



WOMEN ON THE MOVE

GENDERED AID IN THE ROHINGYA
REFUGEE CRISIS



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| GLOSSARY

ACF	Action Against Hunger
BRAC	Bangladesh-based non-governmental organization
CFS	Child Friendly Space
CIC	Camp-in-Charge
CRH	Cooked Rice Husk (used as fuel alternative)
CwC	Communicating with Communities Working Group collective of NGOs and UN Agencies
FD7	Form required to be filled out by NGOs to receive Bangladesh government approval for relief projects
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GenCap	Gender Capacity
GiHA	Gender in Humanitarian Action working group collective of NGOs and UN Agencies
INGO	International Non Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISCG	Inter Sector Coordination Group
JRP	Joint Response Plan
LC	Learning Centre
MSF	Doctors Without Borders
Mahjee	A selected individual, often male, to represent the interests and concerns of a group of families
MNCH	Maternal and Newborn Child Health
NGO	Non governmental organization
OCHA	OCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OXFAM	British-based international non governmental organization

PSEA	Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse -- specifically attributed to violence committed by those in authority such as NGO officials, government officials, those allotted power or authority within refugee camps etc.
PSS	Psychosocial Support Services
Referral pathway	The organized system by which individuals must convey reports of sexual violence/abuse/harassment to ensure the survivor receives relevant care ranging from medical, legal, social supports, and others.
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SPHERE	Standards established and accepted within NGO community for architecture within the field to be created in situations of crisis or emergency relief
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UNWomen	United Nations Women
WASH	Water, Sanitation, Hygiene Initiatives
WFP	World Food Programme
WFS	Women Friendly Spaces
Blanket solutions	Solutions that do not consider nuances of needs across various identities
Dehumanization	Theory by which individuals are reduced to single identities and do not consider the humanity, needs, wants, and perspectives of peoples, and how they can be nuanced through various intersecting identities
Gender mainstreaming	Incorporating gender in all aspects of a project
Gender sensitivity	Considering notions of gender and its implications
Madrasa	Religious school (particularly associated with Islam)
Purdah	Culture that encourages women of age (having reached puberty) to wear veils in public settings

| AUTHORS' NOTE

The privilege to engage in qualitative field research to contribute to a gap in academic literature and support life-saving aid interventions is one that we bear with incredible humility and tenacity. The Rohingya Refugee Crisis is one of the most pressing international humanitarian emergencies the world has seen in centuries, but receives little to no meaningful press that addresses crucial considerations of gender, citizenship, or humanisation. Within this context, we find our work incredibly pertinent and relevant; Not just to support the Rohingya, but to future humanitarian intervention.

We recognize that the privilege to conduct such research would not be possible without the support of various individuals and institutions.

We are grateful foremost to Dr. Emily Hertzman. As our research supervisor, she invested in young students with a belief that we were capable of contributing to academia and making a difference. She has consistently motivated us to reflect, and more importantly ask critical questions throughout our research endeavours. Her passion and drive to support the next generation has been essential to our progress, and her encouragement the basis from which we found our footing. This research would not have been possible without her consistent championing of our abilities.

We are also thankful Alexander Paquin-Pelletier who has consistently encouraged us to pursue our research. Furthermore, he has provided us essential knowledge on field research methodologies and the political context of the Rohingya refugee crisis. For this, our research is inherently linked to his support.

We also recognize our research would not have been possible without the support of the Munk School of Global Affairs, the Asian Institute*, and the Trudeau Centre for Peace, Conflict, and Justice. We would like to thank Dr. Rachel Silvey, the Director of the Asian Institute and Shannon Garden-Smith for their continued support in helping us pursue this research and find relevant outlets to publicize our work.

Our research would not have been possible without their guidance and consistent encouragement.

We also wish to thank the various organizations and individuals that contributed to our research. These include UN Women, UNICEF, ACF, UNHCR, CARE, BRAC, Oxfam, Friendship, and others who wished to remain anonymous. Our research could not have explored the critical themes, gained the essential knowledge, or developed nuanced perspectives of gender mainstreaming without the various voices represented through these organizations. Participants were often incredibly willing and engaged to contribute time and opinions to our research process. For this, we are sincerely thankful.

Finally, we hope that our report helps contribute to the overarching discourse surrounding Rohingya refugees. At the crux of this effort is an attempt to help humanise those who have been dismissed by institutions with the responsibility to protect them. We hope that in providing a gendered lens, we can help contribute to the academic scholarship and the field interventions being carried out, not just in Bangladesh, but in other humanitarian emergencies as well.

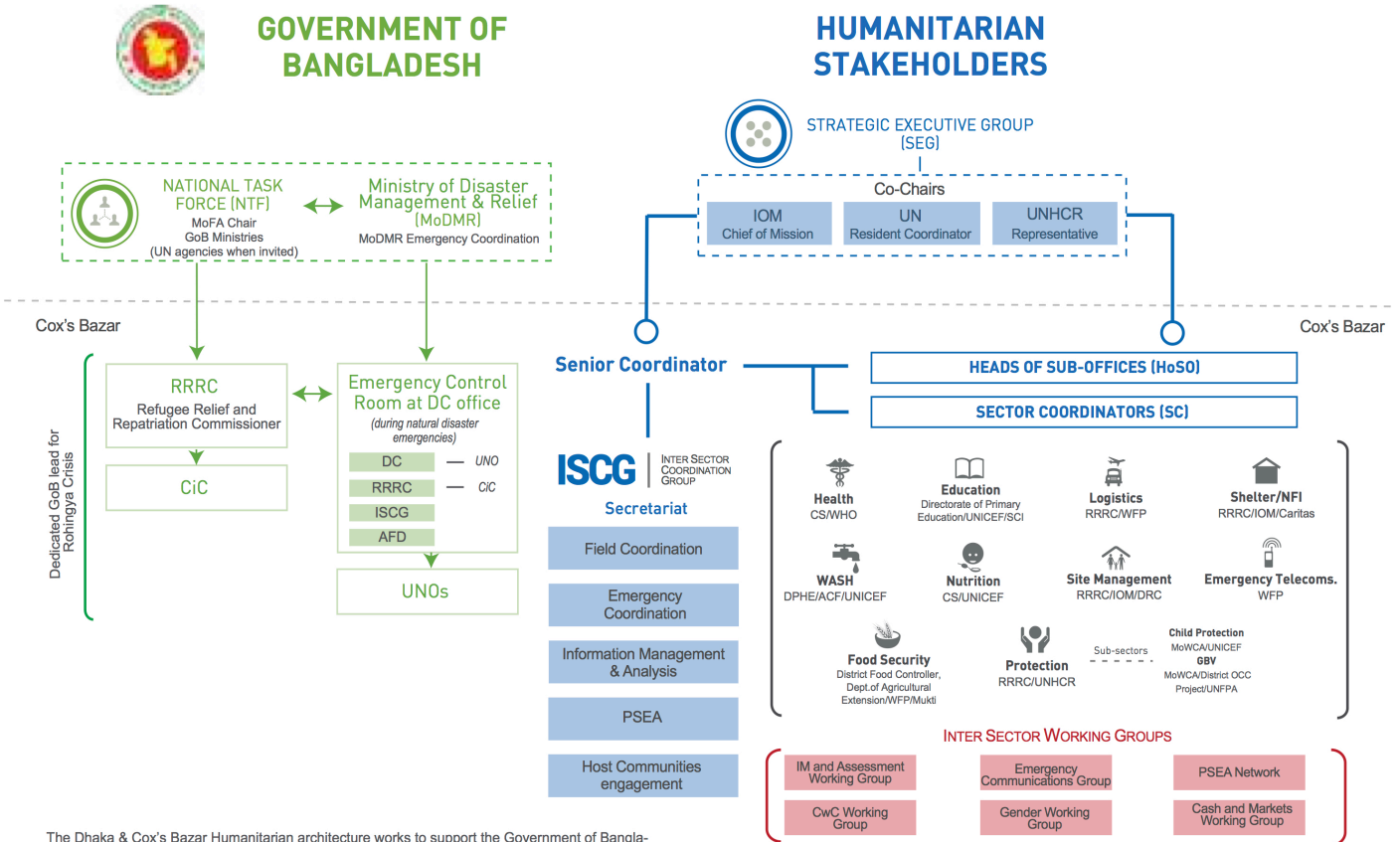
**We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Richard Charles Lee Insights through Asia Challenge (ITAC) at the Asian Institute within the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rohingya Refugee Response Coordination Mechanism

Dhaka

Dhaka



The Rohingya Muslims have been dubbed one of the most persecuted minorities in the world. The United Nations (UN) have repeatedly alleged activities of ethnic cleansing in Myanmar, with many scholars qualifying the activities as genocidal.¹ Due to increased military persecution throughout 2016 and 2017, over one million Rohingya have been forced to flee their home province of Rakhine, Myanmar to neighbouring Bangladesh. It is in this setting that crucial questions must be asked about how the Rohingya are being supported and empowered.

Upon recognition of the gender-based violence enacted in Myanmar through the genocide of the Rohingya, it is crucial to note that women and girls have faced a

disproportionate amount of violence.² As a cause of their age, gender, statelessness, religion, and ethnicity, this specific population has faced trauma and violence like none other. Presently, the majority of the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar are women and children. The number of women and children is highest across the camps (85%) in terms of demographics and 16% of households are female headed. Women and girls comprise 55% of the total population, and are the most affected by human rights abuses, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and domestic violence.³ The precarious existence of these women and girls is complicated and nuanced, and requires in-depth investigation into the ways that they are being supported by the international development community. This research project and subsequent report provide an investigation of that question.

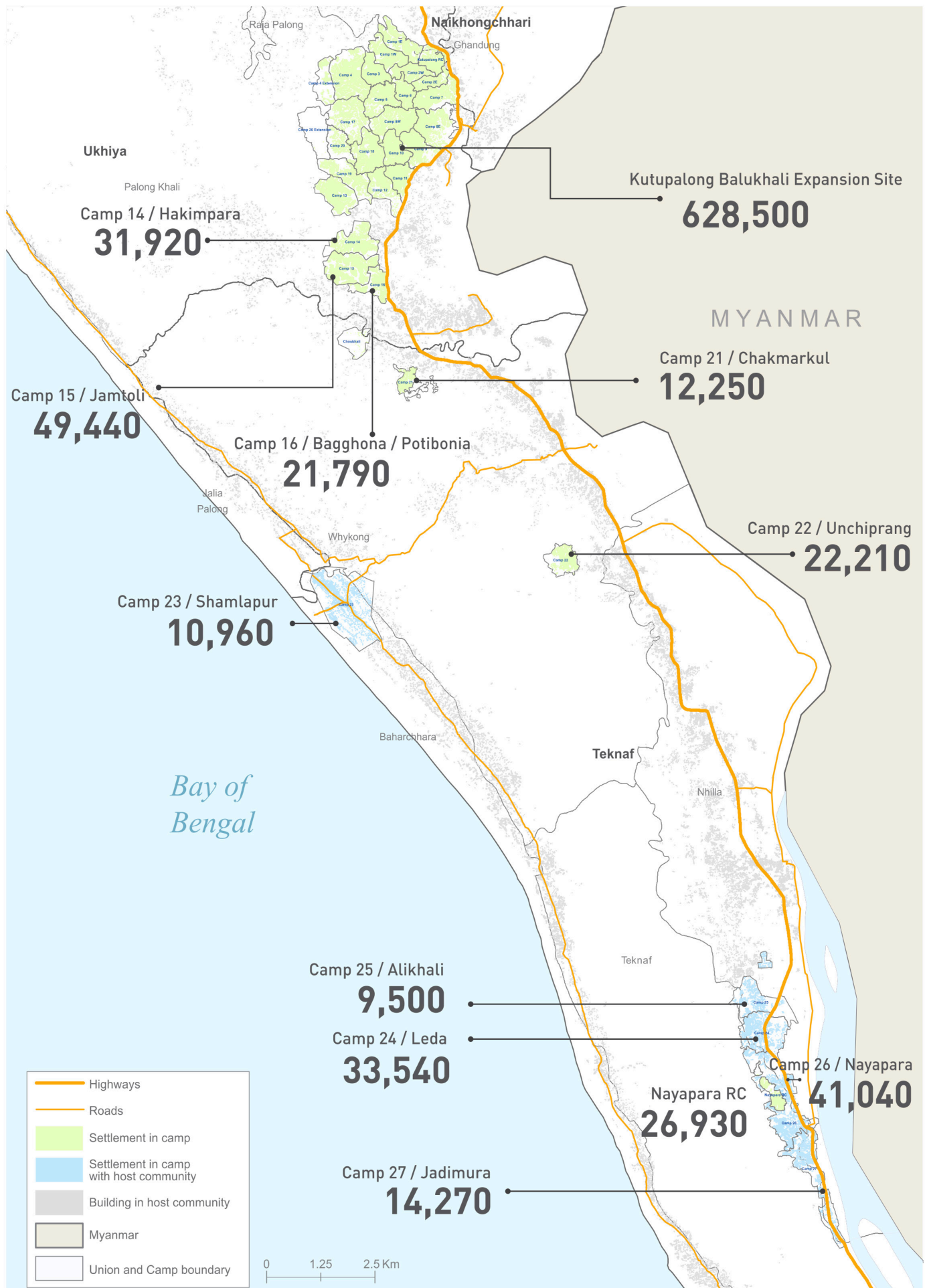
This research project asks specifically: To what extent are aid interventions being implemented to rehumanise Rohingya women in Bangladesh refugee camps, focusing particularly on barriers and best practices in gender mainstreaming of aid intervention. This question is crucial when considering that there exist several gaps not only in academic literature on the topic of gendered aid provision for Rohingya women, but also gaps in the extension of programs and services on the ground. Throughout our research we found consistent themes surrounding concerns of follow-through between policy and implementation, a lack of grassroots approaches, a need for systems of monitoring and accountability, and a fundamental dismissal of gender in several interventions. Furthermore, we found the state of Bangladesh to be in violation of not only international law, but national laws and policies that country has implemented itself, which ultimately created violent discrepancies between international expectations and what is actually taking place in Rohingya refugee camps. These findings have been categorized and are presented in the following six chapters of this report, which collectively make an essential and missing contribution to the existing reporting of program delivery from NGOs and international agencies in Bangladesh.

To conduct this research we aimed to engage in a methodology that was ethical and effective, considering the sensitivities of gender and statelessness. This project primarily relies upon interviews with aid organizations. These interviews were held with UN agencies alongside local and international non governmental organizations' representatives working in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh-- the most saturated region of Rohingya refugees in the country.⁴ We believe the ethics of this methodology are crucial to the success of our research. Considering that the

subjects of the research are vulnerable women and girls surviving trauma from sexual violence and other regimes and systems of harm, we decided that it would be best to work with NGOs who can provide a representative perspective, rather than try to work directly with women who are recovering from trauma. We adopted a qualitative approach, collecting narrative data through interviews in recognition that the processes of (re)humanisation through communication are impossible to explain in quantitative terms. Utilizing a snow-ball sampling method, we worked with 11 organizations, conducted 18 semi-structured interviews in total which collectively spanned over 50 hours during a three weeks period. We also attended Working Group meetings to network with aid officials, and to understand the dynamics of intra-NGO coordinated responses. These Working Groups included Gender in Humanitarian Aid (GiHA), Sexual and Reproductive Health, and Communications with Communities (CwC). Working Groups and sectoral work falls under the “Humanitarian Response Program”, run by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), through which several aid organizations collectively work towards addressing specific needs in a crisis response.

Our choice to focus on the perspectives of aid providers, as opposed to collecting the perspectives of Rohingya women directly constitutes both a strength and a limitation of this study. Although we did have the opportunity to visit refugee camps alongside BRAC, make observations, assess program and service delivery, and meet and interact with refugee women and girls, we did not conduct interviews or try to solicit information from them, believing, fundamentally, that such research would be inappropriate, and subject these vulnerable women to forms of retraumatization. Their perspectives and experiences are considered essential and important and should be collected by local researchers who have native language capabilities and cultural competencies, including many of the NGO workers we interview. The research presented in this report is based on the the perspectives of aid providers, who form one voice in an entire debate, in some ways they represent these women’s experiences and in many ways represent a different perspective. Thus, how perspectives of refugees themselves should be incorporated into gendered aid provision must be a crucial question when thinking about the findings in this report, and in the broader field of service provision in situations of humanitarian crisis.

BANGLADESH: COX'S BAZAR REFUGEE POPULATION AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2018



1 | BANGLADESH'S OBLIGATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW



When analyzing the context within which Rohingya refugees have entered Bangladesh, one is forced to consider the rights the population are entitled to through international law. Specifically, which rights do the Rohingya carry as asylum seekers when arriving in the state of Bangladesh?

The basis for most rights of refugees derives from the international law developed and established following the atrocities of the second world war. With populations displaced across newly drawn borders, the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees has allowed for inalienable human rights for stateless individuals⁵. Particularly, this text roots itself in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights **Article 14** which “**recognizes the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries**”⁶. It is of note that both aforementioned documents were ratified before the creation of the state of Bangladesh, however it is critical to note that these laws present a normative framework that determine guidelines for the basic dignity of various vulnerable peoples above the power of the state. There are subsets of this text that provides a legal foundation to many of the specific issues faced by the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh today. These will be explored throughout this chapter.

Employment

Through several of our interviews, we learned that Rohingya refugees were facing much difficulty with regards to *under-the-radar unwritten* policy being put forth by the Bangladesh government. Specifically, certain unwritten rules had been placed by the government to ensure that a ‘pull factor’-- any reason that would motivate Rohingya to make Bangladesh their permanent home-- was not constructed. The reasoning, implications, enforcement, and future of these regulations will be explored throughout this chapter.

The ability to participate in the economy is heavily restricted for Rohingya refugees. One of the most pressing issues facing the Rohingya is the inability to engage in livelihood training and skills-based learning. These initiatives can be defined as any experience that allows an individual to learn a trade or skill that in the future could benefit them in a job or career. The regulation that prohibits Rohingya from engaging in such learning came as a result of the Bangladesh government ultimately deciding to not allow skills or service training for the refugees, rooted in the overarching hope to ensure that Rohingya are not enticed to find a permanent home in Bangladesh. It is important to note that Rohingya are also prohibited from engaging in employment opportunities such as cash-for-work programs, thus there is

very little room for the refugees to find meaningful work. This issue came to light through the numerous interviews held with NGO workers who were barred from establishing these programs through their organizations as a means of relief and empowerment for Rohingya refugees. It is to be noted that there are several consequences from skills-training for such a large population of migrants, including the oversaturation of the market in one particular profession being trained for, and thus an overall devaluing of such work. Nonetheless, **Article 17** of the Refugee Convention specifically states that Bangladesh must **“accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory the most favourable treatment accorded to nationals of a foreign country in the same circumstances, as regards the right to engage in wage-earning employment”**.⁷ Currently in Bangladesh, this is not the case, as the opportunity to engage in the economy is heavily restricted for Rohingya. We see this as contradictory to the opportunities available to natives within Bangladesh. It must be addressed that many Bengali citizens themselves live in poverty, but are not explicitly prohibited from working, unlike the Rohingya.⁸ Thus, the Rohingya's denial of employment opportunity is a violation of international law that must be addressed, by allowing employment opportunities. This in particular becomes a gendered issue, when considering that if there is no alternative space for a women besides

the domestic sphere to pursue work or employment training, her mobility is ultimately confined and limited. This poses security risks for the ability of a woman to freely enter the community and share negative experiences. It can also be deemed harmful in refusing to engage in opportunities to promoting empowerment for women who have already survived incredible experiences of harm and violence.

Several aid organizations are beginning to provide in cash-for-work programs, empowerment initiatives, and other routes for skills and jobs training. This report calls for the continuing of such, while also encouraging promotion of opportunities within camps, specifically catering to training and employing women. This gendered consideration arises from the several limitations placed on women in their inability to exist in public space without a veil, and their consequent relegation to the household. Many have previous experience working, and should be provided empowering opportunities not just to support themselves, but to provide a sense of purpose and ability within the camp setting.

Education

Another issue that is crucial to human security, and particularly that of children and adolescents in the camps, is the right to education. Upon speaking with

Education Sector specialists, learning centre instructors, and Child Friendly Space workers, we identified and observed several gaps that exist within the educational provisions for Rohingya children in the refugee camps.

Within the camps, formal schools are not allowed to exist, as a result of mitigating the creation of a 'pull factor' for refugees to make Bangladesh their permanent home. To accommodate for this, non-profit organizations have instead introduced 'Learning Centres' where children are taught basic lessons in numbers, rhymes, the English alphabet, and other basic instructions. Within these classrooms there is also contention with regards to the language that is to be employed. The Bangladesh government prohibits the use of Bangla, and thus the children are often taught in their native Rohingya or a dialect that is similar to the Rohingya native language and familiar to local Bengalis, alongside English. This poses several practical issues, in that there lack instructors who are able to engage in these languages. Legally, however, the UN Refugee Convention explicitly states in **Article 22** that Bangladesh has an obligation to **"accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education"**.⁹ Furthermore, Bangladesh is obliged to "accord to refugees treatment as favourable as possible, and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally

in the same circumstances".¹⁰ As a result of our field experience and in speaking with Education Sector specialists, we know that this simply is not the case. This is evident as schools, regardless of architecture, do not exist in the form of providing an elementary education that is egalitarian with the Bangladesh standard structure. This is made evident through Bangladesh's education curriculum for students that guarantees "equal opportunities ... to ensure access of all sections of children to primary education irrespective of ethnicity, socio-economic conditions, physical or mental challenges and geographical differences".¹¹ Furthermore, the state of Bangladesh aspires through its national education policy the following:

Ensuring education for all children is a fundamental issue. It is crucial for our future generation to acquire quality, modern and updated knowledge of science and technology and evolve as a skilled human resource so that they may contribute to eradicate poverty, illiteracy, corruption, communalism and backwardness and build up a developed and prosperous Bangladesh. The education system of Bangladesh needs to be structured towards addressing these issues. Through the expansion of technical and vocational education, the large youth

*population of Bangladesh will have to be turned into a professional and skilled human resource.*¹²

When considering these principles of a strong, modern, updated primary education for all children regardless of social labels in contrast to the Rohingya children prohibited from accessing this curriculum Bangla and are ultimately relegated to a simplistic alternative, there is a fundamental violation of international law present. There is also a gendered lens to be applied within this setting as women and girls face additional barriers (which will be addressed in Chapter 6) to accessing education. The capacity to advocate for these girls to receive an education, and to ensure that this education is comparable to that of the rest of the Bangladesh state and is of a high quality are inherently linked to ensure the prosperity and empowerment of young girls.

Repatriation and Non-Refoulement.

A final determinative issue relevant to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh is the topic of repatriation. At the time of our fieldwork, negotiations were underway between Bangladesh and Myanmar to consider the transfer and repatriation of refugees back to Rakhine state.¹³ This, however, through various interviews with NGO representatives alongside second-hand research of interviews with refugees and further media, indicate the response of refugees to appear as mixed. It is critical to note, however, that within these findings there is a gendered difference; an overwhelming number of responses from women refugees presented a resounding and determined objection to the option of repatriation. Many NGO stakeholders we spoke to, attributed this response to the Crimes Against Humanity and systematic sexual violence that was conducted in Myanmar against Rohingya



women and girls.¹⁴ The impacts of these atrocities are still felt, and should shape the decisions made by state officials. Article 34 of the UN Refugee Convention dictates that Bangladesh “shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees. They shall in particular make every effort to expedite naturalization proceedings and to reduce as far as possible the charges and costs of such proceedings”.¹⁵ With Bangladesh’s covert systematic decision to not create a “pull factor” influencing much of the refugee’s welfare and livelihood, Article 34 has very much been violated. Regardless of the capabilities of the state of Bangladesh, it has made clear that the Rohingya are not welcome as permanent residents.

The right to asylum and naturalization is also addressed under the principle of non-refoulement. This is a concept that derives its principles from various international human rights laws, international treaties, and customary international law, conclusively resolving that an individual cannot be returned to a state where there is a very real threat of “torture, or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.¹⁶ When analyzing the systematic violence committed by state officials against the Rohingya, this threat presents as ubiquitous in Myanmar. The genocide against the Rohingya has been reported as a planned attack to cleanse the state of this population.¹⁷ With this precedent

alongside the systemic denial of such activity by the military and government, engaging in discussions of repatriation can result in precarious conditions for the vulnerable Rohingya people.

NGO Affairs Bureau

The FD7 is the form to be filled by NGOs to submit proposed programs in the case of immediate relief operations with foreign funding, for approval by the NGO Affairs Bureau of Bangladesh. One senior official in the crisis response stated:

“ [A] challenge that remains is the environment which should be provided for by the government. Here is an organization that has compiled resources...for its work... but the government has not cleared them for the FD-7. If the government does not give them the FD-7 document, no organization will implement a project they’ve planned to do. So the protection environment is very critical of the legal environment as an accepting atmosphere”

The FD7 process has been described as a Kafkaesque layer of bureaucracy which is notorious for slowing already delayed governmental processes critical for the implementation of life-saving crisis response. To react and provide solutions to the nuanced developments on the field as they arise, there should

exist a branch of the NGO Affairs Bureau that works to allow for these forms to be processed in a timely manner. This will allow for aid organizations to reach the most marginalized Rohingya to ensure they have access to life-saving materials, alongside opportunities for economic prosperity, physical and mental stability, and an overarching empowered and healthy state of being.

When addressing concepts of government restrictions that infringe upon the welfare of Rohingya refugees living in a manner that is subpar to those of Bengali nationals, one must consider theories of dehumanisation, a framework that has shaped much of our research. Dehumanization happens when an individual, due to a certain trait or lack thereof, is denied one's full humanness in relation to others and is subject to cruelty and punishment by another on this basis.¹⁸ When Rohingya are not allowed the same options to survive and thrive due to their ethnicity and refugee-status, they are being systematically dehumanized, reduced to the pejorative label of "Rohingya and Refugee" rather than seen as individuals and subjected to regimes which deny them access to citizenship, belonging, and basic human rights. Governments should be conscious of such dehumanization, and work to address every single individual as a full human being-- an integral concept of international human rights. This attitude of dehumanisation is intrinsically

linked to the current bureaucracies that encapsulate the Rohingya Crisis humanitarian response and this theory should be carried over into reforms for the FD7 process.

1 | RECOMMENDATIONS

- There are several barriers to the full provision of human rights that are accorded to Rohingya refugees. These must be addressed to ensure that the crisis response can be equitable, ensuring the full humanity of each individual served.
- This report calls for the government of Bangladesh to remove unwritten policies designed to ‘eradicate a pull factor’ and consider the needs of the Rohingya, and the fulfillment of their human rights.
- This report calls for an economic analysis of job opportunities that can be made available for Rohingya and their impacts within refugee camps and greater host communities. This report must be considered to allow for job opportunities that do not have lasting ramifications with regards to oversaturating the market with specific skill-sets and dropping the prices of certain commodities, or find recommendations to mitigate such consequences.
- NGOs must develop a strategy to provide empowerment initiatives, skills-training, and work opportunities for refugees in conjunction with the Bengali government to create opportunities for host community individuals as well. Governments must provide funding for these projects as well, to ensure that funds intended for refugees are not disseminated to solely host community members.
- Standardized education must be developed for primary school students. Curricula has been in the works for Rohingya children, however restrictions of any language must be removed so as to ensure holistic and equitable quality education for students. The curriculum for Rohingya children must be of an equal educational calibre, covering similar or key concepts recognized by the Bangladesh government as fundamental for its own citizenry.
- Repatriation conversations must be held not on governmental levels, but in a grassroots manner that addresses the wants and needs of Rohingya refugees. Specifically, this must include conversations with Rohingya , women, men, children, adolescents, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, survivors of physical/psychological violence, those with disabilities, those having lost family members in the war and otherwise experienced trauma in Myanmar. The principle of refoulement must not be violated.
- Considering the scale of the crisis response presently taking place, this paper also recommends a separate department to be developed to specifically analyze NGO and INGO documentation and requests with the NGO Affairs Bureau of Bangladesh. Designating a specific department with several government officials to respond to crisis responder requests is intended to allow for a timelier process that allows for requests to be addressed in a timely fashion.

2 | FORGETTING THE VARIABLE OF GENDER



One of the most prominent findings of this research was the discovery that many individuals in the NGO and INGO community consider gender-based considerations within the Rohingya crisis response to be non-essential and superfluous. This attitude is rooted in a misconception that attending to gendered requirements of a humanitarian project would detract from providing life-saving assistance for the overarching population. It appears that the policy and work created by NGO officials to mainstream gender in their initiatives are ubiquitous. However, in conducting interviews with both those who operate from offices in Cox's Bazar and those on the ground in refugee camps, a divergence in opinion emerged, alongside a gap in gendered policies and their lack of implementation. This attitude has several ramifications which we hope to address through a series of recommendations. Ultimately, it is necessary that NGO communities reconsider the process of applying their theories of gendered aid provision into action. At this time, translating theory into action is inadequate and does not do enough to consider the specific needs and circumstances of women and girls. This chapter will address these attitudes by deconstructing these perspectives to their roots, alongside analyzing a case study and the applicability of its lessons to the crisis response.

Gender as an extra layer of bureaucracy
The first major policy tool developed

to ensure gendered representation in all programming and crisis response architecture was the Gender and Age Marker developed by the Gender in Humanitarian Action committee. Specifically, the Gender Marker is a tool that codes, on a 0-4 scale, whether or not a humanitarian project is designed to ensure that women, men, boys and girls of all ages will benefit equally from it, and that it will contribute to increasing gender equality.¹⁹ Any proposed project for the Rohingya Crisis Response must pass the Gender and Age marker to ensure that considerations of gender equality are considered. In fact, to receive an FD7, the Gender and Age Marker is a prerequisite. Upon speaking with Mr. Abu Naim, an official in the WASH Sector, it became clear that oftentimes individuals will draft proposals that are intended to be approved through meeting Gender and Age Marker requirements so as to secure funding; but in the long run these gendered considerations are not implemented, and in many cases never intended to be implemented. Why would the appearance of gender considerations be more important than the actual implementation of these considerations? Our research revealed that there is a prominent attitude that sees 'extra' consideration for women in the crisis response a time-consuming and bureaucratic process, which detracts from the more essential work of emergency services for all. It is seen that the efforts and resource allocation that

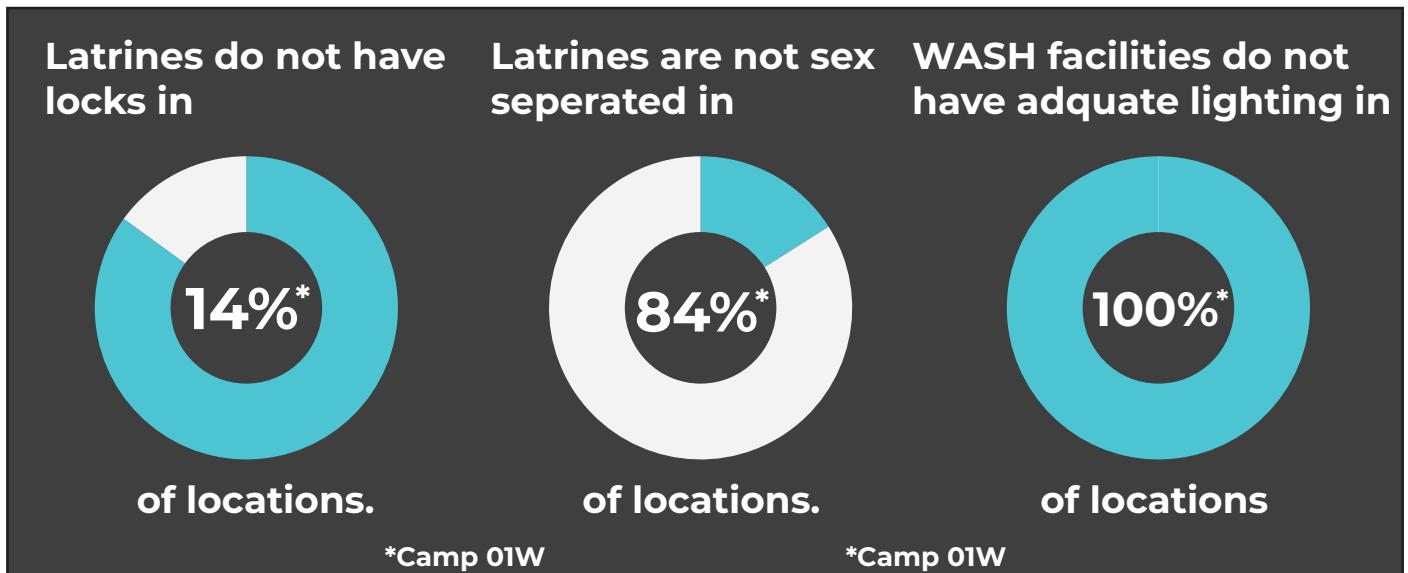
goes to specifically catering portions of projects to issues of gender equality can be better allocated to simply expanding the existing project. That is to say, specific provisions are seen as superfluous and can be better used for supporting the 'main goal' of a project. This is not an anecdotal case. This will be explained below.

WASH Sector Case-study

Within the WASH Sector, providing specific security measures or means of access for women was emphasized in the

project funding approval process, but as explained by Mr. Abu Naim (WASH Sector Specialist), the implementation of these measures can be incredibly difficult, proceed in a trial and error fashion, face resistance, and even be abandoned. For example, the SPHERE standards for a secure latrine for women includes a light in each stall.²⁰ However, because of a lack of light throughout the entire camps, the single light in the latrine began to act more as an indicator that the stall was being used and thus posed a risk of targeting latrine-users. A lit latrine thus posed as an added insecurity for women.





To address this, Mr. Abu Naim explained the next step would be to consult and provide lights for the entire block. This issue of lighting is inherently gendered, as women face high rates of violence within the camps. But many view these steps as long-winded and that it may be easier for beneficiaries to adapt to the provisions, as opposed to creating catered provisions. This instance was further confirmed by a majority of the NGO field and office workers we interviewed.

Within this viewpoint arises a utilitarian perspective which has been universally applied to questions of not only architecture but empowerment initiatives, health services, and further provisions. Expecting individuals to adapt to the function of what exists on the ground pragmatically, rather than thinking about the broader and more specific social and gender implications of these projects and facilities, appears to be the status quo. . However, when those who are adapting are disproportionately

of one identity, and in this case from a marginalized gender group, it can become a major issue of inequality. Several aid workers have stated that much of the work in the camps can be considered 'damage control'. Support for the Rohingya refugees will wane in the next few years, and NGOs will move to work in the next great crisis response, as stated by a humanitarian worker when considering logistics, funding, and timelines NGOs are able to operate within. With this in mind, it is crucial that aid workers both in the boardroom and on the ground attempt to create sustainable solutions for everyday needs that consider gender in their application. Without this consideration, the Rohingya women continue to be marginalized within an already dehumanised population-- unworthy of basic needs necessary for their survival. Only then can there be a basis for the fulfillment of guaranteed human rights and the path paved for next steps in terms of empowerment and humanisation.

2 | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Fundamental training for NGO planners and field workers in the sustainable benefits that arise when considering gender in project planning and application. Initiatives such as OXFAM's WASH Architecture project, that is being created with continuous input from Rohingya women can be used as an example of a success story, and indicative of nuance that is necessary to humanize women.
 - Monitoring systems must be put in place to ensure the continued application of gendered projects, so that they translate from FD7 proposals to tangible solutions for women.
 - It appears that there is a lack of gender diversity in program planning with many of the people responsible for planning emergency and gender-based emergency projects being men. A recommendation is so increase gender diversity in the project planning by hiring and including more women and gender non-conforming individuals.
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3 | SECURITY

The Rohingya refugee crisis is a protection crisis at its core. Rohingya, who are stateless, have survived decades of deprivation and a lack of recognition of their most basic human rights in Myanmar. The refugees fled to Bangladesh seeking asylum from continued persecution and violence that reached an alarming level in August 2017, which many have alleged as genocidal.²¹ The psychosocial distress many refugees suffered is now compounded by the additional protection risks and uncertainties they face while residing in the world's largest refugee camp. One-third of refugee families have at least one specific protection vulnerability that requires specialized attention.²² While Rohingya refugees are resilient and rely on strong community-based protection and self-support mechanisms, this chapter will highlight how there is a need to strengthen the presence of legal aid agencies, ensure refugees' access to justice, and increase the measures taken to address risks of camp security, exploitation, trafficking in persons, and, drug trafficking.

Physical Insecurities

There are currently approximately 1.2 million individuals in need of humanitarian assistance in Cox's Bazar's refugee camp, making it the world's largest refugee settlement.²³ With more incoming refugees, the issue of space constraints has become all the more pressing, especially for young women and girls. Adriani Wahjanto, a Senior Protection Officer with UNHCR states that the ***“reality is that people are living with strangers, very congested, and this is a very conservative community . . . There is a lot of discomfort in terms of younger women being teased.”*** This highlights how space constraints have led to several difficulties across different aspects of Rohingya people's daily lives. Often large families are forced to live in small makeshift houses, that are placed so close to neighboring houses that basic degrees of privacy are impossible. Moreover, due to social arrangements which include forms of patriarchy, sexism, and gender inequality that exist in Rohingya communities, in Myanmar, and in Bangladesh, living in crowded camps makes the vulnerability worse. Issues of protection cannot be separated



from the concepts of gender inequality, and thus protection interventions require a deeper analysis into the subculture of teasing, molesting, and assaulting women. In the Rohingya refugee camps, this has put young women at risk daily of teasing and sexual assault, which has led to an increasing amount of women and girls choosing to stay at home and not leave the house.

Apart from space constraints, there is also a need for more shelter and better housing. Current makeshift housing is quite insecure, making it vulnerable to natural calamities. Talking about the upcoming monsoon season, an Oxfam Programming Officer said the ***“monsoon is the biggest challenge, [and the] entire operation will be thrown into chaos, women and girls will be very vulnerable...need to think about how***

we can avoid this in the future”. Having so many people in such a small area of land that is prone to mudslides, and receives torrential rain during monsoon season is a very dangerous combination. Women and young girls are often more vulnerable to risks regarding their safety during such times. In addition to Sexual and Gender based Violence (SGBV) service points being affected by floods and landslides, there exists a gendered gap on awareness regarding emergency preparedness, and young girls face risks of being kidnapped, and trafficked. But once again, the common perspective that considers attention to the issues of gender as “too much effort” that distracts from more essential emergency responses (as explained in Chapter 2) was evident through our conversation with aid officials. Adriani Wahjanto, a Senior Protection Officer with UNHCR

stated ***“[o]ften it is the case where, this year we cannot answer these (gender-related) questions - they are still getting out of trauma from Myanmar, and we are about to face another emergency with a cyclone”***. Disaster preparedness efforts must take into consideration issues related to gender. It is much more effective and beneficial to include considerations of gender and gender vulnerability from the onset of program planning, rather than engaging in damage control efforts after the fact.

Another extremely complex concern with regards to security of Rohingya women is that of Safe Havens. Currently, safe havens are run by the International Organization for Migration, in the town outside of the refugee camps, for those who have survived trafficking and for whom the camps cannot be a place to continue to live due to high security issues. When talking about the need for more safe havens, a Protection Officer said ***“If I’m allowed to mention a gap in this, one service we need is more safe havens for survivors of sexual and gender based violence . . . For example, after a referral she may be treated, and then she has to go back***

to someone who abused her.” Here the Protection Officer highlights how the perpetrator is often a family member, and that more interventions need to take this into consideration. On the other hand, Adriani Wahjanto, a Senior Protection Officer with UNHCR said ***“safe havens are a temporary option, and permanent separation [such as divorce is] frowned upon. The answer lies in educating the population on prevention strategies. Community outreach members can help train others on issues of Sexual and Gender Based Violence and screen for signs of risk.”*** This depicts how safe havens, as well as broader issues of protection are very complex. A lot of careful thought needs to be put into solution strategies, but there also needs to be an extra focus on changing the mindset, and addressing the root causes of such situations.

Child Protection

Children represent 55% of all refugees and the majority are in need of immediate child protection assistance.²⁴ Young girls face some of the most prominent child protection issues, which encompass the collection of firewood, child marriage,

DISAGGREGATED DATA

			Children (0-4 years)		Children (5-11 years)		Children (12-17 years)		Adult (18-59 years)		Elderly (>59 years)	
Rohingya	Total Female	Total Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Protection	471,386	435,125	81,586	81,586	99,716	108,781	63,456	63,456	208,498	163,172	18,130	18,130
CP	147,742	136,377	25,571	25,571	31,253	34,094	19,888	19,888	65,347	51,141	5,682	5,682
GBV	317,261	292,856	54,910	54,910	67,113	73,214	42,708	42,708	140,327	109,821	12,202	12,202



abuse, trafficking, and concerns for the adolescent age category.²⁵ As of October 2018, some 6,100 unaccompanied and separated children have been registered and are at heightened risk of child trafficking, abuse, and exploitation in the camps.²⁶ Girls, who represent a larger proportion (57%) of this vulnerable group, are particularly at risk of child marriage, sexual exploitation, abuse and neglect.²⁷ There remains a high need for robust family-based alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children, as well as family tracing and reunification and the provision of support to foster care families. An Oxfam Programming officer states, ***“we’re still operating in life-saving mode which is having negative consequences on the refugees as well as [the] host community - there has been a decrease in wage for locals. Being in such situations lead to exploitative***

labor practices and negative coping mechanisms. They may have no other way to survive”. The programming officer talks about how the government restrictions, and camp conditions have led to a rise in negative coping mechanisms – something that has been a salient concern for all. Furthermore, on the issue of firewood collection, a Protection Officer said “18 [children] have said they were abused by the host community on the way to collect firewood. So we have employed Cooked Rice Husk (CRH) [alternative fuel], which is no part of core relief items.” Adolescents girls face a unique risk due to their gender, which is exacerbated by the absence of education, lack of life skills, safe livelihood opportunities, and, by their limited participation in decision making. Overall, understanding and response timing for child rights violations needs improvement via a strengthened alert

and monitoring system in the camps.

Legal Aid

National policy restrictions continue to impact refugee rights, such as freedom of movement, civil documentation, education, and access to justice. A gender specialist assigned to the crisis response, S.P.O said ***“access to justice is not there, it’s nascent. CIC and Majhees should be helping but they’re not because the legal system does not include the Rohingyas . . . The government doesn’t recognize the rights given by [the] 1951 convention to refugees. This is creating a gap.”*** Sustained advocacy efforts are required to recognize the legal status of refugees in Bangladesh. Moreover, the NGOs and Government of Bangladesh need to address important protection issues, especially with regard to civil documentation, access to justice, the right to education and access to livelihood, while at the same time pursuing sustainable solutions. For instance when talking about legal documentation, Marria Ferrante, a UNHCR Protection Officer, said ***“registration is the first step of protection”***. During her interview she outlined the UNHCR’s Family Counting System which includes a database with pictures of Rohingya individuals, names, details regarding the head of their household, and a vulnerability breakdown. With individual documentation, and proof of registration, authorities can account

for missing persons. Keeping in mind child trafficking disproportionately affects girls and young women, legal documentation is an important aspect that can vouch for the status of being missing. This is also especially important for Rohingya refugees who have been stripped of their citizenship and have been stateless for their whole lives, having legal documentation accounts for their original existence, and is the first step towards rehumanization.

Effective access to civil documentation for the most vital events, such as birth, marriage, divorce and death is a priority. Additionally, without proper documents, livelihood opportunities, and education, Rohingyas are forced to operate within the confines of the refugee camp, and have no other option but to depend on the humanitarian aid to survive on a daily basis. More conversations around long term solutions are needed so that the Rohingya people can be empowered, and alleviate their own conditions. Thus NGOs should move forward with a focus on increasing quality aspects, in order to restore and enhance dignity, empower communities, provide specialized protection and humanitarian assistance to increase refugees’ resilience, mitigate the onset of potentially harmful coping mechanisms and enhance community-based protection mechanisms; all with the aim of achieving sustainable protection and solutions.

3 | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Sexual and Gender based Violence (SGBV) service points are likely to be affected by floods and landslides. Additionally, there exists a gendered gap on awareness regarding emergency preparedness, and young girls face risks of being kidnapped, and trafficked. During such times, gendered issues often take a backseat. Disaster management teams should deter from this ideology, and mainstream considerations of gender in every program from the very beginning. This includes in the registration process, architecture of the camp (so as to prevent isolating women), creating community hubs for women in accessible spaces, and more.
- There needs to be a formal case management program, that will take each SGBV case into very careful consideration. A blanket solution is not the correct answer, especially when the intricacies of SGBV are profoundly different from case to case. Not providing personalized aid can result in very dangerous circumstances for women and young girls, like instances where they are sent back home to their perpetrator after having received hospitalization or care for SGBV.
- Targeted interventions with regards to protection issues specifically for the adolescent age group are needed. This age group, especially girls, face a unique set of risks that are not addressed through general Protection sector programs.
- There remains a high need for robust family-based alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children, as well as family tracing and reunification and the provision of support to foster care families. Moreover, having access to legal documentation is an important step in keeping track of refugees, and thus vouching for the missing status for those who are lost, or kidnapped.
- Sustained advocacy efforts are required to recognize the legal status of refugees in Bangladesh. This situation must not be treated as a “temporary” situation, instead efforts to initiate conversations surrounding long-term solutions for Rohingya refugees are needed.

4 | HEALTH

Inadequate and inefficient access to health, as a human right, has always been a cause for concern for the Rohingya refugees. Before the August exodus, Rohingya peoples internally displaced in Myanmar lacked almost all healthcare services due to the Myanmar government's rigid restrictions with regard to incoming aid from NGOs and UN agencies. Now in Bangladesh, there is an entirely different concern with regards to healthcare services: The sheer scale and breadth of the refugee camps makes it tough to have well-coordinated, standardized healthcare. That being said, Global Acute Malnutrition has dropped from 19% to 12%, immunization coverage has grown to 89%, and women delivering babies in health facilities has risen from 22% to 40%.²⁸

Although there have been significant advancements in the span of 8 months since the forced displacement of Rohingya refugees, there are many fundamental issues with how the health sector operates. In this chapter, we outline how these concerns have had detrimental effects on the health, autonomy, mobility, and safety of women and girls through our conversations with various NGO officials working in the Health sector, Education sector, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence sector, WASH sector, and Food Security sector.

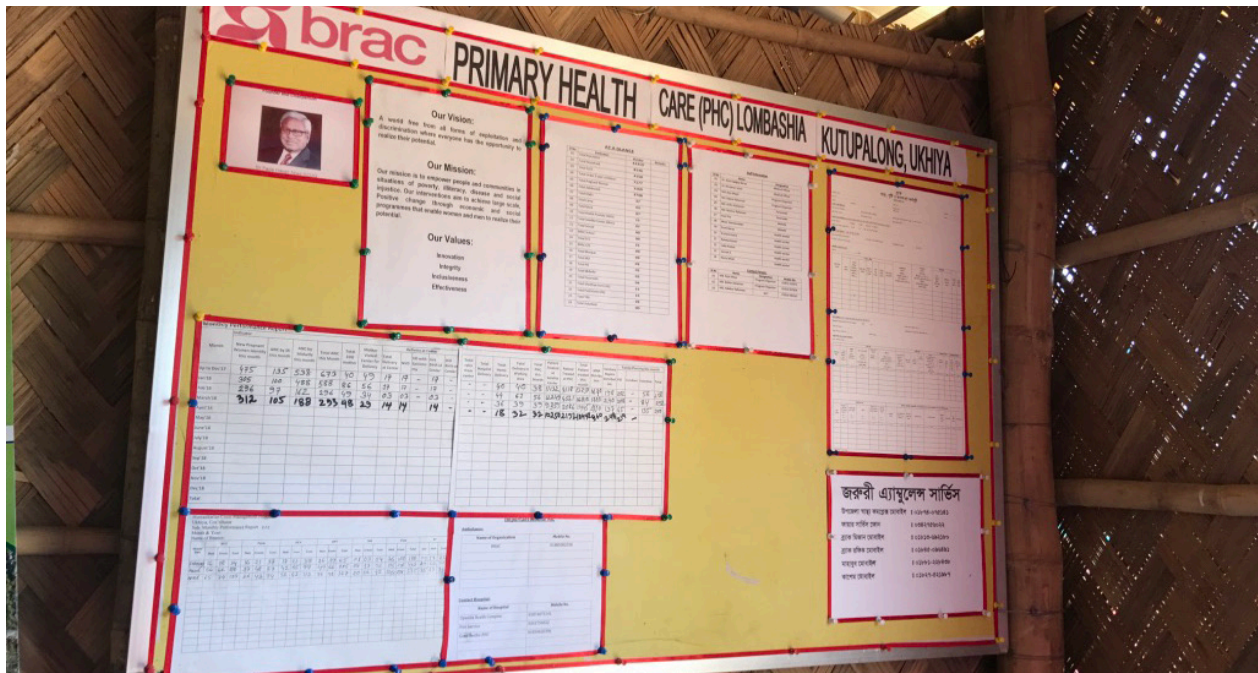
Referral Pathway System

The Referral Pathway refers to a system in place, predominantly standardized within the Health sector, that ensures refugees and those with specific health needs are correctly identified and their needs are addressed. Those organizations that do not have the resources or capacity to cater to certain patients make use of the referral pathway, and thus refer the patients to different facilities that can take care of them. Official documentation and a strict sequence of steps are meant to be followed, in attempts to standardize this system across the refugee camps

Funding required



USD
88.8M



as a whole. The information gathered through these mechanisms can be used to facilitate individual processing.

The referral pathway system was one of the most common pain points for aid officials as well as refugees, as relayed by the aid organizations. For the response actors, we identified a lack of standardization due to a gap in understanding the intricacies and real world application of the referral system. According to Adriani Wahjanto, a UNHCR Senior Protection Officer ***“knowledge is lacking for standardization. Implementation comes from people understanding the system – why is it referred in this way, tracking methods, and confidentiality . . . [the] issue that everyone is facing is “what happens when you identify?”*** A lot of concerns about the referral pathways system were regarding the real world application of this system. In speaking

with NGO officials it was made evident that training was provided on the complicated pathways in itself, but it was not contextualized to the broader workings of the inter-NGO coordination system and the nuanced issues faced by aid workers on a daily basis. This made the referral pathway system seem complicated and intimidating, and was not effective in referring the right kind of help when needed, or referring any help at all.

Having such a lax and flexible system in place, means room for adjustment and improvisation. We learned about an alarming incident during one of our field visits while talking to a doctor in a primary health care facility run by a prominent NGO. While talking about the referral system, the doctor recounted the story of a 15-year-old girl who had come into the clinic alone stating that her brother-in-law had sexually

assaulted her, and thus requested an abortion. Rather than immediately start the referral pathways process, the doctor told us that his first step was to check the validity of her words and determine if the interaction was consensual. He asked her invasive questions of whether she screamed or not during the assault, what her reactions were, and why she couldn't be accompanied by her husband or male guardian. He mentioned how he discouraged her from an abortion, but eventually asked her to go to MSF to request the same. This incident highlights several very important and concerning issues. First, these practices do not fall in line with the referral pathway system. To judge the validity of the basis is the work of a lawyer or judge, not a healthcare practitioner. Secondly, if this NGO was unable to provide the services requested, the doctor is meant to refer the patient, with proper referral paperwork and procedures, to an organization that has the capacity to provide the services. Finally, without proper training on sensitivity and screening, and on the intricacies of the referral pathway system, a lot of patients, especially women and young girls, can be taken advantage of, treated with suspicion and mistrust, or treated as complicit participants rather than victims. It seems as though the current system has taken a very "top down" approach, with a lot of rules and regulations on the pathways being formulated at the "top", but not enough focus on the lived realities from

the bottom up. and efforts to train aid workers, add accountability measures, and develop a nuanced understanding of the obstacles faced by healthcare recipients. That being said, this cannot be written off as simply anecdotal, as several NGO workers addressed the referral pathway system as being flawed in its nature of being taken for granted and unattainable. The security and safety of young women and girls must be prioritized within this process.

Family Planning Services

Another common issue concerning family planning services. Tahmina Yesmin, a Gender and Development Specialist from BRAC highlighted how the cultural barriers, patriarchal society, religion, and child marriage often prohibit women from procuring family planning services. She said ***"One young girl has 3,4 children and she is pregnant again. Upon suggesting family planning services, she refused and said "my husband does not like it"***. Furthermore, Naim Talukder, the WASH Sector Coordinator also mentioned how ***"30-40% of water contamination happens at the source level and 60-70% in the household. So they provide options to purify the water, by teaching about boiling and providing purification tablets. But there are taboos [rumours, superstitions, fears] that the tablets are contraceptives"***. These instances

show how medications, contraception, and family planning services are not accepted due to larger cultural barriers and religion. More efforts need to be put into attaining the trust of the Rohingya people, battling stigma, having more conversations around women's rights, and also trying to form more culturally and contextually appropriate solutions.

Access

When addressing difficulties in accessing medical services, the transportation of patients for a safe facility-based birth continues to be a challenge. This is especially difficult for night time deliveries, as 24/7 facilities with birthing units are scarcely located within the camps. Most medical service centers and birthing facilities have closing times, with only 27 small-medium health centres being open 24/7 serving a population of 1 million²⁹. Furthermore, arranging for emergency patient transport at night remains a major challenge as well, resulting in avoidable maternal and infant mortalities.

In terms of access, another important concern considers the barriers for the elderly population, and disabled individuals to access essential services. Naim Talukder, the WASH Sector Coordinator stated how this was “not the right time” to address such concerns. He was very straightforward about how this was not a priority, and how

accommodations for those who are marginalized is seen as an extra layer of work that should only be implemented when others are accounted for. He mentioned a lack of data could be one of the reasons there are not enough considerations for the elderly and disabled.

Psychosocial Support Services (PSS)



There are substantial amounts of unmet mental health and psychosocial needs that remain a critical concern for the health sector. A more focused response is required to meet the needs and mental well-being of the most vulnerable and marginalized — keeping in mind the genocidal origins of this crisis, this approach to psychological health is particularly important for women and girls who have faced rape, torture and trauma due to ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. With almost every woman and girl having faced some kind of violence at the hands of the military, and the health sector being funded only 39.4% of its

overall needs, PSS and case management are extremely inadequate in the camps.³⁰

An Oxfam programming officer said ***“we don’t do case management - we ensure that everyone understands the referral pathway”***. Furthermore, Risto Ihaleinen, the Education Sector Coordinator said ***“teachers are provided psychosocial support training but they do not provide psychosocial support... it focuses more on if teacher understands the behavior of the child. The teacher would not be the trauma counsellor for those cases, but the teacher is able to identify and then refer to a relevant service.”*** These conversations indicate how there is a dependence on the clearly complicated and flawed referral system, and also a lack of PSS services. With government restrictions on cash-for-work activities, livelihood activities, and education, the lack of PSS and case management can have severe effects on the mental well-being of the Rohingya people, and leads to inadequate rehumanization efforts.

The sheer scale and breadth of this crisis, along with its sudden emergence has made it tough to have well-coordinated efforts, while ensuring efficient and effective systems in place. 18 months post exodus, the much needed focus should be on structural barriers and issues that prevent further harm for those escaping the adverse circumstances and ultimately striving to ameliorate the hardships

in their lives. Instead of only focusing on life-saving assistance and curative treatments, implementing preventative measures, addressing structural and social barriers, as well as focusing on psychosocial support services would be more sustainable and empowering approach to healthcare delivery in the camps.

4 | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Training on the referral pathway should be an iterative process. Apart from familiarizing aid workers on what the system looks like, this should account for the changing conditions in the camps, daily issues faced by aid workers, and should consider feedback from refugees as well.
 - Training, across all levels, must be implemented with regards to gender sensitivity, SGBV screening, referral pathway system and its application - with a stronger focus on training field workers who interact daily with Rohingya refugees.
 - Training must be repeated in the form of “refreshers” and must be consistent.
 - Stricter accountability measures must be put in place for those in positions of power, and those who distribute services/aid. Monitoring of aid officials who interact with refugees on a daily basis is crucial, with room for feedback from refugees regarding the quality of or lack of services with regards to health care, and especially SGBV.
 - More culturally and contextually appropriate solutions should be implemented, especially with regards to sexual and reproductive health services.
 - This could be enhanced by holding focus group discussions (FGD) with beneficiaries.
 - Rohingya women can also conduct peer-peer learning sessions, and workshops on the reasons and benefits for family planning services in an attempt to combat stigma and cultural/religious barriers.
 - Men and boys must be included in conversations surrounding sexual and reproductive health services and rights.
-

4 | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further research needs to be done to understand the needs and landscape of the elderly and disabled populations in the camp, in an attempt to better accommodate them.
 - Teachers who have had rigorous psychosocial support training must be allowed to provide PSS services to young children, in a careful and sensitive manner.
 - PSS services need to be expanded to different sectors such as health, education, protection, gender-based violence.
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5 | CULTURE & RELIGION

The Rohingya Muslim crisis is aggravated by complexities around religious identities and citizenship, reflected in tensions around use of the name Rohingya. Religion has always played an important role in the lives of Rohingyas, and has important repercussions associated with it. Keeping in mind the fact that it was the basis of the ethnic cleansing activities that took place in Myanmar, the Rohingya people's religion is deeply ingrained in their daily lives. The majority of Rohingya people practice Islam, including a blend of Sunni Islam and Sufism, and a minority are Hindu.^{31 32} With the current plight of Rohingya refugees, faith plays an essential role in the post-conflict period when attempting to reestablish their lives.

It is necessary to consider how Rohingya culture and interpretations of religion can affect women in the Rohingya community. In some ways, it can impose limitations on Rohingya refugee women by allocating more agency to men than women, creating power imbalances. Although patriarchy exists everywhere, including the West, we will be analyzing how the intersecting circumstances

that Rohingya women are in, allow for a unique set of barriers that may not arise elsewhere due to intersections of statelessness and trauma post-genocide. In this chapter we will address the different ways in which Rohingya women face barriers against a cultural and religious backdrop in Bangladesh refugee camps. This chapter will also elaborate on how Mosques/Madrasas within this context affect women's mobilities amongst other things, how cultural norms dictate certain life choices, and how the Mahjee system further marginalizes women, and prevents addressing gender specific needs on a community level.

Mosques/Madrasas

Islam is the main religion for Rohingyas, and as followers, they perform five daily prayers, fasting, and learn the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadiths amongst other things. Men and boys go to nearby mosques; and women and girls are meant to perform at home. Although there are space constraints in the refugee camps, the makeshift Mosques and Madrasas (religious schools) are very crucial aspects of the Rohingya refugees' lives. Risto Ihalainen, the Education Sector

Coordinator said ***“When these camps formed, the first thing that popped up were mosques, and madrasas... the Rohingya feel very close to the madrasa system”***. This sentiment extends to the fact that most children, especially girls, are said to feel safer in religious schools and with the teachers at these schools due to cultural familiarity. There is a growing preference for Madrasas instead of Learning Centres (LC) in the camps, creating an environment where there is constant competition between these two institutions. For instance, the overlapping timings of the Madrasas or food distribution by aid organizations with the LC’s contribute to low attendance at the LC’s. And even though food distribution timings may be changed to after LC classes are dismissed for the day, low attendance was still a problem as children were reported to line up for food distribution hours before the start time.

Addressing the space constraints and timing conflicts Kinana Qaddour, BRAC’s Technical Advisor (Education), said they were ***“[we are] looking into space sharing with mosques and other facilities, but women are not allowed in mosques and BRAC has mostly female teachers. Have to look at what the priority is.”*** Situations like these often question the priority of gender, and how there is space to compromise on issues of gender. For instance, Learning Centres are the only places in the camps

where children can be educated, engage in intellectually stimulating activities, be taught issues of equality, rights, and more. Furthermore, BRAC is the only NGO that has successfully implemented an all-female teacher policy, acknowledging the importance of empowering women by providing them a source of income, and also understanding the benefits that a female teacher can have on the children. Implementing a space sharing program that is based on a partnership between LC’s and Madrasas, would mean giving up the all female teacher policy due to religious restrictions that do not allow women to enter mosques. Thus considerations of gender are comprised, instead of making a change to the Rohingya custom of not allowing females into Madrasas. Having such religious restrictions and customs in place result in detrimental outcomes not only for school-going children, but also refugee women who are looking to work and earn a living. This conflict of interest is only one of the issues to emerge out of the clash between Madrasas and LC’s.

Furthermore, Madrasas are physical manifestations of a patriarchal system that propagates the view of restricted mobility for women, and does not consider concepts of gender equality. Not having females in positions of power (ex: teachers) works to create an environment in the camps where women’s and girls’ needs are not addressed. Women in turn become a marginalized population through systemic exclusion and

oppression when religious institutions and individuals in positions of authority spread such ideas.

Upon talking to S.P.O, a Gender Specialist, regarding the resistance to perceptions of gender equality, he mentioned how the concept of “gender justice” had to be invented during the Jordanian refugee response, simply due to the fact that “gender equality” was an absolutely intolerated idea keeping in mind the cultural and religious norms of the society. He saw connections to the Rohingya refugee response, and highlighted the fact that promoting gender equality in such a setting has proven to be difficult as well. In some cases, cultural and religious norms can be detrimental to women’s needs and rights, and this can be exacerbated in the context of the refugee camps.

To tackle such growing issues between the LC’s and Madrasas, a huge focus should be working with religious leaders, community leaders, and parents to highlight the importance of Child Friendly Spaces and Learning Centres. Instead of being in constant competition with each other, NGOs should find a middle path where students don’t have to choose between either one of the institutions. This can also help to gain the trust of the students so that they feel as safe and comfortable in LCs. A means to achieve this would necessitate collaborating with madrasas to develop

curriculum that can be taught in combination with religious teachings. The WFP Nutrition Program should also consider providing nutrition programs through madrasas, in conjunction with an expansion of curriculum or allowing more female teachers. This, thus, also requires addressing gender norms, gendered divisions of labour and gender access to religious spaces so as to ensure the health and education of children.

Cultural Norms

Early child marriage is a growing issue in the camps that needs to be tackled. After starting menstruation a girl is not allowed to leave the house, and is considered to be ‘zowan’ or ‘doñr’ from then on, which means ready for marriage.³³ But marrying off the girl right away is thought to be risky as she lacks the maturity and knowledge to handle life as a married woman. Instead, families spend 2-3 years training the young girl in household affairs and religious teachings. The domestic training includes lessons on how to manage household chores, how to be a “good” wife and how to satisfy the in-laws’ family. The religious training includes lessons on rules and norms, such as how to bathe after having intercourse, the duties of a wife and a husband’s rights.³⁴

Furthermore, Rohingya people say that there is no effective legal barrier against child marriage and no binding minimum

ISSUES PREVENTING EDUCATION ACCESS (Camp 01W)



age, so it is not considered wrong or illegal to them. Instead, they mention that early child marriage provides a hefty financial benefit, as when a young girl leaves to get married, it frees up space in the small makeshift house and leaves fewer mouths to feed with the available relief. But often this young girl has no chance at obtaining education, building any skills, or empowering herself. Religious and cultural norms define her primary role as wife, and mother, who is subservient to her husband, who is defined as the household breadwinner. This inferior position in relation to men, is a reality that is widely accepted as the nature order, and one Rohingya woman noted, *“the wife’s paradise is under the feet of her husband and husbands will beat us if we do not listen to them”*.³⁵ Although awareness programs exist to combat early

child marriage, there is a lack in efforts to break down larger cultural barriers and oppressive systems that harm women. This is also increasingly tough to do in the Rohingya refugee camps due to the government imposed ban on livelihood programs, ban on formal education, lack of education programs for adolescents, and restricted mobility.

The Rohingya are among the most persecuted people on earth, and within this traumatized population, women are the most vulnerable.³⁶ Back in Myanmar, the mostly stateless Rohingya had been sequestered and preyed upon by Myanmar’s military for years. All too often, a Rohingya woman is fated to be passed, like chattel, from man to man — father to husband, soldier to sex trafficker — even in the supposed safety of the

Bangladesh refugee camps. Human rights groups have long accused the Tatmadaw, the country's security forces, of regular assault of Rohingya girls and women.³⁷ For those Rohingya women, who rarely left their rural homes because of religious traditions, the density of the refugee camps can be disorienting. Being in a male dominant society, men and fathers often barr their wives and daughters from roaming in public, socializing, or even going to women-friendly spaces, further ostracizing the women of this community.

Moreover, as mentioned in the Health Chapter under Family Planning Services, BRAC's Gender & Development specialist, Tahmina Yesmin, outlined how the cultural barriers and patriarchal society often limit women from procuring contraception or seeking family planning services. She stated ***“Upon suggesting family planning services she refused and said “my husband does not like it”, these cultural barriers are common, child marriage, polygamy exist”***. This not only highlights the presence of patriarchy in this society, but also further emphasizes the limited autonomy that women have over their bodies, mobility, education, and other important life choices due to cultural norms and traditions.

More awareness workshops are needed advocating for women's empowerment, and breaking down cultural norms such as early child marriage and resistance

towards contraceptives. Instead of holding these sessions with just women, engaging men, as well as community leaders and religious leaders can prove to be more beneficial in convincing the people of the harms of such practices. Separate sessions with women and men, followed by sessions with both men and women can help to educate the men about the burdens that women face as well as the barriers they must confront in order to make health choices for themselves and their families.

Mahjee System

While women bear the brunt of the hardships faced by this refugee population, men are often given advantages and opportunities that work to further isolate and marginalize women. For instance, the Mahjee system is a deeply rooted local governance system that seemed to emerge in the camps on its own after the August exodus. A Mahjee is a community selected male representative responsible for to the needs of 7-10 families in the refugee camp. Women are not allowed to act as a Mahjee. It is a system of community organization and governance that lacks representation of women, and some Mahjees are said to severely neglect gendered issues, and women's needs.

During our data collection phase, we had the opportunity to conduct a brief interview with a Mahjee- who shall remain anonymous. Upon asking about

growing the security risks with regards to women using WASH facilities, we realized that no such concern existed for the Mahjee. Moreover, there was no effort to hear about women's concerns either, in the form of women advisors or separate sessions for women to bring up their needs and concerns. Our data comes from a direct interview with only one Mahjee and is therefore limited in its ability to represent general perspective of all Mahjees. However, it is important to note that one Mahjee tends to the needs of 50 or so individuals in a community and so any lack of knowledge or dismissal of gendered needs will be strongly felt. The Mahjee system ought to be redesigned to address overarching concerns of gender inequality. This lack of support for women's needs should be a top priority for aid organizations to tackle, especially since the Mahjee system is relied upon heavily by the government, army, and NGOs. Rather than challenging or working to improve this system, the Mahjee system is further reinforced and empowered by aid organizations relying on this system to organize and administer programs. Maria Ferrante, the UNHCR Protection Officer stated "***[The] natural response was to collaborate with the Mahjees and utilize existing trusted leadership***". Aid organizations, army officials, and government bodies depend on the Mahjee's to bring up issues of the community, disseminate important information, and allocate relief resources. An Oxfam programming officer said "***we***

know mahjees are powerful and some misuse their power, but we have to use them as the army heavily relies on them, there are so many families and we cannot always reach them."

Furthermore, with regards to Mahjee leadership one Rohingya woman from Camp 1E said:

"The mahji in our block is doing an injustice with us which we are not tolerating. He prepares his own list and takes all the relief. The relatives of mahjis get the things but we don't.... Since we came, we didn't get a water pot, door mat, pillow, and necessary utensils which are essential for us. Considering the mahji is Rohingya, if the mahji treats us differently, who should we share our concerns with?"

With so much responsibility and power in their hands, some Mahjee's have been noted to exploit their power. While the details of this are not formally reported, it has been said to be very detrimental towards some individuals, especially women.

Although this system is an efficient and well functioning system and not all Mahjees are known to exploit their

power, tighter accountability procedures need to be put in place. Having a system where all the Mahjees work together, and are overlooked by an authoritative body will not only prevent them from acting of their own will and as per their convenience, but also allow Mahjees to work with each other and supervise each other. Moreover, all Mahjees in the refugee camps should go through gender sensitivity training, and be educated on the importance of advocating for women's issues. They can be seen as a great way to disseminate important information within the community, as well as encourage the Rohingya families to send their children to learning centres, women friendly spaces, or child friendly spaces. On a general note, there needs to be a higher proportion of women leaders than what currently exists. This could mean modifying the current Mahjee governance system to incorporate women leaders/representatives, or designing a completely new system that has a proper election process and enough women representation.

5 | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Religious leaders, community leaders, and parents can be seen as the gatekeepers for change in this community. Working with these individuals should be a strategy that NGOs and government officials use to encourage the use of WFS and CFS, as well as increase the attendance to Learning Centres.
 - Collaborating with madrasas to develop curriculum that can be taught in combination with religious teachings should be considered.
 - The WFP Nutrition Program should consider providing nutrition programs through madrasas, in conjunction with an expansion of curriculum or allowing more female teachers.
- Engage men and boys in the conversations when trying to break down cultural barriers or practices that can be detrimental for women.
 - Having sessions with women alone first, and then both men and women can help to bring to light some issues that women face on a daily basis. Although the sessions must be moderated with extra caution as putting women in such situations where they express their burdens can sometimes work against them, and further expose them to abuse and harm outside the confines of the workshop setting.
- A system of accountability needs to be put in place to supervise the work of the Mahjees.
 - This system can also work well as working in groups may allow Mahjees to supervise each other as well.
 - Mahjees should be encouraged to hear from women about their concerns as well, either in the form of separate committee for women or through women advisors.

5 | RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Mahjee system needs to be modified to include a fair process of election, as well as a higher representation of women in positions of power.

6 | ADOLESCENT GIRLS

The fact that adolescent girls face multiple forms of discrimination emerged as a central barrier to women's equality and access to health in the camps. Adolescence for Rohingya refugee girls can be a time of insecurity and instability. This chapter will outline the main threats faced by these adolescent girls within the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. Specifically, this will address physical security within camps, initiatives of empowerment, purdah, trafficking, and education.

Security and Empowerment

To begin, there are several threats to the physical security of young adolescent girls in the refugee camps. It is important to note that several of these threats are gendered in their manifestation and thus require an interventionist lens that is gendered in its solution-seeking approach. The first of these, is the issue of negative survival strategies. The Joint Response Plan issued by UNHCR and the IOM identified that several young women had engaged in negative survival strategies such as trading sex for food and essential non-food-items. When conducting our primary research, we



found that not only is this a prevalent, but this ties into several other fundamental power disparities. Adolescent girls have been susceptible to a male gaze that particularly threatens their safety as has been discussed in **Chapter 3** of this policy report.

This construct can be tied to an overarching culture of purdah and its combining with patriarchy. Specifically, purdah requires young women who have reached puberty and who must step outside of their household, to wear a veil. This is associated with many other cultural norms and traditions, but the veil provides a sense of respect and security. Women and girls lack the necessary head scarves that they need to cover themselves in a way which would feel dignifying with this system of purdah. This cultural norm creates an additional constraint for young women to their mobility. If they do not have a veil, they cannot exist outside of the walls of their home with a remote sense of security.

The physical security of young women is also compromised through a high incidence of human trafficking. An investigative report by Al Jazeera revealed the extent of human trafficking and was able to interview a trafficker. He states,

“Our customers prefer Rohingya girls who have just arrived and also very

young girls. They like beautiful and presentable girls....We target girls who only have a single parent, girls with only a father or mother. We also target poor girls who are good-looking ... We treat them to tea and snacks and eventually we tell them that we can get them a job to support their family ...They come because they don't have another option.”³⁸

An important aspect of this interview can be gleaned from the final sentence. Young women engage in this work because they feel they are limited to these options. They are inherently susceptible to danger because of their constrained identity as refugees trapped by the confines of their statelessness and the consequences of this ultimate lack of power over one's own life. But they are furthermore taken advantage of because of the marketability of their age and gender. This report will continue to recommend empowerment initiatives for young women specifically, to ensure they have options to take control of their own lives, without being trafficked or engaging in negative survival strategies. This means encouraging the Bangladesh government (as mentioned in the first chapter) to allow for livelihood and skills-based training initiatives for Rohingya women and girls. These livelihood initiatives have been

successful in registered camps in Cox's Bazar and thus should be implemented in the newer camps as well. Additionally, there need to continue to be options for those who have survived such traumatic experiences of trafficking and abuse.

Safe houses currently exist in unnamed locations within Bangladesh outside of the refugee camps to protect these individuals' right to safety and privacy. Although this has been mentioned in Chapter 3 of this report, safe havens serve as crucial for adolescent girls who are trafficked and exploited. This initiative should be continued, and expanded to reach more survivors. This report stresses however that safe houses should not be considered a long-term solution but rather an interim solution to provide safety and counselling. This is because in the long-term, the hope is that these young women can exist autonomously, choosing careers and lifestyles that suit their own needs and are not limited to escaping sex-trafficking by living in safe-houses. Thus, programs within these safehouses should offer routes for empowerment, skills-training, education, and access to other avenues of long-term independence for these individuals.

Access

There is also a fundamental security concern for adolescent girls with regards to access. That is, because of their age and their gender, it is likely that they

will face barriers to access resources that may be necessary for their survival and health. The referral pathways system has been described in this report, however, what must be further considered is how systems of accountability can be implemented to ensure ease of access for marginalized young women. An anonymous aid official outlines that the system of referral pathways and accountability mechanisms exist within a vacuum of those who create them, but the knowledge of how they are to be used and support refugees is not widely known: ***“Knowledge is lacking, [as well as in] standardization ... [The] implementation [of systems of accountability and reporting] comes from people understanding the system”***. There exists a gap in how the referral pathway works and is administered. This is echoed by the thoughts of another aid official:

“[The] issue that everyone is facing is what happens when you identify? We have been constantly getting training on different pathways, standards, services... [The] main question is what is at the end of the pathway; what actually happens? Not just having complicated pathways but also making sure that help is actually being given”

Not only must these questions be addressed, but there must be a common understanding of how a referral pathway must work, and that there are no exceptions. There must be sensitivity training required for all actors with continuous updates as the crisis continues. There must be accountability structures for workers to be continually assessed, and monitoring systems that track the steps taken by individual health providers when given information regarding an assault. There must also be consideration as a whole, outside of the referral pathway system, with regards to how young women are treated, and what resources they do not have access to. These are all recommendations to ensure that access is provided to those who are often silenced the most, and abused the most. Young women require the space to access support, but furthermore ensure

that the avenues of resources they are provided is consistent, reliable, and can be easily reached without judgment.

Continued sensitivity training must be implemented across the board in every sector, to ensure that gender and age discrimination do not play a factor when those in authority provide resources. Specifically, training must be most emphasized and recurrent for those interacting with beneficiaries on a daily basis. A key finding we noticed is that policymakers often engage in conversations surrounding gender-sensitivity but this has not followed through to the field where field-workers operate. Ensuring gender sensitivity on the field also requires, that figures of authority within the camps such as CICs, legal advocates and others, should comprise some women for the creation



of a safe space that is approachable and accessible for women who may feel uncomfortable approaching men with regards to reporting sexual misconduct.

Education

There is a systematic problem in the way in which education systems have been designed and implemented in Rohingya refugee camps that specifically disadvantages adolescent girls. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as such until they reach 19 years of age. Furthermore, the convention guarantees children the right to education.³⁹ However, adolescent girls are not provided educational opportunities within Rohingya refugee camps, as the age limit to attend Learning Centres is 12 years old and girls are excluded from the Madrasas. The Education Sector, under the overall joint emergency response is one of the most underfunded sectors with \$7 million USD raised as of May 2018 of the overall goal of \$47 million USD according to the Education Sector specialist responsible for the budget. This gap in funds results in very serious ramifications. To begin with, the Bangladesh government does not allow for formal education to be administered within the refugee camps. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this document, this regulation violates international law, but in the context of the Rohingya refugee crisis, places young girls in precarious situations. To adapt

to the Bangladesh government, and also in tandem with the restrictions through the underfunding of the education sector, NGOs have developed Learning Centres, with fluid curricula that are to teach children up to the age of 12. This automatically allows for children 12 and older, and specifically adolescent girls to be forced within the confines of their home--because if they cannot be in school, due to cultural norms and pragmatism of survival needs, young women are tasked with care and household work.

The placement of adolescent girls outside of a setting of education at this particular age poses various risks. In particular, in participating in care work in the refugee camps, adolescent girls are often tasked with entering the nearby forests to collect firewood for cooking. There are several physical security threats that are attached to this task ranging from snakes, dangerous terrain, and sexual violence as the forest is a secluded and quiet region. Although these are key concerns, the security risks to women should not only be highlighted but very much addressed as a key priority with relation to the impact of these forests.

It is also important to note, that many of these young adolescent girls are mothers themselves. Outside from international norms and law considering them as children, they do not see themselves as such, as they have their own children to tend to. This gap in recognition and

awareness must be addressed and a plan must be implemented to address the responsibilities these young women hold in relation to the fundamental rights they are guaranteed as children under the age of 18. Specifically, to afford them choices to engage in skills development and/or education, and a base understanding of the benefits and consequences of both.

6 | RECOMMENDATIONS

- This report acknowledges the various intersecting struggles that a Rohingya girl will face as a result of her dual identity as young and female. Policies that are to be implemented in the future must consider this aspect when considering gender. Gender is not a blanket variable as its intersection with several other determinants of identity can allow or deny levels of social access.
- Providing veils for young women could be a short-term solution, which would allow them to go outside the home while maintaining purdah, however, this would not challenge the the gendered inequalities of the purdah system. Over the short-term young women would be more able to physically access markets, healthcare centres, and other structures that exist outside of their homes. These can be developed through the empowerment initiatives of sewing classes and garment production in registered camps, and providing those for all refugees regardless of camps, as BRAC is doing. In the long-term however, more work must be done to engage boys and men in addressing cultures of purdah and the limitations and barriers they place on women. Many NGOs have begun small-scale work to address gender norms in relation to healthcare and hygiene, but the topic of purdah must also be considered to ensure the mobility and agency of women.
- If women are engaging in sex work one must consider if there is coercion involved, or if this engagement is as a last-resort or economic necessity, and the preferences of the women providing services. If, in fact, it is found that women would prefer to engage in other employment opportunities, this must be addressed and opportunities should be provided.
- This report once again calls for an economic analysis of prospective job markets and opportunities utilizing the human capital of Rohingya refugee women specifically and host communities to understand what options exist for employment.

6 | RECOMMENDATIONS

- If Rohingya refugee women are resorting to negative survival strategies because of the abuse of power of CiCs, NGO workers, etc. this requires active vigilance and severe consequences. Systems of PSEA and Referral Pathways have been proven to be faulty and lack accountability. In cases of abuse of power, there requires a designated ombudsperson per camp, and also an external party to oversee NGO workers so as not to showcase bias.
- If women choose to engage in sex work for favours, money, or other goods of their own volition and active preference, systems must be developed to ensure that these processes are consensual and there is not room for exploitation or abuse. This requires that CiCs or other figures of authority within the camp are given training to ensure that complaints from sex workers are considered with the same level of severity as anyone else in the camp .
- As mentioned before, there must be a common understanding of how a referral pathway must work, and that there are no exceptions.
- There must be sensitivity training which consider gender in tandem with age, required for all actors with continuous updates as the crisis continues.
- There must be accountability structures for workers to be continually assessed, monitoring systems that track the steps taken by individual service providers when given information regarding an assault. This also means, that figures of authority within the camps such as CICs, legal advocates and others, these positions should include women for the creation of a safe space that is approachable and accessible.

6 | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Learning Centres must include curriculum for adolescents until the age of 18. The existing system allows for too many young people to be placed in situations of danger and violates the right of every child to have access to education until 19. Learning Centres must thus be accessible for this population with latrines, hygienic waste management and other necessities. Considerations must be made to engage with young men and women who may be parents but qualify as children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to address if options can be determined for parents who wish to work while simultaneously learning.
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CONCLUSIONS AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

There were several critical themes uncovered throughout the conducting of this research. Across these six chapters, one can identify four major areas that must be addressed by international institutions to ensure the protection and empowerment of Rohingya refugee women.

Gender mainstreaming: Recognition versus Application Gap

There is an overabundance of quantitative studies and there must be more qualitative analysis in order to understand, from the perspective of refugees, what the camp life is like. When on the field, a majority of the resources we were provided as reference materials possessed the tendency to quantify the situation within parameters of numbers and statistics. From the Joint Response Plan to gender analyses conducted within various sectors, there seemed to be a prevalence of quantitative analysis when considering almost all implemented initiatives. Although this is important, especially in such a wide-scale humanitarian crisis, further questions need to be asked. It is not enough to just quantify number of women that

attended a certain workshop or the percentage of women received a certain good. One must question if the women actively participated in the workshop, or their body language throughout the workshop. Moreover, one must record if a distributed good was used, in what ways, was it sustainable, how has it empowered these people etc. One may argue that in a crisis situation there is a requirement to provide life-saving aid first. Although this may be true, the consequences of this aid are sustained for decades thereafter. Therefore it is crucial that in implementing systems of governance, qualitative feedback, material resources, empowerment initiatives, and other supports, gender is considered by qualitative means to ensure the humanization of these peoples.

Quantitative versus Qualitative Program Evaluation and Monitoring

Secondly, there is a gap between the recognition of the need for applying a gender lens in all levels of humanitarian aid, and the actual implementation of programs that are sensitive to the

gendered dimensions of their programming.

We consistently found that gender was acknowledged as relevant to aid mostly in settings of policy and project creation. The gap manifested in translating that action on the ground when implementing such projects. In office settings and on paper gender is advocated for, however, on the ground, at the level of program delivery gender was rarely attended to. We found that field projects reflected a divergence in considerations of gender from the original project proposed. This is concerning when analysing the accomplishments many NGOs tout based upon the project as proposed, as opposed to its actual manifestation and how it can create gaps in effective and empowering aid provision. There must be an analysis of the gaps in how gender is conceptualized and actualized within each individual NGO to ensure that the organization's goals are being fulfilled to the extent they envision them. Furthermore, rigorous training must be conducted for all field workers, with consistent monitoring and support to ensure that the frameworks and guidelines developed at the 'top' are actually followed through to the 'bottom'. Furthermore, more information must be relayed from the field to influence and inform the decisions made in boardrooms and offices to ensure that goals and ideals are being made with pragmatism and realistic field standards in mind.

Accountability and Monitoring

Another key finding that spanned every chapter of this report, was the lack of systems of accountability and monitoring. From structures of PSEA, to referral pathways, to project management, there lacked tools to comprehensively evaluate how initiatives or arrangements were serving their intended population. Reports arise per NGO or working group assessing projects, but there lacks a standardization or sense of entrenched rules. Regular monitoring and evaluation ensures accountability amongst aid workers, and prevents them from adjusting and improvising as per their personal judgments. Without such a framework, there can develop a culture of impunity that ultimately harms beneficiaries.

Role of Government

Lastly, this report would be remiss if it did not consider the intrinsic role the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar play in the creation and perpetuation of this crisis. Regardless of the efforts of NGOs to mainstream gender, or the amount of money the international community raises to ensure the sustainable development of the Rohingya, none of this would be relevant if governments did not cooperate to provide efficient, compassionate access so that Rohingya can thrive through

institutional support. The governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar must acknowledge the injustices, violence, and gender-based discrimination Rohingya and Rohingya women have endured. Without this basic respect for the atrocities these individuals have survived, there cannot be effective trust built to support the people. Furthermore, governments must work to humanise the Rohingya through access to education, livelihood opportunities, legal documentation, and legal status. Viewing them in stereotypical and essentialist terms, as an intrusive population, an ethnically primitive group or as refugees robbing resources from local citizens, ultimately harm more than one million people and deny them their basic human rights. Attitudes must change so that policy can also change. Finally, it must be noted that the crisis has been ongoing for more than two years as of the writing of this report. But yet, conversations surrounding long term solutions for the Rohingya population are nonexistent. There must be efficiency in addressing the future of this crisis with gender in mind at every step of the way. Without these core changes in governmental attitudes towards the Rohingya, there cannot be real change for their empowerment or survival.

Ultimately, we envision a humanitarian response that is effective, efficient, and mainstreams gender to ensure the humanisation and empowerment

of Rohingya women. We encourage organizations to consider these recommendations in earnest, and continue to support the Rohingya refugee crisis.

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