



Rohingya migration to India: patterns, drivers and experiences

This study was carried out by the Development And Justice Initiative (DAJI), commissioned by MMC Asia. This briefing paper has been developed by MMC Geneva and is a shortened version of the original research report which was written by DAJI. The author of this briefing paper is Yermi Brenner.

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Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. After 16 - 20 days waiting on the Myanmar border, a group of Rohingya refugees cross the Naf River, after a journey of around 5-7 hours, into Bangladesh using eight make-shift rafts made out of bamboo and empty palm oil jerry cans.

Briefing Paper

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Introduction

The Rohingya are an ethnic group, the majority of whom are Muslim. To escape persecution in Myanmar, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have been fleeing to other countries for refuge since the 1970s. The largest migrations of this community took place in 2016 and 2017, when episodes of brutal suppression by the security forces of Myanmar caused more than 723,000 Rohingya to seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

While the vast majority of the Rohingya that fled Myanmar are in Bangladesh, there are an estimated 18,000 Rohingya asylum seekers and refugees registered with UNHCR in India.¹ This briefing paper focuses on Rohingya migration to India; examining the drivers, the protection risks the Rohingya face on their journeys, and the conditions these refugees have in Indian cities.

Methodology

The findings of this briefing paper are based on a qualitative and quantitative study, which was commissioned by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) Asia and undertaken by the Development and Justice Initiative (DAJI) in India during the last three months of 2018. This study is predominantly based on 50 individual interviews with Rohingya who arrived in India in the period October 2016 - November 2018.

This primary data was supplemented by a review of available literature, a focus group discussion with 12 Rohingya women, and qualitative interviews with five experts working with the Rohingya in India. The names of all the Rohingya respondents and of the experts have been removed to preserve their anonymity. The findings of the study intend to provide preliminary insights and increase the understanding of movement of Rohingya towards India. The findings are not representative of all movements and experiences of Rohingya who have come to India.

Drivers of Rohingya Migration to India

The Rohingya fled Myanmar due to persecution and violence by state security forces that mounted a brutal campaign that included the destruction of Rohingya villages² and the killing of thousands of people.³ The nature of all Rohingya migration is forced, as they cannot go back to Myanmar until conditions improve. Their main destination country has been Bangladesh, which is currently hosting more than 919,000 Rohingya.⁴

Despite a massive humanitarian effort, led by the Bangladeshi Government with international support, most of the Rohingya in Bangladesh live in overcrowded and unhygienic makeshift camps,⁵ where access to clean water, food security,

1 UNHCR (2019) Press release. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2019/1/5c2f2a374/unhcr-seeking-clarification-india-returns-rohingya.html>

2 Human Rights Watch (2017) Massacre by the River – Burmese Army Crimes against Humanity in Tula Toli. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/12/19/massacre-river/burmese-army-crimes-against-humanity-tula-toli#>

3 Council on Foreign Relations (2018) The Rohingya Crisis. Available at <https://www.cfr.org/background/rohingya-crisis>

4 Inter Sector Coordination Group (2018) Situation Report Rohingya Refugee Crisis. Available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/isccg_situationreport_5july2018.pdf

5 Medicine Sans Frontières (2018) One year on, Rohingya refugees live in dire camps, facing an uncertain future and legal limbo. Available at <https://www.msf.org/one-year-rohingya-refugees-live-dire-camps-facing-uncertain-future-and-legal-limbo>

and healthcare are limited and all desperately needed. Since the Rohingya are traditionally a gender-segregated community, the conditions in the Bangladeshi camps are particularly hard for adolescent girls, who are facing sexual violence, forced prostitution, forced marriages, and human trafficking.⁶ Furthermore, in November 2017, Bangladesh signed a deal with Myanmar for repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees⁷, though the planned repatriations have been repeatedly delayed since.

The harsh conditions in Bangladesh serve as a push factor for Rohingya migration to India. The majority of respondents had lived or spent time in Bangladesh before arriving in India. These respondents cited the destitute conditions in the camps, the scarce employment options, and hostility from the local population as the main reasons for why they left Bangladesh for India.



“My father passed away last year, and my mother could not take care of me. We didn’t have enough to eat so she sent me to India to live with my uncle, who can at least feed me.”

(Respondent 50, interviewed in Jammu)



“The locals in Bangladesh hated us and called us the ‘Burmese people’.”

(Respondent 45, interviewed in Jammu)

A study conducted in 2018 by Indian migration researchers found the main factors considered by the Rohingya when selecting a country of asylum are security, community and economic opportunity.⁸ These findings correspond well with the answers given by the Rohingya interviewed in the current study, who cited the quest for better living conditions and a safe environment, the hope for increased economic opportunities, and the desire to unite with family as the main reasons for seeking refuge in India. Some of the respondents had the perception that India, because of its large Muslim population, would have a tolerant, if not accepting environment.

Dangerous journeys to India

There are two main patterns of Rohingya migration to India: from Bangladesh westward to the state of West Bengal in India⁹ and northeast to the Indian states of Mizoram and Meghalaya. On both of these routes, the Rohingya are vulnerable to exploitation due to their lack of official identification documents, their inability to speak local languages and their lack of financial means. The respondents reported they were distressed while traveling from Bangladesh to India because they feared being detained by the Indian border security forces. Several of them experienced shortage of food or water during their journeys. According to the experts interviewed in

6 Plan International (2018) *Adolescent Girls in crisis: Voices of the Rohingya*. Available at <https://mediabank.plan-international.org/pages/view.php?ref=144832&k=bf3328530a>

7 Westcott, B., Wright, R. & Olarn, K. (2017) *Deal signed for Rohingya to return to Myanmar, but details are scarce*. CNN. Available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/23/asia/rohingya-myanmar-bangladesh/index.html>

8 Majumdar, S. (2018) Chapter 4: The Jailed Rohingya in West Bengal, S. B. R., & Samaddar, R (Eds.), *The Rohingya in South Asia: People Without a State* (pp. 91 - 107). London & New York: Routledge.

9 Mathur, P. & Chopra, K. (2018) Chapter 3: The Stateless People: Rohingya in Hyderabad, S. B. R., & Samaddar, R. (Eds.), *The Rohingya in South Asia: People Without a State* (pp. 74 - 90). London & New York: Routledge; Saugata, R. (2018) Rohingya issue: West Bengal wants refugee policy before acting. Times of India. Available at http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/62587411.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst; Choudhary, R. (2018) Increase In Attempts By Rohingya To Illegally Enter India Through North East. NDTV. Available at <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/increase-in-attempts-by-rohingya-to-illegally-enter-india-through-north-east-1840682>

the study, other violations and incidents often occur during the journeys of Rohingya from Bangladesh to India, such as sexual assault of Rohingya women by Indian border security and robbery of Rohingya individuals and families.



“We did not eat anything for eight days, throughout the travel to India.”

(Respondent 42, interviewed in Jammu)

Role of Smugglers

Most Rohingya do not have identification documents and thus could not use official means of transportation to come to India. To minimise the risks of irregular cross-border migration, they generally travel to India in groups – of up to 10 people or larger clusters of up to 25 individuals – that include known and trusted people. Most of the respondents study had travelled to India either with family or community members, and some hired smugglers to arrange the journey and navigate the dangers *en route*.

The role of smugglers to assist the journeys of the Rohingya from Bangladesh to India has been frequently reported in the news and in academic studies.¹⁰ According to experts interviewed it is impossible for Rohingya to travel to India without a smuggler, as it is too difficult to navigate if one has not travelled these routes before.



“A couple was detained in Moreh while trying to enter India by border forces. They were beaten so badly that the pregnant wife miscarried her baby.”

(Expert Source 2)



“When we tried to cross into India, the border forces caught us. When I showed them my injuries, however, they gave my children and I food and arranged for a car to drop us across the border into India.”

(Respondent 30, Hyderabad)

The study indicates that the smugglers involved in these journeys are usually Bangladeshi, Rohingya or Indian. The Bangladeshi and Rohingya smugglers tend to be hired by the Rohingya who want to move from the camps in Bangladesh to India, while Indian smugglers operate only at the India-Bangladesh border to facilitate the crossing of Rohingya into India. Through interviews with the Rohingya and the experts, a detailed framework of how the smugglers operate was drawn. Bangladeshi smugglers advertise India to Rohingya in camps in Bangladesh as a destination with resettlement opportunities. Those interested in migrating to India are connected with a Rohingya smuggler (usually the focal person) who organises their entire

10 Daily Hunt (2018) *Confine Rohingya Refugees To Designated Camps, Record Biometric Details: Centre To States*. Available at <https://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/news+world-epaper-newswire/confine+rohingya+refugees+to+designated+camps+record+biometric+details+centre+to+states-newsid-89304003>; Chhina, M. (2017) *Rohingya refugees in Dera Bassi, Lalru areas come under security scanner*. The Indian Express. Available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/chandigarh/rohingya-refugees-in-dera-bassi-lalru-areas-come-under-security-scanner-4851856/>

journey. The payment for the journey is generally provided to him and he pays a commission to the other smugglers involved. At the India-Bangladesh border, Bangladeshi and Indian smugglers facilitate the crossing of the Rohingya into India.

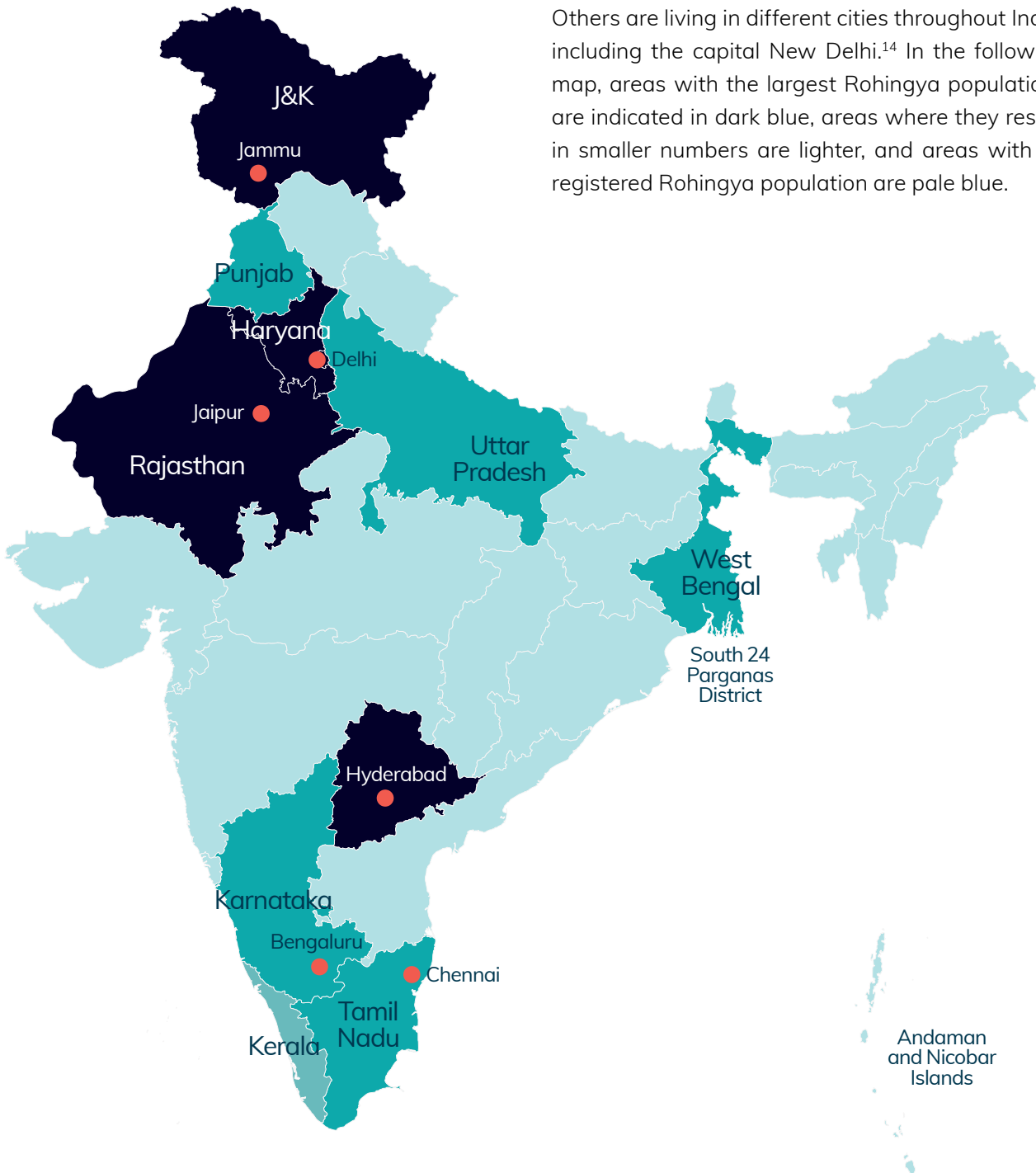
In regards to smuggler fees, respondents recounted being charged between 98 and 168 USD per person to assist the journeys of Rohingya to India. One of the experts said that since security has become tighter on the India-Bangladesh border – to prevent migration of Rohingya, among other groups, such as Bangladeshis¹¹ – the smuggler rates have risen in some cases to more than USD 400 per person, with payment of bribes to border security forces increasingly common. More than half of the Rohingya interviewed for the study had given money at the border to secure their passage into India.

While smugglers have a crucial role in facilitating cross-border migration, they are also involved as perpetrators of human rights violations against the Rohingya. According to the experts interviewed for the study many smugglers are also labour contractors that entrap Rohingya in labour agreements (often resulting in bonded labour) until they pay off their travel fare to India. Media reports mention cases of bonded labour involving Rohingya but did not explicitly mention if smugglers were involved.¹² There have also been reports in the media of Rohingya girls being trafficked and sold into prostitution or marriages in India.¹³ These reports are consistent with statements of the Rohingya women in the focus group discussion, who said Rohingya girls are often sold by Rohingya and Bangladeshi smugglers to men in Kashmir and other countries.

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- 11 Das, P. (2016) *Illegal Migration From Bangladesh: Deportation, Border Fences and Work Permits*. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. Available at <https://idsa.in/system/files/monograph/monograph56.pdf>; The Economic Times (2018) Rohingya crisis: Security tightened along Mizoram border. Available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/rohingya-crisis-security-tightened-along-mizoram-border/articleshow/61019812.cms>
- 12 Daily Hunt (2018). Confine Rohingya Refugees To Designated Camps, Record Biometric Details: Centre To States. Available at <https://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/news+world-epaper-newswire/confine+rohingya+refugees+to+designated+camps+record+biometric+details+centre+to+states-newsid-89304003>; Chhina, M. (2017) Rohingya refugees in Dera Bassi, Lalru areas come under security scanner. *The Indian Express*. Available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/chandigarh/rohingya-refugees-in-dera-bassi-lalru-areas-come-under-security-scanner-4851856/>
- 13 Indian Express (2017) *The Most Unwanted: A gripping account of Rohingya refugees living in India*. Available at https://www.unhcr.org/index.php?option=com_news&view=detail&id=50&Itemid=117; Majumdar, S. (2018). Chapter 4: *The Jailed Rohingya in West Bengal*, S. B. R., & Samaddar, R. (Eds.), *The Rohingya in South Asia: People Without a State* (pp. 91 - 107). London & New York: Routledge; Reuters (2017, May 4). *Over half of Rohingya girls who fled violence became child brides - U.N. survey*. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-women/over-half-of-rohingya-girls-who-fled-violence-became-child-brides-u-n-survey-idUSKBN1801J0>

Conditions in India

As per UNHCR's statistics in October 2018, there are 18,000 Rohingya refugees in India,²² about two-thirds of them are in the cities of Hyderabad and Jammu, where there are large Muslim communities. Others are living in different cities throughout India, including the capital New Delhi.¹⁴ In the following map, areas with the largest Rohingya populations are indicated in dark blue, areas where they reside in smaller numbers are lighter, and areas with no registered Rohingya population are pale blue.



14 Kakvi, K. (2017) Centre says Rohingyas are security threat, Delhi Police disagrees. The National Herald. Available at <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/centre-says-rohingyas-are-security-threat-delhi-police-disagrees>

On the basis of interviews with respondents and media reports, it can be concluded that Rohingya in India live in difficult circumstances and face numerous obstacles. This extends to all facets of their wellbeing, including shelter, livelihoods, education and health. The Rohingya generally reside in settlement clusters in unauthorised areas where they are charged rent.¹⁵ Sudden evictions and non-renewal of informal leases of Rohingya, and poor sanitation in settlement areas have been reported in the media¹⁶ and were confirmed by interviews with respondents. However, of the 50 respondents interviewed, 39 found their shelter arrangements to be adequate. Most respondents also said they had access to clean drinking water, which contradicts news reports.¹⁷ The income earned in the households of 31 of the 50 respondents interviewed was not enough to survive on. As a result, scarcity of food is common.



"I usually eat one meal a day. I can't afford to buy any more food."

(Respondent 26, interviewed in Hyderabad)

Child labour is common in Rohingya families due to their poverty, large sizes and, at times, insufficient number of earners. In some cases, children end up being the primary income-earners.¹⁸ Nearly half

of the respondents had school-age children, but the majority of these children were not enrolled in formal schools. Distance of formal schools from Rohingya dwellings, security concerns for children and language problems were some of the reasons respondents gave for not sending their children to school. Enrolment is usually only in primary education, few graduate to middle school,¹⁹ and there are very limited cases of Rohingya in India accessing higher education.²⁰

About a fourth of the Rohingya respondents mentioned being intimidated and harassed by police and intelligence services. Police officials reportedly came to Rohingya clusters in October 2018, trying to force them to fill forms issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Government of Myanmar. Threats of deportation were also made, according to the respondents. According to the Rohingya Human Rights Initiative, as of October 2018, there were 170 Rohingya men, women and children either in jail or correctional facilities in India.

There are also indications of exploitation of the Rohingya by the police. Four respondents in Hyderabad mentioned that false charges of fraud were filed against them. According to one of the experts, in Hyderabad there is collusion between the police and some lawyers to extort Rohingya refugees. The Rohingya are arrested under false charges and the lawyers colluding with the police are called to handle their cases. The lawyers then

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- 15 Basavapatna, S. (2018) Chapter 2: *Where do #Ibelong?*, S. B. R., & Samaddar, R (Eds.), *The Rohingya in South Asia: People Without a State* (pp. 44 - 73). London & New York: Routledge; UNHCR. Factsheet. India (August 2018); *Indian Express* (2017, January 18). *The Most Unwanted: A gripping account of Rohingya refugees living in India*. Available at https://www.unhcr.org/in/index.php?option=com_news&view=detail&id=50&Itemid=117
- 16 Jain, B. (2017) *Centre to identify, arrest and deport Rohingya Muslims*. *Times of India*. Available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/centre-to-identify-arrest-and-deport-rohingya-muslims/articleshow/57999515.cms>; Chaudhury, S. B. R., & Samaddar, R. (2018). Introduction In Chaudhury, S. B. R., & Samaddar, R (Eds.), *The Rohingya in South Asia: People Without a State* (pp. 1 - 19). London & New York: Routledge.
- 17 Akhtar, Sadia (2018). *They fled violence in Myanmar but Rohingya refugees living in pathetic conditions in Mewat refugee camps*. *The Hindustan Times*. Available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/gurugram/they-fled-violence-in-myanmar-but-rohingya-refugees-living-in-pa-thetic-conditions-in-mewat-refugee-camps/story-Q6q6oEPKOhTyX0bH22refP.html>; Sharma, S. (2018) *Why Locals In Jammu See Rohingya Settlement As Part Of An 'Islamist Project' And Want Them Out*. *Swarajya*. Available at <https://swarajyamag.com/politics/why-locals-in-jammu-see-rohingya-settlement-as-part-of-an-islamist-project-and-want-them-out>
- 18 *Indian Express* (2017) *The Most Unwanted: A gripping account of Rohingya refugees living in India*. Available at https://www.unhcr.org/in/index.php?option=com_news&view=detail&id=50&Itemid=117; The Development and Justice Initiative (2013) *The Rohingya Asylum Seekers and Refugees in India: A Situational Analysis*.
- 19 Socio-Legal Information Centre (2017) *Fact-finding report on Rohingya refugee camps in Delhi and Haryana*. *Human Rights Law Network*. Available at <https://hrln.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Rohingya-FF-report.pdf>
- 20 Singh, Kanishka (2017) *Here is how various refugee communities have fared in India*. *The Indian Express*. Available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rohingya-muslims-refugee-myanmar-india-bangladesh-4843379/>

share the fees given to them by the Rohingya refugees with the police.



"The police came into the house unannounced at 4 am and took my friend and I to the police station. They abused us, kept us in a cell for some time and then released us. They also told us that they had to do this because of orders from above. Incidents like this have been happening here for the last two years."

(Respondent 35, interviewed in Hyderabad)



"The locals here beat up Rohingya and steal our phones... They harass Rohingya women and don't allow us to take water from government water lines. Matters are taken to the sarpanch (local self-government) here but are never addressed."

(Respondent 21, interviewed in Nuh)

India is not signatory to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,²¹ and does not have a domestic refugee policy.²² The country does host over 200,000 refugees and asylum seekers, most of whom are Tibetans (numbering 108,005) and Sri Lankans (61,812), and it has been lauded for its benevolent tradition of accepting refugees on its territory since independence. But its policy towards Rohingya refugees has grown exceedingly stringent over the past two years.²³

There are two characteristics of the Rohingya identity that have influenced this course of action by the Indian Government. The first is their Muslim identity. Tensions along religious lines in India have existed since the country's independence from British rule in 1947. Under the current government, the political environment has become increasingly divisive.²⁴ There has been an increase in anti-Muslim sentiment in the country, which extends to the Rohingya.²⁵ The presence of the Rohingya in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is home to a territorial dispute between India, Pakistan and China, and is rife with Islamic separatist terrorist outfits,²⁶ has been used by the Indian government to build a narrative portraying them as radicals and potential threats to national security.²⁷

The second factor contributing to the Indian government's actions is that the Rohingya are often confused with Bangladeshis because the Rohingya language is similar to Bengali, and some have similar appearances. The migration of Bangladeshis (who are also mostly Muslim) is a politically sensitive and

21 UNHCR. *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>

22 Kasturi, C. (2017) *Parallel moves by Modi govt on Rohingyas*. The Telegraph India. Available at <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/parallel-moves-by-modi-govt-on-rohingyas/cid/1521784>

23 Yhome, K. (2018) *Examining India's stance on the Rohingya crisis*. The Observer Research Foundation. Available at https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ORF_IssueBrief_247_Rohingya_FinalForUpload.pdf

24 Ahmed, N. (2018) *Anti-Muslim bigotry has been normalised under Modi*. Al Jazeera. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/bigotry-normalised-modi-180411100651759.html>

25 Purkayastha, D. (2018) *What is the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016? The Hindu*. Available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/what-is-the-citizenship-amendment-bill-2016/article23999348.ece>

26 Nambiar, H. (2017) *Why leaving Jammu's 10,000 Rohingyas with no choice may be the biggest threat*. The Economic Times. Available at http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/60809214.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

27 The Wire (2018) *States to Collect Biometric Data of Rohingya to Take Action With Myanmar: Rajnath Singh*. Available at <https://thewire.in/politics/states-to-collect-biometric-data-of-rohingya-to-take-action-with-myanmar-rajnath-singh>

securitised issue in India. Bangladeshis have been migrating to India in very large numbers (over three million currently live in India) and this migration is reported to be driven by economic reasons. Measures have been taken to quell their movement into India, including tighter border controls; the setting up of tribunals to determine the nationalities of suspected Bangladeshis; as well as identification, detainment and forcible deportation.²⁸ The study suggests that it is very uncommon for Rohingya to travel to India in the same group with people from other religions or ethnicities; only two respondents reported grouping with Bangladeshis on their migration journey.

The seminal moment that led to drastic changes for the security of the Rohingya in India was in 2017. Public interest litigation was filed in the city of Jammu seeking the identification and deportation of the Rohingya and Bangladeshis.²³ Thereafter, unverified reports and statements by government officials linking the Rohingya to Pakistani terrorist groups became common.²⁹ In the same year, the Central Government issued directives to identify and deport the Rohingya back to Myanmar.³⁰ A petition was filed in India's Supreme Court against this directive, which has yet to be heard. In the interim, the court ordered that deportation was not permitted.³¹ However, in October 2018, seven Rohingya men were deported back to Myanmar, in

violation of International Humanitarian Law, and without the intervention of the Supreme Court.³²

On the diplomatic level, the Indian Government has also not been supportive of the Rohingya. Despite international calls for India to facilitate a political resolution to the Rohingya crisis stemming from Myanmar, there has been no statement by the Indian government regarding the role of the Myanmar security forces and government in the emergency. Furthermore, India abstained from voting on the UN Resolution on the Situation of Rohingya Muslims and other Minorities in Myanmar in 2017.³³

The presence of UNHCR in India affords the Rohingya some protection. Each Rohingya who applies for asylum with UNHCR is required to prove her/his claim to refugee status through a three-stage interview process held usually in New Delhi. Amongst the Rohingya interviewed in this study, 92 percent had either UNHCR refugee cards or Under Consideration Certificates.

Indian authorities do not acknowledge the documents issued by UNHCR as legitimate identification papers.³⁴ Without any officially recognized IDs the Rohingya access to health and education facilities – as well as to formal labour – can be restricted. There are news reports about Rohingya children being turned away from

28 Das, P. (2016) *Illegal Migration From Bangladesh: Deportation, Border Fences and Work Permits*. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. Available at <https://idsa.in/system/files/monograph/monograph56.pdf>

29 Nambiar, H. (2017) *Why leaving Jammu's 10,000 Rohingyas with no choice may be the biggest threat*. The Economic Times. Available at http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/60809214.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

Jain, B. (2017) *Centre to identify, arrest and deport Rohingya Muslims*. Times of India. Available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/centre-to-identify-arrest-and-deport-rohingya-muslims/articleshow/57999515.cms>; Singh, B. (2017) *Northeast on alert as threat of influx by Rohingyas looms large*. The Economic Times. Available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/northeast-on-alert-as-threat-of-influx-by-rohingyas-looms-large/articleshow/60887580.cms>

30 Kumar & Raja (2018) *By deporting 7 Rohingya men, Supreme Court and Government of India failed to uphold international humanitarian obligations*. The Leaflet. Available at <https://theleaflet.in/deporting-rohingya-supreme-court-government-india-failed-international-humanitarian-obligations/>; Mathur, P. & Chopra, K. (2018) Chapter 3: *The Stateless People: Rohingya in Hyderabad*, S. B. R., & Samaddar, R (Eds.), *The Rohingya in South Asia: People Without a State* (pp. 74 - 90). London & New York: Routledge.

31 Roy, S. (2018) *Rohingya issue: West Bengal wants refugee policy before acting*. Times of India. Available at http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/62587411.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

32 Kumar & Raja (2018) *By deporting 7 Rohingya men, Supreme Court and Government of India failed to uphold international humanitarian obligations*. The Leaflet. Available at <https://theleaflet.in/deporting-rohingya-supreme-court-government-india-failed-international-humanitarian-obligations/>

33 Balachandran, P (2017) *India Abstains From Voting on UN Rohingya Resolution*. The Citizen. Available at <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/5/12284/India-Abstains-From-Voting-on-UN-Rohingya-Resolution>

34 UNHCR (2018) *Factsheet – India*.

government schools,³⁵ which have been confirmed by the interviewees. Five of the respondents were not permitted to access hospitals as they did not have Aadhaar cards,³⁶ and another six were refused employment for the same reason.

Onwards Movement

The increased insecurity felt by the Rohingya in India since the campaign against their right to asylum has been instrumental in some families leaving the country and others considering to do the same. However, over half (28 of 50) of the respondents interviewed stated they wanted to stay in India for a number of reasons (listed in descending order): safety, peaceful co-existence with Indian locals, work opportunities, community, living conditions, family and access to services. Only three of the respondents interviewed had plans for onward migration from India to another country while three others, had no immediate intentions of moving from India, but also did not want to settle down in the country.

Questions on plans to settle in India or move onwards were answered based on the assumption that returning to Myanmar was not currently a possibility. Two-thirds of the total number of respondents interviewed voluntarily said that they would go back to Myanmar if the conditions were safe for them to do so and if they were given the rights of citizens.³⁷

Respondents who wanted to leave India, did so because of fear of being deported to Myanmar. One of the experts stated that 25 to 30 Rohingya families had left Jammu in the month of November 2018, when the police and intelligence services began biometric fingerprinting in the city. Further reasons (given by respondents) for wanting to leave India included lack of earning opportunities, language problems and security.

The study suggests that onward movement from India has been increasing since September 2018 and is currently at a higher rate than migration of Rohingya to India. Given that these movements largely take place through irregular routes it is difficult to estimate the frequency. Bangladesh appears to be the most common destination for Rohingya leaving India, according to news reports⁶¹ and interviews with respondents. Incidents of Rohingya leaving for Malaysia have also been mentioned in the media⁶² and were recounted by three respondents. Other destination countries include Sri Lanka, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia.

Onward migration through official channels was also mentioned by the respondents and by one of the experts in the study. Rohingya individuals and families have used official channels to leave India for Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and USA, through sponsorship by relatives and coordination of the International Organization for Migration.

35 Basavapatna, S. (2018) Chapter 2: Where do #Ibelong?, S. B. R., & Samaddar, R (Eds.), *The Rohingya in South Asia: People Without a State* (pp. 44 - 73). London & New York: Routledge; The Development and Justice Initiative (2013). *The Rohingya Asylum Seekers and Refugees in India: A Situational Analysis*; Singh, K. (2017) Here is how various refugee communities have fared in India. The Indian Express. Available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rohingya-muslims-refugee-myanmar-india-bangladesh-4843379/>

36 Aadhaar cards are a form of Indian identification documents. For more information, see <https://uidai.gov.in/>

37 The respondents were not asked whether or not they wanted to go back to Myanmar and provided this information without being prompted.

Conclusion

This briefing paper focused on the migration experiences and conditions of Rohingya in India. It identified that family linkages, security and the promise of good living conditions attract the Rohingya to India. The presence of a community in India and a large Muslim population in the country are also important factors. While this indicates agency in their migration decisions, the arrival of Rohingya in India is a result of forced migration, since the Rohingya flee persecution in their country of origin and it is not safe for them to return to Myanmar given the present conditions there.

The Rohingya arrive in India mostly through Bangladesh, and their travel is usually facilitated by smugglers. Border officials and smugglers operate on the India-Bangladesh border and are bribed to secure passage into India. There are serious risks to their safety when crossing borders. The most vulnerable are women and girls, who have limited to no agency in their movements.

In India, the Rohingya reside in four main locations: Hyderabad, Jammu, Nuh, and Delhi. They live in destitute conditions in terms of their quality of life. They have low incomes and are usually working as manual labourers. Most Rohingya children are not enrolled in formal education and access to health services is difficult. The Rohingya interviewed for this study reported that they had no problems with the local population, but their sense of security is threatened by the possibility of being detained or deported by police and security services. They are also at high risk of exploitation by police, lawyers and employers.

The majority of Rohingya who participated in the study want to continue living in India. Nevertheless, onwards movements were on the rise in the last six months of 2018. While many Rohingya aspire to move to Western and Gulf countries, outmigration generally takes place through irregular means to countries in the region, like Bangladesh, Malaysia, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Others, often sponsored by family members, managed to move to Canada, New Zealand and USA.

The findings of this report suggest that the migration of the Rohingya to and from India is on going. On one hand, the threat of deportation from India and increasing harassment by police authorities and intelligence agencies may discourage Rohingya from coming to India. On the other hand, the perpetuation of the conditions in Myanmar and plans in Bangladesh to begin 'repatriating' the Rohingya³⁸ serve as on-going push factors for Rohingya migration to India.

38 Peterson, Rahman & Safi (2018) Bangladesh admits no Rohingya willing to take repatriation offer. The Guardian. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/15/rohingya-refugee-repatriations-bangladesh-myanmar>



Photo credit: William Daniels / Panos (2017)

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Rohingya refugees working as fishermen on the beach at Shaplapour. Bangladesh has hosted Rohingya refugees for three decades; as of June 2018, there were almost 920,000 staying in Cox's Bazar, most of whom had arrived since the beginning of the year. Once inside Bangladesh some Rohingya refugees join migrants leaving by boat and ship in mixed flows with the intention to reach Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and previously Australia.

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network consisting of six regional hubs (Asia, East Africa, Europe, Middle East, North Africa & West Africa) and a central unit in Geneva. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of, and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

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