

Halima, Bangladesh



Halima returning from collecting water from a pump near her shelter in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.
Photo credit: Inmanuel Biswas/Caritas Bangladesh

[▶ Watch Halima's story.](#)

Halima is raising two children under seven, in an overpopulated refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, while caring for her mother who has a disability. Widowed at just 21, Halima fled increasing violence in Myanmar in 2017, arriving at the camp with nothing. Caritas Australia, through its partner, Caritas Bangladesh, helped Halima by providing a shelter and cooking equipment so that she could feed her family. She also participated in a water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) program, before taking on the role of community WASH trainer herself. Halima strives to 'Be More' as she works to provide a healthy, thriving and independent life for her family.

After the tragic passing of her husband several years ago, Halima was left to fend for herself, caring for her young children and her widowed mother whose disability means she has difficulty walking. Then life in Myanmar became too dangerous.

"In Myanmar, we have always been victims of discrimination. We had no opportunity to go to school. They started to bomb, shoot us and set fire to the houses in the village. Leaving our homeland and coming to an unknown country for us was a matter of survival. I felt devastated inside."

During the three-day journey to Bangladesh, Halima walked across mountains and through jungles, fearful of foxes and elephants, often struggling to carry her mother – with little food to eat.

Halima arrived at the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, home to over 1.3 million people, with no way of providing for her children with their most basic daily needs, with no way even to protect them from the scorching sun.

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Caritas Australia, in solidarity with its partner organisation, Caritas Bangladesh, provided Halima with a stove and gas, so that she could cook for her family, and helped her to set up a makeshift shelter. As time went by, Caritas helped Halima to improve her new home, building retention walls and drains to protect it from monsoonal rains, as well as maintaining wells, toilets and waste management.

Halima also participated in a water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) program, learning safe hygiene practices, how to source clean drinking water and to keep her family clean and healthy in the densely-populated camp.

She was then appointed to the role of community mobiliser, responsible for inspecting and organising the cleaning of washrooms, wells and toilets in her block and sharing her knowledge of safe practices with others in the camp – a role particularly important as the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

With the help of community mobilisers, like Halima, Caritas Bangladesh and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) worked to minimise the spread of coronavirus by distributing information, hygiene kits, soap, masks and protective equipment, installing hand-washing stations, and conducting training sessions about COVID-19.

Halima is proud that she is able to earn a small income from her training role, while also helping to maintain the cleanliness of the camp community. Her son, now aged 7, and her daughter, aged 5, are adapting to life in the camp and have started attending school.

“My life has changed a lot after participating in the WASH program,” Halima says. “Before, my kids fell sick two or three times a month. Now I can keep my children clean, educate them and cover expenses for their needs. I can feed them balanced food and ensure our clothes are clean. I can afford a doctor and medicines for my mother.” Over 2,300 households which includes around 10,580 people, have benefitted from the program so far.

Halima aspired to ‘Be More’ for her family and for her community in the camp. Taking small steps, she made a big difference to their daily lives, sowing seeds of hope for the future.

“We are very thankful to Australian people. We pray for their sound health and positivity so that they can keep stretching a helping hand as always,” says Halima. Thank you very much Caritas Australia.”

“We will educate our children, make them empowered so that they can stand on their own. We will bring them up with dignity to secure their future,” Halima says.



Halima shares a meal with her children, cooked on a Caritas donated LPG gas stove, in their shelter in a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh. Photo credit: Inmanuel Biswas/Caritas Bangladesh

TOPIC STUDY: FORCED DISPLACEMENT



Engage with the [Country Study Thinglink](#) and do some of your own research to find out the information below. Suggestions for reliable sources are included on the Thinglink and below.

<p>Predict how many people are forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations.</p> <p>Find out the correct answer. Does this surprise you? Why/Why not? What has changed?</p>	<p>Prediction:</p>	<p>https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/get-facts/</p> <p>https://www.refugeeweek.org.au/statistics-on-refugees/</p>	
	<p>Actual:</p>	<p>How many internally displaced people (IDPs) are there worldwide?</p>	
		<p>What is the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee?</p>	
<p>68% of all refugees originated from just five countries. Myanmar is one, what are the other four countries?</p>		<p>What does it mean to be 'stateless'?</p>	
<p>What percentage of forcibly displaced persons are children below the age of 18 years of age?</p>		<p>Identify the main reasons people are forcibly displaced from their home countries.</p>	
<p>What is the average length of time that refugees spend in camps?</p>		<p>How many refugees does Australia recognise or resettle annually?</p>	
<p>Summarise Caritas Australia's support to improve the wellbeing of refugees</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>		<p>Select two relevant Sustainable Development Goals relevant to forced displacement.</p> <p>Why did you select these?</p> <p>www.globalgoals.org</p>	

“Dear young people. Do not bury your talents, the gifts that God has given you! Do not be afraid to dream of great things!”

- Pope Francis

Reflection questions:

- How did Halima use her own gifts to help others in her community?
- Why is it important that we do not hide our gifts and talents?
- What are ‘great things’ that we can use our gifts and talents to achieve?

How could you use your gifts and talents to raise awareness about the issues raised in Halima’s story?

Advocate

Put your new knowledge into action. Use Caritas Australia's Advocacy Toolkit which covers how to build your advocacy message, action ideas, engaging your MP, organising a petition, engaging the media, and raising aware in your community.

[Download the toolkit here](#)



Pray

Write a prayer of intercession based on what you have learnt from Halima's story. You may want to share these as a class at an end of the week reflection, or on your online classroom platform.

Here is an example of one:

Loving God, we pray for those who are forcibly removed from their homes and have experienced hurt and trauma. May they find peace, comfort and healing. We pray to the Lord.

