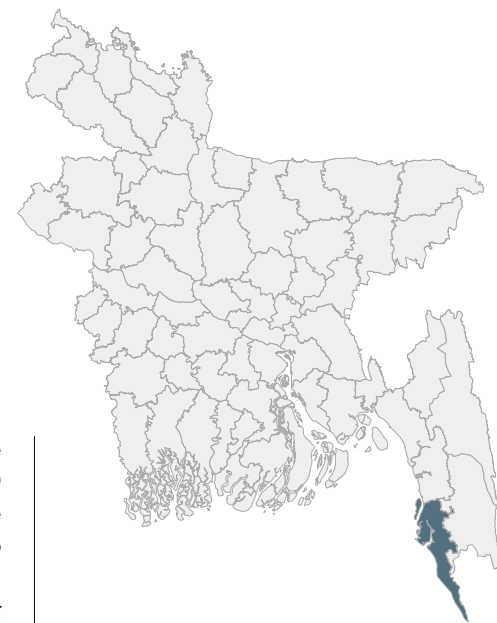


May 2021

For Rohingya, trust begins with who is asking the questions



The Kutupalong–Balukhali expansion site in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh has become one of the largest refugee settlements in the world, since the arrival of more than 700,000 Rohingya in 2017. Surveys and needs assessments among the refugee population are typically designed in English, translated to Bangla, then interpreted during enumeration to Rohingya by Bangladeshi humanitarian workers or interviewers who speak Chittagonian, a local dialect. Chittagonian is often considered mutually intelligible with Rohingya, but this has been questioned by Translators Without Borders (TWB) and other humanitarian actors. One TWB study found the two languages do not use similar words for many important concepts,¹ while the Joint-Multi Sector Needs Assessment (J-MSNA) reported difficulties among refugee communities in understanding information when not delivered in Rohingya.² Moreover, written scripts for Rohingya are new and not in wide use among the population. Only a third of refugee households in Cox’s Bazar are able to read and write.³

Findings from a 2019 REACH pilot assessment indicate survey results from Bangladeshi interviewers can exhibit considerable bias for perception-related questions.⁴ A recent qualitative study from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and ACAPS suggests this bias can be reduced by working with Rohingya interviewers.⁵

In early 2021, Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) in partnership with IOM conducted its fifth round of surveys with Rohingya aid recipients to gauge their views on the humanitarian response. To ascertain whether the ethnicity of the interviewer had an effect their responses, surveys were conducted by both Rohingya and Bangladeshi interviewers across the same locations. We surveyed five camps (2E, 9, 15, 18, 20), with a sample size of approximately 120 per camp and interviewer type.

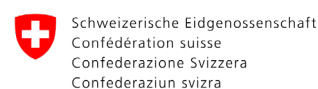
Key findings

- Respondents interviewed by Rohingya express much lower levels of satisfaction with aid services than those interviewed by Bangladeshis. Similar effects were observed for most questions on whether a particular aid service improved over the last 12 months.
- Differences between the interviewer types were also significant on topics around safety, respect and information provided by aid agencies. This variation aligns with the social desirability⁶ of the answer option. Rohingya interviewers are more likely to elicit views that are socially undesirable, and less likely to capture perceptions and behaviors that are socially desirable.

In partnership with:



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¹ Translators Without Borders. September 2019. “Misunderstanding + Misinformation = Mistrust.” https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Report_A_Three-Part_Report_-_Cross-Border_Trends_Sep2019.pdf.

² Inter-sector Coordination Group. October 2020. “Joint Multi-Sector Needs Assessment.” https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/bgd_2020_jmsna_preliminary_findings.pdf.

³ Translators Without Borders. September 2019. “Misunderstanding + Misinformation = Mistrust.”

⁴ REACH. April 2019. “Participation of Rohingya Enumerators in Data Collection Activities.” https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/reach_bgd_brief_rohingya_enumerator_pilot_april2019_1.pdf.

⁵ ACAPS, IOM. April 2021. “Our Thoughts: Rohingya Share Their Experiences and Recommendations.” <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/our-thoughts-rohingya-share-their-experiences-and-recommendations>.

⁶ Social desirability bias is described as “the tendency of some respondents to give positive self-descriptions in order to create a positive image of themselves rather than answering truthfully or accurately.” Kühne, Simon. August 2018. “From Strangers to Acquaintances? Interviewer Continuity and Socially Desirable Responses in Panel Surveys.” *Survey Research Methods*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 121-146. <https://doi.org/10.18148/srm/2018.v12i2.7299>.

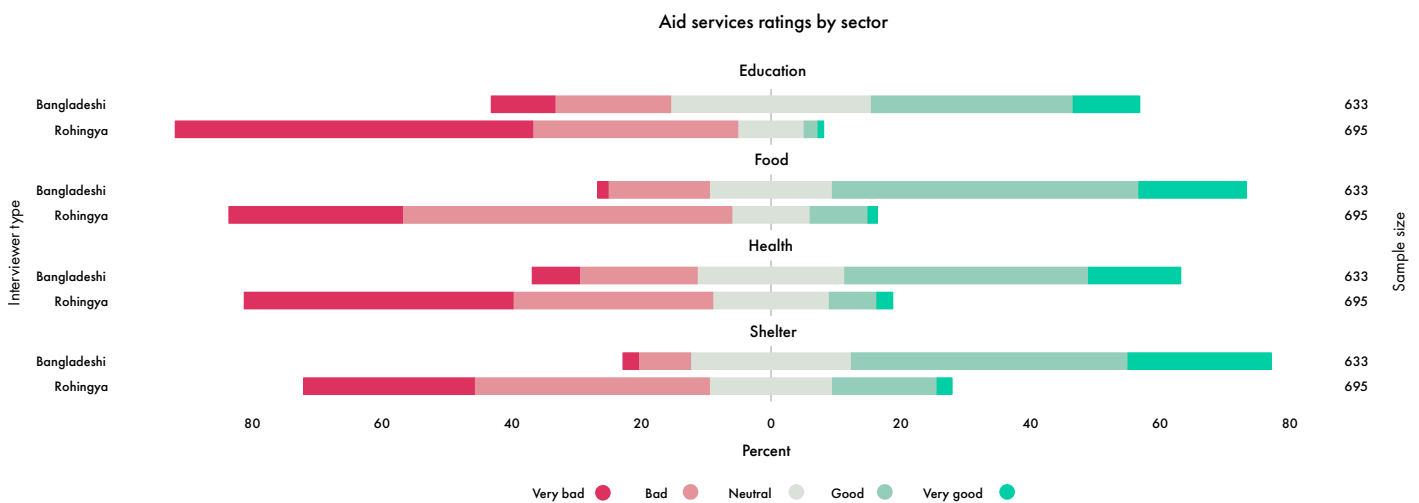
What we found

Ethnicity-of-interviewer effect

Ethnicity-of-interviewer effects are well-studied and documented in the United States,⁷ mainly investigating effects between Black and white interviewers and interviewees. Recently some research has also been conducted in Europe among ethnic minorities and immigrant communities.⁸ Evidence from other parts of the world is more limited, with only a few studies published in the last decade – including in a selection of African countries⁹ and the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁰ No systematic study has been undertaken in a refugee context.

Rohingya are more likely to report dissatisfaction with aid services when speaking to Rohingya

When comparing survey outcomes, we see significant differences between perceptions collected by Bangladeshi vs Rohingya interviewers. When asked whether they are satisfied with education, food, health, and shelter services, the majority of people asked by Rohingya interviewers are dissatisfied, while the majority asked by Bangladeshi interviewers say they are satisfied. Those speaking with Rohingya enumerators were less likely to choose 'neutral'.



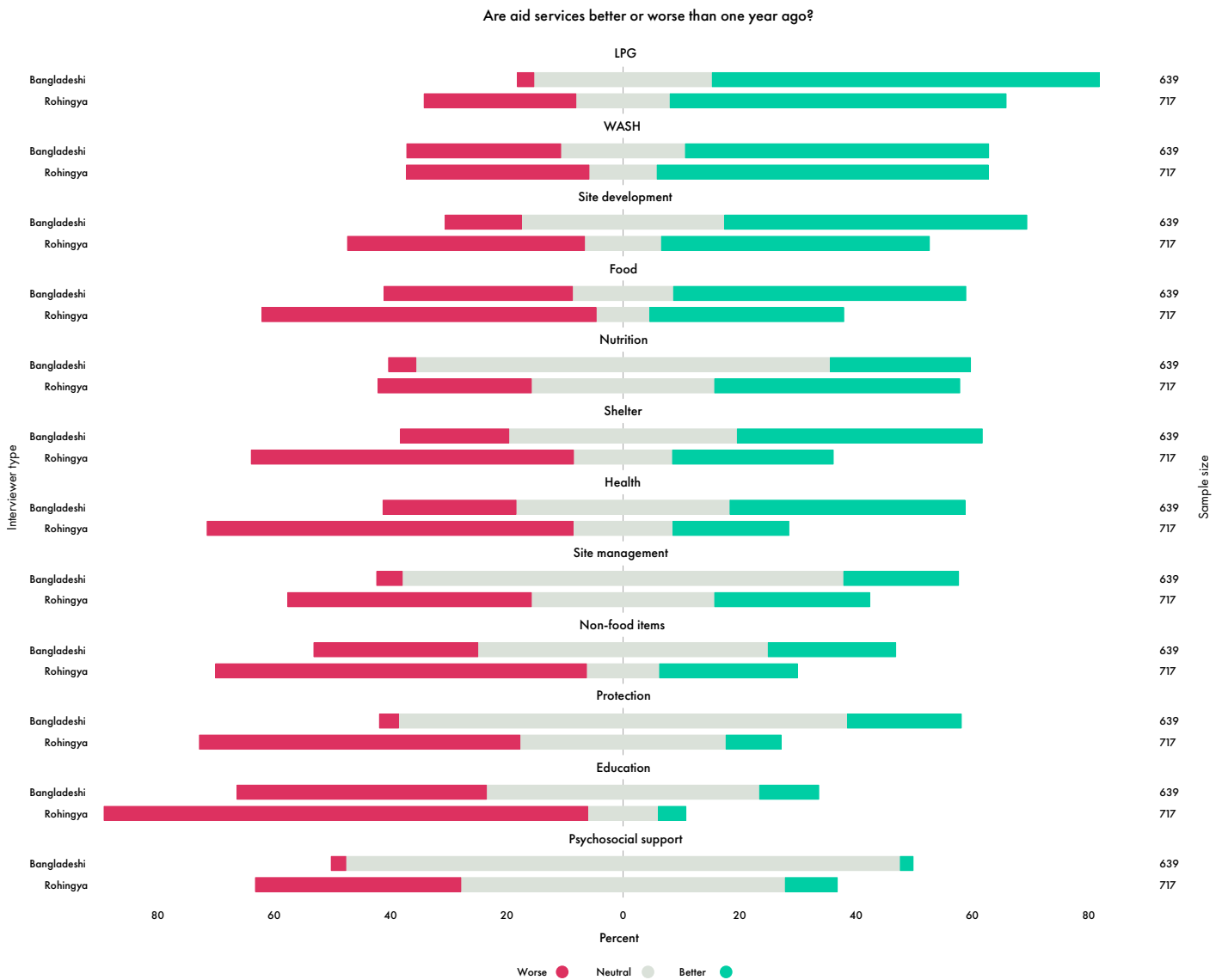
⁷ West, Brady T., and Annelies G. Blom. November 2016. "Explaining Interviewer Effects: A Research Synthesis." *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology*, Vol. 5, Issue 2, pp. 175-211. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jssam/smw024>.

⁸ Kappelhof, Joost. January 2017. "Survey Research and the Quality of Survey Data Among Ethnic Minorities." *Total Survey Error in Practice*, edited by Paul P. Biemer et al., John Wiley & Sons, Inc, pp. 235–52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119041702.ch11>; Heelsum, Anja van. 2013. "The Influence of Interviewers' Ethnic Background in a Survey Among Surinamese in the Netherlands." *Amsterdam University Press*, pp. 111-130. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9789048519187.006>.

⁹ Adida, Claire L., et al. October 2016. "Who's Asking? Interviewer Coethnicity Effects in African Survey Data." *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 12, pp. 1630–1660. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414016633487>.

¹⁰ Gengler, Justin J., et al. November 2019. "Citizenship and Surveys: Group Conflict and Nationality-of-Interviewer Effects in Arab Public Opinion Data." *Political Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-019-09583-4>.

A similar pattern is observed when asking if aid services are better or worse than before. People asked by Bangladeshi interviewers are far more likely to select the neutral option, which could either indicate perceptions of no improvement, or reluctance to give an answer in either direction. For all questions, responses collected by Rohingya are more negative on average. This difference is most stark when people are asked about psychological support services, while the question around water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services elicits the least variation between interviewer groups.



Rohingya are more hesitant to share negative experiences with Bangladeshi interviewers

Whether Rohingya or Bangladeshi interviewers elicited higher levels of agreement seems to align with the social desirability of the answer option (see side bar). Overall, questions asked by Rohingya interviewers elicit higher levels of agreement with socially undesirable topics (whether refugees observed extortion by aid workers, filed a complaint against aid agencies, sold excess food aid, etc).

Social desirability bias

Social desirability bias describes the “tendency of some respondents to give positive self-descriptions in order to create a positive image of themselves rather than answering truthfully or accurately” (see: footnote 6). In a humanitarian context, aid recipients might be incentivised to give positive responses to questions relating to aid quality and systems in order to be viewed more favourably by service providers. Conversely, they might be disincentivised to respond truthfully to questions that are “incriminating” (i.e. selling aid) or sensitive in nature.

For questions that are socially desirable (whether refugees would approach aid workers to report sensitive complaints, can ask aid workers about aid services, believe their opinions are considered in programming, perceive that female family members can use latrines safely at night, etc), we see the opposite effect: data collected by Bangladeshi interviewers shows much higher levels of agreement. Questions that refer to refugees' interactions with people within their own community, and thus have less potential for social desirability bias, showed little to no difference between interviewer groups.

The charts below show differences between interviewer types. Figure 1 exhibits agreement with socially desirable topics, while agreement with less socially desirable topics are represented by Figure 3. Some questions in the middle (Figure 2) have smaller differences, and thus less social desirability loading.

Interpreting graphs (Fig 1-3)

All questions in Figures 1-3 are binary. Survey participants were able to choose "yes," "no," or "don't want to answer." The graphs below only represent those who answered affirmatively to the question ("yes").

Figures 1 and 3 show more than 10% difference in responses between enumerator types. Figure 2 exhibits less than 10% difference between interviewer types.

Fig. 1: Binary questions eliciting more agreement from Bangladeshi interviewers

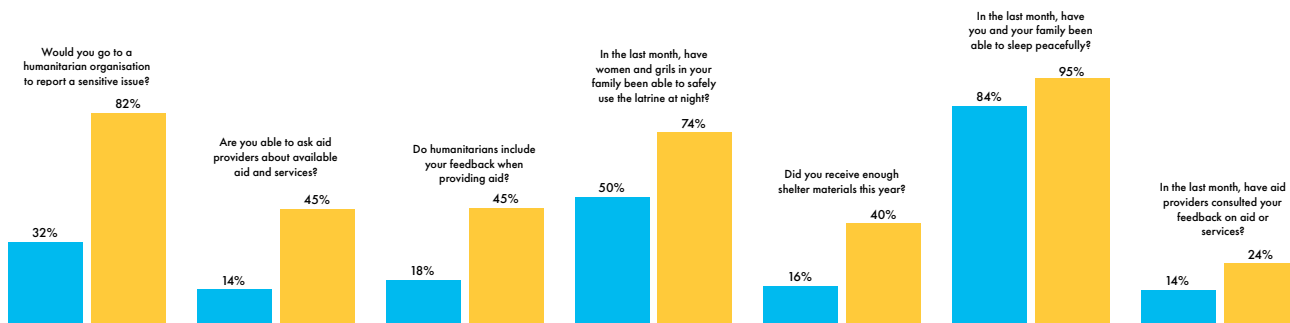


Fig. 2: Binary questions eliciting similar responses from both interviewer types

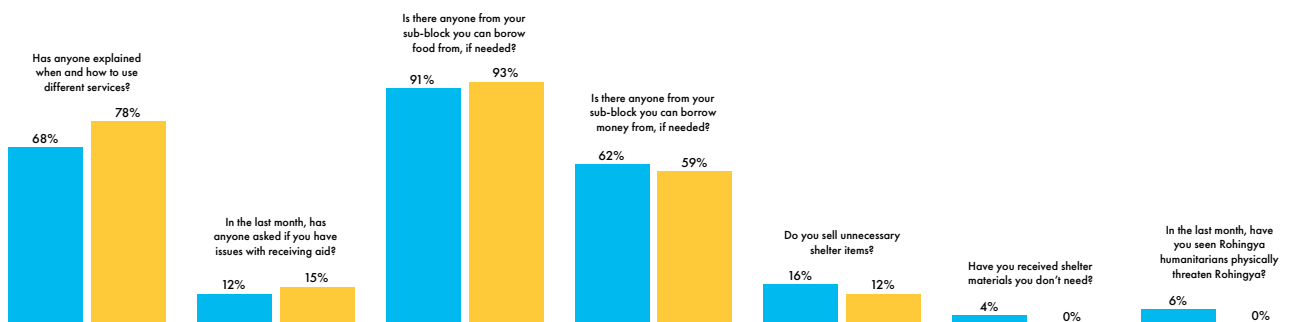
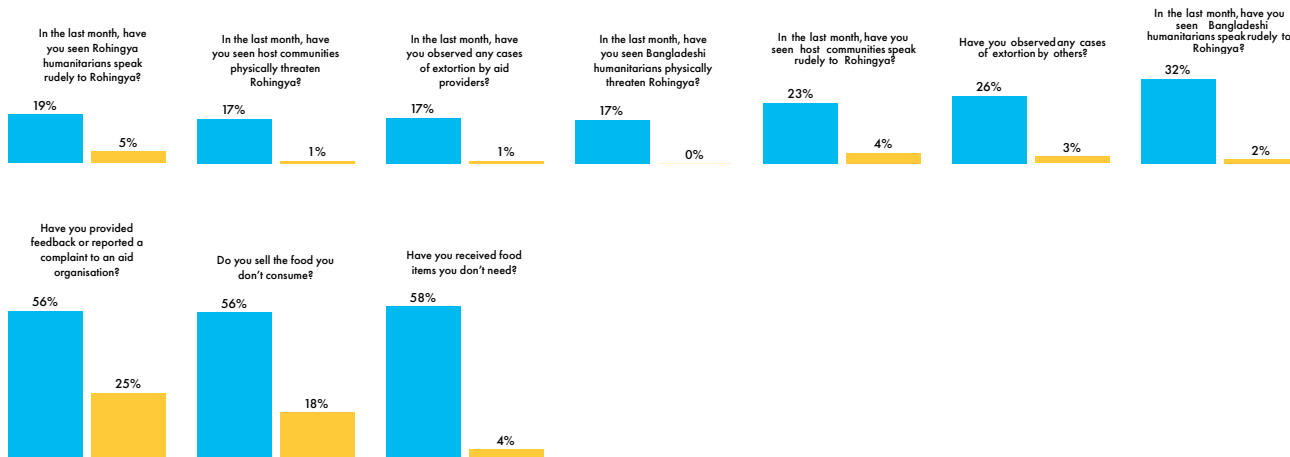


Fig. 3: Binary questions eliciting more agreement from Rohingya interviewers



● Rohingya interviewers ● Bangladeshi interviewers

Conclusions

Of the 40 questions asked, only six do not show significant difference¹¹ by interviewer ethnicity.¹² This demonstrates the extent to which response biases have impacted our understanding of the needs, preferences, and experiences of Rohingya in Cox's Bazar. Our research shows that Rohingya feel more comfortable sharing their honest perspectives with people from their own ethnic group, especially around more sensitive, "socially undesirable" topics.

Recommendations

While some questions remain unanswered, the following recommendations may bring us a step closer to reducing bias and better understanding of experiences of Rohingya aid recipients.

1. Provide qualitative and bias training to Bangladeshi interviewers.
2. When creating new surveys, work closely with Rohingya interviewers and let them formulate and test specific questions in Rohingya, taking into account speech patterns and nonverbal communication techniques, rather than translating questions from English or Bangla.
3. Hire and train a larger number of Rohingya interviewers.
4. For questions with large ethnicity-of-interviewer effect, conduct surveys exclusively with Rohingya interviewers.
5. If conducting surveys with both interviewer types, inform researchers on which questions Rohingya are more likely to provide more accurate results. Identify questions that are prone to ethnicity-of-interviewer effects and report size of these effects in addition to the usual survey characteristics, such as sampling approach and size, and margins of error.

¹¹ We found statistically significant differences between these two groups for 36 out of the 40 questions by using relevant multivariate and univariate tests. More details will be presented in more technical subsequent publication.

¹² Questions which do not show a significant difference between enumerator groups include: *Are WASH services better or worse than one year ago?; Are nutrition services better or worse than one year ago?; Do you have to sell shelter materials that you don't need?; Last month, has anyone come to ask whether you have any problems with receiving aid?; If you had an emergency, is there someone in your sub-block you can borrow money from?; and If you did not have enough food, is there someone in your sub-block you can borrow food from?*

Methodology

Survey tool

In and out-group effects, problems with understanding the language, and “differences in the interpretation of concepts” are considered to be the main factors that contribute to measurement errors when surveying ethnic minorities.¹⁴ While in and out-group effects and language barriers remain an issue, challenges around understanding concepts were mitigated through a mixed-method approach in survey design.

The questionnaire was designed in collaboration with Rohingya interviewers and qualitative researchers from IOM’s Communication with Communities (CwC) team, drawing from themes commonly explored by Ground Truth Solutions’ perception monitoring work. The survey tool consisted of 40 questions, most of which were binary in nature.

Questions about aid satisfaction were split into two parts: respondents were initially asked whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the aid they receive, followed by a question on the magnitude of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The answers to these two questions were combined to create a five-level ordinal scale. Questions on whether humanitarian aid and services improved or worsened in the last 12 months were asked separately and then combined into a three-level ordinal scale (improved, neutral, worsened).

Testing the survey tool

The survey tool was tested by Rohingya interviewers using an initial set of pilot questions derived from qualitative studies carried out by IOM CwC. The interview questions were then adjusted based on feedback from this pilot phase.

Training

Rohingya interviewers received training on both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods through IOM CwC – including on topics such as detection of bias in responses. The team was newly trained and less experienced in quantitative enumeration than their Bangladeshi counterparts. Bangladeshi interviewers were part of a 100-member enumeration team that regularly conducts surveys and assessments in the camps. Most of these enumerators have multiple years of experience in quantitative data collection. Both groups received the same training on the survey tool and how to use the form in Kobo. The same trainer conducted sessions for both groups.

Language

Bangladeshi interviewers used questionnaire forms that were translated to Bangla, and consequently translated to Rohingya during data collection. Rohingya interviewers used the original questionnaire developed in Rohingya.

Sampling

Out of the 34 camps in the Kutupalong–Balukhali expansion site, we selected five camps based on camp size, population density, and level of refugee community interaction with host communities. Given the overall high population density and lack of census data in the camps, a geo-information-systems-based (GIS) sampling approach was used. Approximately 120 coordinates per enumerator group were randomly generated for each camp. Interviewers then used the coordinates to survey people at these locations. The actual sample sizes were slightly higher than planned, as demonstrated below. With a sample size of 120 people per camp, the margin of error amounts to 9% at a 95% CL.

Table 1: Interviews per camp and enumerator type

Interviewer ethnicity	Camp 2E	Camp 9	Camp 15	Camp 18	Camp 20	Total
Rohingya	137	141	145	142	152	717
Bangladeshi	132	124	127	130	126	639
Total	269	265	272	272	278	1,356

This paper presents key findings from our study on ethnicity-of-interviewer effects in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh in early 2021. Data for this analysis was collected as a part of our ongoing work to track the perceptions of Rohingya and host communities on the aid and services they receive.

Our quantitative survey is conducted in partnership with the IOM Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM) and Communication with Communities (CwC) units. With the support of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), GTS will continue to collect surveys on a bi-annual basis to inform response planning and programme adjustments.

To see our [previous reports](#) on feedback from Rohingya and host communities, or findings from our [COVID-19 perception survey](#), visit our [website](#).

Perception data

Ground Truth Solutions gathers feedback from affected people, using their views, opinions, and perceptions to assess humanitarian responses. Gathering perception data from affected populations should be viewed as complementary to other monitoring and performance data. Collecting feedback is a vital first step in closing the accountability gap, empowering affected populations to be part of the decisions that govern their lives, building relationships with communities, and understanding local knowledge. Whenever possible, the process of collecting such feedback should be followed up with longer-term dialogue between affected communities and aid agencies. Communicating the results of the surveys back to affected people and triangulating perception data with other information sources is central to our approach in Cox’s Bazar.

Survey participation and bias detected by interviewers

No information on declined interviews is available for Bangladeshi interviewers. For Rohingya interviewers, 18 people approached for an interview declined to participate and seven did not receive humanitarian assistance. For another four people interviewed, interviewers flagged potential bias of the survey respondent. This considered instances where the presence of, or interruptions by, others in the area (neighbours, aid workers, family members) may have influenced survey responses. These interviews were not considered for the analysis and are not included in the table above.

Data collection dates

Rohingya interview teams collected data between 1 February and 3 March 2021, and Bangladeshi interviewers between 7 February and 2 March 2021.

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For more information about our work in Bangladesh or to provide feedback on this report, please contact Cholpon Ramizova (cholpon@groundtruthsolutions.org) or Meg Sattler (meg@groundtruthsolutions.org).