

# BACKGROUND GUIDE

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
(UNHCR)

Agenda : Bangladeshi Refugee Crisis

# Table of Contents

1	Letter from Executive Board	Pg 3
2	Introduction	Pg 4 - 5
3	Historical Background	Pg 6 - 7
4	Case Study	Pg 8 - 10
5	International Framework	Pg 11 - 13
6	QARMA	Pg 14 - 15
7	Bibliography	Pg 16

# Letter from EB

Dear delegates,

Greetings from the Executive Board. It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you all to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees committee of KLE Model United Nations Conference 2024. Our agenda, “Bangladeshi Refugee Crisis” aims to address the ongoing refugee crisis by focusing on the challenges faced by Bangladesh in providing humanitarian aid and shelter.

As delegates, you will explore international efforts to support Bangladesh in managing the crisis, including resource mobilization, diplomatic interventions, and resettlement programs and examine the human rights situation, long-term solutions for refugees, and the need for sustainable repatriation processes. You will also develop strategies for enhancing regional cooperation, securing international aid, and ensuring the protection and dignity of displaced populations.

This background guide aims to provide an overview of the agenda and act as a guide for your further in-depth research by referring to various data sources. I eagerly anticipate engaging discussions and active participation from everyone. Your contributions are invaluable, and I’m excited to hear your insights! All the best!

Regards,

Neha S Kittur,

Chair – UNHCR Committee

# Introduction

The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority group who have lived for centuries in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar - formerly known as Burma. Despite living in Myanmar for many generations, the Rohingya are not recognized as an official ethnic group and have been denied citizenship since 1982, making them the world's largest stateless population.

The Rohingya have suffered decades of violence, discrimination and persecution in Myanmar. Their largest exodus began in August 2017 after a massive wave of violence broke out in Myanmar's Rakhine State, forcing more than 742,000 people - half of them children - to seek refuge in Bangladesh. Entire villages were burned to the ground, thousands of families were killed or separated and massive human rights violations were reported.

More than 1.3 million people were displaced within Myanmar in 2023 due to escalating violence following the military takeover in February 2021. By the end of 2023, there were more than 2.6 million internally displaced people (IDP) in the country. An additional 1.3 million refugees and asylum seekers from Myanmar are hosted in other countries, including nearly 1 million stateless Rohingya refugees who are living in Bangladesh. Most are settled in and around Kutupalong and Nayapara refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar region — some of the largest and most densely populated camps in the world. Rohingya refugees have also sought refuge in other nearby countries like Malaysia (168,400), India (93,100), Thailand (84,000) and other countries across the region.

Humanitarian aid is critical, with 95 percent of Rohingya households in Bangladesh dependent on humanitarian assistance. Rohingya refugees lack legal status and livelihood opportunities, and their movements outside the camps are restricted, leaving them entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance and at heightened risk of exploitation and abuse.

UNHCR's activities include registering refugees, providing protection and legal assistance, preventing gender-based violence, ensuring provision of adequate shelter, health care and sanitation, supporting education and skills development, as well as livelihood opportunities and distributing life-saving relief items where needed.

Given the camps and their inhabitants are highly exposed to weather-related hazards such as severe storms like Cyclone Mocha, or to fires, flooding and landslides, UNHCR also works to protect and mitigate against such dangers. UNHCR continues to engage in political dialogue on their voluntary repatriation. Until safe and dignified returns are possible, Bangladesh and the Rohingya refugees will require sustained and adequate financial support to ensure they can live safely.

# Historical Background

- The Rohingya, an ethnic Muslim group, have a long history in the Arakan region, which was once an independent kingdom known as Mrauk-U. Muslim traders began arriving as early as the eighth century, and their presence solidified over the centuries, particularly after the Mrauk-U king sought help from Bengal to repel Burman invasions in the 1400s. This led to the integration of Muslim officials into the local governance, even under predominantly Buddhist rulers.
- In 1784, the Burman king Bodawpaya conquered Arakan, prompting many Rohingya to flee to what is now Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. Subsequent conflicts, including resistance against the Burman authorities, intensified the Rohingya's marginalization. The British colonial period (1824-1942) allowed some autonomy but failed to grant citizenship to the Rohingya, who had lived in the region for centuries.
- World War II exacerbated tensions, with communal violence displacing thousands. After Burma's independence in 1948, the Rohingya were further marginalized, seen as illegal immigrants, and faced restrictions on movement and civil rights. Armed resistance emerged in the 1950s, leading to military crackdowns.

- The late 20th century saw significant waves of Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh, particularly during Operation Nagamin in 1977, which resulted in over 200,000 refugees escaping violence. By the early 1990s, another exodus occurred, driven by severe persecution and human rights abuses, leading to over 250,000 refugees entering Bangladesh.
- Repatriation efforts in the 1990s were fraught with challenges, including allegations of forced returns and insufficient living conditions in camps. While some refugees were able to return, many faced ongoing violence, property confiscation, and restrictions in Arakan, maintaining a cycle of displacement. Despite international attention and attempts to mediate, the Rohingya continue to struggle for recognition and rights, both in Myanmar and abroad, with ongoing humanitarian crises and limited support from the global community.

# Case Study

- Over the course of her life, Za Beda, a 27-year-old Rohingya woman living in Myanmar's western Rakhine State, has had to adapt to increasing restrictions on her rights and freedoms.
- In 2012, intercommunal clashes rocked Rakhine State. Za Beda was 17 at the time and had just started her own family. Together with tens of thousands of others, they were forced to flee.
- A decade later, over 153,000 Rohingya like her remain displaced, the majority of them confined to camps. An additional 447,000 live in villages where they have little freedom of movement, affecting their ability to obtain healthcare, attend school or make a living. Another 700,000 Rohingya fled a further round of violence in 2017 and now live as refugees in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the region.
- Restrictions on the amount of land the camps can occupy have meant that many are unable to expand to accommodate growing populations. Living in a crowded camp with limited sanitation facilitates and a growing family has brought hardships for Za Beda. "I have difficulties sleeping because there is not enough space for the eight of us in our shelter. I often go to my neighbor's house to sleep," she says.



- Access to healthcare is an additional challenge. Now enduring a difficult pregnancy with her third child, Za Beda is unwilling to seek medical care due to a cumbersome and costly administrative process involving the need for approval from local administrators, male escorts, and navigating security checkpoints where extortion is common.
- “I get upset when complications occur during childbirth,” says Hassinah Begom, a midwife who attends to the needs of Za Beda and other pregnant women in the camp. Despite not having had any formal training, she has successfully delivered over 500 children during her two-decade career and is often the first person mothers call on when they need assistance.
- “In serious cases, I have to quickly accompany them to the hospital. We cannot leave if it is past 6pm because of the curfew. When we do go, only one person is allowed to accompany the patient, and we are not allowed to bring our phones. We also pay higher prices for medication,” says Begum. “Thankfully, no mother has died under my care.”
- Policies such as denying equal access to citizenship and essential services, as well as movement restrictions, have kept the Rohingya marginalized and highly dependent on humanitarian aid. “No amount of aid is enough to solve the crisis,” says Federico Sersale, UNHCR’s head of office in Sittwe, the Rakhine state capital. “While it is imperative to assist, access to rights and freedoms, social cohesion between communities, the closure of camps, and allowing the Rohingya to return to their homes or places of choice are crucial to lasting solutions.”

- Even after giving birth with little or no medical care, women living in the camps continue to worry for their children. Birth certificates are rarely issued to Rohingya children, a key document that provides them with a legal identity.
- Restricting the Rohingya's access to civil documents like birth certificates has long term consequences. As children grow up, they are unable to acquire other important identity documents such as national registration cards, leaving them legally and administratively invisible. This in turn jeopardizes their future prospects, limits their freedom of movement and traps them in a cycle of poverty and marginalization.
- While primary education is often provided by humanitarian agencies for free inside camps, state run high schools are often located far from camps and segregated from other communities. School fees and transportation costs add to the financial strain faced by cash-strapped families, a situation exacerbated by the lack of employment opportunities.
- Reflecting on the difficulties faced in her own life and those of her children, Za Beda worries about the future. "I feel sad and unhappy with the situation ... I cannot imagine what life will be like when the children grow up," she says.

# International Framework

## **JOINT RESPONSE PLAN 2022**

The 2022 Joint Response Plan (JRP) was a humanitarian plan to address the needs of Rohingya refugees and forcibly displaced people (FDMNs) in Bangladesh. The plan's goals included:

- Repatriating Rohingya refugees to Myanmar
- Protecting Rohingya refugees and their families
- Supporting the well-being of host communities
- Improving disaster risk management and addressing climate change

## **JOINT RESPONSE PLAN 2024**

Under the leadership of the Bangladesh Government, the 2024 Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis was launched on 13 March. Through the 2024 JRP, the UN and its partners are calling on the international community to extend financial support to address the prioritized needs of Rohingya refugees and the Bangladeshi communities that are hosting them as the refugee crisis enters its seventh year.

The 2024 JRP is focusing on five key objectives-

- Work towards the sustainable and voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees/FDMNs to Myanmar.
- Strengthen the protection of Rohingya refugee/FDMN women, men, girls, and boys.
- Deliver life-saving assistance to populations in need.
- Foster the well-being of host communities.
- Strengthen disaster risk management and combat the effects of climate change.

## **IOM**

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) supports the government's efforts to:

- Enhance rights-based migration management
- Strengthen migration protection through humanitarian border management
- Train national authorities on migration legislation, civil registration services, and more
- Support border patrol and rescue missions

## Italian Cooperation

The Italian Cooperation Joint Committee (AICS) supports emergency programs in Bangladesh, including:

- Working with UN agencies and international NGOs
- Providing humanitarian support to Rohingya refugees and host communities

# Questions A Resolution Must Answer (QARMA)

When drafting a resolution on the "Bangladeshi Refugee Crisis," it's important to address key questions to ensure a comprehensive approach. Here are some critical questions the resolution should answer:

1. What political, economic, and environmental factors are driving refugees from Bangladesh?
2. What specific demographics (e.g., women, children, ethnic minorities) are most impacted and what critical services (food, shelter, healthcare) do refugees require urgently?
3. What current humanitarian efforts are in place, and who is leading them (governments, NGOs, international organizations)?
4. How are neighboring countries responding to the refugee influx, and what policies are they implementing?

5. What strategies can be developed for sustainable integration or voluntary repatriation of refugees?
6. What measures will ensure the safety and rights of refugees throughout the crisis?
7. What financial and logistical support is needed from the international community to address the crisis effectively?
8. What commitments will be sought from countries to uphold international refugee protection standards?

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