 December 2020. Five were with women (aged 20 - 60) and five with men (aged 25 - 63). The majority of participants were from male-headed households with some from female or child-headed households. Males were the income earners in all but one household where a grandchild contributes the financial support he receives from an orphanage, to the household.

This was of particular note in Camp 14: 26% cited this as a major concern from July to October, compared to 8% in the four preceding months from March to June.

We explored this further with Camp 14 residents. Rohingya men and women interviewed for this report said pandemic movement restrictions and safety measures make it difficult for them to pursue work opportunities. In some cases, their cash income has stopped altogether.

Concern related to the increasing financial burden among Rohingya community



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(Note: The Rohingya community is provided with relief in terms of their basic needs such as food and shelter and are not allowed to work in the formal economy. However, there are opportunities to earn cash in the informal sector. The community say they require a source of cash for expenses such as education and medicine. They list additional monthly costs as clothes, tea, betel-leaf, snacks and cosmetics.)

“ Our lives have been devastated since Coronavirus arrived. I lost my job and now I’m unemployed. I have nothing to do now.”

– Rohingya man, unemployed, 27, Camp 14

## Limited work opportunities

Those who are volunteers, and imams (Islamic leaders) working in mosques say they have retained their jobs. However, many men who had informal, temporary employment as day labourers, construction workers, porters or tailors have lost their jobs, according to the men themselves or their wives. Work opportunities in general have decreased, including work within host communities, such as on plantations and as seasonal harvesters, day labourers, porters, or as betel nuts collectors. One participant said he reduced the fee he pays for his children's private tuition. He said the tutor agreed because the tutor also needs money and has lost income as a result of having fewer students to teach.

“ My husband used to work as a day labourer for the host community. But now he cannot find any work, and even if he does manage to work somehow, payment is low. It is because everyone is suffering from coronavirus, and they also cannot pay more or as before.”

– Rohingya woman, housewife, 25, Camp 14

“ What I earned before has decreased greatly. I am earning less now. Coronavirus doesn't allow interaction among people. If you have no connection with others, how will it be possible to earn money?”

– Rohingya man, imam, 38, Camp 14



## Financial hardship and coping mechanisms

All participants said they've had to come up with new ways to cope with increased difficulties as a result of not having access to cash, which they say is essential so they can afford additional items such as tuition. Even before the pandemic, some families sold relief items in order to have cash— now, with work opportunities reduced or non-existent, they say they must resort to selling even more of their relief items. They also report taking loans from friends, relatives or neighbours during emergencies and/or to cover extra costs.

“ I sell all the lentils I get as relief and get BDT 500 monthly. But this money isn't sufficient as I don't have any work now. So, I must take loan from friends and neighbours and relatives.”

– Rohingya man, unemployed, 25, Camp 14

“ I don't have enough money for my daily expenses. The money I get by selling relief items and other help supports me with my daily expenses. So, I have to suffer and ask Allah to help me.”

– Rohingya man, unemployed, 63, Camp 14

In addition to decreased work opportunities/access to cash, it is reported that the amount of relief provided has been reduced since the COVID-19 outbreak. Some of those interviewed reported they receive smaller quantities of food such as rice, lentils, chilies, onions, ginger, garlic and oil. As a result they now must purchase some of these items as well as fish, meat and spices. All participants expressed their dissatisfaction with this, some even saying that as a result they are consuming less food. Some participants also complained about the quality of food, for example the dried fish they receive. Others noted they normally sell lentils which are not part of their diet.



“ For my family, this amount of rice and other items is not enough. Besides, I do not have an earning member [in my household] so we now eat less to manage with the food we have.”

– Rohingya woman, housewife, 27, Camp 14

“ We have to sell some relief items to buy other things. I sell dry fish and eggs as the children do not eat those items.”

– Rohingya woman, housewife, 50, Camp 14

Some participants have found alternative sources of cash during the pandemic. One elderly female participant said her grandchild, who is an orphan, receives a monthly stipend from an orphanage for his own expenditure. He shares this and other money received through help from neighbours with his family. Another male participant said his wife sells spinach and gourds from her home garden.

# The Rohingya community wants more information about COVID-19 testing and treatment

*Source:* To understand current community perspectives and experiences in the camps, particularly in relation to information needs in the context of COVID-19, Translators without Borders conducted interviews over the phone with nine men and nine women from the Rohingya community. The interviews took place in early December 2020.

Organisations, agencies and the authorities in Cox's Bazar have made substantial efforts to provide the Rohingya community with the information they need. However, many community members still lack key COVID-19 knowledge. Many Rohingya people still do not know where to go to get tested, are not aware of the testing process and do not know what will happen if they test positive.

COVID-19 testing is crucial to prevent outbreaks of the virus in the Rohingya camps. Testing enables health authorities to identify, isolate and treat people who are infected and, in turn, reduce the risk to the community. We spoke to 18 camp residents to explore their knowledge and experiences of COVID-19 testing in the camps.

## COVID-19 testing: not many people know the details

Most members of the Rohingya community are aware of the dangers of COVID-19 and are trying their best to protect themselves from contracting the virus. Yet awareness of testing and its importance in community protection remains low. When discussing COVID-19 testing, many confused this with testing involving checking vital signs or doctors asking them about COVID-19 symptoms. However, most of those interviewed knew that people with symptoms like a fever, cough or headache should see a doctor. Many also expressed concern about a likely rise in COVID-19 cases during winter. Some also noted that it is common to suffer these symptoms during winter without being COVID-19 positive. However, it is clear that the community needs more specific information related to the testing of COVID-19.

Five of the 18 people interviewed have heard about COVID-19 testing but are not sure about the details.

They want more information about:

- Where to go if they have symptoms
- Which hospitals and clinics offer testing in the camps
- What happens to people who test positive for the virus
- How long they will need to stay in Cox's Bazar or isolation centres
- What treatment they will receive
- How long the treatment takes

For many community members, the lack of information about COVID-19 testing and treatment makes them afraid of getting tested. To allay their fears and encourage people to get tested, they need more information so they can make informed choices.

“ In Camp 12 one of my relatives was suspected of having coronavirus as he had been facing difficulties with cold, fever, headache, and a swollen neck. He was taken to an IOM hospital to do the coronavirus test. After two days his result came back positive and then he was taken to hospital and kept there.”

– Rohingya man, 34-36, Camp 9

“ I'm a bit worried about testing because I have heard that if people are having fever or symptoms of coronavirus they are taken to Cox's Bazar and it takes a long time for them to come back home. I'm very afraid about that.”

– Rohingya woman, 34-36, Camp 12

“ I would like NGOs to let us know exactly what hospitals or clinics we can visit for coronavirus tests or treatment.”

– Rohingya man, 50-53, Camp 3

“ I want to know where the test is available and why NGOs don't tell us about it.”

– Rohingya woman, 34-36, Camp 12

BBC Media Action and Translators without Borders are working together to collect and collate feedback from communities affected by the Rohingya crisis. This summary aims to provide a snapshot of feedback received from Rohingya and host communities, to assist sectors to better plan and implement relief activities with communities' needs and preferences in mind.

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If you have any comments, questions or suggestions regarding *What Matters?*, you are welcome to get in touch with the team by emailing [info@cxbfeedback.org](mailto:info@cxbfeedback.org)