

APRRN ADVOCACY BRIEFER- STRATEGIZING FOR ROHINGYA REFUGEE PROTECTION AND DURABLE SOLUTIONS

**A Regional and Multi-Stakeholder
Approach**

APRRN ROHINGYA WORKING TEAM & SECRETARIAT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

S. No.	Details	Page No.
1.	Abbreviations	2
2.	Executive Summary	3
3.	Background	5
4.	The Rohingya in Myanmar	7
5.	Country Sections	
	Bangladesh	10
	India	14
	Thailand	19
	Indonesia	22
	Malaysia	25
6.	Thematic Sections	
	Mental Health Concerns of Rohingyas in South Asia and Southeast Asia	30
	Impact of Misinformation, Disinformation, and Hate Speech on Rohingyas in South Asia and Southeast Asia	32
7.	Recommendations	35

ABBREVIATIONS

AA – Arakan Army
ARSA - Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
ASEAN – Association of South East Asia Nations
ATD – Alternatives to Detention
FDMN – Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals
FRRO – Foreigner Regional Registration Office
GAGE – Gender & Adolescence Global Evidence
GRF – Global Refugee Forum
HRW – Human Rights Watch
IDP – Internally Displaced Population
INGO - International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM - International Organization for Migration
ISOC - Internal Security Operational Command
JRP – Joint Response Plan
LTV – Long Term Visa's
MCO – Movement Control order
MHA – Ministry of Home Affairs (India)
MMC – Mixed Migration Centre
MSF - Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
NSM – National Screening Mechanism
NUG – National Unity Government
PPSC - Protected Persons Screening Committee
PRiA - Protecting Refugees in Asia
PTSD - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RLI – Refugee Led Initiatives
UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WFP – World Food Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Rohingya crisis remains one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges of our time, characterized by systemic persecution, forced displacement, and protracted statelessness. Since the Myanmar military's brutal crackdown in 2017, which led to the mass exodus of over 740,000 Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh, the situation has worsened due to continued violence, deteriorating humanitarian conditions, and inadequate international response. This document provides an overview of the current crisis, its regional implications, and the challenges facing Rohingya communities across South and Southeast Asia.

Background and Current Crisis

Myanmar's military regime has intensified repression since the 2021 coup, resulting in increased displacement, human rights violations, and a deepening humanitarian crisis. Over 2.6 million people are now internally displaced, and the Rohingya community continues to face severe restrictions on movement, lack of citizenship, and systematic discrimination amounting to apartheid. The rise of the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine State further complicates the situation, as Rohingya civilians are caught between conflicting factions and forced recruitment efforts.

Meanwhile, neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, are grappling with the long-term impact of hosting Rohingya refugees. Many Rohingya face detention, lack of legal status, forced repatriation, and increasing hostility from host communities.

Regional Implications

- ◆ **Bangladesh:** Hosting over a million refugees, Bangladesh faces immense challenges, including funding shortages, security concerns, and worsening conditions in Cox's Bazar camps. Efforts to relocate refugees to *Bhasan Char* Island have raised further concerns regarding sustainability and human rights.
- ◆ **India:** With an estimated 22,500 registered Rohingya, and thousands more unregistered, Rohingya refugees in India face growing hostility, arbitrary detentions, and the threat of deportation. A lack of legal recognition leaves them highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.
- ◆ **Malaysia:** As home to the largest Rohingya population in the region outside Bangladesh, Malaysia lacks a formal refugee protection framework, leading to widespread detention, discrimination, and exclusion from legal employment and education.
- ◆ **Thailand & Indonesia:** While these countries serve as key transit points, they have increasingly restricted Rohingya arrivals. Thailand has pushed back boats and detained

refugees in immigration centers, while Indonesia has seen rising xenophobia and misinformation campaigns that threaten its traditionally humanitarian response.

Thematic Concerns

1. **Mental Health Crisis:** Displacement, trauma, and prolonged uncertainty have led to widespread mental health challenges among Rohingya refugees. Limited access to psychological support exacerbates their distress, particularly among women, children, and survivors of violence.
2. **Hate Speech and Misinformation:** The Rohingya crisis is compounded by state-led and social media-driven misinformation campaigns that frame refugees as security threats, further marginalizing them and fuelling discrimination.

The Rohingya crisis remains an urgent humanitarian and political issue that demands sustained international attention and a coordinated regional response. Without meaningful intervention, Rohingya refugees will continue to face persecution, statelessness, and worsening humanitarian conditions. Addressing these challenges requires not only immediate relief efforts but also long-term political solutions to ensure the rights and dignity of the Rohingya people are upheld.

BACKGROUND

A catastrophic chapter in Rohingya history began on August 25, 2017, in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State, ironically just after Kofi Annan's Advisory Commission released a report¹ envisioning peace and prosperity for the region. What started as attacks by ARSA militants on police posts with rudimentary weapons led to a devastatingly disproportionate response from the Myanmar military. Their campaign included mass sexual violence, killings of civilians including children, and the destruction of hundreds of Rohingya villages, followed by the systematic erasing of Rohingya communities through demolition and new construction for non-Muslim groups.²

This violence triggered an exodus of over 740,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh, who joined hundreds of thousands of previously displaced refugees. Many undertook treacherous journeys through jungles or across waterways, with numerous casualties reported.³ This crisis added to a decades-long pattern of forced displacement, including earlier mass exoduses in 1979 and 1991-92.

The human rights situation in Myanmar has continuously deteriorated significantly from 2023, as the military junta intensified its brutal crackdown on peaceful opposition while battling growing armed resistance. The authorities imprisoned over 1,600 people through unfair trials, with sentences ranging from hard labour to death.⁴ The military's campaign of violence led to more than 4,000 civilian deaths since the 2021 coup, including at least 1,345 in 2023 alone. Particularly devastating was the April 11 airstrike on Pa Zyi Gyi village, which claimed at least 100 civilian lives, including 35 children.⁵ The military's heightened aerial bombardments expanded from border regions into Myanmar's heartland.

The humanitarian and human rights crisis has deepened as more than 2.6 million people are currently internally displaced, with an additional 500,000 fleeing their homes after Operation 1027 began in October 2023. The Rohingya community's situation remains especially dire, with

¹ Myanmar, Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, '[Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine: Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State](#)'.

² Human Rights Watch, '[Burma: 40 Rohingya Villages Burned Since October](#),' 17 December 2017; Human Rights Watch, '[Burma: Scores of Rohingya Villages Bulldozed](#),' 23 February 2018.

³ Reuters, '[A Deadly Crossing](#),' 1 November 2017.

⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-east-asia-and-the-pacific/myanmar/report-myanmar/>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-65238250>

approximately 634,000 being stateless within Myanmar⁶ and confined to squalid internment camps or living in fear in Rakhine State under conditions amounting to apartheid. The devastation wrought by Cyclone Mocha in May 2023 was exacerbated by the military's obstruction of humanitarian aid.⁷ Meanwhile, human trafficking flourished, with an estimated 120,000 people forced to work in cyber scam operations along the Thai and Chinese borders.⁸ Basic human rights and freedoms remained severely curtailed, with journalists facing imprisonment for their work, and peaceful protesters facing harsh repression – even simple acts like wearing flowers on Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday led to arrests.

On the other hand, the Arakan Army (AA) has made significant strides in Myanmar's Rakhine State, capturing control of 14 out of 17 townships and dealing major blows to the military junta.⁹ Formed in 2009, the AA has grown into a powerful ethnic armed group with an estimated 30,000 – 35,000 soldiers, driven by strong leadership, a vision of self-governance, and strategic alliances. Their rise has been fuelled by frustration with political suppression and the marginalisation of Rakhine aspirations, positioning them as a key player in the region's complex political landscape.

The AA's relationship with the Rohingya community remains fraught and complicated. While avoiding overt hostility, the group has historically used rhetoric that delegitimizes the Rohingya, including recent references to them as "Bengali Muslims."¹⁰ The situation is further complicated by the military junta's practice of forcibly conscripting Rohingyas and the involvement of Rohingya armed groups in the conflict.¹¹ The ongoing tensions have been exacerbated by counter-attacks, forced recruitments, and the broader context of displacement and statelessness.

Eight years later, the Rohingya crisis remains entrenched, with the situation in Rakhine state deteriorating amid an intensified three-way conflict. The remaining Rohingya population continues to face grave dangers, including being used as human shields and subjected to forced recruitment. The ongoing military operations have triggered new waves of internal displacement, with many fleeing aerial bombardments. Those attempting to escape by sea face additional perils, as their boats are often pushed back and denied permission to dock at potential safe havens. The absence of a viable solution leaves the Rohingya community's future increasingly uncertain, precarious and unsustainable.

The regional dynamics are also further complicated by Bangladesh's challenging role in managing the Rohingya crisis. With over a million displaced people in camps facing deteriorating conditions,

⁶ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar>

⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/tc-2023-000069-mm>; See also, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/05/1136677>

⁸ <https://cyberpeaceinstitute.org/news/trafficked-cybercriminals-in-southeast-asia/>; See also, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-02-05/thailand-will-cut-to-myanmar-border-regions-to-stop-scam-centres/104897578>; See also, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3296831/china-thailand-pledge-joint-action-myanmar-cyber-scam-centres-human-trafficking>; Access the OHCHR report here - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/08/hundreds-thousands-trafficked-work-online-scammers-se-asia-says-un-report>

⁹ <https://thedi diplomat.com/2024/12/ethnic-rebel-group-announces-seizure-of-key-town-in-western-myanmar/>

¹⁰ <https://thedi diplomat.com/2019/12/myanmars-rohingya-vs-bengali-hate-speech-debate/>

¹¹ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/myanmar-junta-s-forced-conscription-rohingyas>; See also, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/rohingya-crisis-exploitation-recruitment-and-challenges>

significantly reduced funding, in particular as a result of the recent U.S. public aid freeze, and limited opportunities, Bangladesh is re-evaluating its approach. An interim government led by Muhammad Yunus is exploring new diplomatic strategies, including potential semi-formal engagements with non-state actors such as the AA.¹² The future remains uncertain for the Rohingya, who continue to seek a place of safety and belonging amidst ongoing political instability and significant human rights and humanitarian challenges.

THE ROHINGYA IN MYANMAR

The Rohingya have faced decades of systematic persecution and discrimination in Myanmar, with approximately 600,000 (or fewer now) still residing in Rakhine State, including over 150,000 confined to displacement camps for ten years. The 1982 Citizenship Law effectively rendered the Rohingya stateless, as they were issued only temporary registration cards and consistently portrayed as “illegal immigrants” from Bangladesh, denying them basic rights and citizenship.

Discriminatory policies progressively restricted the Rohingya’s fundamental freedoms, including limitations on movement, marriage, childbirth, and access to essential services. They were barred from civil service employment, faced poor healthcare and education opportunities, and experienced hostility not only from state authorities but also from the local Rakhine Buddhist population who viewed them as an existential threat.

The persecution intensified during the Thein Sein government (2010-2015), with the Rohingya being excluded from the national census and having their temporary ID cards cancelled. Two significant episodes of violence preceded the 2017 mass atrocities: in 2012, intercommunal violence led to the forced relocation of 120,000 Rohingya to segregated IDP camps, and in 2016, military clearance operations in response to ARSA attacks resulted in approximately 70,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh¹³, serving as a precursor to the massive exodus of 742,000 in 2017.

Post 2017 Exodus

The period following 2017 saw significant conflict between the AA and the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) in Rakhine State, leading to a ceasefire after the 2020 elections. While the AA has shown some positive changes in rhetoric towards the Rohingya¹⁴, promoting inclusiveness and establishing Village Committees, the reality on the ground remains complex. The Rohingya find

¹² <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/bangladeshs-foreign-policy-on-myanmar-the-need-for-broader-engagement/> ; See also, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/arakan-army-control-rakhine-govt-mulling-over-new-rohingya-policy-3775031>

¹³ Vivian Tan (UNHCR Malaysia), ‘UNHCR seeks equal treatment for all Rohingya in Bangladesh,’ 20 March 2017.

¹⁴ Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, ‘Arakan Army Seeks to Build ‘Inclusive’ Administration in Rakhine State,’ The Diplomat, 31 August 2021.

themselves caught between the dual governance of the military and the AA, facing exploitation and abuse from both sides.

The situation of approximately 150,000 Rohingya IDPs in camps since 2012 remains dire. Although the Myanmar government introduced a “National Strategy on resettlement of IDPs and closure of IDP camps” in 2019, the plan has serious flaws. Rather than providing durable solutions or allowing returns to places of origin, it merely reclassifies camps without addressing fundamental issues of freedom of movement or consultation with the affected communities.

In the five years since 2017, there have been no meaningful structural improvements for the Rohingya in Rakhine State. Core issues like citizenship rights remain unaddressed, movement restrictions have in reality intensified, and humanitarian access continues to be severely limited. Since the military coup, the situation has further deteriorated, with new restrictions leading to the arrest of approximately 2,000 Rohingya attempting to leave their townships, highlighting the ongoing crisis facing this community.

Developments

Following the military coup in Myanmar, there has been a notable shift in attitudes towards the Rohingya from opposition groups and young activists, who have expressed regret for past prejudices and shown solidarity with the community. This change in perspective has been particularly evident in social media exchanges between anti-coup protesters and Rohingya refugees.

The National Unity Government (NUG), functioning as a parallel government, has taken steps to address Rohingya rights.¹⁵ These include issuing a policy statement¹⁶ recognizing Rohingya citizenship rights, pledging to abolish the National Verification Card process, and appointing Rohingya representatives to key positions. The NUG has also shown favour to implementing recommendations from the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State and working towards Rohingya repatriation when conditions allow.

However, these initiatives have been met with mixed reactions. Some NUG supporters and Rakhine activists have criticized the policy changes, particularly the lack of consultation with Rakhine stakeholders and actionable steps to implement the ‘vision’. Rohingya representatives themselves remain sceptical about whether these commitments represent genuine change or are merely diplomatic moves to gain international recognition.¹⁷ With tensions growing between the AA and the military despite their ceasefire, the prospects for meaningful Rohingya repatriation and addressing root causes of discrimination remain uncertain.

Current Realities and Concerns

¹⁵ July Myo, [‘Junta Brutality Gives Myanmar’s Majority a Taste of Ethnic Minorities’ Plight,’](#) Radio Free Asia, 23 April 2021.

¹⁶ Republic of the Union of Myanmar, National Unity Government, [Policy Position on the Rohingya in Rakhine State](#), 3 June 2021; NUG Statement 19, 2022 <https://mofa.nugmyanmar.org/statement-19-2022/> ;

¹⁷ Frontier Myanmar, ‘The NUG’s Rohingya policy: ‘Campaign statement’ or genuine reform?’ 15 July 2021.

Since 2017, when Myanmar's military launched attacks against the Rohingya population, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee, the situation has transformed from a purely humanitarian issue into a multifaceted crisis with significant political, social, and security implications. The situation has been further complicated by the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar and recent fighting between the military and armed opposition groups, making the prospect of repatriation increasingly uncertain.

The conditions in the refugee camps remain dire, with significant challenges in sanitation, healthcare, and emergency management. Funding shortfalls have led to reduced food aid, with the World Food Programme having to cut assistance to just \$8 per person¹⁸ monthly which was later raised to \$10¹⁹ after several months of advocacy. The camps face severe health risks, lacking adequate facilities. Gender-based violence has become a pervasive concern, while natural disasters like floods, landslides, and cyclones regularly threaten the fragile shelters of the refugees. Youth continues to be threatened with armed groups engaging in kidnapping and abduction.²⁰

International response to the crisis has weakened over time, with humanitarian aid funds dropping dramatically from initial levels.²¹ While Bangladesh maintains its stance on repatriation as the only sustainable solution, the process has been hampered by Myanmar's non-cooperation and complex regional politics. Major powers like China, India, and Russia have shown reluctance to act decisively, citing Myanmar's sovereignty and non-interference principles. The crisis remains largely unresolved, with the resurgence of fighting in Rakhine State and the wider country potentially risking further refugee influxes into Bangladesh.

As the United States has historically been one of the largest donors to the Rohingya humanitarian response, the aid cut has created a ripple effect. This has forced humanitarian organizations to scale back critical programs and seek alternative funding sources. Local NGOs and implementing partners have had to prioritize immediate survival needs over longer-term development and self-reliance initiatives. The funding shortfall has further complicated Bangladesh's ability to manage the refugee situation, potentially affecting both host communities and refugees. This has led to increased pressure on local resources and infrastructure, particularly in the Cox's Bazar region.

Though regional platforms like ASEAN have provided a forum for discussing the Rohingya crisis, but more intensive monitoring and mediation efforts are needed. A strategic approach that carefully navigates the complex regional politics while fostering stronger cooperation among member states is essential to enhance protection for the Rohingya refugees. ASEAN's non-interference stance certainly limits its ability to impact and broker the post-coup environment.

¹⁸ <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2023/12/13/wfp-aid-food-cuts-mean-people-hunger-crisis-around-world>

¹⁹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/wfp-increase-food-ration-us8-us10-all-rohingya-refugees-coxs-bazar>

²⁰ <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/we-are-too-scared-go-anywhere-rohingya-childrens-fears-violence-spirals-bangladesh-refugee-camps> ; See also, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/10/myanmar-bangladesh-rohingya-community-facing-gravest-threats-since-2017/>

²¹ <https://www.nrc.no/news/2024/july/alarming-drop-in-global-funding-to-people-in-war-and-crisis> ; See also, <https://odihpn.org/publication/decreasing-funds-while-repatriation-is-a-distant-destiny-can-localisation-be-an-answer-to-the-protracted-rohingya-crisis/>

ASEAN intervention through the Five Point Consensus Plan²² and appointment of a special envoy has yielded limited practical results, though constrained by the body's non-interference principles and consensus-based approach. Regional responses have been further hampered by a lack of political will to implement even modest practical solutions, with host countries resistant to granting work rights or formal education access to refugees, fearing these as potential pull factors. This focus on deterrence has overshadowed efforts to address root causes and push factors in Myanmar, leaving the fundamental drivers of displacement unresolved.

The following sections delve deeper into country sections and attempt to unpack the ground realities, concerns, gaps and protection needs across South and South-East Asia. These in turn have underscored the need to develop two thematic areas – Misinformation, Disinformation and Hate Speech being one and the other being Mental health – which resonate as a developing concern across the jurisdictions discussed. Though there would be others in addition to the above, these were unanimously voiced and a need to find a solution was underlined.

COUNTRY SECTIONS

Bangladesh

For the 1,006,670 Rohingya refugees²³ taking shelter in Bangladesh, living conditions and protection remain extremely precarious due to overcrowding, lack of safety against gang violence, kidnapping, trafficking and natural disasters, with women, girls and children being particularly vulnerable to these threats. The situation is further exacerbated by new restrictions on movements imposed by Bangladesh authorities and by rising tensions with host communities.

Bangladesh is to be commended for its important role in hosting such a massive number of refugees, including during the two previous exoduses - in 1978 and 1991/92. The Government of Bangladesh refers to the Rohingya as 'Forcible Displaced Myanmar Nationals' (FDMN) and not as 'refugees', as opposed to those Rohingya who fled in 1991/92 and 1979. To call refugees something else does not change the fact that they are refugees, nor does it change their rights, or the legal obligations of States and other actors, but the concern is not only semantic. As the situation has become protracted, Bangladesh's response has increasingly focused on securitisation. Barbed-wire fences were constructed in and around the camps, additional road checkpoints were set up, and regular arrests if outside camps, have further limited refugees' mobility and curtailed their right to freedom of movement as outlined in international law. They are also prohibited to engage in livelihood activities, including in the camps, as thousands of refugee shops were destroyed earlier this year.²⁴ Over the years, there have been considerable restrictions in the operations of Refugee-led initiatives (RLIs) in the camps which has impacted the communities in developing capacities to respond and engage with developing situations.²⁵

²² <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/Chairmans-Statement-on-ALM-Five-Point-Consensus-24-April-2021-FINAL-a-1.pdf>

²³ UNHCR – population data as of 30 November 2024 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/bgd>

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, '[Bangladesh: New Restrictions on Rohingya Camps](#),' 4 April 2022.

²⁵ Insecurity, risk and resilience: The contributions and challenges of Refugee-Led Initiatives in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/insecurity-risk-and-resilience-contributions-and-challenges-refugee-led-initiatives-rohingya-refugee-camps-bangladesh>

Nonetheless, many continue to raise donations and funds to continue the critical work to facilitate access to education, developing skills for livelihood opportunities, and building capacities for responding to disasters, among others. Additionally, health facilities in the camps are unable to meet the needs of those refugees with chronic diseases or complicated health conditions

Heightened insecurity has plagued the camps. Armed groups and criminal gangs are perpetrating increasing violence against Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, while authorities have erected multiple barriers that prevent these victims from accessing police protection, legal aid, and medical care.²⁶ There are clear indications which point to the fact that armed groups in the camps sustain their activities through the tacit assistance of Bangladeshi intelligence factions which emboldens them. Responses by security forces have been inadequate, concentrated on containing refugees with fences and roadblocks, and, when arrested, culprits are rarely prosecuted. On 29 September 2021, Mohibullah, a prominent and moderate refugee leader and human rights activist, was coldly assassinated by members of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)²⁷. Women and children are particularly at risk of gender-based violence and trafficking.²⁸ The security situation and other risks have increased manifold with a rise in organised crime, homicides, suicides and political violence. The dire conditions and increased securitisation in the camps has led to more Rohingyas leaving Bangladesh and embarking on dangerous sea journeys. During the sailing season (which is typically between October to March) in 2024, 600 Rohingyas lost their lives and refoulement incidents from Bangladesh are also on the climb.

Refugees are exposed to natural disasters, particularly floods and landslides during the monsoon season, sometimes cyclones, and fires during the hot and dry season. In 2021 alone, 150 fires were reported, the largest one killing 15 refugees and burning down 10,000 shelters.²⁹ The fire on March 5, 2023 impacted over 16,000 Rohingya refugees residing in Camp 11 of Kutupalong, Cox's Bazar which swept and caused severe damage.³⁰ In July 2021, monsoon rains and strong winds caused flash floods and landslides which killed six people and destroyed 2,500 shelters.³¹ Recently, a devastating fire on December 24 2024, destroyed 432 homes and damaged another 312 in the Rohingya camps. Two people lost their lives, and 19 others were injured. The poor quality of shelters construction makes the refugees more vulnerable during the monsoon season and unprotected from natural disasters in camps.

The escalation or resurgence of the conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State started in November 2023 with the launch of a rebel counter-offensive by the Arakan Army and two other groups such as Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Arm, Ta'ang national Liberation Army (together they

²⁶ Bangladesh: Spiraling Violence Against Rohingya Refugees

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/13/bangladesh-spiraling-violence-against-rohingya-refugees>

²⁷ Bd24news.com, '[Police say ARSA killed Rohingya leader Mohib Ullah to stop refugee repatriation](#),' 14 June 2022.

²⁸ Cox's Bazaar: Insecurity, Criminality and Rohingya Women

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2023/02/06/coxs-bazaar-insecurity-criminality-and-rohingya-women/>; See also, <https://catwinternational.org/2017/11/rohingya-women-and-girls-face-risk-of-sex-trafficking-in-refugee-camps/>

²⁹ Kristy Siegfried (UNHCR), '[Rohingya refugees lead response to fire threat in Bangladesh camps](#),' 10 June 2022.

³⁰ <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/bangladesh-camp-11-fire-incident-initial-rapid-assessment-report-march-2023>

³¹ UNHCR, '[Deadly floods and landslides hit Rohingya camps in Bangladesh](#),' 28 July 2021.

are referred to as the Three Brotherhood Alliance) that has posed the biggest threat to military control since the coup in Feb 2021. Myanmar's military responded by stepping up indiscriminate air strikes that have killed, maimed, injured and displaced several civilians. The impact on Rakhine State, where many Rohingya still live has been severe. Several have lost their lives and towns have been transformed into battlegrounds.³² In such circumstances, many have undertaken arduous journeys in search of life and liberty in Bangladesh but many of them have experiences of *push back*. Conservative estimates put the number at 400, but this number could be several times higher given the heightened human mobility from November 2023 onwards from Rakhine state. There is a lack of a legal and human rights framework to ensure access to protection, registration, medical care and other services. Many of the human rights violations, abuse, mass killings and atrocities of newly displaced people are still undocumented. The first set of responders were fellow Rohingyas who, in 2024 undertook activities and advocacy in the camps to ensure access to shelter and food. Some of the private INGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and AFAD (Turkish Hospital) provided emergency treatment to the newcomers. In the later months, the newcomers are being given access to medical assistance and food rations, but several are not registered and thus at risk of being forcibly returned to Myanmar. Instances of border guard forces detaining unaccompanied children and returning them to Myanmar has been noted.³³

The 2023 UN Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis has received less than one-third of the US\$876 million sought in donor contributions.³⁴ The funding shortfall had led the World Food Programme (WFP) to cut Rohingya food rations by a third in 2023, down from \$12 to a mere \$8 a month per person, increasing malnutrition, disease, and desperation among refugees.³⁵ While the rations were partially restored to \$10 per person monthly from January 1, 2024³⁶; and are set to increase to \$11 from June 1, 2024³⁷, they still remain below the original assistance levels. Humanitarian works and Rohingyas have noted that these cuts are manifesting medical and social concerns. In contrast, the 2024 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya refugee response is 53 percent funded as of 30 September 2024, with USD 455.7 million received against the overall appeal of USD 852.4 million. There is increased destitution, lack of livelihoods, barriers in accessing protection, lack of freedom of movement which is leading to more refugees undertake journeys in search of better opportunities, only for some to die and others to reach shores in Indonesia or Malaysia with further protection concerns. Rising uncertainties need critical gaps to be bridged, monitoring of the situation, appropriate response and preparedness. The recent cuts in funding from USAID and the U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and

³² A/HRC/57/56: Situation of human rights in Myanmar - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5756-situation-human-rights-myanmar-report-united-nations-high>

³³ Bangladesh: New Rohingya Refugees Lack Protection, Aid <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/25/bangladesh-new-rohingya-refugees-lack-protection-aid>

³⁴ <https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1143/summary>

³⁵ Bangladesh - Impact of Food Ration Cuts on the Displaced Rohingya Population in Cox's Bazar, <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/bangladesh-impact-food-ration-cuts-displaced-rohingya-population-coxs-bazar-may-2024>; See also, Bangladesh: UN experts decry devastating second round of rations cuts for Rohingya refugees <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/06/bangladesh-un-experts-decry-devastating-second-round-rations-cuts-rohingya>

³⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/wfp-increase-food-ration-us8-us10-all-rohingya-refugees-coxs-bazar>

³⁷ <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-increases-food-rations-again-rohingya-coxs-bazar-will-reach-full-ration-august>

Migration (PRM) are expected to further deteriorate the humanitarian situation in the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh, threatening essential services and support for the refugee population.

Bangladesh witnessed a chaotic shift of Awami League rule which ended abruptly due to intensive student protests in August 2024. This upheaval cost the lives of 300 protestors, forcing Sheikh Hasina to flee the country and an interim government to assume power. Amidst the political turmoil, the fate of Rohingyas in the camps has become further uncertain. Over the last six months, the interim government has pledged to maintain Bangladesh's policy of hosting the displaced Rohingya and repatriating them to Myanmar when conditions allow. In his mid-August policy address, Yunus reiterated the country's dedication to aid the displaced Rohingya.³⁸ In September, Yunus appealed to humanitarian organisations, including the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), to increase its assistance for the displaced population.³⁹

About half of the refugees are children. According to UNICEF, the refugee population include upwards of 500,000 school aged children and adolescents, who have remained without any formal education.⁴⁰ In 2020, Bangladesh approved the use of the Myanmar curriculum, but learning centres were closed for nearly two years during the COVID-19 pandemic⁴¹. A Myanmar Curriculum pilot project was finally launched by UNICEF in November 2021 and had enrolled 10,000 children by May 2022⁴². Recruiting and training teachers to provide quality education in Myanmar language will prove a challenge. Concurrently, Bangladesh forcibly closed and dismantled about 30 refugee community-led schools⁴³ depriving Rohingya children of alternative education. In 2022, an Education Strategy was unveiled which is jointly managed by UNICEF and Save the Children International.⁴⁴ Apart from ensuring access to education, rising fear and safety concerns loom large in the minds of the children and youth⁴⁵ and there is no higher education to pursue.

The continued influx of Rohingya refugees (due to the deteriorating situation in Myanmar) has mildly affected host communities due to environmental degradation, pressure on public services, infrastructures, access to land, as well as inflation and competition for livelihoods. Initial solidarity has gradually given way to anti-refugee sentiments as the situation has become protracted, and as resources have declined. As of 30 November 2024, the Joint Response Plan

³⁸ UNHCR welcomes Prof Yunus's commitment to support Rohingyas <https://www.bssnews.net/news-flash/205757>; See also, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/18/bangladeshs-yunus-promises-support-to-rohingya-in-first-policy-speech>

³⁹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/unhcr-bangladesh-operational-update-september-2024>

⁴⁰ <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/rohingya-crisis>

⁴¹ Kristy Siegfried (UNHCR), '[Rohingya and Bangladeshi teachers pair up to tackle education hurdles in camps](#),'.

⁴² UNICEF, '[Education milestone for Rohingya refugee children as Myanmar curriculum pilot reaches first 10,000 children](#),'

⁴³ Amnesty International, '[Bangladesh: Restore and strengthen capacity of community-led schools in Rohingya camps](#),'

⁴⁴ <https://rohingyaresponse.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Education-Sector-Strategy-2022-Rohingya-Response.pdf>

⁴⁵ https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/i-am-Still-Living-in-Darkness-Young-Rohingya-refugees-reflect-on-five-years-in-Bangladesh.pdf/?_gl=1*io98dg*_gcl_au*MTQyNiY4MzcwMC4xNzM1NjE5NDAY*_ga*MTU0Nzc2MzY1MS4xNzM1NjE5NDAY*_ga_GRKVSTV36C*MTczNTYxOTQwMy4xLjAuMTczNTYxOTQwMy42MC4wLjA.

(JRP) for 2024 was 56 per cent funded⁴⁶ and humanitarian actors are concerned. Tensions with host communities continue to be observed and there are often instances of the Rohingya community being depicted as an economic burden, a social security threat, or as victims of international inertia. Over the last two years, steps have been taken to ensure that both the international and regional lens do not escape the concerns of the Rohingya community in the wake of the resurgence late in 2023. The Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 witnessed the multistakeholder pledge being shaped and steps being taken to respond with solutions by a number of countries, but much more begs to be implemented.

Relocation to Bhasan Char Island

In December 2020, the Bangladesh authorities started relocating large groups from the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar District to *Bhasan Char*, a remote silt island in the Bay of Bengal about 60 km from the mainland. Infrastructures to ultimately accommodate 100,000 refugees were built by the Bangladesh Navy. By end of 2024, approximately 36,000 Rohingya have been transferred and currently reside on the island⁴⁷.

Bangladesh's claim that relocation was voluntary continues to be questionable, as many refugees signed up without informed consent, lured by promises of enhanced services and means of livelihood⁴⁸, which have not yet materialized. While better shelters and open space were available, they found no education facilities, and are faced with poor health care, food shortages, limited livelihood opportunities, and no freedom of movement. As a result, hundreds have paid smugglers to return to the mainland. On 14 August 2021, a fishing boat carrying refugees attempting to return clandestinely to the refugee camps capsized, leaving eleven dead and 16 missing⁴⁹.

A UN delegation was invited to visit the island in March 2021 after multiple requests to the Bangladesh Government. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with UNHCR on 9 October 2021, permitting UN agencies to deliver assistance and services. A subsequent food security assessment by the World Food Program (WFP) released in July 2022 revealed that 92 per cent of refugees were highly vulnerable and completely dependent on humanitarian assistance, and only 35 per cent of households were consuming adequate nutritious food⁵⁰.

Although the JRP budgeted US\$100 million for assistance on *Bhasan Char*, only 2 per cent was secured by May 2022 as donors were reluctant to support humanitarian programmes amid reports of coercion. On 4 August 2022, the United States and Canada finally decided to pledge

⁴⁶ UN OCHA, 'Financial Tracking Service,' Bangladesh Country Summary.

<https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1162/summary>; See also, <https://rohingyaresponse.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/JRP-2024-funding-update-as-of-30-November-2024.pdf>

⁴⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/market-functionality-assessment-bhasan-char-bangladesh-strengthening-emerging-markets-bolster-rohingya-refugee-resilience-december-2024>
<https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/bangladesh-red-crescent-society-population-movement-operation-pmo-coxs-bazar-operational-update-no-103-october-2024>

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch, '[An Island Jail in the Middle of the Sea](https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/08/11/an-island-jail-in-the-middle-of-the-sea),'; See also, Understanding 'refugee resettlement' from below: Decoding the Rohingya refugees' lived experience in Bangladesh
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X24001244>

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch, '[Bangladesh: Fleeing Rohingya Die at Sea](https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/08/11/an-island-jail-in-the-middle-of-the-sea),'.

⁵⁰ World Food Program, '[Bhasan Char Rapid Food Security Assessment](https://www.wfp.org/publications/bhasan-char-rapid-food-security-assessment),'.

financial assistance allowing for much needed scale-up⁵¹. In 2023, Japan and UNHCR agreed to provide US\$2.9 million for ongoing assistance and protection for refugees in Cox's Bazar and *Bhasan Char*. Japan's significant aid includes a recent US\$4.4 million for food through WFP, adding to previous aid in March 2023. Japan's contributions has been crucial in providing shelter, healthcare, and services to the Rohingya and host communities. For the current JRP, over 50 per cent has been met, inclusive of *Bhasan Char*. Some refugees believe that the *Bhasan Char* projects is borne out of the scarcity of humanitarian assistants.

Concluding, developments and settlements in *Bhasan Char* are in constant danger, given that their existence is dependent on the flow and temperament of the waters around them. It is a relatively new formation and in complete isolation from mainland Bangladesh. Although housing and other facilities have been constructed on the island, questions remain over the sustainability of such a geographically unstable land. Adverse climatic conditions, coupled with rising sea levels pose a threat. Concerns over the provisions for health, livelihood, education and security on the island also persist.

India

Around 22,500 Rohingya are registered with UNHCR in India⁵², but the Indian Government consistently cites a figure of 40,000 Rohingya. The UNHCR factsheet confirms 32,379 Rohingyas in India.⁵³ There has been a constant trickle of Rohingya arriving from northern Rakhine to India via Bangladesh over the years, especially after 2012 and following the military operations in northern Rakhine in 2016 and 2017. The main Rohingya settlements are located in Assam, Delhi, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. They are in detention in all the above jurisdictions along with Bihar, Manipur and Tripura. Many live in destitution, earning income from manual labour, as waste pickers, scrap metal collectors or odd jobs to earn a daily wage.

India does not have a domestic law nor consistent policy on refugees and asylum seekers and is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. India has provided documentation and permission to some groups of refugees directly, while offering Long Term Visas (LTVs) to others. In 2011, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) set out a standard operating procedure to deal with foreign nationals who claim to be refugees, which included provision of LTVs where “prima facie the claim (of refugee) is justified, (on the grounds of a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, sex, nationality, ethnic identity, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” But, in practice, this guidance is rarely followed, and many refugees remain vulnerable to criminal prosecution rather than refuge.

In 2013, the FRRO (Foreigner Regional Registration Office) began issuing long-term visas to the

⁵¹ BD24news.com, '[US and Canada agree to help Bangladesh manage Rohingya in Bhasan Char](#),'.

⁵² <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar#:~:text=According%20to%20UN%20sources%2C%20about,Kachin%20state%20in%20the%20Northeast>. Also refer to <https://reliefweb.int/report/india/lifetime-detention-rohingya-refugees-india>

⁵³ <https://reporting.unhcr.org/india-factsheet-9656>

Rohingya community. However, obtaining these visas was challenging due to the extensive documentation requirements. The FRRO mandated several documents, including rental agreements, police verification, electricity bills, Form C, a residential letter from UNHCR (known as an RP letter), the landlord's national ID, and a refugee card. For many Rohingya refugees, gathering all these documents proved difficult. The process also included a home visit by an FRRO official to verify our residence before visa issuance. Long-term visas were only available to Rohingya refugees in two states: Hyderabad and Delhi. The program ran from 2013 to 2018, with visas requiring annual renewal.

Some among new arrivals are routinely apprehended⁵⁴ when they entered India from Bangladesh, and face indefinite detention, mostly in the bordering States of Assam, Tripura and West Bengal, men spending years in jails and women and children in shelter homes and juvenile frameworks under government's supervision. They have had no regular access to UNHCR; although legal aid is being provided either by UNHCR partners or through state legal services mechanisms which has occasionally resulted in few of them released.

The protection environment for Rohingya refugees has rapidly deteriorated after the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014 and by 2016 the situation started to get worse. The following trajectory of events from 2016 where Hindu extremists started organising anti-Rohingya hate campaigns in Jammu, India's largest Rohingya settlements, demanding their eviction was followed with the MHA directive issued in 2017 which was a critical moment.

In August 2017, the Home Ministry issued a directive to all State Governments to identify and deport '*illegal foreign nationals from Rakhine State*' as they aggravate security challenges in the country⁵⁵. This was closely followed with suspension of the renewal and/ or grant of LTVs to Rohingyas.⁵⁶

Subsequently, in 2018, police stations were instructed to collect biometric data of Rohingya residents in their areas, as well as personal details on a bilingual form from the Myanmar Embassy⁵⁷ titled, 'National Verification.' This exercise was also undertaken by the Government of India.⁵⁸ This spread anxiety among Rohingya refugee communities across India. The Advisory was soon challenged in the Supreme Court and continues to languish.⁵⁹

54 Rohingya migrant and refugees and asylum seeker are also arrested from the train stations, bus terminals, buses and also when Rohingya refugee visit their relatives to the detention centers and jails. And some people also being arrested while approaching the UNHCR office Delhi.

55 India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 'Advisory on Illegal Migrant,' (New Delhi 2017). Available at https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/advisoryonillegalmigrant_10092017_2.PDF

56 Bureaucratic Gaps and Exclusion: The limits of documentary 'protection' for Rohingyas in India <https://www.unsw.edu.au/kaldor-centre/our-resources/legal-and-policy-resources/commentaries/bureaucratic-gaps-and-exclusion-the-limits-of-documentary-protection-for-rohingyas-in-india>

57 The Quint World, '[Rohingya Refugees in Delhi Are Scared of the Govt and the Media](#),' 16 October 2018.

58 States to Collect Biometric Data of Rohingya to Take Action With Myanmar: Rajnath Singh <https://thewire.in/politics/states-to-collect-biometric-data-of-rohingya-to-take-action-with-myanmar-rajnath-singh>

59 Mohammad Salimullah And Anr. V Union Of India And Ors. Writ Petition (Civil) No. 793 of 2017; Follow the trajectory here - <https://www.scobserver.in/cases/mohammad-salimullah-rohingya-deportation-case-background/>

On 1 October 2018, India announced the imminent deportation of seven Rohingya who had already been detained in Assam for several years. An interim plea was filed to stay the deportation order but, on 4 October, judges at the Supreme Court dismissed the petition, allowing for the first ever deportation to Myanmar to take place.⁶⁰ Another deportation of five Rohingyas was recorded in January 2019.⁶¹ The most recent attempt to deport another batch of Rohingyas took place early this year (March 2024) which was later stopped as the Myanmar authorities stopped working with the Indian counterparts.⁶²

Suspicion over biometric data collection and fear of deportation triggered an exodus of several thousand Rohingya from India to Bangladesh. Between October 2018 and October 2019, at least 20 Rohingya, all in held prolonged detention, were deported back to Rakhine State in Myanmar.⁶³

During the Covid-19 period in India, lockdowns severely impacted and exacerbated the vulnerabilities of Rohingya refugees in India. Apart from losing their livelihood, access to treatment and government assistance programs became difficult. The rising xenophobia in the country among local communities preventing CSOs and partners on the ground to facilitate support in settlements. A survey by the refugee-led Rohingya Human Rights Initiative in August 2021 found that nearly 56 percent of Rohingya refugees lost employment due to the pandemic.⁶⁴

On 6 March 2021, authorities called for about 265 Rohingya for a verification process in Jammu, but they were instead detained for the purpose of deportation.

As of 2022, UNHCR reported that at least 240 Rohingya in India were detained on charges of illegal entry - 39 detained in a shelter in Delhi while 235 others are detained in a holding center in Jammu. At the end of June 2022, UNHCR reported that 291 Rohingya were in detention in India, 263 in the Jammu holding centre, and 33 in a Welfare centre in Delhi, most if not all holding a UNHCR card, and UNHCR continue to face challenges to release them⁴⁶. This figure does not include at least 100 Rohingya detained in Assam and Tripura in India's North-East in the past few months⁴⁷. Risks of detention, deportation and fear of family separation have increased stress and vulnerabilities.

Over the years, there have been many instances of deportations from India to Myanmar.⁶⁵ In

⁶⁰ India: 7 Rohingya Deported to Myanmar, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/05/india-7-rohingya-deported-myanmar>; See also, No Direction Home – How the worlds largest democracy treats the most persecuted minority <https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/how-worlds-largest-democracy-treats-worlds-most-persecuted-minority>

⁶¹ Five Rohingya deported to Myanmar <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/five-rohingya-deported-to-myanmar/article25901401.ece>

⁶² India says new law saves persecuted refugees. Rohingya ask 'Why not us?' <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/27/rohingya-in-india-accuse-modi-of-double-standards-on-citizenship-law>

⁶³ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/05/india-7-rohingya-deported-myanmar>; See also, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/31/india-rohingya-deported-myanmar-face-danger>

⁶⁴ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/56-rohingya-refugees-lost-jobs-during-pandemic/articleshow/85499019.cms>

⁶⁵ In October 2018, India deported 7 Rohingya men from Assam stating that they had agreed to be 'repatriated' to Myanmar.

In January 2019, a Rohingya family of five that had been jailed in Assam was deported to Myanmar. UNHCR was refused access to these detainees to ascertain their well-being and secure them legal representation.

March 2022, one of the detained women, Hasina Begum, was suddenly taken out of the holding centre and deported to Myanmar, despite having UN refugee status, leaving her husband and three minor children behind in Jammu.⁶⁶ Moreover, her village of origin in Maungdaw Township in Rakhine State had been completely burnt down in 2017 and no longer exists. Another Rohingya man, also registered with UNHCR, was arrested in Jammu days later and hastily deported to Myanmar on 4 May.⁶⁷ These deportations prompted another exodus of nearly 3,500 Rohingyas⁶⁸ from Jammu to Bangladesh, including family members of the two deportees. Both eventually arrived safely in Maungdaw town with nowhere else to go. Hasina managed to reunite with her children in Bangladesh, but the other deportee was arrested while attempting to cross the Naf River, and is now jailed in Myanmar. Over the years, ten Rohingyas have died in detention.⁶⁹ Rohingyas lodged in detention centres in Assam went on a hunger strike seeking immediate release and resettlement.⁷⁰

Rohingya boats had occasionally been rescued by the Indian Coast Guards in the vicinity of the Andaman Island, whilst sailing toward Malaysia. These vessels were usually discovered in a situation of distress due to engine failure, leakage, or being lost at sea without food and water for days, some passengers in need of medical care. The Coast Guards had launched rapid rescue operations and swiftly provided first aid to the survivors aboard. Thereafter, they were pushed back out of India's territorial waters.

On 22 February 2021, 90 Rohingyas, including 65 women, 20 men and 5 children, were rescued in a broken boat, and provided with humanitarian assistance.⁷¹ They were held up at sea for more than three months, and were then escorted out to international waters in another boat in better condition and with a working engine. They eventually washed ashore in Aceh on 4 June. More

In September 2019, a group of four Rohingyas men were deported from Manipur. They were arrested in 2013 from Manipur's Churachandpur and convicted under the Foreigners Act. They had been lodged in Manipur Central Jail until they were deported to Myanmar in 2019.

In April 2021, Indian authorities attempted to deport a lone 14-year-old girl from Assam, who was believed to be a victim of human trafficking. However, the Myanmar immigration department refused to accept her, stating that the situation was currently not appropriate for deportation. She was subsequently sent to a shelter home in Silchar; despite requests to send the girl to her uncle in Hyderabad or her parents in Bangladesh, the police indicated that the government orders required her to be sent to Myanmar.

⁶⁶ India Begins Deporting Rohingya Refugees

<https://thedi diplomat.com/2022/04/india-begins-deporting-rohingya-refugees/>; See also, Human Rights Watch, 'India: Rohingya Deported to Myanmar Face Danger.'

⁶⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/20/rohingya-families-in-kashmir-fear-separation-as-india-cracks-down>

⁶⁸ community approximates

⁶⁹ Addressing the Issues of Rohingya Detention and Human Rights Violations in India at G20

<https://aprrn.org/newsroom-detail/37/>; Elderly Rohingya refugee dies after 1,287 days of indefinite detention in Jammu 'Holding Centre' <https://maktoobmedia.com/features/elderly-rohingya-refugee-dies-after-1287-days-of-indefinite-detention-in-jammu-holding-centre/>. Between 2021 and 2024, 10 female Rohingyas have died in detention – 9 of them in Jammu detention centre and 1 in Delhi Detention centre. Among them 8 of them were registered with UNHCR India.

⁷⁰ Indefinite Detention And Desperation: Myanmar Refugees On Hunger Strike In Assam, India Cry For Justice <https://www.rohingya.org/news/indefinite-detention-and-desperation:-myanmar-refugees-on-hunger-strike-in-assam-india-cry-for-justice.html>

⁷¹

https://www.facebook.com/rohingya/photos/a.1634050146836240/2826359764271933/?type=3&mibextid=wwXlfr&rdid=yxobHDazGnLMbQbf&share_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fshare%2F18NVmBmcY8%2F%3Fmibextid%3DwwXlfr

concerning is the case of the boat with 105 passengers found drifting off Indonesia in late December 2021. This vessel was initially spotted near India adrift with a damaged engine. As attempts at fixing it failed, the Indian Coast Guards towed them out to the Malacca Strait and abandoned it in stormy weather, with only a tarpaulin to be used as a sail. This latest pushback by India could have led to loss of lives aboard had Acehnese fishermen not traced it. After three days of negotiations, Indonesia brought them ashore and allowed them to disembark.

On July 24, 2023, Indian police reportedly arrested more than 74 Rohingya refugees in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.⁷² As of December 2024, ROHRIngya estimates that there are 676 Rohingya refugees in immigration detention across India, and 608 of them have no ongoing court cases or sentences pending.⁷³ Among the major areas of concern are the conditions in detention⁷⁴, deteriorating mental health concerns, lack of access to legal representation as well as accessing UNHCR for registration as well.⁷⁵

The Indian authorities have also stopped issuing exit visas to refugees, therefore blocking access to resettlement.⁷⁶

Increased border controls are an extension of a hostile environment and rising xenophobia towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. During and post the pandemic, Rohingyas faced a surge of hate speech events which has led to attacks on them, loss of livelihood and even detention without recognition of their refugee status. The rise of hate speech and xenophobia has led to attacks on Rohingya refugees in their workplaces or on the way to work. The severe nature of the lockdowns during the pandemic and reduction of services in the realm of non-COVID related health services, together with the increase in xenophobia towards Rohingya has further impeded access to healthcare.

Rohingyas have been portrayed as illegals and criminals because of the “illegal” way in which they are forced to undertake journeys and flee from persecution. They end up blamed for the social and economic ills of society, including rising crime. All of these trends have contributed to the alarming rise in xenophobia against refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. Recently, they had approached the Delhi High Court with a prayer to seek protection for the life of their families and community members and flagged social media content, which was dismissed.⁷⁷

⁷² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/25/india-police-arrest-seventy-four-rohingya-in-latest-crackdown-on-refugees>; See also, India: End Crackdown and Indefinite Detention of Rohingya Refugees <https://www.fortifyrights.org/glo-inv-2023-07-28/>; See also, <https://www.rohingya.org/news/a-rohingya-mother-on-mathura-detentions-‘i-just-want-to-live-with-my-family-peacefully’-html>

⁷³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/rohingya-refugees-india-hunger-strike-over-prolonged-detention-2024-09-12/>

⁷⁴ See also, Destinies under Detention- A Case for the Right to Dignity & Humane Treatment of Rohingya Refugees in India

<https://sabrangindia.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Rohingya-report-1.pdf>

⁷⁵ See also, Urgent Appeal on the Situation of Myanmarese Refugees in India <https://aprrn.org/newsroom-detail/42/>

⁷⁶ Rohingya refugees in arbitrary detention, denied exit permissions by India: Report <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/rohingya-refugees-in-arbitrary-detention-denied-exit-permissions-by-india-report/article66867255.ece>

⁷⁷ Rohingya refugees move court over ‘hate campaigns’ on Facebook, flag high risk in poll year

Thailand

Thailand has primarily been a transit country⁷⁸ for Rohingya heading to Malaysia by boat or overland. Statistics estimate approximately 6000 Rohingyas⁷⁹ to be settled in different provinces – many having arrived decades ago and other arriving recently in the wake of consecutive rounds of violations and escalation of conflict. The earlier set of people obtained renewable temporary documentation, whereas recent arrivals remain undocumented and many face detention and worse. Denial of access to any legal status puts them at high risk of arrest, detention and exploitation.

Since 2006, Rohingya have regularly arrived on Thai shores in rickety boats escaping from Rakhine State or Bangladesh camps to find better conditions or seeking family reunification in Malaysia. After reaching Thailand on boats, smugglers acting in collusion with Thai officials, transported them by road and on foot to jungle camps at the Thai-Malaysian border, where they were detained by smugglers and traffickers and abused until their relatives pay a ransom fee before being taken into Malaysia.

Over the years, Thailand has become home to a few million migrants, including an estimated 81,000 verified refugees and asylum seekers⁸⁰. In the past, Thailand has given asylum to the Rohingyas as well as political prisoners from Myanmar. Since the mid-1980s, refugee and displaced people's camps along Thailand's western border have protected people evading Myanmar's military operations. Today, more than most refugees remain in these camps as Myanmar's peace process falters and others in different provinces. The recent funding cuts have severely constrained humanitarian organizations responding both to the protracted Rohingya crisis and to broader refugee movements across Southeast Asia, forcing many to scale back essential services and protection activities despite growing needs on the ground.

In 2008, the Royal Thai Government tasked the Internal Security Operational Command (ISOC), operating under the Prime Minister's Office, to handle the "Rohingya issue". ISOC has a long-standing three-pronged action plan^{81,37}:

- 1) The Royal Thai Navy will intercept Rohingya boats approaching Thai territorial waters;
- 2) Upon interception, these boats will be provided with fuel, food, and water to sail onwards to another country, or they will be escorted out of Thai waters;

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/rohingya-refugees-move-court-over-hate-campaigns-on-facebook-flag-high-risk-in-poll-year/article67787156.ece>

⁷⁸ Though there is an argument that many trafficking rings are also operative across the extremely porous Thai-Myanmar border. Several accounts from Rohingyas confirm this argument. Available here

<https://graphics.thomsonreuters.com/13/12/ROHINGYA-THAILAND.pdf>

⁷⁹ Computation from the statistics available here - [https://www.unhcr.org/th/wp-content/uploads/sites/91/2024/12/Thailand Myanmar Border Refugee Population Overview November2024-External.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/th/wp-content/uploads/sites/91/2024/12/Thailand_Myanmar_Border_Refugee_Population_Overview_November2024-External.pdf)

⁸⁰ [https://www.unhcr.org/th/wp-content/uploads/sites/91/2024/12/Thailand Myanmar Border Refugee Population Overview November2024-External.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/th/wp-content/uploads/sites/91/2024/12/Thailand_Myanmar_Border_Refugee_Population_Overview_November2024-External.pdf)

⁸¹ Sunai Phasuk, Thailand Needs to stop inhumane navy 'push-backs'

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/22/thailand-needs-stop-inhumane-navy-push-backs>

- 3) Any boat that manages to land on Thai soil will be seized, passengers arrested, and held in indefinite detention.

The Royal Thai Navy has a history of pushing back refugee vessels, including those in distress. In 2009, hundreds of Rohingya were left to die at sea after the Royal Thai Navy towed them out in engineless boats.⁸² Similar incidents occurred in 2015, when the Royal Thai Navy provided minimal assistance but forced vessels out of Thai waters despite having dying passengers and mechanical problems aboard.⁸³ Rohingya intercepted in Thailand are typically detained indefinitely in police stations, immigration centres, or confined shelters (for women and children).⁸⁴ Despite agreements to provide alternatives for detained children, reports from 2020-2022 showed dozens of Rohingya children remained in police custody, while hundreds of others were held in various facilities across Thailand.⁸⁵

Thailand established a National Screening Mechanism (NSM) in 2020 to assess cases of non-nationals fleeing persecution. Thailand's implementation of the NSM in September 2023⁸⁶ marks a significant shift in its approach to refugee protection, aiming to independently screen refugees without UNHCR assistance.⁸⁷ The mechanism is designed to grant “protected person” status to non-nationals who face well-founded fears of persecution in their home countries. While this development represents a step forward in Thailand's refugee and human rights protection framework, the implementation is proceeding gradually as the Thai government, with UNHCR's technical support, continues to develop the necessary procedural standards and policies.

However, the NSM faces several critical challenges and limitations. Its legal subordination to the Immigration Act means that refugees seeking protection may still face arrest, detention, or prosecution based on their immigration status, even though Clause 15 of the regulation provides for delayed deportation.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the regulation lacks clarity on crucial aspects, including the precise definition of who qualifies for protection and what rights are attached to “protected person” status.⁸⁹ Most critically, certain vulnerable groups are systematically excluded from this protective framework, with the Rohingya—a population widely recognized as experiencing severe persecution—being explicitly denied protection under the mechanism.⁹⁰ The Protected Persons Screening Committee (PPSC) holds significant discretionary power in defining persecution and

⁸² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/04/burmese-boat-survivors>; See also, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/05/26/perilous-plight/burmas-rohingya-take-seas>

⁸³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/16/world/asia/migrant-boat-myanmar-thailand.html>; See also, <https://www.dw.com/en/thai-navy-turns-back-boat-carrying-migrants/a-18451005>

⁸⁴ [No Safe Haven: The Plight of Rohingya Children Across Asia,](#)

⁸⁵ UNHCR, ‘UNHCR Submission for the Universal Periodic Review – Thailand – UPR 39th Session (2021)’, February 2021, Available at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/61951b547.html>

⁸⁶ . ‘UNHCR Operational Fact Sheet, 30 September 2023’. Retrieved from https://www.unhcr.org/th/wp-content/uploads/sites/91/2023/10/UNHCR-Thailand_Operational-Factsheet-July-September-2023.pdf

⁸⁷ UNHCR Welcomes Thai Cabinet Approval of National Screening Mechanism’. Press release. <https://www.unhcr.org/th/en/16791-unhcr-welcomes-thai-cabinet-approval-of-national-screening-mechanism.html>

⁸⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/13/letter-prime-minister-srettha-thavasin-re-implementation-national-screening>

⁸⁹ <http://opiniojuris.org/2020/01/28/thailands-national-screening-mechanism-key-issues/>

⁹⁰ Gazette, *Notification of the Protected Person Screening Committee on the Criteria, Methods and Conditions for Protected Person Screening - Article 2(3)*, 27 March 2023, <https://ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/documents/140D072S0000000003500.pdf> (In Thai)

determining protection eligibility, leading to uncertainty about how the mechanism will function in practice, particularly in cases involving national security considerations.

Advocacy groups have emphasised the severe challenges faced by Rohingya refugees in establishing their Myanmar citizenship status. Without official documentation, these refugees become targets for various forms of exploitation, including forced labour and extortion by officials. There have been documented cases where Rohingya refugees faced deportation when unable to meet bribe demands.⁹¹ While migration continues to be a key factor in Thailand's socio-economic development, irregular migration is also a notable feature and there are varied responses to asylum seekers, particularly those fleeing persecution.⁹² These perceptions are influenced by regional experiences and local community dynamics. In southern Thailand, for instance, different patterns of refugee integration have emerged, highlighting how local contexts can shape community responses to newcomers. This suggests the importance of understanding and addressing community concerns while developing inclusive refugee policies and practices that benefit both host communities and those seeking protection.

A study in 2023 by the Mixed Migration Centre,⁹³ analyzing the drivers of migration reveals that fundamental rights violations and security concerns are the predominant factors driving people to leave their countries of origin. Over three-quarters of individuals cited lack of rights and freedoms (78%) and exposure to violence, insecurity, and conflict (76%) as their primary reasons for migration. While the majority made independent decisions to migrate, the choice of Thailand as a destination was largely determined by geographic accessibility, with two-thirds of migrants indicating it was their only viable route. Once in Thailand, migrants face significant challenges in meeting basic needs, with a vast majority requiring humanitarian assistance for essential items such as food and water. Without formal recognition or protection from Thai authorities, thousands of Rohingya live in legal limbo, forced to pay exorbitant fees to brokers for documentation and regularly subjected to extortion by Thai officials.⁹⁴

The Royal Thai navy's policy of intercepting and pushing Rohingya boats toward Malaysia or Indonesia, combined with refusing UNHCR access to conduct refugee status determinations, has created a dangerous pattern that puts already vulnerable people at further risk of harm, with hundreds currently held in immigration detention centres without proper legal protections or pathways to safety.⁹⁵ Urgent action is needed to address the critical situation of Rohingya refugees stranded at sea, with emphasis on coordinated search and rescue operations and safe disembarkation procedures. Drawing lessons from the 2015 crisis, which resulted in significant loss of life, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive regional response through ASEAN and the Bali Process frameworks.⁹⁶ Lastly, Thailand continues to experience an escalating wave of anti-migrant

⁹¹ <https://asia-ajar.org/2024/06/27/indonesia-malaysia-thailand-new-report-from-rohingya-oral-histories-urgent-regional-action/>

⁹² <https://thailand.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1371/files/2023-10/public-perception-report-v1.pdf>

⁹³ https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/276_Rohingya-refugees-in-Thailand-Snapshot.pdf

⁹⁴ <https://hardstories.org/stories/minority-rights/the-rohingyas-silent-struggle-in-thailand>

⁹⁵ <https://thailand.iom.int/news/increasing-arrivals-rohingya-boats-iom-scales-support>

⁹⁶ <https://roasiapacific.iom.int/news/iom-calls-coordinated-response-save-lives-rohingya-stranded-sea>

sentiment against Myanmar nationals, driven by widespread misinformation and disinformation sparking physical demonstrations and xenophobic rhetoric.⁹⁷

Indonesia

In July 2022, only about 800 Rohingya refugees were residing in Indonesia,⁹⁸ while the numbers in 2024 have swelled to more than 2000 Rohingyas⁹⁹. Over the past few years, Indonesia has increasingly become an intended place of disembarkation for Rohingya boatloads.¹⁰⁰ Many headed to Malaysia at a later juncture. Acehese fishermen along with villagers have for many years played a crucial role in rescuing Rohingya in distress at sea, using their traditional customary law (*Hukum Adat Laot*) as a legal and moral foundation for such rescues even when the Indonesian security forces have tried to push boats back.

While not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, following the maritime crisis in 2015, Indonesia issued a Presidential Decree in December 2016 with provisions for disembarkation for boats in distress and for the coordination of humanitarian assistance for refugee new arrivals.

However, in June 2020, Indonesia was initially reluctant to let a group of 99 Rohingya, including women and children, brought near the shore by Acehese fishermen but local communities protested and literally carried them ashore in defiance. It was later found that three fishermen had negotiated the pick-up of these 99 passengers from the mother vessel in exchange for monetary compensation. The three were later sentenced to five years imprisonment for people's smuggling. This incident had implications as fishermen were ordered not to tow Rohingya boats ashore and instead to inform the maritime authorities, making disembarkation more uncertain.

In late December 2021, another boat in distress, escorted out of Indian waters, was stranded at sea in the Straits of Malacca. Acehese fishermen provided them with food and water but dare not pull them ashore. It took three days until the Indonesia Government finally issued permission to bring them to shore and disembark exhausted passengers.

The last two years (2023 and 2024), saw an unprecedented rise in boat movements of Rohingyas recording a massive 78% increase.¹⁰¹ Data indicates that roughly 3,000 Rohingya refugees have reached Indonesia's Aceh and North Sumatra regions, with women and children comprising the majority of arrivals.¹⁰² UNHCR interviews with these refugees reveal multiple factors driving the surge in sea crossings: deteriorating security conditions in Bangladesh's refugee camps, reduced

⁹⁷ https://thailand.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1371/files/documents/2024-10/myanmar-appeal-2024_0.pdf; See also, <https://asia-ajar.org/2024/06/27/indonesia-malaysia-thailand-new-report-from-rohingya-oral-histories-urgent-regional-action/>

⁹⁸ UNHCR Indonesia, 'Monthly Statistical Report, July 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/id/wp-content/uploads/sites/42/2023/03/Indonesia-Fact-Sheet-July-2022-FINAL.pdf>

⁹⁹ UNHCR Indonesia Protection Brief, November 2024 <https://reliefweb.int/report/indonesia/unhcr-indonesia-protection-brief-november-2024>

¹⁰⁰ While boat movements of Rohingya refugees have occurred since 2012, they became a more regular feature with frequent disembarkations in Aceh, Indonesia particularly from 2015 during the initial Bay of Bengal boat crisis.

¹⁰¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/indonesia/spike-arrivals-unaccompanied-rohingya-children-indonesia-highlights-increasing-desperation-save-children>

¹⁰² <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/rohingya-refugees-arriving-indonesia-boat-surge-700-sea-crossings-predicted-reach-new-high>

costs of maritime travel, ongoing unrest in Myanmar, and the absence of meaningful progress in establishing safe conditions for their return home. The latter includes a continued failure to address the fundamental causes of Rohingya displacement from Myanmar.¹⁰³

The demographics of Rohingya arrivals have evolved significantly. While boat arrivals historically originated from Bangladesh's refugee camps, since late 2022, entire families—including parents and children—have been arriving with the intention to settle in Indonesia or with hope for resettlement to a third country. Unlike previous migrants who viewed Indonesia as a temporary stop en route to Malaysia, these families lack both the familial connections and financial means to continue onward.

Most recently, in January 2025, a new pattern has emerged with Rohingya refugees arriving directly from internally displaced person (IDP) camps in Central Rakhine. The ongoing armed conflict in Myanmar has severely restricted humanitarian access to these camps, pushing their residents to the edge of starvation. This dire situation suggests we may see an increasing number of boats departing directly from Myanmar, marking a shift from the previously dominant Bangladesh departure points.

Recent Rohingya arrivals in Aceh face significant challenges beginning with their disembarkation process. Despite the presence of starvation, deaths, and reported violations aboard vessels, the process of allowing passengers to come ashore has been markedly slow. Once on land, shelter remains a critical concern, with many refugees confined to temporary accommodations—primarily tents and makeshift structures—for extended periods. In some cases, they have faced sudden eviction notices without alternative housing solutions.

While efforts continue to register new arrivals and provide assistance to vulnerable individuals, basic needs remain largely unmet. Water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities at accommodation sites require urgent attention to mitigate health risks. Relations with host communities have become strained, fuelled by misinformation, disinformation, and misconceptions about the circumstances of Rohingya arrivals.

Although IOM has worked to secure housing solutions, many Rohingya are increasingly choosing to relocate to Pekanbaru that offer some freedom of movement and allow families to stay together. This has resulted in the emergence of a self-established makeshift camps, operating without basic services. While IOM provides minimal cash assistance for basic subsistence, this informal settlements lack adequate access to water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities. The situation is further complicated by funding constraints, which severely limit the scope and scale of assistance available to the Rohingya community.

The role of Acehnese fishermen in Rohingya maritime movements has become increasingly complex. Previously they were known for humanitarian rescue operations¹⁰⁴; but recent law enforcement actions have revealed instances of organised smuggling activities, with fishermen

¹⁰³ UNHCR Indonesia Protection Brief, November 2024 <https://reliefweb.int/report/indonesia/unhcr-indonesia-protection-brief-november-2024>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-27/aceh-fishermen-praised-rohingya-refugees-indonesia-australia/12400268>; See also, <https://www.insideindonesia.org/archive/articles/acehnese-fishermen-and-rohingya-rescue-at-sea>

facing arrests¹⁰⁵. This development has complicated the narrative around maritime assistance to Rohingya boats in Acehese waters. Lastly, the Presidential Regulation on the Handling of Foreign Refugees and Asylum-Seekers is currently under review for amendment.

Most Rohingya arriving by boat in Aceh, however, quickly move on to Malaysia, their intended destination, where they have relatives (including many women and girls who are being brought as brides for Rohingya men in Malaysia) and community support networks help them access livelihoods.

For Rohingya refugees who do end up staying for longer periods of time in Indonesia, livelihood options are very limited. Indeed, Rohingya regularly travel irregularly to Malaysia using the same channels that Indonesian migrants take to seek employment there. Indonesia has, however, shown some flexibility with access to education, allowing refugee children to enroll in national schools provided there is space in the school. UNHCR reported that as of July 2022, there were 850 refugee children (not all are rohingya) currently enrolled in accredited national schools.

Indonesia has also adopted alternatives to detention, transitioning from immigration detention centres to community housing facilities for refugees in asylum seekers. Maritime arrivals in Aceh, however, are often sheltered in makeshift camps in district government buildings before being transferred to these housing facilities in other provinces. Indonesia was vocal on the persecution of Rohingya in Myanmar and chaired ASEAN in 2023.

Nonetheless with the rise of the numbers there have been triggers which has sparked intense debate wherein their arrivals have been rejected. Hate speech and incidents of fake information drives have also seen a substantial rise.¹⁰⁶ The incident of 27 December 2023 which began as an online hate campaign quickly transformed itself into a mob attack on the recent boat arrivals. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to aver that they are not mandated or obligated to accommodate and the same is being undertaken on humanitarian grounds. Significant numbers of Acehese refuse to accept the growing members of the refugee community.

UNHCR, IOM and several other local stakeholders play an important role in responding to the protection to the Rohingya refugees. The potential concerns surrounding access to services, basic essentials, registration and legal support are being responded by a cohort of bodies and institutions.

Among the challenges which the Rohingya refugees face in the face of protracted displacement are access to territory after reaching Aceh and parts of Indonesia. While many Indonesians are sympathetic, many continue to resist the presence. Many boats face resistance when disembarking causing further relocation and delay in accessing protection. Lack of access to economic opportunities poses a serious concern for the majority looking to find ways to support their families and relatives and lead a dignified life. Another rising concern are the opportunities for resettlement and/ or complementary pathways being made available. Indonesia is often perceived as a 'transit country' to Malaysia where economic opportunities are in multitude; but recent developments show a reversal of decisions thereby terminating the journey in Indonesia

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/unhcr-calls-indonesia-let-rohingya-stranded-sea-off-aceh-2024-10-23/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://un-dco.org/stories/rising-above-hate-indonesia-tackles-disinformation-against-rohingya-refugees;>
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-12-28/indonesian-protesters-storm-rohingya-refugee-shelter/103269442>

in search of life and liberty.

Last but not the least, the challenge to navigate the rising misinformation, disinformation and hate speech vis-à-vis the community is proving to be critical. Due to a rise in such instances, there is a considerable shift in the perceptions towards that of the refugees and giving shape to violence being perpetuated. Debunking these versions have become a priority along with clarifying the narrative with facts. The concern of muted and simmering hatred continues to impact the community and the response of the cohort of local and international agencies.

Malaysia

For decades, Rohingya have sought refuge in Malaysia and they have for years comprised the largest refugee population in the country. At the end of November 2024, out of 192,170 refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR, 111,410 were Rohingya¹⁰⁷. In addition, there are an unknown number of unregistered Rohingya who live in every state in Peninsular Malaysia, and mostly reside in urban or peri-urban areas.

Malaysia has been noted as among the most outspoken country in the region condemning the systematic violence against the Rohingya and calling for root causes of the crisis to be addressed in Myanmar, including denial of citizenship, and has taken the strongest stand within ASEAN against the Myanmar military since the 1 February 2021 coup. However, Rohingya refugees continue to be in want of formal mechanisms of protection in Malaysia with many arriving on shores only to be detained¹⁰⁸ or resisted from disembarking from boats¹⁰⁹. With Malaysia not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the country lacks a legal framework that recognises refugees and grants them rights. Thus, Rohingya, like other refugees in Malaysia, continue to lack legal documentation, do not have the right to formal employment, and cannot access education through the national education system.

Malaysia has periodically considered ways of granting more rights, protection and livelihood opportunities to Rohingya refugees, such as a 2017 pilot project on Rohingya work rights in the plantations and manufacturing sector¹¹⁰ as well as the newly amended Directive Number 23 under the National Security Council which aims to improve social protection of refugees and asylum seekers regardless of their background, age, gender or country of origin.¹¹¹ Previously, in 2006, the Government of Malaysia began to issue IMM13 permits to Muslim Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, but stopped amid accusations of bribery and corruption in the issuing process.¹¹² This decision left some 4,000 Rohingyas holding receipts proving they paid for IMM13 permits

¹⁰⁷ UNHCR Malaysia, 'UNHCR Malaysia Figures at a Glance,' <https://www.unhcr.org/my/what-we-do/figures-glance-malaysia>

¹⁰⁸ Malaysia detains 196 Rohingya migrants from Myanmar <https://www.newagebd.net/post/south-asia/254426/malaysia-detains-196-rohingya-migrants-from-myanmar>

¹⁰⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/01/04/malaysia-rohingya-refugees-turned-away/17fc6a00-caa7-11ef-a9b8-74e0b395057f_story.html#:~:text=While%20Malaysia%20has%20accepted%20Rohingya,seekers%20registered%20with%20the%20U.N.

¹¹⁰ Beh Lih Yi, 'Malaysia in pilot scheme to allow Rohingya refugees to work,' Reuters, 24 November 2016.

¹¹¹ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review A/HRC/56/11/Add.1 (page 5) Available at <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/094/80/pdf/g2409480.pdf>, See also,

¹¹² <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/uscri/2008/en/59608>

without the permits themselves. These permits would allow them to work, attend school, and live in the country legally.¹¹³

However, either of these are yet to translate effectively into broader policies and practices. Without formal protection, Rohingya continue to work informally in low-skilled jobs such as cleaners, grass cutters, construction workers, and in wholesale markets, but are often subjected to arrest and detention for lack of documentation and for working illegally. Another challenge facing the community is delays in registration of new arrivals which results in continued persecution and inability to access basic services and protection.

Despite adopting the 'Five-Point Consensus'¹¹⁴ on the evolving crisis in early 2021, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has failed to fulfill its pledges or take meaningful steps to end human rights violations and ensure access to effective humanitarian assistance. With the current chairmanship of Malaysia, priority is expected to be placed on the scrutiny of the effectiveness of the plan and pave the way for meaningful and sustainable implementation.

Rohingya children continue to be at a high risk of growing up without access to structured education. While there are a number of alternative learning centres run by NGOs, these do not meet the needs of all Rohingya children and the majority of Rohingya children who are receiving some form of education attend learning centres run by the refugee community, where the quality of teaching is often poor, and funding is not sustainable.¹¹⁵ Refugees registered with UNHCR can access government healthcare facilities but have to pay half the foreigners' rate, which many, surviving hand to mouth, cannot afford.

Covid-19 pandemic restrictions had a profound impact on the economic survival of refugee communities, many of whom lost employment and daily income. To curb the spread of Covid-19, Malaysia declared a Movement Control Order (MCO) and took strict measures to prevent the entry of foreigners into the country. In the early months following the announcement of the MCO in April 2020, Malaysian maritime enforcement agencies pushed back several Rohingya boats to the high seas. The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) Asia's June 2020 Report brought forth the impact of the pandemic restrictions on Rohingyas and Bangladeshi residing in Malaysia.¹¹⁶ The crisis extended beyond public health concerns, as these communities faced increasing marginalisation through xenophobia, arrests, and detention. Hateful messages targeting the Rohingya community in Malaysia spread across social media platforms, including Twitter and Facebook, causing widespread fear among refugees in 2020. These posts contained discriminatory language, dehumanizing imagery, and calls for forced deportation to Myanmar, with users threatening Rohingya activists and their supporters with physical violence, murder, and sexual assault.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Nur Syazwani Muzafarkamal & Ishtiaq Hossain, 'Malaysia's Policy towards the Rohingya Refugees', *Journal of Islam in Asia*, Vol 16, No. 3, December 2019, Page 437 – 453 at pp. 444.

¹¹⁴ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/Chairmans-Statement-on-ALM-Five-Point-Consensus-24-April-2021-FINAL-a-1.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Rohingya Refugee Education in Malaysia: An Analysis of Current Standards and Challenges

DOI: [10.9734/ajess/2024/v50i71474](https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2024/v50i71474) Available at <https://journalajess.com/index.php/AJESS/article/view/1474>

¹¹⁶ Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on Rohingya and Bangladeshis in Malaysia
https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/113_covid_snapshot_Asia.pdf

¹¹⁷ <https://www.fortifyrights.org/mly-inv-2020-05-11/>; See also, https://brill.com/view/journals/gr2p/15/2-3/article-p177_005.xml?language=en

The Malaysian government implemented extensive control measures, including surveillance, securitisation, eviction, and deportation, effectively targeting undocumented foreigners, including refugees. The Rohingya refugee community in particular became the target of heightened xenophobic sentiments and perceived the fear of verbal and physical attacks during the pandemic for several interconnected reasons.¹¹⁸ They faced accusations of non-compliance with lockdown regulations, while simultaneously dealing with the fallout from a viral fabricated message that falsely claimed that a Rohingya activist was demanding Malaysian citizenship. Adding to these tensions, the arrival of boats carrying Rohingya refugees in Malaysian waters during lockdowns was perceived as a threat to both public health and national sovereignty.¹¹⁹ The Rohingya who manage to undertake perilous journeys and reach Malaysia often will have mental health concerns in addition to infectious diseases and face challenges in accessing medical assistance.¹²⁰

Despite lacking formal protection frameworks, Rohingya refugees demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of financial instability and potential labour exploitation. While common rhetoric often portrays refugees as a drain on public resources, Protecting Refugees in Asia's (PRiA) research reveals that most Rohingya refugees are, in fact, self-sufficient with minimal state support. These communities exhibit significant adaptability and a strong drive to learn, quickly acquiring language skills and displaying significant entrepreneurial initiative. Their capabilities and work ethic position them well to address current labour shortages across various industries.¹²¹

Detention of refugees and asylum seekers is a major concern in Malaysia. Since August 2019, UNHCR has been denied access to immigration detention centres, therefore unable to secure the release of those in need of international protection. Six people, including two women and two children, were killed when they were struck by vehicles while attempting to cross a highway after more than 500 Rohingya refugees escaped from Sungai Bakap facility in Penang state, a temporary immigration detention center in northern Malaysia. Malaysian authorities responded by setting up roadblocks and deploying police, immigration officials, and volunteer security

¹¹⁸ https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/89379/ssoar-aseas-2023-1-abd_jalil_et_al-The_Effects_of_COVID-19_on.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y; See also, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/11/malaysia-urged-to-end-violent-threats-against-rohingya-refugees>

¹¹⁹ Abd Jalil, A., & Hoffstaedter, G. (2023). The effects of COVID-19 on refugees in peninsular Malaysia: Surveillance, securitization and eviction. *Advances in Southeast Asian Studies*, 16(1), 79-99. See also, '#SayNoToRohingya': a critical study on Malaysians' amplified resentment towards Rohingya refugees on Twitter during the 2020 COVID-19 crisis <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00358533.2023.2244287>

¹²⁰ Rohingya are at risk "wherever we go, whether Myanmar, Thailand, or Malaysia" <https://reliefweb.int/report/malaysia/rohingya-are-risk-wherever-we-go-whether-myanmar-thailand-or-malaysia#:~:text=Malaysia%20hosts%20approximately%20200%2C000%20stateless,%2C%20exploitation%2C%20arrests%20and%20detention.>

¹²¹ Research Report: Understanding the current and potential contribution of Rohingya refugees to the Malaysian economy <https://adsp.ngo/publications/research-report-understanding-the-current-and-potential-contribution-of-rohingya-refugees-to-the-malaysian-economy/>

services to recapture the refugees, with 362 already re-arrested.¹²² The Director-General of Immigration revealed in the aftermath of the breakout that there were around 2,200 Rohingya detainees held across the country since August 2019.¹²³ Human rights lawyers and refugee advocacy groups have questioned the legal basis for prolonged detention, especially given that Rohingya cannot be deported to Myanmar. In the meantime, in February 2022, the Malaysian government officially launched an Alternatives to Detention (ATD) for unaccompanied and separated children pilot project, but it excludes Rohingya children.

PRiA's research report confirms that immigration detention has inflicted severe and lasting trauma on Rohingya refugees.¹²⁴ Within detention facilities, they face both physical and psychological abuse, which often exacerbates trauma from previous experiences. Children in detention are particularly vulnerable, suffering long-term consequences to their well-being. These detention practices fundamentally contradict Malaysia's stated goal of providing a protection-centered environment for vulnerable populations.

In March 2024, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released an in-depth report highlighting the impact of the country's detention system, disclosing that "the Malaysian government is detaining about 12,000 migrants and refugees, including 1400 children, in conditions that put them at serious risk of physical abuse and psychological harm."¹²⁵

One year after the Malaysian government launched Baitul Mahabbah in 2023, an initiative to relocate children under the age of 10 from immigration detention centres to dedicated facilities, concerns persist about the program's effectiveness and true nature. While currently housing 170 children, including unaccompanied minors, these centres continue to function as detention facilities rather than genuine alternatives.¹²⁶ Despite Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution's stance that children should not be detained in immigration depots, and despite better conditions than standard detention centres, the Baitul Mahabbah facilities still restrict children's freedom and prohibit visitors. Approximately 50 detained Rohingya children are under immigration official supervision in a centre close to Kuala Lumpur's International airport. Many of these children, along with their mothers, had already endured violence in Bangladesh's refugee camps and Myanmar's apartheid system before undertaking dangerous sea voyages to reach Malaysia. This situation is particularly concerning given Malaysia's significant refugee population. The problem is compounded by the government's refusal to grant UNHCR, pro bono lawyers and civil society organisations access to these facilities to review asylum claims, leading to the indefinite detention of thousands of Rohingya refugees who cannot be deported. Rather than maintaining Baitul Mahabbah as a long-term solution, it is pertinent to underscore that the Malaysian

¹²² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/20/six-killed-as-hundreds-of-rohingya-flee-malaysia-detention>; See also, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/2297538/six-rohingya-dead-hundreds-flee-after-riot-at-malaysian-detention-camp>

¹²³ https://www.hmetro.com.my/mutakhir/2022/05/840008/60-tahanan-jim-masih-diburu#google_vignette

¹²⁴ Research Report: Impact of Prolonged Immigration Detention on Rohingya Families and Communities in Malaysia <https://adsp.ngo/publications/adsp-research-impact-of-prolonged-immigration-detention-on-rohingya-families-and-communities-in-malaysia/>

¹²⁵ Malaysia: Abusive Detention of Migrants, Refugees <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/05/malaysia-abusive-detention-migrants-refugees>

¹²⁶ Malaysia's Promised Immigration Reform Fails Children <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/09/malysias-promised-immigration-reform-fails-children>

government should work with civil society groups to quickly develop a comprehensive plan for the immediate release of all children from immigration detention.

Malaysia intensified its crackdown on irregular migration in early 2024, conducting hundreds of raids throughout Kuala Lumpur targeting both undocumented migrant workers and their employers.¹²⁷ The controversial nature of these operations came to light when Malaysia's Home Minister acknowledged that approximately 80 per of those detained actually possessed proper documentation, rendering their arrests unwarranted.¹²⁸ This situation reflects Malaysia's immigration policies having created increasing barriers for non-nationals seeking legal documentation, refugee status, or citizenship. The situation for Rohingya refugees has been further exacerbated by the recent freeze of USAID and PRM funding, cutting off critical humanitarian assistance and protection services that many vulnerable Rohingya families depend on for their survival, leaving them with even fewer resources and support mechanisms during this crisis.

¹²⁷ Around 200 immigration raids conducted in Malaysian capital in first week of 2024

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/watch/around-200-immigration-raids-conducted-malaysian-capital-first-week-2024-video-4049241>

¹²⁸ <https://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news/230076/saifuddin-questions-rights-group-s-claim-on-children-held-at-immigration-depots/>

Thematic Sections: Mental Health Concerns of Rohingyas in South Asia and Southeast Asia

The Rohingya crisis remains one of the most protracted humanitarian challenges with over a million individuals displaced due to systemic persecution and violence in Myanmar. The forced displacement of Rohingya populations across South and Southeast Asia has created a complex web of mental health challenges transcending national boundaries. While a bulk of the dialogue and advocacy focuses of humanitarian needs and rightly so, the mental health impact of this prolonged displacement and uncertain legal status continues to affect across multiple host countries demands greater attention. This section examines the mental health landscape of Rohingya populations, analysing common and distinct challenges across different regional contexts. The section also shares specific examples of steps taken to respond to these emerging concerns.

The community face a range of mental health challenges rooted in their traumatic experiences. Primary trauma from persecution and violent displacement in Myanmar is compounded by secondary stressors in host countries. Studies highlighted high prevalence rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression, resulting from exposure to violence, including witnessing massacres, sexual violence, and destruction of homes.¹²⁹ Prolonged and repeated displacement exacerbates anxiety, stemming from uncertainties about the future, restricted mobility, and statelessness. GAGE's midline assessment indicates that approximately 60% of Rohingya refugees show symptoms of depression, while 84% exhibit signs of emotional distress inclusive of anxiety and depression.¹³⁰

Women and children are particularly vulnerable, but that does not undermine the impact of trauma to convert to deep mental health concerns for men. Women, many of whom have survived gender-based violence, face stigmatization along with being hesitant or lack safe spaces for psychosocial healing.¹³¹ Children, exposed to conflict and life in overcrowded refugee camps and/ or detention like conditions, experience developmental delays, behavioural issues, and education disruption, further compounding mental health challenges.¹³² Cultural stigma and a lack of awareness about mental health hinder refugees from seeking help.¹³³ For many,

¹²⁹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7441657/> ; See also, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9885485/>

¹³⁰ <https://www.gage.odi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Bangladesh-PSS-Midline-2024-WEB98.pdf> Page 2

¹³¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8715339/> ; See also, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/14687968221078373>

¹³²

https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20191220_acaps_analysis_hub_in_coxs_vulnerabilities_in_the_rohingya_refugee_camps_0.pdf; See also, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/sites/uk/files/legacy-pdf/5bbc6f014.pdf> Pg 26

¹³³

[https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6998923/#:~:text=Rohingya%20refugees%20tend%20not%20to,associated%20with%20mental%20illness%20\(R](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6998923/#:~:text=Rohingya%20refugees%20tend%20not%20to,associated%20with%20mental%20illness%20(R)

psychological suffering is expressed somatically, making it harder for health workers to diagnose and treat conditions.¹³⁴

Living conditions significantly influence mental health outcomes, with distinct patterns emerging across different host countries. In Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, where the largest Rohingya population resides, overcrowded camp conditions and limited mobility create unique stressors.¹³⁵ These conditions are further complicated by recurring environmental threats – regular monsoon flooding and cyclones trigger trauma responses; while frequent camp fires exacerbate feelings of insecurity and instability. The presence of criminal networks within camps, gender-based violence, and limited educational and livelihood opportunities create additional layers of psychological distress. Young people are particularly affected, with studies showing high rates of depression among adolescents who see little prospect for their future. BRAC University's recent studies highlight how monsoon-related disasters and camp fires trigger anxiety and re-traumatization.¹³⁶

The mental health impact on Rohingyas in India is severely heightened by rising incidents of detention and politicization of their displacement, with many experiencing acute anxiety and trauma from the constant fear of arrest or deportation.¹³⁷ The framing of their presence as a security concern rather than a humanitarian issue has not only intensified their psychological distress but also created additional barriers to accessing mental health support, as many avoid seeking help from formal institutions due to fear of identification and detainment.

Mental health distress among Rohingyas in Thailand is deeply rooted in the trauma of historical maritime pushbacks and refusal-to-disembark incidents, where refugees face prolonged periods stranded at sea in life-threatening conditions.¹³⁸ The prevalent use of immigration detention centers, where Rohingyas face indefinite confinement in overcrowded conditions, creates severe psychological trauma, particularly among those who have already survived trafficking networks operating along both the Myanmar-Thailand as well as the Thailand-Malaysia corridor.¹³⁹

In contrast Rohingyas in Malaysia typically live in urban settings, the stress stems from different sources – delays in registration and issuance of documentation, resulting in primarily the fear of detention and lastly the struggle for gaining employment.¹⁴⁰ The urban refugee experience is marked by persistent anxiety over immigration raids, with many Rohingyas reporting severe psychological distress from witnessing family members arrests or experiencing detention themselves.¹⁴¹ Children and youth face additional psychological burdens from limited access to

¹³⁴ <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ijmhsc-11-2022-0112/full/html?skipTracking=true>

¹³⁵ <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/rohingya-refugees-flee-bangladesh-urgent-action-needed-provide-basic-needs>

¹³⁶ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39737225/>

¹³⁷ <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/a-lifetime-in-detention-rohingya-refugees-in-india/>; See also, <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/human-dynamics/articles/10.3389/fhumd.2022.921461/full>

¹³⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2017/09/thailand-hard-line-on-refugees-leaves-thousands-vulnerable-and-at-risk/>

¹³⁹ <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/advocacy-letters/the-situation-of-the-rohingya-and-deadly-sea-crossings/>

¹⁴⁰ <https://comparativemigrationstudies.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40878-024-00407-x>

¹⁴¹ <https://idcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Research-Report-Impact-of-Immigration-Detention-on-Rohingya-English.pdf>

formal education, while women report high levels of anxiety from being particularly vulnerable to harassment and exploitation in informal work settings. The absence of legal work rights, combined with the constant threat of arrest, creates a pervasive environment of fear that significantly impacts their mental well-being.¹⁴²

Rohingyas often experience social isolation and community fragmentation which is manifested through mental health challenges in Indonesia.¹⁴³ Due to refusal to disembark, often families are fragmented across the country's archipelagic geography and decentralized refugee management which creates unique psychological stressors, with small Rohingya populations scattered across different islands. The fragmentation severely limits cultural continuity and collective coping mechanisms, leading to many navigating complex landscapes without assistance and support networks.

The mental health of Rohingyas must be recognized as a critical component of any humanitarian response. Addressing these concerns not only alleviates individual suffering but also fosters resilience and stability among displaced populations, contributing to more effective regional management of the refugee crisis.

Thematic Section: Impact of Misinformation, Disinformation, and Hate Speech on Rohingyas in South Asia and Southeast Asia

Misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech has significantly exacerbated the plight of Rohingyas, contributing to violence, forced migration, and widespread human rights violations. Rohingya refugees not only face misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech but also endure transnational repression, particularly in South and Southeast Asian host states. Governments in countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia, and India have at times imposed strict surveillance, movement restrictions, and deportation threats on Rohingyas, often under political pressure or security pretexts. In some cases, Rohingya activists and community leaders have reported harassment, arbitrary detention, or forced repatriation, despite the risk of persecution in Myanmar. Digital repression is also growing, with reports of online surveillance and cyber threats targeting Rohingya voices advocating for rights and recognition. These tactics undermine their asylum protections, silence dissent, and exacerbate their vulnerability, making it difficult for them to access legal status, education, and livelihoods in host countries. This section attempts to explore the role of such harmful narratives across South Asia and Southeast Asia and their socio-political, security, and humanitarian consequences.

At the core of these disinformation efforts is a coordinated strategy to portray Rohingyas as threatening outsiders.¹⁴⁴ State-sponsored media in Myanmar and sympathetic networks in neighbouring/ host countries consistently often depict Rohingya communities as illegal immigrants and potential security risks. This narrative serves a critical political purpose:

¹⁴² <https://adsp.ngo/publications/press-release-the-need-for-formalising-and-expanding-rohingya-access-to-livelihoods-in-malaysia/>

¹⁴³ <https://academic.oup.com/jpubhealth/article-abstract/46/4/e700/7729373>

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.apc.org/en/news/countering-misinformation-disinformation-and-hate-speech-targeting-rohingya-refugees>

transforming a vulnerable population into a perceived threat that can be legitimately marginalized, displaced, and denied basic human rights.

Cultural and religious intolerance forms the bedrock of anti-Rohingya narratives, deeply rooted in historical animosities and systematically amplified through digital platforms. These tensions are not merely historical artifacts but actively maintained through calculated propaganda that exploits existing societal fractures. Political actors across Myanmar, Bangladesh, and other regional contexts have masterfully manipulated these narratives, transforming the Rohingya population into a convenient political scapegoat.¹⁴⁵

The political manipulation extends beyond mere rhetorical strategies. State and non-state actors deliberately construct narratives framing Rohingyas as threats to national identity, economic stability, and cultural integrity. Economic factors further exacerbate this dynamic, with vulnerable populations often redirecting economic frustrations toward marginalized communities. By positioning Rohingyas as competition for scarce resources, political actors create fertile ground for systematic discrimination.

Social media platforms have emerged as primary vectors for hate speech and misinformation, prioritizing quick engagement over fact checking or accuracy. These digital ecosystems create self-reinforcing echo chambers where inflammatory content spreads exponentially faster than factual information.¹⁴⁶ Traditional media outlets compound this challenge through biased reporting that often uncritically reproduces state-sponsored narratives about Rohingya populations. Grassroots networks play an equally critical role in disseminating harmful narratives. Local community leaders, religious networks, and informal communication channels become conduits for transmitting deeply entrenched prejudices. These networks operate beyond formal media infrastructures, making them particularly challenging to monitor and counteract.

In South Asia, particularly Bangladesh and India, Rohingya refugees face complex misinformation landscapes. Bangladesh struggles with hosting large refugee populations while managing domestic economic pressures.¹⁴⁷ India's political discourse has frequently framed Rohingyas as national security threats, using this narrative to justify exclusionary immigration policies. Southeast Asian contexts present equally challenging dynamics. Malaysia¹⁴⁸ and Indonesia¹⁴⁹ demonstrate fluctuating public sentiments, with solidarity and hostility coexisting in fragile balance. Myanmar represents the most extreme manifestation of these trends, where state-sponsored disinformation has been instrumental in legitimizing genocidal actions against Rohingya populations.

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-5172/5/3/70>

¹⁴⁶ [https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Weaponization Social Media FINAL Nov2019.pdf](https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Weaponization%20Social%20Media%20FINAL%20Nov2019.pdf)

¹⁴⁷

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353429749_INFORMATION_DISORDER_IN_THE_INFORMATION_AGE_ACTORS_TACTICS_AND_IMPACTS_IN_SOUTH_AND_SOUTHEAST_ASIA

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14623528.2024.2375122>; See also,

<https://www.isis.org.my/2020/06/24/campaign-of-hate-fake-news-and-anti-refugee-rhetoric-in-malaysia/>

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/18/the-online-hate-campaign-turning-indonesians-against-rohingya-refugees>; See also, <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/rising-above-hate-indonesia-tackles-disinformation-against-rohingya-refugees>;

The human cost of these coordinated disinformation campaigns are profound and multifaceted. Systematic misinformation directly contributes to human rights violations, providing rhetorical justification for violence, mass displacement, and institutional discrimination. Rohingya communities experience comprehensive social exclusion, not just through physical marginalization but through a calculated effort to erase their collective identity and historical presence.

Addressing this complex challenge requires a comprehensive, multi-layered approach. Digital literacy programs must be developed to help communities critically evaluate online information.¹⁵⁰ Technology companies need to develop more sophisticated content moderation strategies that can identify and neutralize coordinated disinformation campaigns. Regional governments must be held accountable for their role in perpetuating harmful narratives.

International advocacy efforts focus on exposing these systematic disinformation strategies. This requires collaboration between human rights organizations, technology experts, academic researchers, and media professionals. The goal is not just to counter individual pieces of misinformation but to fundamentally disrupt the infrastructure that allows such narratives to proliferate.¹⁵¹

Educational initiatives are crucial in this context. By developing programs that promote intercultural understanding and critical media literacy, we can begin to dismantle the foundational structures that enable hate speech and misinformation. Young people, in particular, must be equipped with the tools to recognize and challenge discriminatory narratives.

Understanding and addressing the interplay between misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech is critical to mitigating the ongoing crisis faced by Rohingyas. Regional and international cooperation, coupled with robust counter-narrative strategies, are essential to protecting this vulnerable community and fostering long-term stability in South Asia and Southeast Asia.

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/13/8/418>

¹⁵¹ <https://asia-ajar.org/2024/06/27/indonesia-malaysia-thailand-new-report-from-rohingya-oral-histories-urgent-regional-action/>

Recommendations

Regional Framework and Diplomatic Action

1. Recognize the term 'Refugee' in ASEAN deliberations and policies, and develop a regional refugee protection framework integrated into ASEAN Vision 2045.
2. Begin diplomacy and negotiations for far-reaching and long-term responsibility-sharing arrangements among the international community, including states, parliaments, humanitarian agencies, donors, civil society, private sector, and both Rohingya and host communities.
3. Integrate refugee protection into the ASEAN Vision 2045 work plan during Malaysia's chairmanship in 2025.

Direct Protection Measures

4. Strengthen regional collaboration to protect those distressed at sea during irregular migration in accordance with ASEAN agreements on Search and Rescue Cooperation.
5. End boat push-backs and develop protection-based timely and predictable disembarkation protocols, including providing immediate assistance to persons rescued at sea.
6. Guarantee access to places of safety where risks are mitigated, needs are met, and legal status can be determined.
7. Cease arbitrary arrests and detention of Rohingya refugees and accord legal recognition of their status as stateless.

Humanitarian Support and Basic Rights

8. Provide basic needs (affordable healthcare, formal education, and right to work) and emergency support for refugees.
9. Improve existing humanitarian conditions vis-à-vis camp settings, providing legal documentation, ending prolonged detention and deportations.
10. Grant UNHCR access to detention centers to register unregistered Rohingya refugees and facilitate the release of existing UNHCR document holders.

Participation and Representation

11. Guarantee meaningful participation of Rohingya in decision-making ensuring shared ownership of outcomes, support refugee-led initiatives, and recognize that decisions about Rohingya should include their participation.
12. Engage directly with Rohingya youth, victims, vulnerable, and marginalized groups in developing policies and priorities for the ASEAN Chair's deliverables in 2025.
13. Bring the voices and represent the concerns of Rohingya in Parliamentary sessions and appropriate forums.
14. Host regular public hearings on the Rohingya situation to obtain updated information regarding the crisis.

Countering Marginalization and Discrimination

15. Reject the normalization of Rohingya marginalization and urge States and other actors to speak out against xenophobia.
16. Counter hate speech against refugees and contribute to changing the narrative on refugees, including Rohingya.
17. Include literacy programs on refugee rights in national school curricula to improve acceptance and treatment of refugees, including Rohingya.

Collaborative Approach and Coordination

18. Embrace a "whole-of-society" approach via stakeholder collaboration in all contexts to identify needs, vulnerabilities and risks.

Durable Solutions

19. Promote and pursue ALL possible durable solutions: local integration, resettlement, complementary pathways.
20. Share responsibilities among ASEAN Member States to protect refugees and provide humanitarian support.
21. Develop policies for private sectors and state-owned enterprises to prevent financial support to the Myanmar military.

Sustained Attention and Support

22. Keep the Rohingya on the agenda amidst the emergence of new global crises.
23. Increase financial and capacity support for civil society, including refugee-led initiatives.
24. Monitor the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus and provide constructive recommendations to make it effective.

Specific Call to Action for Malaysia

25. Draft and adopt national legislation to recognize and protect refugees.
26. Take immediate efforts to release all Rohingya refugee children from detention centers to explore placement programs.