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Examining the Humanitarian Dimensions of the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh²

Abstract

The Rohingya refugees situation in Bangladesh is among the major humanitarian issues of the 21st century, which has been triggered by the systematic persecution of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar. This paper critically examines the humanitarian response with focus on the most significant factors such as humanitarian aid supports and socioeconomic impacts on both Rohingya Refugees and the host populations. The study assesses the function of international agencies, the adequacy of humanitarian assistance, and the long-term implications of prolonged displacement. Based on a critical review of scholarly articles and policy reports, this paper evaluates the effectiveness of various humanitarian interventions. Additionally, it also analyzes the intricacies involved in the implementation of policies and offers strategic recommendations towards sustainable humanitarian responses like enhanced regional coordination, and long-term funding mechanisms. The findings emphasizes the need to adopt a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to effectively cope with the multidimensional nature of the crisis.

Keywords: Rohingya, Refugee, Humanitarian Crisis, Bangladesh, Myanmar

Absztrakt

A rohingya menekültek helyzete Bangladesben a 21. század egyik legnagyobb humanitárius problémája, amelyet a rohingya kisebbség Mianmari rendszerszintű üldözése váltott ki. Ez a dolgozat kritikai szemlélettel vizsgálja a humanitárius válaszokat, különös figyelmet fordítva a legfontosabb tényezőkre, mint a humanitárius segélyek támogatása és a rohingya menekültek, valamint a fogadó közösségek szociális-gazdasági hatásai. A kutatás értékeli a nemzetközi ügynökségek szerepét, a humanitárius segítségnyújtás megfelelőségét, és a hosszan tartó menekültügyek hosszú távú következményeit. Tudományos cikkek és politikai jelentések kritikai áttekintésére alapozva, a dolgozat értékeli a különböző humanitárius beavatkozások hatékonyságát. Ezen kívül elemzi a politikák végrehajtásának bonyolultságait, és stratégiai ajánlásokat fogalmaz meg a fenntartható humanitárius válaszok érdekében, mint a fokozott regionális koordináció és a hosszú távú finanszírozási mechanizmusok. Az eredmények hangsúlyozzák annak szükségességét, hogy átfogóbb és koordináltabb megközelítést alkalmazzunk a válság többdimenziós jellegének hatékony kezelésére.

Kulcsszavak: Rohingya, menekült, humanitárius válság, Bangladesh, Myanmar

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I. Introduction

The Rohingya in Myanmar were subjected to grave human rights violations, including violence, discrimination, and statelessness.³ The Rohingya refugee crisis is one of the most pressing humanitarian crisis of the 21st century, affecting not only the dislocated Rohingya people but also the host country, Bangladesh, and the global community at large. Ever since the massive arrival of Rohingya refugees from the Rakhine state of Myanmar in 2017, Bangladesh has been sheltering close to a million displaced Rohingya people in Cox's Bazar. The Rohingya refugee crisis has a notable effect on the judicial system, the economy, the environment, the security, and so on in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is experiencing tension on resources due to this crisis, causing disruption of its local schooling system and stressing its scarce resources to the limits.⁴ The Rohingya people have been extremely vigilant about threats to their safety since the 2021 coup in Myanmar, particularly since the Myanmar military has refused to grant them citizenship. Thus, it has become one of the biggest refugee camps globally.⁵ They are residing in camps with facing acute humanitarian distress. The arrival of the large scale of Rohingya Refugees has caused immense pressure on the resources of Bangladesh, raising the issue of humanitarian aid, and socio-economic stability. The crisis has posed complex legal, political, and humanitarian challenges that require multidimensional interventions.

Notwithstanding the numerous humanitarian efforts organized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and a multitude of non-governmental organizations (NGOs),⁶ there still remain difficulties in providing sufficient assistance, security and legal protection⁷ to the Rohingya refugees. The restricted legal status afforded to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, along with Bangladesh's non-ratification of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, has frustrated the development of a comprehensive refugee policy, thereby contributing to their precarious position.⁸ Their legal status is uncertain in Bangladesh, as they have not been granted formal refugee status under the country's national laws and are only allowed limited access to legal protection and work.⁹ Furthermore, international humanitarian aid is plagued by recurring funding constraints and logistical challenges, further exacerbating camp vulnerabilities. With the ongoing crisis, concerns regarding repatriation, integration, and sustainable humanitarian assistance gain greater urgency.¹⁰ In addition, the socio-economic

³ Rahaman, Razidur: Search for Durable Solution to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh. In *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 2024, p. 2. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15718115-bja10187>.

⁴ Islam, Shahidul – Nawshin Eva, Farzana – Khan, Rabbi: Exploring the Transformative Effects of the Rohingya Settlement on Secondary School Students in Bangladesh. In *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2024, pp. 252-56.

⁵ UNHCR, Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, 2023, Available at: <https://rohingyaresponse.org/project/2023-jrp/#:~:text=The%202023%20JRP%20requests%20%24876,Agencies%2C%20Bangladeshi%20and%20international%20NGOs.>

⁶ Goodwin-Gill, Guy S. – Mcadam Jane: *The Refugee in International Law*, Oxford University Press, 3rd ed. 2007, pp. 345-450.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Crawley, Heaven – Skleparis, Dimitris: Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe's Migration Crisis. In *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2018, pp. 48-50.

⁹ Rohingyas and Refugee Status in Bangladesh, *Forced Migration Review*, Available at: <https://www.fmreview.org/phiri/>

¹⁰ UNICEF Bangladesh Humanitarian Situation Report, UNICEF, Report No. 62, 2022. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/133961/file/Bangladesh-Humanitarian-SitRep-No.62-31-December-2022.pdf>

consequences of the crisis have been profound. Despite the commitments made by international donors to provide financial assistance, the humanitarian aid provided is insufficient to address the increasing needs of the refugee population. This situation results in funding deficits and uneven distribution of relief efforts. Furthermore, the long displacement has heightened tensions among Rohingya refugees and the host communities over the competition for resources, job opportunities, and environmental degradation.¹¹ This study critically examines the humanitarian response to the Rohingya refugee crisis, including the sufficiency of assistance and socio-economic impacts on both the refugees and the host communities. It also evaluates the contributions of international organizations, the efficacy of current humanitarian action, and the long-term implications of prolonged displacement. Based on a critical review of scholarly literature and policy documents this paper discusses the policy implementation challenges and suggests strategic solutions for sustainable humanitarian intervention. It is imperative to address these concerns in order to develop an overarching, long-term strategy that safeguards the rights and dignity of Rohingya refugees while preventing negative impacts on Bangladesh.

II. Research Methodology

This research uses the doctrinal research method, which is based on a review of the literature of primary and secondary sources. Academic articles and policy reports are largely used as research methodologies in this research.

III. Historical Background of the Rohingya Refugee Crisis

The Rohingya refugee crisis is the most protracted humanitarian crisis in the world. They have faced systematic discrimination, persecution, and forced displacement in Myanmar, which led them to leave the country. This persecution traced back to the colonial period, post-independence policies of the country, and the rise of Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar.

III.1. Colonial and Early Post-Independence Developments

The territory of Myanmar (former Burma) was a British colony and was integrated into British India from 1824 until the Second World War. After the Second World War, Japan invaded Burma.¹² The British facilitated labor migration from Bengal, leading to an increase in the Rohingya population in Rakhine State (former Arakan) of Burma.¹³ The British encouraged Bengali and other Indian immigrants to settle in Burma for paddy fields and tea plantations. Under British rule, the Burmese Buddhist majority felt particularly unsupported and threatened. Traditionally, rule by the Burmese kings had been legitimized by their homage and protection of the Buddhist religious hierarchy.¹⁴ Thomas Campbell Robertson, a

¹¹ Neef, Katja – Jones, Evan – Marlowe, Jay: The Conflict, Climate Change, and Displacement Nexus Revisited: The Protracted Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh. In *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2023, pp. 235-239.

¹² History of the Rohingya, Rohingya Culture Center, Available at: <https://rccchicago.org/history-of-the-rohingya/>, Accessed Date: 25/01/2025.

¹³ Farzana, Kazi Fahmida: Boundaries in Shaping the Rohingya Identity and the Shifting Context of Borderland Politics. In *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2015, pp. 292-299.

¹⁴ History of the Rohingya, Rohingya Culture Center, Available at: <https://rccchicago.org/history-of-the-rohingya/>

magistrate from Chittagong, was one of the first English to initiate himself to the Rakhine language, and he started to collect Rakhine manuscripts in 1825.¹⁵ However, this was a rare occurrence. Other evidence of the East India Company's expansion eastwards suggests that the British interacted with the population through local Muslim translators in the early colonial times and obtained historical information on the country through local Muslims. Following independence in 1948, the Union of Burma extended citizenship to most Rohingya, although their status was always contentious. The 1948 Citizenship Act enabled naturalization but did not ensure legal protection for the Rohingya and exposed them to political whims.¹⁶

This ambiguity became more apparent after General Ne Win's military coup in 1962, which marked the beginning of widespread anti-Rohingya policies.¹⁷ Therefore, The British Government failed to uphold its so-called promise to establish a free Muslim State in the North Arakan region, giving rise to a Mujahid movement demanding autonomy within the Union of Burma. Burmese Prime Minister U Nu assassinated the independence hero Aung San in the 1960 election. U Nu vowed Statehood for the Mon People and Arakanese in the 1960 election campaign, and after the elections, when he was elected, he planned to introduce Statehood.¹⁸ However, with General Ne Win's coup d'état in 1962 and his imposition of the "Burmese Way to Socialism", MFA was dissolved.

General Ne Win initiated the persecution against Rohingya gravely in earnest once again; abuses of human rights and terrorization of the populace, including forced relocations and forced labour became pretty much de rigor within most of the ethnic minority zones of the country, especially a viciously draconian "Four Cuts" military operation, identical in intent with that of the strategic hamlet experiment of the USA in Vietnam.¹⁹ The 'Operation Four-Cut' was adopted by the Tatmadaw (the Armed Force) after it took power in 1962 and adopted a population-centred approach to counterinsurgency. The strategy focused primarily on cutting insurgents off from the population through 'scorched earth' strategies and compulsory relocation decrees.²⁰ The 'Operation Four-Cuts' sets out to forcibly remove civilians from insurgent-held 'black' areas into areas more firmly under Tatmadaw control. Hundreds of relocation sites were designated over the years, mostly along frontier areas where the Tatmadaw was dominant, but often where Ethnic Armed Organizations also maintained a presence.²¹ The UN Fact-Finding Mission in Myanmar concluded that Tatmadaw has carried out attacks that resulted in the killing of civilians, including children. Tatmadaw also has the custom of arresting men and boys of military age in villages, interrogating them, and arresting and torturing them to obtain information about their assistance to the Arakan Army.²²

rohingya/ Accessed Date: 25/01/2025.

¹⁵ Leider, Jacques P.: Rohingya The name. The Movement. The quest for Identity. 2014, pp. 11-12, Available at: https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/Jacques-P-Leider-2014-01-28-Rohingya-The_Name-The_movement-The_quest_for_identity-en.pdf Accessed Date: 26/01/2025.

¹⁶ Ibrahim, Azeem: The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide. The Hurst, 2016, pp. 85-100.

¹⁷ Sengupta, Sucharita: Stateless, floating people: the Rohingya at Sea, Edn. SB. Ray Chaudhury & R. Samaddar, The Rohingya in South Asia: People Without a State, 1st ed. Routledge, 2018, pp. 4-18.

¹⁸ Chan, Aye: The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar). In SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2005, pp. 403-13.

¹⁹ Rahaman, Razidur: Rohingya-the Community of No Human Rights. In The Daily Observer, 2017. Available at: <https://www.observerbd.com/news/68541> Accessed Date: 01/02/2025.

²⁰ Jolliffe, Kim: Ethnic Conflicts and Social Services in Myanmar's Contested Regions, The Asia Foundation, 2014, pp. 5-6. Available at: https://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/assessment_file_attachments/Ethnic_conflict_and_social_services_in_Myanmar_contested_regions_-_Asia_Foundation_June_2014.pdf

²¹ Ibid.

²² Detailed findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, UN Human Right Council, 2019. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/20190916/A_HRC_42_CRP.5.pdf. Accessed Date: 02/02/2025.

III.2. Adoption of 1982 Citizenship Law and Exclusion from Citizenship

The Myanmar military government led by General Ne Win adopted 1982 Citizenship Law which profoundly affected the Rohingya minority. This Law introduced three-tiered citizenship²³ system (Citizen, Associate Citizen, and Naturalized Citizen) in Myanmar. The ‘Citizen’ status is granted to individuals who belong to one of the 135 recognized ethnic groups of Myanmar whose ancestors were settled permanently in Myanmar from the period anterior to 11185 BE. to 1823 AD.²⁴ (the year before British colonization). These ethnic groups include the Bamar, Shan, Karen, and others. Full citizens enjoy complete rights, including voting, holding public office, and owning property. The Associate Citizen²⁵ are granted to those who applied for citizenship under 1948 Citizenship Law but failed to fulfill the requirements of full citizenship. It gives less privileges and rights than full citizen. Associate Citizens in Myanmar have fundamental rights such as residency, employment, education, and healthcare, but they experience considerable restrictions that underline their marginalization. They are forbidden from holding high-level public roles, including government and military positions, and their voting rights are frequently restricted, particularly in important elections. They are also restricted from foreign travel due to the requirement for specific permissions. These limits highlight Associate Citizens’ secondary position, as they lack the full legal and political privileges that Full Citizens possess.

This hierarchical system fosters inequality and reflects Myanmar’s discriminatory citizenship policy, which disproportionately affects ethnic minorities such as the Rohingya, who are frequently consigned to intermediate or insecure status. Naturalized citizens²⁶ of Myanmar are awarded citizenship based on their long-term residency and devotion to the state. However, their rights are severely curtailed, including political involvement, voting rights, and economic rights. They are denied important government positions, military service, and political power. Voting rights are similarly curtailed, reducing their impact on political processes. Economic rights are limited, including property ownership and access to public services. The rule primarily reserved the full citizenship for 135 officially recognized ethnic groups, leaving numerous ethnic minorities, notably the Rohingya, as naturalized citizen. This Citizenship Law affected mainly the Rohingya Muslim minority and most of the Rohingya denied Myanmar Citizenship. Near about a million of Rohingya are deprived due to the lack of documentation proof required under section 6 of the 1982 Citizenship Law that their ancestors lived there and were citizens under the 1948 Citizenship Law. The reason for such failures was the poor administrative governance of Myanmar and several displacements of Rohingya, including the 1977, 1992, and 2012 persecution against Rohingya. Myanmar’s government has treated Rohingya as “illegal immigrants” or “foreigners.” for a long. They have been denied to register for birth certificates and other legal documentation. As a result, many of them do not have proof of birth certificate, and to get citizenship by naturalization, they must have to prove these legal documents. Many Rohingya left Myanmar following the military coup led by General Ne Win. Those who left or tried to leave during the 1988 insurgency cannot apply for Myanmar Citizenship. Myanmar set this 1982 citizenship law very systematically by targeting mainly Rohingya Muslims to exclude them from Myanmar citizenship. This lack of recognition has resulted in millions of Rohingya being stateless, further complicating their access to essential civil documents, including birth certificates and residency papers. However, they became stateless and after the persecution in 2016 and 2017

²³ Section 3 of the 1982 Citizenship Act of Myanmar.

²⁴ Section 3 of the 1982 Citizenship Act of Myanmar.

²⁵ Section 23 of the 1982 Citizenship Act of Myanmar.

²⁶ Section 42 of the 1982 Citizenship Act of Myanmar.

near about a million Rohingya left Myanmar and living in Refugee Camps in Cox's Bazar District in Bangladesh.

IV. The Impact of Rohingya Refugees on the Host Community

Refugee camps have complex impacts on the host community, leading to both positive and negative experiences. Negative impacts involve increased insecurity and conflicts with refugee populations. The growing demand for relief and aid in refugee-hosting areas raises awareness of host communities' challenges and may benefit their livelihoods. However, the overexploitation of limited natural resources can also result in the diverse impacts refugees and camp presence may have on hosting communities, with mixed consequences being the most likely outcomes.²⁷ Economic development in the host area can be brought about by cheap labor, trading, farming, and infrastructural improvements such as constructing new roads and market links. Population growth within the zone through non-refugee migration and refugee settlement may have various consequences.²⁸ The mass influx of refugees can lead to conflict in accessing common property resources, as scarce natural resources in refugee camps can pressure these resources, potentially triggering conflict between the two parties.²⁹

IV.1. Socio-Economic Impacts

Positive socio-economic impacts include new livelihood opportunities and improved social services like health and education. The economic theory states that the existence of refugees will strain the supply chain of commodities and labor markets since foreign financial assistance increases demand for domestic goods.³⁰ The perceptions of refugee camps and prolonged displacement have significantly impacted socio-economic dynamics and vulnerabilities in host communities. Overburdened basic necessities, including healthcare and education, can lead to competition and resentment among host community members and refugees, causing increased tensions and economic vulnerabilities.³¹ Refugees who struggle to blend in and be accepted may find it more difficult to start over and contribute positively to their new communities.³² Childbirth is increasing in the Rohingya refugee camps as they are not aware of family planning. Increasing childbirth impacts the shortages of jobs, food, healthcare, and other necessities. Along with several social problems, the Rohingya refugee crisis affects local food shortages, food supply scarcity, transportation and hike expenses, shortages of natural resources, and tourism.³³ The refugee host area in Cox's Bazar faces inadequate food security and nutritional status, with residents relying on daily wages and insufficient social safety measures. The area is vulnerable to natural disasters and climate

²⁷ Grindheim, Kristoffer Andre: Exploring the Impacts of Refugee Camps on Host Communities: A Case Study of Kakuma Host Community in Kenya, Master's Thesis, University of Agder, 2013, pp. 15-18.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Martin, Adrian: Environmental Conflict Between Refugee and Host Communities. In *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2005, pp. 330-345.

³⁰ *Supra* Note 27. p. 85.

³¹ Ullah, A.K.M. Ahsan: Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar: Seeking Justice for the "Stateless." In *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2016, pp. 285-301.

³² Banerjee, Debjani: Socio-economic and Environmental Impact of Rohingya Refugee Camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Master's Thesis, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, 2024, pp. 27-29. Available at: <https://nmbu.brage.unit.no/nmbu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/3151960/no.nmbu:wiseflow:7110597:59113401.pdf?sequence=1>

³³ Uddin, Riyaz- Nesa, Fazilatun: The Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Socio-Economic, and Environmental Impacts on Local Community in Bangladesh. In *Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2021, pp. 279-280.

change, with agriculture being the main livelihood. Teknaf and Ukhiya depend on agriculture, while 92% rely on firewood. Inadequate cultivable land led to low agricultural production and economic uncertainty.³⁴ The supply systems are limited due to the safety in the camps which encounter the normal livelihood of the host community. Rohingya refugees are illegally working in many places, and the people from the host community are becoming jobless.³⁵ Refugee arrival has led to a decline in work opportunities for marginalized and poor people of the host community, with local hosts being poorer in the unskilled labor sector, while skilled wage earners and traders benefit from resource flow.³⁶

Consequently, between August 2017 and May 2018, the average daily wage income decreased by around 24%, significantly raising the poverty rate (52%) among the local population.³⁷ The food price hike is remarkable in Cox's Bazar, much higher than in other parts of Bangladesh. To survive in this situation, both the Rohingya Refugees and the host community need financial support. Much financial aid is needed to ensure the basic necessities to the Rohingya refugees and to give some basic support to the host community. The 2024 Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis Joint Response Plan is being implemented through the leadership of the Bangladesh government. The funding appeal is seeking \$852.4 million to assist some 1.35 million people, including host communities and Rohingya refugees.³⁸ Cox's Bazar is one of Bangladesh's central tourist zone. The port town and its beaches have always been the country's top tourist destinations, and the region is now teeming with international aid employees.³⁹ The price of daily commodities also tends to grow because of the increased demand for goods in Bangladesh's coastal areas. These price increases have created massive pressure on the national budget to feed at least about one million Rohingya and provide accommodation.⁴⁰ Food prices increased by 8% in Ukhia, with vegetable and protein prices rising by 36% and 7%, respectively. Aid-supplied cereals and lentils showed a significant mitigating effect.⁴¹ The poor people from the host community are dissatisfied, while the relief aid focuses only on the Rohingya Refugees, and they are getting little assistance. This social effect is causing a breakdown in the relationships among them and in the level of animosity directed at the refugees. There is a growing cross-cultural practice that affects the local culture. The Rohingya women are interested in marrying local Bangladeshi men, though there is a restriction by the government on such marriage between Rohingya and Bangladeshi. However, somehow, they managed the Bangladeshi National Identity Card and Birth

³⁴ Impacts of the Rohingya Refugee Influx on Host Communities. UNDP, 2018. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/bd/Impacts-of-the-Rohingya-Refugee-Influx-on-Host-Communities.pdf> Accessed Date: 03/02/2025.

³⁵ Supra Note 28. p. 280.

³⁶ Rohingya Refugee Crisis Creates New Generation of Bangladeshi Aid Workers: IOM, 2018. Available at: <https://www.iom.int/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-creates-new-generation-bangladeshi-aid-workers-iom>. Accessed Date: 03/02/2025.

³⁷ Bangladesh Poverty Assessment Facing Old and New Frontiers in Poverty Reduction. The World Bank, 2019, p. 32. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/793121572582830383/pdf/Bangladesh-Poverty-Assessment-Facing-Old-and-New-Frontiers-in-Poverty-Reduction.pdf> Accessed Date: 03/02/2025.

³⁸ UN and Partners Seek \$852.4m to Support Rohingya Refugees and Bangladeshi Hosts, (2024). Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/un-and-partners-seek-852-4m-support-rohingya-refugees-and-bangladeshi-hosts#:~:text=The%202024%20Joint%20Response%20Plan,Rohingya%20refugees%20and%20host%20communities> Accessed Date: 03/02/2025.

³⁹ Alam, M.: How the Rohingya Crisis is Affecting Bangladesh and Why It Matters. In The Washington Post, 2018, Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/02/12/how-the-rohingya-crisis-is-affecting-bangladesh-and-why-it-matters/>. Accessed Date: 03/02/2025.

⁴⁰ Naeem, Nasruzzaman – Ahmad, Syed Magfur: Adverse Economic Impact by Rohingya Refugees on Bangladesh: Some Way Forwards. In International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2020, pp. 3-4.

⁴¹ Supra Note 4.

certificates and married Bangladeshi men.⁴²

IV.2. Impact on Security

Refugee arrival may result in security challenges to the host population, including local crime, violence, conflicts with the host population, organized crime, drug smuggling, and human trafficking, targeting both refugees and the host population.⁴³ The Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh is a growing concern that poses a threat to domestic stability and security, as well as multinational stability in the Southeast Asian region.⁴⁴ The jihadist group ARSA has already attracted soldiers to cross-border fighting and trafficking of military weapons and narcotics from refugee camps, undermining law order and protection.⁴⁵ Rohingya are entering the Middle East secretly with Bangladeshi Passports and birth certificates, leading to various illegal activities and international problems for Bangladesh.⁴⁶ The former Bangladeshi Minister for Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Mr Nurul Islam, reported that at least two hundred thousand Rohingya managed Bangladeshi Passports and traveled abroad as workers, which is an alarming security issue for Bangladesh.⁴⁷ Trafficking has been prominent in Cox's Bazar refugees camps, with Rohingya women often involved in drug smuggling and sex work. The Fortify Rights Organization and Human Rights Commission of Malaysia investigated that over 170,000 Rohingya boarded boats from Myanmar and Bangladesh heading for Malaysia and Thailand during 2012-15, creating between \$50 million and \$100 million a year in trafficking. Smugglers piled hundreds and thousands of Rohingya refugees into processed fishing boats, stripped them of food, water, and energy, and committed murder and sexual assault at sea.⁴⁸ Prostitution, drug smuggling are increasing in Refugee host area.⁴⁹ About 80% of residents feel unsafe with Rohingya refugees nearby due to constant surveillance, security personnel deployment, and clashes between host communities and refugees, as well as between refugees and law enforcement authorities.⁵⁰ The Rohingya Refugees are living below the poverty level, which generates insecurity and leads them to act in criminal activities to survive.⁵¹ Rohingya women

⁴² Forbidden love: Police Hunt Bangladeshi Who Married Rohingya Refugee. SBS News, 2017, Available at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/forbidden-love-police-hunt-bangladeshi-who-married-rohingya-refugee/noencshrc> Accessed Date: 04/02/2025.

⁴³ Karen, Jacobsen: Livelihoods in Conflict: The Pursuit of Livelihoods by Refugee and the Impact on the Human Security of Host Communities. In *International Migration*, Vol. 40, No. 5, 2003, pp. 95-120.

⁴⁴ Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh: A Security Perspective, BIPSS Special Report, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, 2017. Available at: https://bipss.org.bd/pdf/Rohingya_Refugee_Crisis_in_Bangladesh.pdf Accessed Date: 03/03/2025.

⁴⁵ Faruk, Hasan-Al Imran-Mian, Nannu: The Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh: A Vulnerable Group in Law and Policy. In *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2014, pp. 226-253.

⁴⁶ Coorlim, Leif-Page, Thomas: Stolen Son: The Child Traffickers Preying on the Rohingya, CNN, 2019, Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/08/31/asia/stolen-son-rohingya-coxs-bazar-intl/index.html> Accessed Date: 03/02/2025.

⁴⁷ Two Lakh Rohingyas Went Abroad with Bangladeshi Passport, The Daily Star, 2018. Available at: <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/2-lakh-myanmar-rohingyas-went-abroad-with-bangladeshi-passport-minister-1568974> Accessed Date: 04/02.2025.

⁴⁸ Supra Note 28. p. 281.

⁴⁹ Iqbal, Nomia: Rohingya Women in Bangladesh Face 'Forced Prostitution', BBC, 2017. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41928555> Accessed Date: 04/02/2025.

⁵⁰ Yasmin, Lailufar – Akther, Sayeda: The Locals and the Rohingyas: Trapped with an Uncertain Future. In *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2020, pp. 104-118.

⁵¹ Datta, Sujit Kumar: Rohingya's Problem in Bangladesh. In *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1-2, 2015, pp. 134-138.

are involved in drug smuggling and prostitution to earn money, which has an impact on the society and internal security of Bangladesh.⁵²

IV.3. Impact on Environment

The Rohingya refugee host area is facing environmental challenges. The environmental degradation is increasing due to the Rohingya Refugee influx in the host territory⁵³ and other challenges including natural disasters, lack of supply of drinking water, and proper waste management.⁵⁴ The Rohingya Refugee influx generates excessive demand for natural resources with long-term challenges for a sustainable environment in the local area.⁵⁵ Rohingya influx resulted in indiscriminate cleaning of forests and hilly areas.⁵⁶ Hills are cleaned and cut down to accommodate Rohingya Refugees, causing soil erosion, sedimentation, and siltation. Approximately 3,000 to 4,000 acres of hill land in the catchment area of Teknaf-Ukhia-Himchari have been cleared of forests in order to build shelters for the Rohingya refugees.⁵⁷ This makes the hills unsuitable for vegetation cover and leads to stream congestion, which causes habitat loss, water pollution, and water scarcity downstream.⁵⁸ Hill cutting and clearing vegetation increase the risk of hill and land-slides during monsoon rains. Denuded hills become dry, generating cracks. During rainy seasons, water enters through cracks, leading to local landslides, shelter destruction, and potential causes.⁵⁹

V. The Humanitarian Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has taken a unique initiative to safeguard refugees and improve living standards for a growing number of long-term Rohingya refugees. The Rohingya persecution triggered international reactions. The former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon urged for the cessation of vigilante attacks, targeted threats, and extremist rhetoric against Rohingya.⁶⁰ The Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh has been a colossal humanitarian operation undertaken by the Bangladesh government, the UN (Mainly UNHCR and WFP), European Union, the USA, some other countries, and NGOs. Since 2017, almost one million refugees have been given shelter in Cox's Bazar, the largest refugee camp in the world. Aid organizations have provided food, shelter, health care, and education in the

⁵² Supra Note 51.

⁵³ Khatun, Fahmida: Addressing Rohingya Crisis: Options for Bangladesh, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), 2017, pp.23-25. Available at: <https://cpd.org.bd/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Presentation-on-Implications-of-the-Rohingya-Crisis-for-Bangladesh.pdf> Accessed Date: 04/02/2025.

⁵⁴ Myat, Lily: The Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Social, Economic, and Environmental Implications for the Local Community in Bangladesh. Masters Thesis, Flinders University, 2018, pp. 41-42. Available at: <https://flex.flinders.edu.au/file/20455f70-482e-480d-843e-288609037d12/1/Thesis%20Myat%202018.pdf> Accessed Date: 04/02/2025.

⁵⁵ Ahmed, Kaamil: Bangladeshi Forests Stripped Bare as Rohingya Refugees Battle to Survive, *Mongabay*, 2018. Available at: <https://news.mongabay.com/2018/01/bangladeshi-forests-stripped-bare-as-rohingya-refugees-battle-to-survive/> Accessed Date: 03/02/2025.

⁵⁶ Report on Environmental Impact of Rohingya Influx, UNDP, 2018, pp. 41-42. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/bd/REIRI.pdf> Accessed Date: 04/02/2025.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Report on Environmental Impact of Rohingya Influx, UNDP, 2018, 41. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/bd/REIRI.pdf> Accessed Date: 04/02/2025.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Secretary-General Urges Swift Action by Myanmar Government to Stop Vigilante Attacks in Northern Rakhine, United Nations, 2012. Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/2012/sgsm14605.doc.htm> Accessed date: 04/02/2025.

refugee camps. However, problems such as overcrowding, lack of resources, and environmental degradation remain.

V.1. UNHCR in Humanitarian Response

The UNHCR established refugee camps in Bangladesh as part of its initial strategy to provide early rehabilitation and temporary resettlement for conflict-affected Rohingya refugees. The assistance included housing and livelihood aids, scaling up fundraising campaigns for basic logistics supplies, providing doctors for emergency assistance, and durable solution. The UNHCR's Policy Development and Evaluation Service reviewed the progress made in implementing this initiative, focusing on the extent to which it has exercised its mandate for durable solutions, played a catalytic role in other actors' engagement, and improved the quality of life for refugees.⁶¹ The Rohingya refugees have no livelihood and legal status, and their freedom of movement is restricted outside the camps, thus totally dependent on humanitarian assistance and also at a heightened risk of abuse and exploitation. The activities of UNHCR include refugee registration, protection and legal assistance, prevention of gender-based violence, ensuring adequate shelter, health care, and sanitation, education and vocational training, livelihood opportunities, and distribution of life-saving relief items as needed.⁶² UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service is assessing progress in implementing the remarkable initiative. The focus is on whether UNHCR has fulfilled its mandate for long-term solutions, acted as a catalyst for other actors, and improved refugee quality of life while pursuing solutions.⁶³ It has collaborated with the WFP⁶⁴ and other NGOs to provide the Rohingya refugees with food security and medical services.⁶⁵ Moreover, UNHCR has established safe spaces for women and children, provided vocational training, and supported informal education systems. Women's empowerment programs enhance skills and economic self-sufficiency. UNHCR collaborates with local authorities to improve security in camps.⁶⁶ It has also pondered resettlement and local integration, but the reluctance of Bangladesh to provide permanent status to Rohingya refugees has made these options not feasible.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Faye, Malang: A forced migration from Myanmar to Bangladesh and Beyond: Humanitarian Response to Rohingya Refugee Crisis. In *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, Vol. 6, No. 13, 2021, pp. 3-12.

⁶² Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained, UNHCR, 2024. Available at: <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/> Accessed Date: 05/02//2025.

⁶³ Kiragu, Esther- Rosi, Angela Li- and Morris T.: States of Denial-A Review of UNHCR's Response to the Protracted Situation of Stateless Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh. 2011, p. 1. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/in/sites/en-in/files/legacy-pdf/4ee754c19.pdf>. Accessed Date: 05/02/2025.

⁶⁴ UNHCR-WFP Joint Assessment Mission Report. 2021, Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000134936/download/?_ga=2.154654971.297675064.1739643920-508256536.1739643920 Accessed Date: 05/02/2025.

⁶⁵ Joint Response Plan: Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, 2022. Reliefweb, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/2022-joint-response-plan-rohingya-humanitarian-crisis-january-december-2022> Accessed Date: 06/02/2025.

⁶⁶ Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, UNHCR, 2023. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women-and-girls.pdf> Accessed Date: 05/02/2025.

⁶⁷ Azad, Ashraful-Jasmin, Fareha: Durable Solutions to the Protracted Refugee Situation: the Case of Rohingyas in Bangladesh. In *Journal of Indian Research*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 2013, pp. 25-35.

V.2. *The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Response*

ASEAN has since identified the Rohingya issue from the 1990s, with Malaysia and Thailand having done so. However, Thailand and Malaysia governments have warned against regarding the issue as an internal one since it could cause instability or human misery.⁶⁸ ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus criticized Myanmar for segregating Buddhist and Muslim communities in Rakhine State, referring to the humanitarian crisis and ASEAN's inaction. It also warned that if the Rohingya Muslim crisis is not tackled, it can lead to extremism and radicalization and become a security threat.⁶⁹ ASEAN developed the idea of Responsibility to Protect (R2P)⁷⁰ human rights within the region.

V.3. *Bangladesh Response*

The Rohingya humanitarian response in Bangladesh is led by the Government of Bangladesh, with the National Task Force (NTF) and National Committee on Coordination, Management, and Law and Order established by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, respectively. The Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) coordinates the response in Cox's Bazar, while the Deputy Commissioner coordinates the response to host community needs and ensures security and public order in the district. The Strategic Executive Group guides the Rohingya humanitarian response and engages with the Bangladesh government through liaison with the NTF and relevant line ministries.⁷¹ Bangladesh implemented the National Strategy on Undocumented Myanmar Nationals (Rohingya) and Refugees, involving various ministries and agencies. It also allocated 2,000 acres of forestry land for a new camp to the west of Kutupalong, Cox's Bazar.⁷² The District Authority has implemented a donation mechanism, providing urgent medical attention and water to spontaneous settlements. Local communities have provided food and other basic needs to new arrivals, while the Department of Immigration and Passports has implemented biometric registration with UNHCR support.⁷³ Bangladesh established a new camp on Bhasan Char, a newly emerged island in the Bay of Bengal, to resettle 100,000 Rohingya from Cox's Bazar with better facilities. The Rohingya claimed that Bangladesh was forcibly taking them and that the region was unsafe.⁷⁴

V.4. *NGOs Response*

NGOs like BRAC, Save the Children, Médecins Sans Frontières and IRC have provided humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees. They have offered crucial services like healthcare, education, and livelihood programs, which supplemented the efforts of

⁶⁸ Supra Note 63.

⁶⁹ C.R, Abrar: Multilevel Approaches to Human Security and Conflict Management: The Rohingya Case, NTS Policy Brief, 2013, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Key R2P and Atrocity Prevention information for Asia and the Pacific, Available at: <https://r2pasiapacific.org/key-r2p-and-atrocity-prevention-information-asia-and-pacific> Accessed Date: 05/02/2025.

⁷¹ Supra Note 66.

⁷² Humanitarian Response Plan, Rohingya Refugee Crisis, 2017-2018, Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2017_HRP_Bangladesh_041017_2.pdf

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Islam, Didarul – Siddika, Ayesha: Implications of the Rohingya Relocation from Cox's Bazar to Bhasan Char, Bangladesh. In *International Migration Review*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 2022, pp. 1195-1205.

international agencies. NGOs have also focused on mental health and psychosocial care, implementing nutrition programs and water sanitation interventions. They have also undertaken skill development programs, offering vocational training to Rohingya refugees to enhance self-reliance and preparedness for repatriation. However, NGOs face challenges like funding, regulation, and access to far-flung refugee camps. The government's reluctance to offer formal employment hampers the success of livelihood programs, and security concerns and overcrowded living conditions hinder the delivery of services without disruption.

VI. Challenges in the Humanitarian Response

The humanitarian response has been faced with several challenges, affecting different stakeholders, including the government of Bangladesh, UN agencies, non-government organizations (NGOs), donors, and Rohingya refugees themselves. The Bangladesh government encounters political and economic difficulties in solving the Rohingya crisis. The open-border policy of Bangladesh, prioritizing repatriation over integration, has constrained global funding for the Rohingya crisis, too. It has resulted in movement, work, and education restrictions among the Rohingya community, which is adverse to long-term opportunities. Besides, the government has not had international assistance due to donors' reluctance to offer long-term money without a clear repatriation policy.⁷⁵ Refugees endure mobility restrictions, no employment, and poor living conditions. The coordination challenges involve the absence of disaster preparedness and civil-military cooperation with vague policies and regular staff rotation. Accountability concerns are due to inconsistencies in quality and effectiveness, specifically in sanitation and infrastructure. Domestic NGOs are important but usually pushed aside by foreign organizations, restricting them from influencing decisions. Stronger coordination and long-term planning of the response to the Rohingya crisis are needed because of policy constraints, operational inefficacies, and sustainability issues.⁷⁶ To ensure sanitation, health, education, and other security issues are very challenging as the camps are densely populated. UNHCR and NGOs play a crucial role in delivering humanitarian aid, but they experience operational difficulties such as funds shortages, bureaucratic obstacles, and security concerns. Due to insufficient funds, the organizations have been compelled to reduce essential services such as food rations and medical attention.⁷⁷ Moreover, bureaucratic limitations by the Bangladesh government, such as visa limitations for international relief staff, have delayed the deployment of humanitarian staff. Another problem is coordination among the actors. The influx of various NGOs has resulted in duplicated efforts and inefficiency in assistance delivery. Many agencies struggle to coordinate their activities owing to high turnover and the absence of a joint response plan.⁷⁸ International donors have been among the strongest supporters of humanitarian aid but have issues of accountability and long-term viability. With uncertain repatriation timelines, many donors hesitate to support causes without a sound exit plan.⁷⁹ Moreover, political considerations enter into funding decisions, as some nations opt for bilateral over international donations.

⁷⁵ Supra Note 68.

⁷⁶ Cook, Alistair D.B. – Yen Ne S., *Foo: Complex Humanitarian Emergencies and Disaster Management in Bangladesh*, Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2018.

⁷⁷ Rahman, Shafik A.: *Rohingya Crisis: The Picture of Fund Crisis and its Impacts*, CETRI, 2023. Available at: <https://www.cetri.be/Rohingya-Crisis-The-Picture-of?lang=fr> Accessed Date: 06/02/2025.

⁷⁸ Hossain, ANM Zakir: *Unfolding the Role of Non-State Actors in Rohingya Refugee Crisis at Bangladesh*. In *Košická Bezpečnostná Revue*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2020, pp. 20-32.

⁷⁹ Supra Note 6. pp. 115-130.

VII. Solutions for Sustainable Humanitarian Intervention in the Rohingya Refugee Crisis

The Rohingya crisis has raised concerns about the involvement of UN members like China and Russia in South Asia. The US, UK, France, EU, Germany, Arab League, and OIC are hesitant to seek a permanent solution, while India and China have supported the Myanmar government. Bangladesh needs a sustainable solution, and the Rohingya refugee can use the 'Return to Protected Homeland' method to avoid Western forces. Convincing various state and non-state actors to support a permanent solution is crucial as major regional powers pursue their national interests in Myanmar. Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh calls for a coordinated, long-term humanitarian response. Consolidating legal and policy measures to safeguard and secure the rights of the Rohingya refugees facilitates long-term livelihoods through vocational training, skills building, livelihood interventions, and investment in sustainable infrastructure like durable shelter, sanitation, and health facilities. Global and regional coordination is also needed with Bangladesh, prioritizing the resettlement programs and increasing international aid. Voluntary, safe, and dignified repatriation to Myanmar is the aspiration, but voluntary following international human rights standards. The involvement of Myanmar, international organizations, and human rights mechanisms is needed to create conditions conducive to a sustainable return. The Security Council (SC) of the United Nations has an important role in addressing the Rohingya humanitarian crisis. Under articles 39 to 42 of the Charter, the SC can play an important role in restoring peace and security in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. It can adopt a binding resolution for an unobstructed humanitarian aid delivery⁸⁰, like Syria, in the affected region of Myanmar as well as in Cox's Bazar of Bangladesh. It can also support regional and diplomatic initiatives by coordinating diplomatic efforts with ASEAN and regional actors to ensure the safe repatriation of Rohingya refugees under internationally supervised conditions.⁸¹ An international humanitarian fund, similar to the UN Trust Fund for Afghanistan,⁸² can be established for the Rohingya crisis. The deployment of a UN peacekeeping or monitoring mission to Rakhine State would assist in protecting returning Rohingya communities and stopping ethnic cleansing.⁸³ A combination of these strategic interventions can assist in developing a more sustainable humanitarian response, ensuring long-term stability for Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh.

VIII. Conclusion

The Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh continues to be a massive humanitarian issue, requiring continued international support and policy creativity. The solution to this crisis is becoming uncertain day by day. Although Bangladesh has been remarkably generous in accepting Rohingya refugees, the burden cannot be perpetually carried without lasting solutions. The Rohingya crisis is an iniquitous matter that poses a grand challenge to Bangladesh. Bangladesh and Myanmar entered into bilateral agreements and physical arrangements on 23 November 2017, and 16 January 2018, respectively, with the cutoff date of January 23, 2019, for the repatriation of 670,000 Rohingya migrants who fled during the persecution in the Arakan state of Myanmar. But nothing has been achieved by such an arrangement yet. However, they are residing in the Refugee camps in Bangladesh. At the

⁸⁰ UN SC Resolution- S/RES/2165, 2014. Available at: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2165>

⁸¹ Chetail, Vincent: *International Migration Law*, Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 230-45.

⁸² UN Security Council Resolution-2679, 2023. Available at: [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2679\(2023\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2679(2023))

⁸³ Chesterman, Simon: *You, The People: The United Nations, Transitional Administration, and State-Building*, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 190-198.

initial time of the influx, the host community welcomed Rohingya refugees on humanitarian grounds but presently it is evident that conflicts between them are increasing. The argument regarding the Rohingya controversy is that inequality in access to opportunities and resources is the genesis of conflict between host communities and refugees. The situation in Bangladesh surpasses much beyond national, regional, and global scales. Thus, an urgent and comprehensive measure needs to be found to end the Rohingya problem and protect the local population and Bangladesh from harm.

A multilevel approach is needed to address the Rohingya refugee crisis. Myanmar needs to end violence, cooperate with the international community for humanitarian aid, and ensure Rohingya rights. As a member state of the UN, Myanmar has obligation under the Charter of the UN to protect international peace and security.⁸⁴ Bangladesh needs to be more accommodating in terms of displaced Rohingya having access to basic needs and keep an eye on the situation for early warning. Government officials, humanitarian agencies, health professionals, environmental authorities, and law enforcement authorities agree that the Rohingya refugee presence in Bangladesh imposes an enormous range of long-term adverse effects on society, the nation, and the region. Bangladesh should uphold R2P standards, respect international commitments under international human rights laws, accept Rohingya asylum seekers into its territory, and allow NGOs for long term to provide humanitarian aid. Bangladesh may adopt specific legislations and guidelines to monitor, control, and to ensure some basic rights including accessing education to the Rohingya refugees. Other countries, including India, Malaysia, and Thailand, should not refuse Rohingya from their borders. In line with the concept of R2P, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights should call for a regional dialogue to convince about the human security needs to the Rohingya Refugees and to pressure Myanmar to grant Rohingya citizenship and end discriminatory and exclusionary practices. The summit should also urge ASEAN members to safeguard Rohingya asylum seekers and stateless individuals. A combined strategy encompassing legal acknowledgment, enhanced humanitarian assistance, and regional cooperation must be adopted to ensure the long-term sustainability and dignity of the Rohingya community. This humanitarian crisis must be end.

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⁸⁴ Preamble and article 1 of the Charter of the UN.

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