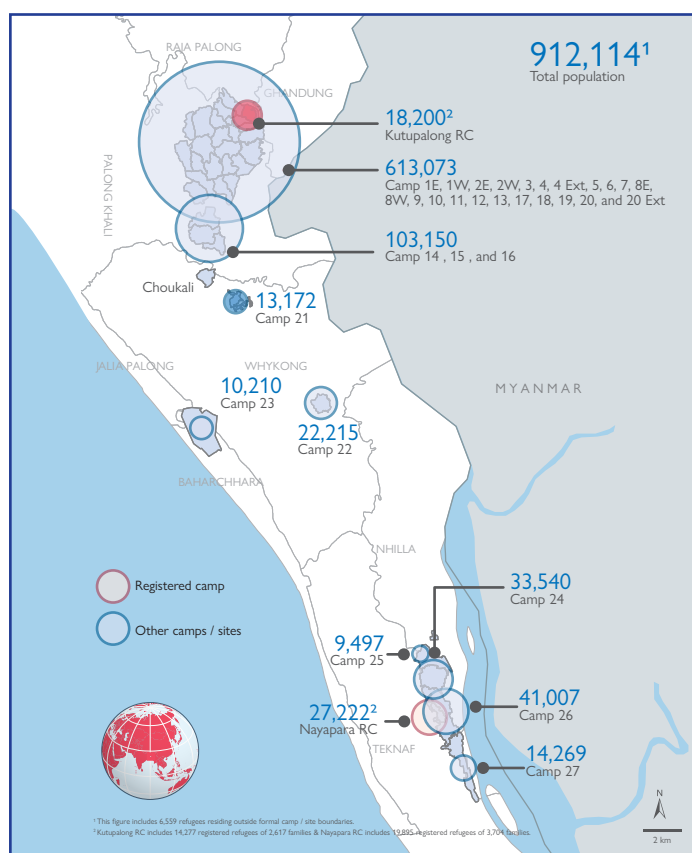


# INDICATORS OF RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND OTHER PROTECTION CONCERNS IN THE BANGLADESHI HOST COMMUNITY

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh | 2019



## THE CONTEXT OF THE ROHINGYA HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Since August 2017, an estimated 745,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar by crossing the border into Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. While it was not the first time the Rohingya people were forced to seek refuge in Bangladesh, the recent influx is the largest.

In the 2019 Joint Response Plan, it was recognized that the Rohingya humanitarian crisis had socio-economic implications for the Bangladeshi host communities, increasing living costs, demand over water, firewood and other scarce resources while decreasing the livelihood of local skilled and unskilled laborers. From the 1.2 million people considered in need of humanitarian assistance in the Response Plan, nearly one third (27%) were crisis-affected populations in host communities. That is the equivalent of 335,900 people in the Bangladeshi host communities.

## What is human trafficking?

Trafficking in persons is a crime and a serious violation of human rights, which takes place in every country.

Trafficking in persons is a process that includes the exploitation of boys, girls, men and women within their own countries or across international borders. Through deception, physical or psychological coercion, or debt bondage, human trafficking victims can become trapped in situations of sexual exploitation, forced labour, servitude, slavery or organ removal.

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children that supplements the United Nations Transnational Organized Crime Convention came into force in 2000 and defined the crime of human trafficking.

According to the Protocol, trafficking in persons comprises an act of the trafficker(s), by particular means such as force, fraud or coercion, for the purpose of exploiting the victim; if the victim is a child, only an act for the purpose of exploitation is required. Trafficking can be domestic (internal), whereby the entire crime occurs within a country, or it can be international – the criminal elements occurring in more than one country.

The main counter-trafficking law in Bangladesh is the "Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act," 2012. The Government of Bangladesh revised and launched the 2018-2022 national plan of action to counter human trafficking, focusing on the operationalization and enforcement of the existing Act through better inter-agency coordination, victim support and other activities such as the improved training of officers and the harmonization of existing laws.

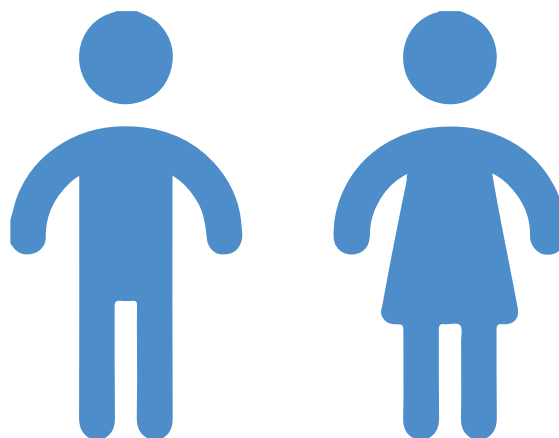
## Indicators of human trafficking in Cox's Bazar host community

Cox's Bazar is a district whose Bangladeshi population has had, and continues to have, limited socio-economic opportunities that were connected to traditional agriculture and fishing sectors. For decades, there have been challenges related to food security, nutrition, access to healthcare, employment and sustainable livelihood options. Some of the challenges are related to the limited cultivable land, scarcity of water, poor infrastructure and weather characterized by cyclones and monsoons. All these factors – poverty, limited access to services and livelihood options – are known to increase the vulnerability to exploitation and recruitment for illicit activities by organized groups, which often amounts to human trafficking. Cox's Bazar is not an exception. Due to the geographical location of the district, which is near the Myanmar border on the East and the Bay of Bengal on the West, human trafficking can take both a domestic and cross-border dimension.

A multi-sectoral needs assessment in the Bangladeshi host communities was conducted by REACH and IOM's Needs Population Monitoring (NPM) teams in November and December 2018. The assessment took place in Ukhia and Teknaf sub-districts (called Upazilas) where the majority of the Rohingya are living. In January 2019 over 900,000 Rohingya were estimated in Ukhia and Teknaf. Detailed information on the data collection is available in the Survey Methodology section.

The analysis of the collected data illustrates the risks and vulnerabilities to human trafficking specific to the Bangladeshi host community in Cox's Bazar. As human trafficking is a human rights violation and a crime that is complex, it cannot be easily measured, but the data can provide an indication of the forms of human trafficking as well as specific risks that are reported to be present, and the way they could affect girls, boys, women and men.

Data collected suggest that Bangladeshi children and adults from the Cox's Bazar host community face serious risks of human trafficking for labour exploitation.<sup>1</sup> Early marriage and the associated risks of sexual exploitation and domestic servitude, particularly in the case of women and girls, are also present in a high number of households, based on the information provided by the members of the host community.



**Boys and girls are exposed to different types of risks of exploitation, according to the information provided by household members. For example, boys in particular were reported to be engaged in child labour, while girls were considered vulnerable to child marriage.**

All these are protection concerns that could manifest into cases of human trafficking and should be taken into account by the current humanitarian assistance aimed at the Bangladeshi host community and the Rohingya. Complementary counter-trafficking interventions addressing the risks and vulnerabilities in the host and Rohingya communities should also be considered to mitigate the possibility of trafficking networks targeting any one group.



Street drama is going on counter trafficking issue in host community.  
© IOM

<sup>1</sup> The risks are related to cross-border human trafficking due to the way the questions were phrased. The specific human trafficking indicators integrated into the household survey questionnaire did not include anything related to human trafficking for sexual exploitation of adults. The questions in the survey, which were also relevant to child protection, included important indicators of child trafficking for sexual exploitation. See Limitations section.

## Survey Methodology

The findings in this document are based on a multi-sectoral needs assessment conducted by REACH and IOM's Needs Population Monitoring (NPM) team, in November and December 2018. The household survey was conducted with crisis-affected people from the Bangladeshi host population, 11 administrative units called unions, from the Ukhia and Teknaf sub-districts. Approximately 30% of the interviews were done by IOM's NPM, while the rest were conducted by REACH. The data collection team consisted of 41 REACH enumerators and 25 NPM enumerators. The training of data collectors included a session dedicated to human trafficking, that covered key concepts, the aim of the human trafficking indicators included in the assessment, and guidance on the way to safely and ethically conduct the interview.

The aim of the assessment was to identify the severity and geographical spread of acute needs within the host community population.

In addition to key indicators for food security, livelihoods, health and other sectoral issues, six specific questions that indicate human trafficking risks were included in this household survey. Other protection indicators which are also relevant from a counter-trafficking perspective – for example questions related to the risks for children – were also included in the survey.

Male enumerators surveyed male respondents and female enumerators surveyed female respondents.

The results are generalizable to the population of each sub-district and union. The household survey was conducted using a stratified random sample to produce results generalizable to the population of each sub-district.



Household interview taking place. © IOM

## The survey respondents

The survey had an almost equal number of men and women who were interviewed. Approximately half (53%) of all 2,881 respondents were heads of households. Almost all heads of households interviewed were men. No children were interviewed.

The average age of respondents was nearly 37 years, and the average size of the household was 5.6 members.

The main sources of income reported by the members of the host community are from skilled labour wages, small businesses and agricultural production and sales. It is notable that remittances were the main source of income for 12% of the households.

More than half of respondents (58%) said that they never interacted with the Rohingya, and 78% said that they have no relationship with the Rohingya (while 6% said the relationship is “bad” or “very bad”). Those households which reported being unhappy or very unhappy with the presence of Rohingya refugees in their communities cited competition for services, utilities, or resources such as firewood or food as their main reasons.



CT awareness raising session- coordination with local police. © IOM



## Limitations of data collection, analysis and interpretation

The data contain indicators of human trafficking risks, rather than estimates of the prevalence of human trafficking. The surveys were not designed to estimate the prevalence of human trafficking or labour exploitation, or identify victims of trafficking. Data collection on human trafficking, as defined by the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, is difficult to undertake, particularly in a large-scale, complex humanitarian setting. The act, means and purpose are the three main elements of human trafficking, and ascertaining the presence of each element requires different data collection tools, and screening that needs to be undertaken by a protection or counter-trafficking specialist. Nevertheless, the analysis results give an indication of trafficking risks and potential patterns.

In addition, the data analysis cannot always estimate the number or percentages of individuals affected. Most of the questions in this survey were designed to refer to known experiences of the community, and not to necessarily at individual or household level. For example, the question on “safety risks” faced by girls and boys is based on the perception of risks, and they are not related to the household of the respondent, but the community. Therefore, despite the sample being representative of the host communities in the two locations, the findings for example do not give the prevalence estimates of abductions, sexual violence, forced labour or forced marriage.

Cultural and social biases on gender and age. The key indicators for human trafficking and other protection issues are questions that refer to perceptions related to different groups – girls, boys, men and women. It can be assumed that the respondents’ perception of the risks for girls are heavily influenced by their cultural background and their views on general practices applicable to women and girls, which for example are seen as more engaged in domestic activities than boys. Hence, a large percentage of respondents referred to child labour, an activity often performed outside of the household, in the case of boys, while the risks to girls were perceived to be those more connected to the home environment, such as marriage and sexual violence.

### Age and selection of respondents at household level

Child-headed households were not surveyed. These types of households are generally considered vulnerable to protection risks, therefore the perception of heads of

household under 18 were not reflected into the survey results. For example, unaccompanied children as a category of risks for children were rarely reported.

Certain questions were asked to respondents of a particular sex and age. For example, the question on child marriage was asked only to women and men between the age of 20-25, who reported to be married. The question on final say on whether or not the respondent should work to earn money was asked only to female respondents, by female enumerators.

In addition, only one individual from each surveyed household was asked the questions, and the responses reflect that one perception, and not that of other household members.

**Limited indicators of domestic trafficking** Most of the questions that were designed as indicators of human trafficking cover only cross-border movements. For example, certain questions related to experiences of individuals who travelled outside of Bangladesh. Other protection-relevant questions refer to the issues known to happen in the community.

**Indicators of risks for specific forms of trafficking** The surveys do not cover all types of known risk factors or indicators related to all forms of human trafficking. The level of detail provided by the survey is limited, restricting insight into the contexts in which trafficking occurs. Human trafficking for sexual exploitation, especially of women and girls, account for a large percentage of IOM’s identified victims globally; however, this document excludes an analysis of existing case data of identified victims in Cox’s Bazar or Bangladesh.

**Perception of survey respondents** All characteristics and experiences of the respondents and their household were self-reported, and their observations are inevitably subjective. The respondents’ willingness to openly answer might vary across different questions, especially for those more sensitive ones, as the protection indicators tend to be.



## Findings

Almost half (45%) of the surveyed households had knowledge about a circumstance that indicate the risk of human trafficking. Their responses refer to issues known by respondents to happen to people from the same community or location. These issues were non-payment, being forced to work, marriage offer, work offer, study offer and disappearance – all linked to movement abroad.<sup>2</sup> Sabrang and Baharchara were the Unions with the highest percentage of households where these issues were reported to happen in the community.

A higher rate of female (48%) than male respondents (41%) said that they were aware about specific issues that indicated the risks to human trafficking.

There were no major differences in households' response rates between Ukhia and Teknaf, generally not more than 1 to 4 percentage points.

The highest rate of positive responses to the human trafficking indicators were related to work: offers of work abroad, work not paid abroad, and forced work abroad.

Survey data also show that abductions and disappearances were an issue of concern in the host community, however it was not clear if this was a means for the purpose of exploitation. Generally, the perceptions and issues reported by the respondents detailed in this document, could be further explored either through a follow-up thematic survey or through qualitative research, in order to gain a better understanding of human trafficking in Cox's Bazar.

This analysis mostly refers to risks of international trafficking. A high number of households were aware of work offers abroad being made. In addition, some households said they relied on remittances as the main source of income. The international dynamic of human trafficking remains a risk for Bangladeshi host community members in Cox's Bazar, although internal trafficking trends should be further explored through a specifically done survey.

### Indicators of cross-border human trafficking risks in the Bangladeshi host community

#### **Non-payment for work abroad (outside the country)**

Approximately one fourth (24%) of respondents heard about people from their community who recently returned from abroad and worked or performed other activities

without getting the expected payment. The percentage of those who knew of such cases was higher among those households for which remittances were their main source of income, than households which had other main source of income by 2 percentage points.

#### **Offers of work abroad**

24% of respondents heard about work offers outside the country being made in the survey location. Rates of knowledge of these offers were higher among female (29%) than male (17%) respondents. The response does not differ greatly across the two sub-districts.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Being forced to work abroad**

22% of respondents heard about people from the host community who recently returned from abroad and worked or performed other activities against their will. A higher rate of male (25%) than female respondents (19%) knew about these cases. This is the largest disparity between men and women on answers to the questions that indicate trafficking risks. The highest percentage of households that said they knew of such cases were in Sabrang Union.

#### **Offers of marriage abroad**

12% of respondents heard about offers of marriage abroad being made to other people within the host community. There was almost no difference in the rate of positive responses given by men and women.

#### **Disappearances**

12% of respondents heard about people who disappeared from the host community, after going outside of Bangladesh for work or study. More women than men interviewed said they knew this type of cases.

Approximately 7% of respondents mentioned that finding missing people was one of their main household information need; the need was much higher in Teknaf (9%) than in Ukhia (4%). Nevertheless, this information need was less frequently mentioned than, for example, the need to know about the way to generate income or to access financial support (mentioned by 28% of households), or the information need on how to get healthcare (25% of households).<sup>4</sup>

#### **Offers of study outside Bangladesh**

6% of respondents heard about offers to study outside the country being made in the survey location. Rates of knowledge of these offers were higher among women (7%) than men (4%) interviewed.

<sup>2</sup> The risks are related to cross-border trafficking due to the way the questions were phrased. The specific human trafficking indicators integrated into the household survey questionnaire did not include anything related to human trafficking for sexual exploitation of adults. The questions in the survey, which were also relevant to child protection, include important indicators of child trafficking for sexual exploitation. See Limitations section.

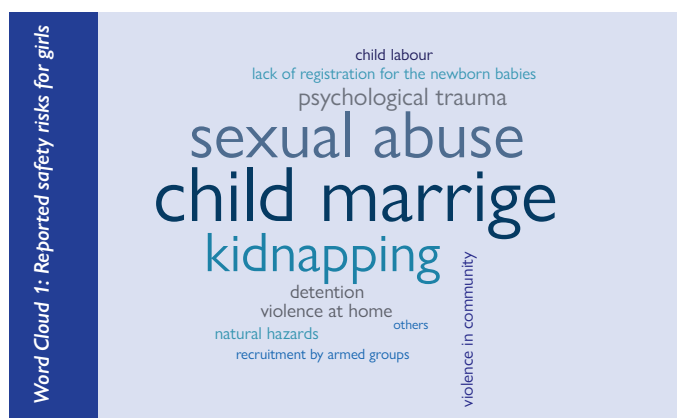
<sup>3</sup> When it is not mentioned in the case of other findings, it should be assumed that the responses do not vary much across the two sub-districts where the survey was conducted.

<sup>4</sup> While the survey question is on information needs, the responses appear to refer mostly to needs of support or services.

## Risks and vulnerabilities to child trafficking

The protection risks facing children need to be explored in order to better understand the issue of child trafficking in the context of the host population in Cox's Bazar. Children can be found in almost every household – there was at least one child in 92% of all surveyed households.

Key issues of child protection that were frequently reported – which also highlight trafficking or at least exploitation risks for children – were early marriage, sexual abuse/violence and abduction for girls, and child labour and detention for boys. There were also other differences between the perceived risks for boys and for girls. For example, as illustrated in the word clouds, certain risks are only associated with boys, as it is the case of recruitment by an armed group and detention. There were no follow-up questions in the survey, to better understand the nature of recruitment into armed groups or the detention, considering that these are typically mentioned in armed conflict settings, which is not the Cox's Bazar context. One potential explanation is the presence of other criminal groups that may target vulnerable children to carry drugs or other contraband, or abduction and extortion.



### Early marriage

One third (32%) of women interviewed who were 20-25 years reported to have married before they reached 18.<sup>6</sup> This confirms that child marriage was common in the Bangladeshi host community in these two sub-districts in Cox's Bazar, which reflects trends in the rest of Bangladesh. Whykong Union had the most reported cases of early marriage at household level in the context of this survey. Almost half of the surveyed households associated early marriage with a safety risk for girls, in a context in which safety risks were not reported as being common. For example, respondents from 86% of households said that they feel secure in their location.

**Child labour was the most commonly reported safety risk for boys (24%), while the risk of marriage was reported to be main risk faced by girls (46%) in the respondents' communities.** The fact that children, and girls in particular, marry was also supported by the finding that approximately one third of all young women in the survey were married before 18. Child labour as a risk for boys was most frequently mentioned in Raja Palong Union, while risk of marriage for girls was most often mentioned in the Sabrang Union (over half of households interviewed).

**A notable reported risk for girls was sexual abuse or sexual violence, which was mentioned by almost half (42%) of the households.** Sabrang was the Union where it was most frequently mentioned. **Approximately 2% of households reported such a risk for boys.** The reported risk of sexual violence that girls might also reflect socio-cultural norms on gender roles. For example, almost half of male respondents said<sup>5</sup> that “a wife should tolerate being beaten by her husband in order to keep the family together.” In addition, these risks were reported in a way that were associated with a domestic (home) environment for girls (e.g. marriage, sexual exploitation), and a more public space for boys (e.g. child labour).



These risks were likely to be local, as 12% of households mentioned that they were aware of marriage offers abroad, which was a much lower percentage than other type of offers reported to happen.

**The rates of perceived risk of abduction for children in the community were high. Risk of abduction for girls (35%) was reported by a higher percentage of households than for boys (21%).**

**About one third of respondents said that they were not aware about the risks for boys in their communities.** This response had the largest share of all response options to the question on the risk for the boys.

<sup>5</sup> This question was asked to male respondents only. They could agree, disagree or select “depends” about specific statements.

<sup>6</sup> The question of early marriage was asked only to women who were aged 20 to 25.



## Interpreting gender norms in the local context for this survey

The context of socio-cultural norms related to gender differences for men, women, boys, and girls must be acknowledged when interpreting the information relevant to risks of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) or human trafficking collected through the survey. For example, the perceptions on the risks that could affect girls might reflect the respondents' social expectations related to gender roles. These risks are linked to situations that place girls in a domestic, home context and to activities that are linked to boys – mostly public places – as result of masculinity norms. Women and girls culturally engage less in income-generating activities. Another example of the importance of gender norms are related to the implications of the findings for the programmatic responses. Interventions should consider the common attitudes towards the role of girls, women, boys and men in the Bangladeshi host communities from Ukhia and Teknaf.

The survey results point towards a strong imbalance in the decision-making power between male and female Bangladeshi. For example, the husband was widely considered by the survey respondents as the primary decision maker, including in the wife's activities outside of the household. For example, nearly half (46%) of women interviewed said that the husband or partner has a final say on her ability to engage in paid work, while 75% of men interviewed said that they disagreed with allowing a married woman to work outside the home. One third of the women interviewed also reported that they were never allowed to go to the market (even if accompanied), in the context in which the market is the primary food source for almost all (94%) of households. One third of women mentioned that the husband or partner has a final say on the use of family planning methods.

Safety concerns are also one of the most frequently mentioned barriers for accessing primary education for both girls and boys.<sup>7</sup> Further details on this were collected during the survey follow-up focus groups. While a few participants noted no safety concerns for children in their communities, a majority shared a fear of road accidents on the way to schools as a primary concern. As it is illustrated in the word clouds 3 and 4, the most frequently mentioned perceived barrier to primary education is the location of the education facilities, which were too far, according to 11% of households. Perceived barriers do not differ greatly by the sex of the respondent, with the exception of boys who are engaged in activities to support their family and parents who think that it is not appropriate for girls to attend school.

In addition, 17% of households reported that they had at least one child in the household who was working, or who was at risk of early marriage, or had been separated and recently joined the household.<sup>8</sup>

39% of households reported the presence of children exhibiting at least one behaviour relating to symptoms of distress in the 30 days prior to data collection. It is not clear whether the symptoms most frequently mentioned – such as headaches or nightmares – were related to any abuse or exploitation.

Just 19 from over 2,000 households surveyed reported missing children, and almost as many said that they prefer not to answer.

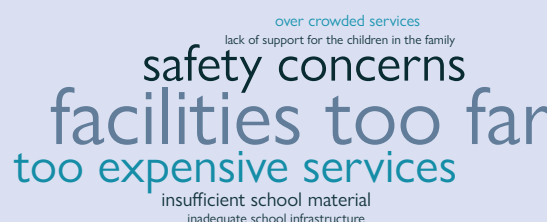
### Knowledge of protection mechanisms

The respondents showed very limited knowledge of community-based protection mechanisms referred to in the survey, such as community or committee members working on child protection (4%) or safety and security (14%).

Word Cloud 3: Barriers for access to primary education for girls



Word Cloud 4: Barriers for access to primary education for boys



<sup>7</sup> No further details about the nature of these safety concerns was collected. Overall, approximately 14% of all households reported barriers to access primary education for girls. The same percentage of households reported barriers for boys.



## Conclusions

The survey findings show risks of trafficking, exploitation and human rights violations, for both Bangladeshi adults and children in the host communities in Ukhia and Teknaf, Cox's Bazar. They give a picture of certain protection needs and risks, in a context that can be characterized by limited and precarious options for rural livelihood and income generating activities, high poverty, inadequate infrastructure, as well as proximity to Bangladesh's border. Some of these issues reported by the host community should be further explored, considering the limitations of this type of survey questionnaire and method.

Considering the context in South-East Bangladesh, it is likely that similar trends related to trafficking risks can also be found affected the Rohingya in formal and informal camp settlements in Cox's Bazar. It can be reasonably assumed that with a few potential exceptions, the Rohingya would not be any more immune than the host population from the human trafficking risks found in this analysis.

## Implications of the findings

### The humanitarian response - addressing the risks and needs of the crisis-affected populations

- There should be accessible services and specialised case management for boys, girls, men and women victims of human trafficking in the two sub-districts, for all crisis-affected populations. The next Humanitarian Response Plan should also meet the most urgent protection needs of Bangladeshi, particularly in Teknaf and Ukhia. The findings do not show major differences in the responses provided by households in Ukhia and households in Teknaf. Interventions, such as reducing barriers for children to access education and increasing livelihood options for men and women, that mitigate the risks of human trafficking should be part of the protection response.
- More should be invested into the capacity of the relevant government ministries to offer social support to vulnerable families. The child protection system should have a preventative approach in addition to the investigative one.
- Parents should access income-generating activities, to avoid households coping mechanisms that involve child labour or child marriage and the associated risks of exploitation, which are widespread practices in the host community. The two sub-districts have a very young population; for example, there was at least one child in most of the surveyed households, and the average age of respondents was 37 years.

- Sensitization campaigns should include:
  - (1) clear messages on the risks for boys
  - (2) men as a target audience
  - (3) information of available services and community-based protection mechanisms, in addition to messages related to the trafficking risks for women and girls, and female audiences. The findings suggest that there appears to be limited knowledge among the households about the risks for boys in their communities, as respondents from one third of household surveyed said that there were no risks for boys. This response might also be related to gender norms, and higher acceptance of boys than of girls in public places. The results suggest that there is very limited knowledge on community-based protection mechanisms.
- Men, in addition to women, girls and boys, should be well included in the prevention and outreach activities, considering that the male respondents of this survey were slightly less aware than women about risks.
- The livelihood and empowerment programs should consider the social norms on gender, and gender roles in family life, before their implementation. For example, the programs aimed at women and girls should be at neighbourhood level. The findings show that the neighbours' home was the most acceptable place for a woman to go alone outside of her home.
- A transition and recovery approach for overall development of the district should be sensitive to the protection needs of the host community and include measures that minimize factors that "push" people into exploitative situations.



District Level Counter Trafficking Committee (CTC) Meeting at Cox's Bazar. © IOM



## Further research/information gathering

### Topics to be researched:

- The reported risks of recruitment into criminal (armed) groups and detention for Bangladeshi boys from the host community should be further explored, through a qualitative survey method.
- The risks of detention for boys that was mentioned of almost one third of surveyed households, should be further explored. For example, it would be useful to understand in which context the detention happens and what is the profile of the boys affected.
- The issue of missing persons should be explored – in what context this is happening, and to whom - as respondents said that they needed information about findings missing persons. Disappearances were also mentioned as a safety risk in the case of children.
- The safety concerns related to access to education should be better understood especially in the context of strengthening the education activities in the context of the response to the crisis. The safety risks for education access were reported in the survey but they were not contextualized or unpacked.
- In addition, the case of the symptoms of distress in the case of children, reported in nearly 40% of interviewed households, could be explored, to understand if they are linked to safety or protection risks.

“Community-based protection mechanisms” should be better defined to match the expectations of the Cox’s Bazar protection. More formative research is on the type of services and institutions exist, which could be perceived to act as protection mechanisms by community members

### Research design:

- The indicators of human trafficking should refer to the experiences of the respondent or the household rather than perceptions about what is happening in the community. If the survey questions are about the direct experiences of respondents or their household members, the surveys should be conducted by protection actors or data collectors who have received additional training on ethical considerations and the application of the “Do no harm” Principles, psychological first aid and referral mechanisms.
- The indicators of human trafficking should have follow-up questions related to all groups of interest – boys, girls, women and men, rather than referring to all members of the host community as a homogenous group. Ideally a thematic assessment, focusing on human trafficking as a protection issue should be conducted.
- “Community-based protection mechanisms” should be better defined to match the expectations of the Cox’s Bazar protection. More formative research is on the type of services and institutions exist, which could be perceived to act as protection mechanisms by community members



Debate competition on combating human trafficking © IOM