

Jamila, Bangladesh



Jamila and her daughter stand outside their shelter in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.
Credit: Inmanuel Biswas/Caritas Bangladesh

[Watch Jamila's story.](#)

Twenty-two-year-old Jamila is a single mother, living in the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. A Rohingya woman, she fled the armed conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State to save herself, her elderly mother and eight-month-old baby daughter.

Having been abandoned by her husband, she faced life in the camp, caring for them on her own. Thanks to the generosity of Caritas Australia's supporters and through our partnership with Caritas Bangladesh, Jamila had access to emergency food and shelter, as well as lifesaving practical and emotional support through career training and trauma counselling.

Jamila, according to cultural tradition, was married at 18, arranged by her parents. When she was just three months pregnant, she was abandoned by her husband. Not long afterwards, she fled armed conflict in Myanmar carrying her baby daughter, accompanied by her elderly mother, sister and brother-in-law.

"I cannot explain the mental agony of leaving my own country," Jamila says. "All I thought was that I needed to escape. People were trembling in fear, then we had to walk for five or six days."

After an extremely difficult journey Jamila arrived at a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh with almost nothing.

"It seemed a totally awful place for me, I was completely overwhelmed" Jamila says. "In the early days, it was a bare area, with no life-supporting needs like food, shelter and water."

There were also unexpected dangers, with fears that roaming elephants would trample their makeshift shelters.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people, have crossed into Bangladesh since August 2017, fleeing deadly violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Over 1.3 million people remain in the densely populated camps, in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

Cox's Bazar is already one of the most vulnerable districts in Bangladesh in which to live due to its increased exposure to natural disasters, poverty, poor education and limited livelihoods. Even before the refugee crisis, 33 percent of residents lived below the national poverty line, 17 percent below the extreme poverty line.*

* Source: [UNOCHA Reliefweb Report](#)

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When Jamila arrived at the refugee camp, she was assisted with immediate emergency food and shelter. However, as a woman alone without any livelihood skills, Jamila was facing an uncertain future.

With hope for a better life, Jamila joined the camp's Women Friendly Spaces project, run by Caritas Bangladesh. In this safe, joyful and motivating environment, Jamila felt a sense of belonging. She received counselling and emotional support, learnt about health and hygiene and participated in a parenting program. She also signed up for sewing training as part of a skills-building workshop to help refugee women to earn an income. Through the generosity of Caritas Australia's supporters, about 280,000 people have benefitted from this program so far.

"For the first time in my life, in the camp, I felt cared for and accepted," Jamila says. "The facilitators took care of my daughter, so that I could attend classes or take a nap if needed. My worries of an uncertain future are disappearing. It was like a ray of hope that spreads in the dark night, through the light of the Women Friendly Spaces," Jamila says.

Just as things were looking up in the camp, COVID-19 hit. Without proper sanitation and with water, soap and masks in short supply, it posed a serious threat.

On the ground, Caritas Australia's partners, Caritas Bangladesh and Catholic Relief Services (Caritas USA) were able to quickly act to minimise its spread, by sharing prevention messages, conducting training sessions, installing hand-washing stations, repairing toilets and distributing soap and masks.

Jamila has now built a sense of family and community around her mother and little girl.

"I am proud of my potential and strength that was hidden before. I will bring up my 'fairy girl' providing good financial support thanks to donations from Caritas supporters. I wish to raise my daughter as happy-go-lucky and bring her up with dignity. I will make her a bright life," Jamila says smiling.



Jamila learning to sew as part of the Women Friendly Spaces project run by Caritas Bangladesh.
Photo credit: Inmanuel Biswas/Caritas Bangladesh

1. Read and discuss/write your responses:

- a) Identify the key challenges faced by those living in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar.
- b) Explain how Caritas Australia and their partners in Bangladesh are empowering the refugees in Cox's Bazar to overcome some of these challenges.
- c) What have been the impacts of Jamila's participation in the Caritas Australia supported program?
- d) Explain which Catholic Social Teaching principles you see reflected in Jamila's story.

2. Life as a refugee

- a) Watch the video of [Lulu Mitshabu](#) sharing her story as a refugee arriving in Australia from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Construct a [Venn diagram](#) that compares and contrasts Jamila and Lulu's stories as refugees. What is one similarity and one difference that surprised you?
- b) Refugee Prayer Pilgrimage
 - As a class, take part in [the Refugee Prayer Pilgrimage](#), where you will be encouraged to rethink your preconceptions as you reflect on the lives and journeys of migrants and refugees.

3. Discover the rights of refugees.

- Watch the [United Nations Refugee Agency video](#) on Refugee Rights.
- Explain the rights refugees are entitled to under the 1951 Refugee Convention.
- Draw a cartoon or image to illustrate one or more of these rights.



COUNTRY STUDY: BANGLADESH



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 life expectancy in Bangladesh and Australia. Find out the correct answer. Does this surprise you? Why/Why not What has changed?</p> <p>https://ourworldindata.org/life-expectancy</p>	Australia	Bangladesh	<p>https://www.britannica.com/place/Bangladesh</p> <p>https://dfat.gov.au/geo/bangladesh/Pages/bangladesh-country-brief.aspx</p>	
	<p>Prediction:</p> <p>Actual:</p>	<p>Prediction:</p> <p>Actual:</p>	<p>What are the official languages?</p>	
			<p>What is the main religion?</p>	
<p>What is the population of the Bangladesh? What is the population of Australia?</p> <p>https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth</p>	<p>Bangladesh:</p> <p>Australia</p>		<p>What system of government does Bangladesh have?</p>	
<p>What is the poverty rate in Bangladesh?</p> <p>https://data.worldbank.org/</p> <p>http://hdr.undp.org/en/data</p>			<p>In what region of the world is Bangladesh located?</p> <p>What direction is it from Australia?</p>	
<p>List three major factor/s affecting poverty and wellbeing (E.g. Education)</p>			<p>Describe the ways Australia is connected to Bangladesh E.g. trade that occurs between the two nations, services that are exchanged, immigration history, etc.</p>	
<p>Summarise Caritas Australia's support to improve wellbeing</p>			<p>Select two relevant Sustainable Development Goals.</p> <p>Explain your selection.</p> <p>www.globalgoals.org</p>	

"Let us think of the refugees and displaced, those who suffered the effects of atomic radiation or chemical attacks, the mothers who lost their children, and the boys and girls maimed or deprived of their childhood. Let us hear the true stories of these victims of violence, look at reality through their eyes, and listen with an open heart to the stories they tell."

- Pope Francis – Fratelli Tutti #261

Reflection questions:

- How does this quotation relate to Jamila's story?
- Why is it important that we listen to the stories of each refugee and migrant?
- How might you 'listen with an open heart'?

- How does your support of Caritas empower those living in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh?
- How might you raise awareness in response to what you have read and thought about in Jamila's story? Think about the stories of people you may know or even students in your own school.



Pray

Write a prayer of intercession based on what you have learnt from Jamila'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 our brothers and sisters who are detained at our borders, and all migrants around the world. That they are welcomed and treated with dignity as they find a new home where they can flourish and build your kingdom. We pray to the Lord.

