

COX'S BAZAR PANEL SURVEY: RAPID FOLLOW-UP ROUND 2

# STATUS OF EDUCATION AMONG SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN IN COX'S BAZAR



This is the third in a series of briefs to disseminate findings from high-frequency rapid follow-ups on the CBPS sample, by the Poverty and Equity GP of the World Bank.



EDUCATION



COVID-19



CHILDREN

This brief summarizes findings from rapid welfare tracking surveys in Cox's Bazar. Two rounds of tracking surveys were implemented via phone interviews in 2020 to monitor the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on labor markets, wages, and household coping strategies. The first round was conducted during the COVID-related lockdowns in April-May 2020. A second round was conducted from October-December 2020 (roughly 6 months after the government-imposed lockdowns), and also included a short module on education. The brief recaps key findings from the 2019 baseline on education, followed by updated findings on the status of school-aged children from the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of the rapid follow-up surveys in light of COVID-19 induced school closures and disruptions.

These rapid phone surveys are built on the Cox's Bazar Panel Survey (CBPS), which is a multi-topic survey that focused on socio-economic outcomes and access to services. The baseline CBPS survey, implemented in March-August 2019, was designed to be representative of the recently displaced Rohingya population (displaced after August 2017) in Cox's Bazar and the host community. Within the host community, the survey was further stratified into high exposure (HE, within 3 hours walking distance of a Rohingya camp) and low exposure (LE, more than 3 hours walking distance from a Rohingya camp) areas within the district. The overall sample size of the CBPS baseline was 5020 households, split roughly equally across Rohingya camps and host communities, and within the latter, equally among HE and LE areas. In this second tracking survey, 3,438 households originally surveyed in the baseline were covered.

## KEY MESSAGES:

### 1.

**Children in high exposure areas demonstrate gains in education access since 2019 despite COVID-19 closures, possibly due to the heightened focus of humanitarian efforts on alternative access to learning.** At baseline in 2019, HE areas had higher dropout rates particularly from secondary school, and a higher share of out-of-school children, compared to LE areas. By late 2020, high exposure host households continued to report higher rates of school dropouts but also reported higher shares of school-aged children remaining engaged in educational activities despite school closures.

### 2.

**Beyond COVID closures, financial constraints remained a key factor behind dropouts, in addition to gender-specific constraints.** Half of the school aged children in the host community reported not studying due to COVID closures in 2020, with low exposure children reporting higher inactivity than high exposure counterparts. Financial constraints remain the most pervasive non-COVID related issue for all school-aged children, potentially made worse by COVID-induced labor market shocks. Households, particularly in HE regions, reporting a lower number of income sources compared to baseline were significantly more likely to report financial constraints and the need to start working as reasons for children not to study anymore.

### 3.

**Despite COVID-induced closures in educational programs in the Rohingya camps, there has been an increase in educational engagement among teenage children. This may reflect increased efforts by UNICEF in ensuring basic grade competencies in preparation for the GoB decision to expand the scope of education for Rohingya children to secondary equivalent levels under the Myanmar curriculum.** While rates of current education engagement among children 5-12 years old have seen declines (possibly due to COVID-19 closures), the 13-16 age group reported more than double the rates of educational engagement compared to 2019.



#### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PROGRAMMING:

1. Faced with overwhelming concerns that school closures due to COVID would have wide-ranging and long-term implications on youth literacy and education continuity, the humanitarian education sector strengthened its focus on maintaining and expanding access to alternate learning modes, including through home-based caregiver-led education and distance learning. This response to a tangible nation-wide bottleneck was relatively more successful in HE areas, given the higher presence of humanitarian efforts.
2. This success story suggests that it may be worthwhile to invest in alternative learning modes for school-age children at risk of dropping out of school, by bringing schooling closer to home, rather than relying solely on physical attendance in classrooms. Analysis of reasons behind school drop-outs suggest that such strategies may help teenage boys at risk of dropping out flexibly manage school and work responsibilities; and help teenage girls continue their education in the face of increasing mobility constraints.
3. Bringing education closer to the home may also help the HE host community take advantage of opportunities for increased labor market earnings from tertiary education. Residents of Ukhia and Teknaf face relatively long travel times to the nearest secondary schools. Expanding education and learning access could help keep secondary-school age children in school, and increase the pool of young, educated adults who can gain from the increased supply of relatively well-paying jobs in and around the humanitarian effort.

## ABOUT THE COX'S BAZAR PANEL SURVEY AND HIGH FREQUENCY ROUNDS.

Bangladesh's local economy started experiencing impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in early to mid-March 2020, with the first case being reported on 7 March. A full countrywide lockdown was in place from 26 March-28 May 2020. The first round of the CBPS high-frequency tracking surveys was conducted within the government lockdowns (between April-May 2020) and focused on capturing key trends in the labor market related to the economic contraction.

Findings from the second round, conducted approximately 6 months following the lockdowns (October-December 2020) are summarized in this brief. Round 2 surveyed 1,092 households in high exposure upazilas (primarily Ukhia-Teknaf), 1,088 households in low exposure upazilas (Cox's Bazar Sadar, Ramu, Pekua, Chakaria) and 1,662 households in Rohingya camps. Education data was collected as part of the household roster in the baseline survey and added as a module in the Round 2 rapid follow-up. Education updates were collected on current engagement

### TIMELINES

<b>Baseline</b>	Mar-Aug	2019
<b>Round 1</b>	Apr-May	2020
<b>Round 2</b>	Oct-Dec	2020

of school-aged children in studies, reasons for not studying and households' intention to send children back to school post-closures. Findings are presented using the survey rounds as repeated cross-sections, and confirmed through panel analysis.

The education update initiated in Round 2 is part of a broader, mixed methods study on aspirations and well-being which aims to understand parental aspirations and ambitions for their children, and the capacity of the Rohingya and Bangladeshi hosts in Cox's Bazar to achieve those aspirations.

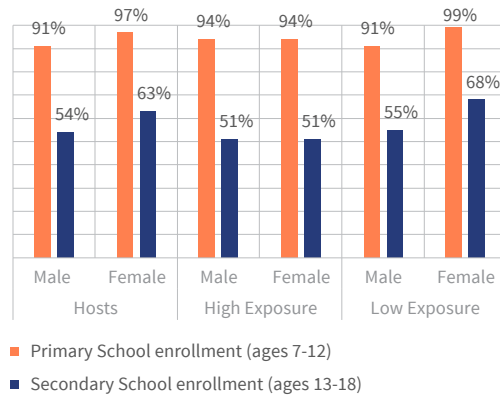
## HOST COMMUNITIES IN 2019: LOW LITERACY ADULT POPULATION WITH GENDER GAPS; AMONG SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN, HIGH PRIMARY ENROLMENT RATES BUT SIGNIFICANT SECONDARY SCHOOL DROPOUT.

According to the CBPS baseline conducted in 2019, only 60 percent of host adults in Cox's Bazar can read; one-third of the adult population have no schooling at all, and an additional 25 percent have reached primary school completion or less. There is also a gender gap in educational attainment between adults: 37 percent of adult women have no schooling, compared to 29 percent of men. Adults in high exposure areas reported lower educational attainment than low exposure adults, with larger male-female gaps in attainment in Ukhia and Teknaf. Among children of school-going age, enrollment rates in primary

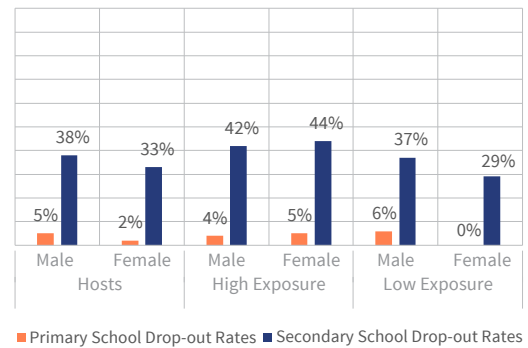
school were high in 2019 (Figure 2). There were no visible gender gaps, except in low-exposure host communities, where girls reported higher enrollment rates. However, secondary enrollment rates were lower than the national average: 54 percent for boys and 63 percent for girls, compared to national rates of 63 percent and 66 percent respectively (Figure 2). This was mirrored in the much higher rates of dropouts in secondary schools, for both girls and boys, especially in high exposure regions (Figure 1). On average, more than a third of secondary school age children drop out before completing this level.

## REASONS FOR NON-ATTENDANCE AND DROPOUTS AMONG SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN VARY SHARPLY BY GENDER.

**Figure 1:** Baseline (2019) enrolment rates in host communities

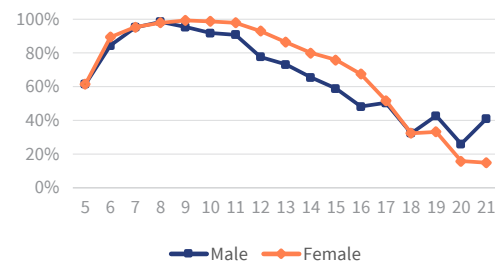


**Figure 2:** Baseline (2019) dropout rates in host communities



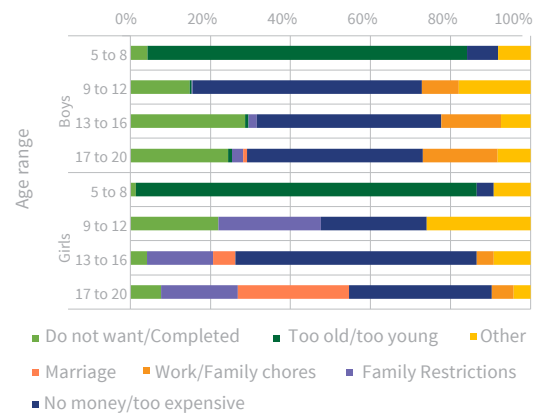
Within the host community, boys and girls are generally equally likely to be attending school until the age of 12. Gender gaps in attendance start to appear in this cohort of children of secondary school age, with girls more likely to attend school than boys. By age 18, this pattern is somewhat reversed (Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Age distribution by gender for baseline (2019) school attendance



Educational costs and the lack of sufficient funds for education were most cited reasons for host girls not attending school (36 percent), followed by marriage (18 percent) and family/social restrictions (16 percent). Out-of-school girls from the host community were likely leave school for marriage between the ages of 17 and 20 (28 percent).

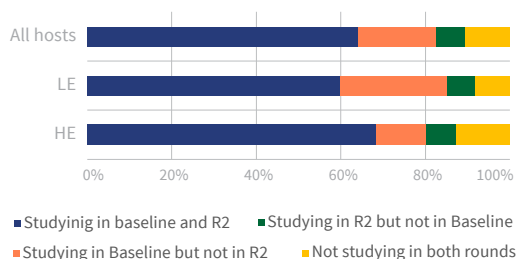
**Figure 4:** Reasons for not going to school during baseline (2019)



The primary reason cited for not attending amongst host community school-aged boys were financial costs of education (41 percent) followed by reporting completing education or not wanting to study (22 percent), and the need to work (14 percent).

## DESPITE HAVING A HIGHER SHARE OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL AT BASELINE AND IN ROUND 2, CHILDREN IN HE AREAS WHO WERE IN SCHOOL, WERE MORE LIKELY TO REMAIN ENGAGED IN STUDIES AMIDST SCHOOL CLOSURES IN 2020, COMPARED WITH THEIR PEERS IN LE AREAS.

**Figure 5:** Panel transitions between baseline and R2 education status, out of all school



Between October-December 2020 (Round 2 of the tracking surveys, R2), two out of three host households reported that school-aged children (5-18) were actively studying, with the proportions in HE being larger than LE and with no notable difference between boys and girls. The higher rates of student engagement could be attributable to the government's nationwide efforts in ensuring remote-learning platforms during COVID-19 closures, with high exposure regions receiving added attention from the education cluster in Ukhiya-Teknaf as part of the Rohingya response. Educational continuity among

school aged children in the host community are also found to correlate significantly with education level and current employment status of the household head, suggesting that such households may place greater value on continuing their child(ren)'s education through alternative channels such as online learning and private tuitions, and have the means to do so.

Panel transitions between the baseline and R2 uncover similar topline trends: despite a larger proportion of school age children out of school in both rounds in HE areas, both retention in school during COVID, and new entrance to school during COVID are higher in HE areas. At baseline and R2, 13 percent of school age children in HE areas were out of school compared with 8 percent in LE areas. However, the share of children currently studying in R2 is higher in HE areas, at 75 percent, compared with 67 percent in LE areas. This is partially explained by two positive shifts in HE areas: (a) a higher share of children studying in R2 relative to baseline; and (b) and a lower share of children in school in baseline but not in school in R2.

## FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS CONTINUE TO BE A KEY FACTOR BEHIND DROPOUTS BEYOND COVID CLOSURE, WITH ADDITIONAL CONSTRAINTS FOR GIRLS.

Among children not studying during R2, 50 percent were reported as being temporarily out of school due to COVID-related school closures. 99 percent of their parents reported that the children would return to school when they reopened. However, COVID-19 closures seem to have impacted education more strongly in LE areas than in HE areas close to camps. Indeed, the share of LE school aged children reporting being out of school and not studying due to COVID-related school closures is twice as high as in HE areas (63 vs 32 percent). Among those who were out of school due to non-COVID-related reasons, financial constraints were the key reason for all

children. For girls, the most common reasons reported was included marriage and other social constraints, whereas for boys, financial constraints paired with needing to join the labor force as most common reasons for not studying. Panel analysis confirm these trends showing that COVID-related school closures were the main reason for households reporting children dropping out of school between the baseline in 2019 and R2 in late 2020. For those out of school in both rounds, structural barriers such as social restrictions, marriage, need to work and financial constraints remain important constraints.

## HOW DO GAINS IN EDUCATION ACCESS AND ATTAINMENT AFFECT BROADER WELL-BEING IN COX'S BAZAR?

Analysis on the returns to education on the labor market indicate that, a priori, statistically significant returns to education for hosts emerge only when individuals have obtained some level of tertiary education. However, there are some differences in returns across high and low exposure areas. For HE hosts, returns to tertiary education are significantly positive only when the individual is a wage worker in the service sector. This may be related to the recent emergence of NGO jobs in Ukhiya-Teknaf related to the Rohingya response and efforts to support the neighboring host community. More generally, individuals with tertiary education only receive significant-

ly higher returns if they are wage workers. For self-employed individuals, earning levels do not seem to be impacted significantly by education, but instead depend on their sector of activity.

While tertiary education attainment clearly generates returns in employment in the form of monthly salaried, formal jobs (all host individuals with tertiary education who were employed had these types of jobs), only 3.65 percent of hosts had attained this level of education at baseline. The paucity of educated individuals is also evident in the fact that more than four-fifths of monthly salaried jobs are held by individuals with higher secondary education or less.

## ROHINGYA COMMUNITIES<sup>1</sup>: VERY LOW LITERACY ADULT POPULATION WITH LARGE GENDER GAPS; SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN IN CAMPS ONLY HAD LIMITED ACCESS TO INFORMAL LEARNING CENTERS IN CAMPS AT BASELINE.

In 2019, 62 percent of Rohingya adults reported never having attended school, and an additional 22 percent who attended did not complete primary school. Only 23 percent of Rohingya adults reported being able to read, with considerably larger gender gaps than what was observed in

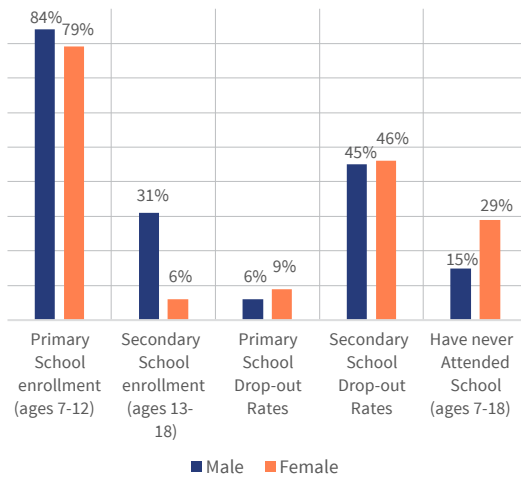
host communities. Among school-aged children in camps, despite reliance on informal learning centers, access to some form of educational attainment was already better than their previous generations with 58 percent attending schools.

Table 1: Schooling Attainment for adults (18+), by stratum and gender

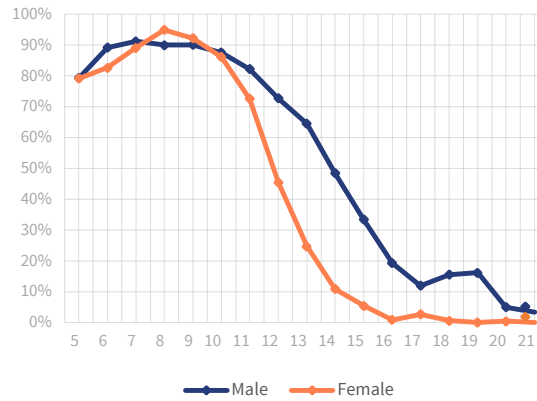
Gender	No Schooling	Some Primary	Complete Primary	Some Secondary	Complete Secondary	Religious Education
Male	51%	24%	2%	12%	2%	4%
Female	71%	21%	1%	2%	0%	5%

<sup>1</sup>As per the regulations set by the Government of Bangladesh, there is no formal curriculum operational inside camps. Education is provided to Rohingya under the Learning Competency Framework and Approach (LCFA), based on which the “Guidelines for Informal Education Programming” (GIEP) was drafted. Levels I and II i.e., the equivalent levels up to grade 2 in a formal school system are currently approved, with higher levels approval and operationalization in process.

**Figure 6: Educational attainment by gender of school aged children in camps during the 2019 baseline**



**Figure 7: Age distribution by gender for baseline (2019) school attendance**



At baseline in 2019, Rohingya children in camps had no access to a formal education system with standardized curriculum and instruction with more than 70 percent of the children going to learning centers (LC’s) run by various non-government organizations (NGOs). Consequentially, while primary enrolment rates for the community were on the higher end (84 percent for boys, 79 percent for girls) with effectively no gender gaps, the status of secondary education attainment was equally abysmal. Enrollment rates are substantially lower, and the gender gap worse (Figure 6)<sup>2</sup>.

There was also clear evidence of divergence in school attendance amongst the Rohingya children by gender after the age of 10. Only 45 percent of Rohingya girls aged 12 were attending school, compared to 73 percent of boys of the same age (Figure 7). The gap increases with age as by the age 15, a negligible proportion of Rohingya girls are enrolled in any type of schooling (5 percent), compared to more than a third of boys (33 percent).

Rohingya children do not have access to a formal education system with standardized curriculum and instruction. The education cluster led by UNICEF, in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) built the Learning Competency Framework and Approach (LCFA), which is currently followed across informal Learning Centers (LC’s) in camps.

Based on the LCFA, the GoB drafted the “Guidelines for Informal Education Programming” (GIEP) policy, a 2-year program designed to facilitate attainment of basic competencies across age groups 5-14 years. Under the GIEP, Levels I and II are equivalent to pre-primary up to grade 2 teaching English and Burmese literacy, numeracy, life skills; Levels III and IV are equivalent to grades 3-8, with the addition of science as a subject. Apart from learning centers under the LCFA, adolescents aged 15 to 18 years received literacy, numeracy, life-skills and vocational skills training in centers such as Multi-purpose Child and Adolescent Centre’s run by UNICEF.

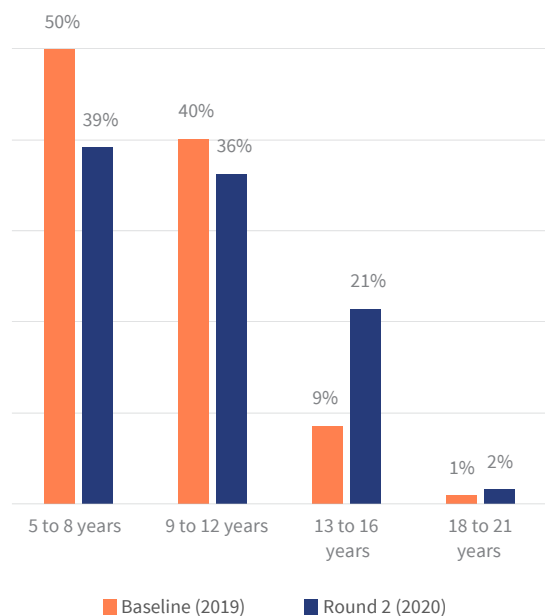
<sup>2</sup>These rates of enrolment coincide with updated findings according to the 2020 Multi Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA), which states that 76 per cent of girls and 80 per cent of boys aged 6 to 14 were attending NGO-run LCs.



DESPITE LOCKDOWNS AND SCHOOL CLOSURES, RATES OF REPORTED ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION CLEARLY INDICATE THE EXPANSIONS IN ACCESS.

Despite the protracted operational contractions on account of COVID-19, half of the school-aged children (54 percent) reported studying during Round 2 (Oct-Dec 2020), indicative of the efforts by the education cluster in attempting to ensure education continuity through a range of door-to-door service delivery and distance-learning methods.

While rates of current education engagement among previously well-established groups aged 5-12 years old have seen expected declines (plausibly due to COVID-19 closures), the 13-16 age group on the contrary reported more than double the rates of educational engagement compared to 2019. There may be two ways to explain this, apart from the obvious factor of children from lower age groups in baseline continuing to study.



The Government of Bangladesh’s decision to expand access to education for the Rohingya under the Myanmar curriculum is expected to benefit post-primary students significantly. On 29 January 2020, the Government of Bangladesh eased regulations of education, granting approval for the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot (MCP) in the camps. This pilot plans to initially target Rohingya students from grades 6-9, an older cohort of children/adolescents who currently have lower access than younger groups. The curriculum is being prepared to include Burmese, English, mathematics, science and social studies. Later phases are expected to expand access across grades and subjects covered.

The education sector in Cox’s Bazar had planned to introduce the Myanmar curriculum in camps starting in April 2020, initially targeting 10,000 Rohingya students in grades six to nine. COVID restrictions starting in end-March however classified education under non-essential operations, putting a halt to said improvements in education access inside camps.

(i) Ongoing preparations for expanding education access under the Myanmar curriculum may be responsible for increased appetite and participation among these age-groups.

(ii) home-based caregiver led education modalities in camps introduced in response to Learning Center (LC) closures may have catalyzed higher participation among female adolescents, whom parents are reluctant to send to co-educational LCs for socio-cultural reasons<sup>3</sup>. This hypothesis is further strengthened by the fact that increase in participation in this age-group was driven by girls (+28 percentage points; boys: +16 percentage points).

<sup>3</sup>Source: Sreeparna Banerjee, “Children Left Behind: Challenges in Providing Education to the Rohingya Children in Bangladesh,” ORF Issue Brief No. 465, May 2021, Observer Research Foundation.