



CENTRE FOR  
HUMANITARIAN  
LEADERSHIP



# WHERE WILL MOST OF THE ROHINGYA BE BY 2022?

**Attachment: key driver analysis and hypotheses**

February 2020

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This document should be read in conjunction with [Where will most of the Rohingya be by 2022? A scenario analysis](#).  
This document contains the analysis of key drivers of change used to build the four scenarios.

Cover image: The Rohingya refugee camp near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, April 2019. Image © Dominic Nahr / Save The Children

# IMPLEMENTATION OF RETURNS MOU

## Definition

The set of multipartite political and legal agreements that frame the conditions and timeline for a return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar.

## Evolution over time

In 1977, the Rohingya ethnic minority were considered 'illegal' after being stripped of their citizenship, thus beginning a cycle of forced displacement. Persecution against the Rohingya has forced Rohingya women, girls, boys and men into Bangladesh for many years, having been an area of cross-border movement with significant spikes, following violent attacks in 1978, 1991–1992, 2016, and the largest refugee influx to Bangladesh in August 2017.<sup>1</sup> In 1977/78 Operation Dragon King drove some 200,000 Rohingya across the border to Bangladesh, and by 1979 most were repatriated back to Myanmar. In 1992, Rohingya refugees saw forced repatriation take place, with the following years seeing hundreds of thousands of Rohingya sent back to Myanmar.<sup>2</sup> Since August 2017 an estimated 745,000 Rohingya refugees have joined thousands of Rohingya already in Cox's Bazar who fled the earlier episodes of violence and abuse, bringing the figures—and potential scale of returns—in the Rohingya refugee camps up to 915,000; mass displacement on an unprecedented scale.

As early as November 2017, an agreement was signed between Myanmar and Bangladesh to plan repatriating hundreds of thousands Rohingya refugees, stating the returns should start within two months.<sup>3</sup> The government of Myanmar said the deal was based on a 1992/93 repatriation pact between the two countries that followed a previous spasm of violence. Agreeing to complete returns within two years and sparking concern from the international community and aid agencies that returns would not be voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable. The tripartite agreement signed in June 2018 is a MoU signed with UNDP, UNHCR and the Myanmar government that they would work to create conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar.

The continuous diplomatic stalemate between Bangladesh and Myanmar on the contentious issue of returns to Rakhine State has seen tensions rise, with both countries blaming the other for the failed repatriation

attempts;<sup>4</sup> these agreements have little chance of being effectively implemented. The government of Bangladesh also believes that international actors have not pressed Myanmar enough to address the security, rights and accountability issues to enable any large-scale return.<sup>5</sup>

China has continued to initiate external pressure in favour of early returns. The growing interventionist/mediation role of China—against vast economic and geostrategic interests—continues to impact implementation of returns MoU, pushing to expedite a returns process. The country has important economic and geostrategic interests in Myanmar, including a multi-billion-dollar China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), and is a major investor in Bangladesh, giving it significant leverage<sup>6</sup> and political influence.

Since August 2017, three efforts for small-scale returns to Myanmar have been attempted. Previous tries in January and November last year sparked fear, protests and confusion over how would-be returnee lists were gathered.<sup>7</sup> Amid concerns from the international community on conducive conditions for returns would not be met, UNHCR and the government of Bangladesh halted the latest attempt on 22 August 2019 due to conditions not conducive for return, including that any repatriation must be voluntary, safe and dignified.<sup>8</sup> Since the latest influx, while there has been a small number of self-elected returns, to date no large-scale returns have taken place. An analysis of data assessing the current status of Rohingya settlements in northern Rakhine State and potential repatriation camps and military bases constructed on the sites of former Rohingya settlements showed minimal preparation and raised significant concerns about the conditions under which returning Rohingya would be expected to live. There is a continued lack of access throughout Rakhine State for the UN, aid agencies and international monitors, which hinders their ability to operate and deliver humanitarian assistance including life-saving services.<sup>9</sup>

UNHCR has had a challenging time working with Bangladesh in the context of repatriation. For example, during the November 2018 repatriation attempt, UNHCR

1 UN OCHA, 'Rohingya Refugee Crisis', <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>

2 Médecins Sans Frontières, 'Timeline: A visual history of the Rohingya refugee crisis', 23 August 2019

3 Reuters, 'Myanmar, Bangladesh agree to cooperate on Rohingya refugee repatriation', October 2017

4 New Straits Times, 'Myanmar blames Bangladesh for second failed Rohingya repatriation', 23 August 2019

5 International Crisis Group, 'Bangladesh–Myanmar: the danger of forced Rohingya', 12 November 2018.

6 *ibid.*

7 The New Humanitarian, 'Tensions flare as Bangladesh tries to send Rohingya home', 21 August 2019.

8 UNHCR, 'Statement on voluntary repatriation to Myanmar', 22 August 2019.

9 OHCHR, 'Update on Myanmar at the 41st Session of the Human Rights Council', 10 July 2019.

criticised the Rohingya deal between Myanmar and Bangladesh, stating, “conditions in Rakhine state were not yet conducive for return of refugees”, with UN spokesman for the UN Secretary General, Stephane Dujarric stating, “UNHCR, which is in lead on the issue of refugees, was not consulted on this matter.”<sup>10</sup> With following attempts, UNHCR has had to strike a delicate balance to engage with Myanmar and Bangladesh to ensure future repatriation attempts are UNHCR-facilitated, but stay firm on their principles for any repatriation to be voluntary with conducive conditions in place.

In December 2018, a study on capacity and complementarity in the Rohingya Response acknowledged the unusual configuration of UN agencies (while UNHCR is typically the lead agency in refugee responses, the government of Bangladesh appointed the International Organization for Migration [IOM] in a leadership role in the response with the government) disrupted typical roles and responsibilities, contributing to a scenario where UN agencies are vying for space, resources and recognition.<sup>11</sup> This has had an effect on the nature of the response, partnerships and accountability, as well as the role of the Inter-Sector Coordination Group, led by IOM/OCHA. As a result, IOM has a larger than usual implementation role and this has resulted in an overlapping mandate with UNHCR that nominally performs a leadership role in refugee crises.<sup>12</sup>

Forced repatriation carries serious risks for security and stability on both sides of the border. A rushed repatriation is likely to increase tensions in Rakhine state. A secretive repatriation process without the consultations and preparations needed in Rakhine state could easily inflame hostilities and provoke violence against returnees or the remaining Rohingya population.<sup>13</sup> If refugees fear that they will be forced back to Myanmar, they may become more desperate to leave the camps and to attempt dangerous sea journeys across to Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia or other countries, prompting wider regional implications, as it did during the maritime migration crisis of 2015.<sup>14</sup>

The Rohingya refugees themselves have said they would not return until their conditions were met, including returning to their own country certain of their safety, and with dignity. In August 2019, protests erupted in Rohingya refugee camps amid Bangladeshi authorities’ attempts to ignite plans to begin sending refugees back. Groups of Rohingya staged protests on the eve of the latest return date, with Rohingya community leaders demanding full rights and citizenship before

they return. Hundreds of Rohingya signed or marked with thumbprints a statement denouncing the planned returns.<sup>15</sup>

While ASEAN seemingly has a critical role to play, so far it has not managed to do much other than make bland statements of support for the government of Myanmar, seemingly constrained by staunch adherence to its principle of non-interference.<sup>16</sup> Further, there are concerns Myanmar will push ASEAN AHA Centre to be more involved in repatriation matters, which will further impact/hinder UNHCR’s access and ability to influence future repatriation efforts to be voluntary and have appropriate conducive conditions in place.

In early January 2020, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sought Cambodia’s support for early repatriation of Rohingya displaced.<sup>17</sup> This move demonstrated Hasina’s strategy to enlist other ASEAN members to support pushing early repatriation, despite conducive conditions not in place for voluntary returns.

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10 Ellis-Peterson, H & Azizur, S, ‘UN criticises Rohingya deal between Myanmar and Bangladesh’, *The Guardian*, 1 November 2018.

11 Wake, C & Bryant, J, ‘Capacity and complementarity in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh’, *Humanitarian Policy Group Working Paper*, Overseas Development Institute, December 2018.

12 *ibid.*

13 International Crisis Group, ‘Bangladesh–Myanmar: the danger of forced Rohingya’, 12 November 2018.

14 International Crisis Group, ‘Bangladesh–Myanmar: the danger of forced Rohingya’, 12 November 2018.

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15 *The New Humanitarian*, ‘Tensions flare as Bangladesh tries to send Rohingya home’, 21 August 2019.

16 Barber, R, ‘The ASEAN Summit and the disregard of Rohingya Refugees’, 26 June 2019.

17 *The Daily Star*, ‘Rohingya repatriation: Bangladesh seeks Cambodia’s support’, 10 January 2020.

### Critical uncertainties:

- Will Rohingya be forced back to Myanmar, without conducive conditions for voluntary returns?
- If so, what will be the impact on security and stability for Rohingya in the already insecure environments on both sides of the border?
- In the case a precedent of forced smaller-scale repatriation is set, will larger-scale forced returns become increasingly likely, or will that be a trigger unifying the aid community to collectively prevent this from happening ever again?
- If repatriation (forced or conducive) occurs, and given the continued lack of access throughout Rakhine State to allow UN, aid agencies and international monitors in Myanmar, will aid agencies have access to support repatriated Rohingya?
- If forced repatriation occurs, what will be the impact on Rohingya in the Rakhine State?
- Will failed repatriation attempts negatively affect international funding, in the context of an already under-funded response?

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**Hypothesis 1** Under bilateral agreement, Bangladesh and Myanmar continue unsuccessful attempts on repatriation of Rohingya refugees, no conducive conditions in place for voluntary returns, UNHCR marginalised, ASEAN/ AHA mechanisms involved.

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**Hypothesis 2** Under bilateral agreement, Bangladesh and Myanmar conduct small- or large-scale repatriation of Rohingya refugees, no conducive conditions in place for voluntary returns, UNHCR marginalised, leading to increased insecurity, instability and violence against Rohingya on both sides of border.

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**Hypothesis 3** Bangladesh and Myanmar conduct UNHCR-led and facilitated repatriation to Myanmar, China's mediation/ brokering role is limited (intentional more than effective), with relatively conducive conditions in place for voluntary returns.

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**Hypothesis 4** Increased bilateral tensions with Bangladesh and Myanmar, suspension of any further repatriation attempts (up to 2022).

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# RELOCATION TO BHASAN CHAR

## Definition

The island of Bhasan Char has been identified by the government of Bangladesh as a relocation option for up to 100,000 Rohingya, as a way to decongest the refugee camps.

## Evolution over time

Bhasan Char did not exist 20 years ago, it emerged from the sea as one of a myriad shifting, unstable (sedimentary) islands.<sup>18</sup> It is located in the estuary of the Meghna River. It takes about 90 minutes to reach the Hatiya Island from Noakhali on the mainland, and then 30 minutes by speedboat to the island.<sup>19</sup> The island is subject to flooding during the monsoon season, and tidal channels can be seen cutting across the island, consistent with areas being submerged. The island's rapidly changing shoreline is another risk to human settlement, and the shape of the island has changed dramatically since it emerged from the sea.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, in 2017, the Bangladesh government announced their intent to start relocating Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char, as necessary to reduce pressure and congestion on the world's largest refugee camps.<sup>21</sup>

The government of Bangladesh (and China) has invested significant resources (US\$275 million) in the creation of infrastructure on the island to accommodate the relocation, and requested that the UN and international donor community support relocation. Construction commenced from early 2017, and, with Chinese support, the Bangladesh government began clearing land and building roadways and infrastructure.<sup>22</sup> Based on architectural plans, each refugee is allocated an average of 3.6 square metres in covered living area; this barely meets the UN's emergency minimum standards.<sup>23</sup> As of December 2018, construction of the 1440 buildings appeared complete.

Aid agencies have criticised plans, due to the flood-prone nature of the island which could be submerged during a high-tide; scepticism that it is fit for purpose; and concern it could turn into a semi-permanent solution.<sup>24</sup> Since the announcement, multiple NGOs have emphasised the difficulty and high-risks involved in evacuating hundreds of thousands from the island in

the event of natural disaster.<sup>25</sup> The United States urged Bangladesh to postpone any refugee relocations to Bhasan Char until independent experts can determine whether it is a suitable location,<sup>26</sup> and the European Union has bilaterally discussed the relocation plan in assuring the 'voluntary nature' of Rohingya relocation. There is no clarity on whether NGOs will be expected or allowed to implement services and/or projects on the island, or even to access it for monitoring purposes.

In early 2018, the government of Bangladesh briefed UN agencies on its plans for ongoing relocation plans for the island. UNHCR produced a position statement in relation to the island that, while not opposing the relocation, set out key principles based on the limited information available for the relocation plans, along with potential risks;<sup>27</sup> their only visit to the island was in September 2018. UNHCR had avoided vocalisation in the media of their position until further information on Bhasan Char was provided.

The monsoon season continues to be a push factor pressuring Bangladesh government plans to relocate Rohingya refugees in between seasons (November to March). Ahead of both 2018 and 2019 monsoon seasons, the government halted both efforts amid UN and aid agencies' safety and security concerns for relocation.<sup>28</sup> The government has repeatedly stated in public that only those who volunteer will be moved to Bhasan Char and that no one will be forcibly relocated;<sup>29</sup> however, progressing relocation plans continue to raise fears premature relocation will commence before adequate protection safeguards are in place.

On 19 October 2019, the government of Bangladesh released a promotional video on the move to Bhasan Char island. The UN visits referred to in the video are those conducted in September 2018—the UN has not been to the island since then—with the optics of the visit presented as endorsement by the UN. UNHCR has since engaged more emphatically on a media and bilateral basis. A UNHCR spokesperson in Cox's Bazar affirmed:

Following recent developments, including reports that government officials in the camps have begun identifying refugees for relocation, the UN has reached out to the government seeking clarifications on its relocation plan and the next steps in the process. The

18 Reuters, 'A remote home for the Rohingya', 31 December 2018.

19 Acharjee, D, 'Relocation of Rohingya to Bhasan Char "next month"', The Independent, 20 October 2019.

20 Reuters, 'A remote home for the Rohingya', 31 December 2018.

21 Adams, B, 'For Rohingya, Bangladesh's Bhasan Char will be like a prison', Human Rights Watch, 14 March 2019.

22 Reuters, 'A remote home for the Rohingya', 31 December 2018.

23 The UN's emergency minimum standard is 3.5 square metres per person.

24 Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration, Avoiding a crisis within a crisis: assessment report, Centre for Policy Development, March 2019.

25 Marsh, S, 'Bangladesh prepares to move Rohingya to island at risk of floods and cyclones', The Guardian, 19 July 2019.

26 The Daily Star, 'US wants postponement of Rohingya relocation to Bhasan Char', 24 October 2019.

27 UNHCR, 'Relocation of Rohingya Refugees to Bhasan Char island', Rohingya Refugee Crisis, 2018.

28 Adams, B, 'For Rohingya, Bangladesh's Bhasan Char "will be like a prison"', Human Rights Watch, 14 March 2019.

29 Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration, Avoiding a crisis within a crisis: Assessment Report, Centre for Policy Development, March 2019.

UN wants to understand the government's planning, particularly as it relates to the critical protection and operational issues that should be considered before any relocations take place. These should include refugees' access to basic rights and services, justice and governance, education and livelihoods opportunities, and their ability to move within Bhashan Char and to and from the mainland.<sup>30</sup>

On 29 October 2019, Shah Kamal, senior Secretary of Bangladesh's Disaster Management Ministry, announced, "Despite all preparations being in place ... we can start the relocation process at any moment. But since the relocation has developed some international concerns, the UN agencies will conduct a technical assessment regarding the safety issues in the island." Kamal continued: "We will not start the relocation without any clearance from the UN agencies."<sup>31</sup>

On 3 November 2019, the Bangladesh government said plans to relocate thousands of Rohingya to Bhasan Char were "uncertain" after authorities failed to gain support from UN agencies. Bangladesh Disaster Management and Relief Minister Enamur Rahman told AFP, "The plan [for relocation] was in doubt as the UN has not supported the relocation so far."<sup>32</sup> Aid agencies including UNHCR, IOM and the World Food Programme held meetings with the government of Bangladesh and told Rahman the island was "isolated" and "flood-prone". A UN official said, "UN agencies cannot support a move for which [they] have no technical information," and set out a list of conditions that had to be met, including a regular shipping service between the islet in the Bay of Bengal and the mainland.<sup>33</sup> The UN is committed to finalising technical assessment first to ensure clear communication of its position. The plan is to start technical assessment trips in mid-November 2019, where a "UN technical assessment team, comprising experts from different countries, will evaluate the safety features of Bhasan Char, 17–19 November"<sup>34</sup> Another important element is securing a clear strategy and further detail from the Bangladesh government on mobilising volunteers, what would happen after the physical relocation, and what life on the island would be like for refugees, including sustainability, livelihoods, et cetera. At the end of November 2019, the visit was postponed after Dhaka insisted on seeing the "terms of reference" for the trip.<sup>35</sup> The UN and the government agreed to postpone the visit to ensure that the right experts are on hand and

all necessary logistical arrangements are in place. The international community is awaiting an update on this assessment.<sup>36</sup>

As of 31 December 2019, the Bangladesh government proposed that Bhasan Char was ready to receive Rohingyas; however, the Rohingyas are reluctant to go to the uninhabited island on the grounds that it is a cyclone-prone region and that help will be difficult to access in an emergency situation, due to being disconnected from the mainland. The Bangladesh government blamed international aid agencies for its failure to relocate. The UN opines that relocation should take place only after an independent feasibility study, but it has to be voluntarily.<sup>37</sup>

Frustrated Bangladeshi authorities refuse to plan for the long term, and have introduced stringent security measures at refugee camps.<sup>38</sup> Authorities have placed restrictions on Rohingya movements and access to the internet, launching a crackdown in the camp, shutting shops run by refugees, blocking internet services, confiscating mobile phones, putting up fencing and setting a curfew.<sup>39</sup> Relocation to Bhasan Char will also further isolate the Rohingya population, and reinforce the complete dependency of the population relocated to Bhasan Char (in terms of means of subsistence, livelihoods, et cetera.) Dhaka's restrictions on aid activities prohibit its partners from building safe housing in the Rohingya camps or developing programs that cultivate refugee self-reliance. Combined with heavy-handed security measures, this approach risks alienating refugees and setting the stage for greater insecurity and conflict in southern Bangladesh.<sup>40</sup>

Bangladesh has been pushing to assert an allocation of funding for mass relocation in the 2020 Joint Response Plan (JRP), expressing that if UN agencies don't help support future Bhasan Char relocation plans, they will withdraw support for collecting funding to the JRP.<sup>41</sup> NGO internal correspondence from a high-level coordination meeting between humanitarian organisations and the Bangladesh government noted that the government's call to include Bhasan Char in the JRP was difficult to consider without full details of the relocation plan, including the UN's role.

30 Sumon, S, 'Dhaka awaits UN approval before relocating Rohingya to new home', Arab News, 30 October 2019.

31 *ibid.*

32 Agence France-Presse, Bangladesh Rohingya Island Relocation 'Uncertain' after UN Doubts, <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/bangladesh-rohingya-island-relocation-uncertain-after-un-doubts>, 3 November 2019.

33 Agence France-Presse, 'Bangladesh Rohingya Island Relocation 'Uncertain' after UN Doubts', 3 November 2019; Sumon, S, 'UN Stalls relocation plan for 100,000 Rohingyas', 6 November 2019.

34 Dhaka Tribune, UN Technical Team to assess Bhasan Char on Nov 17-19', 6 November 2019.

35 Sumon, S, 'UN trip to Rohingya island delayed', Arab News, 25 November 2019.

36 The Business Standard, 'An inside look at Bhasan Char – a new home for the Rohingya', 10 January 2020.

37 The Business Standard, 'An inside look at Bhasan Char – a new home for the Rohingya', 10 January 2020.

38 International Crisis Group, 'A sustainable policy for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh', 27 December 2018.

39 Marsh, S & Ahmed, R, 'Our only aim is to go home: Rohingya refugees face stark choice', The Guardian, 4 November 2019.

40 International Crisis Group, 'A sustainable policy for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh', 27 December 2018.

41 Zaman, S, 'Government tags Bhasan Char relocation with JRP support', Bangla Tribune, 25 July 2019.

### Critical uncertainties:

- Will the Bangladesh government ultimately go ahead with relocation plans on this island without the endorsement or support of UN agencies, in particular, UNHCR?
- What will happen on Bhasan Char after any relocation of the Rohingya population occurs?
- Will UN and aid agencies be granted access to the island, on their own terms, to deliver basic services, including protection services, to Rohingya populations on Bhasan Char island in the event of their relocation there?
- What will be the impact to the Rohingya on the island during monsoon season, especially if exacerbated by a natural disaster?
- What will be the environmental impact of mass relocation to, and inhabitation on, Bhasan Char island?
- Will relocation of Rohingya to Bhasan Char—and hesitancy of the international donor community citing safety and security concerns—further cement stagnation of already dwindling JRP funding by the donor community?

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**Hypothesis 1** Relocation of Rohingya to Bhasan Char island, UN-endorsed protection framework addressing safety and security concerns, UN and international donor community fund relocation, some aid agencies operate on island to deliver essential services.

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**Hypothesis 2** Continued postponement of Bangladesh government Bhasan Char relocation plans (up until 2022), explained due to factors including lack of UN endorsement, political and climate-related impediments, absence of voluntary relocation.

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**Hypothesis 3** Bangladesh government conducts relocation to island without UN-endorsement, which does not address protection framework or voluntary concerns, China fund relocation, some aid agencies/donors operate on Bhasan Char.

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**Hypothesis 4** Bangladesh government conducts relocation to island without UN-endorsement, which does not address protection framework or voluntary concerns, aid agencies do not operate on Bhasan Char.

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# NATURAL DISASTER AND MONSOON SEASON AFFECTING COX'S BAZAR AREA

## Definition

The effects of climate change are increasingly being felt and have begun affecting ecosystems, human populations and historical weather patterns. Changes in weather patterns are being seen globally. Global surface temperatures rose 0.74°C between 1906 and 2005, and 2016 was the warmest year on record. By 2100, global temperatures are expected to increase by 3.7 to 4.8°C above the average compared to 1850–1900.<sup>42</sup>

The impact of natural disasters depends heavily on the characteristics of the territory, its infrastructure, the population density, and authorities' anticipation and adaptability capacities. Low-lying coastal areas will be particularly vulnerable, especially in Asia.<sup>43</sup> Bangladesh is one of the countries most vulnerable to extreme weather events like floods and cyclones; lack of resilience and adaptive capacity, dense population and poverty make the situation worse.<sup>44</sup> Every year, rainfall and flooding have impacted across the country, affecting hundreds of thousands of people,<sup>45</sup> which can exacerbate tensions between competing priorities and limited resources.

The monsoon season in Bangladesh runs from June to September, preceded and succeeded by cyclone seasons, running from April to May and October to November. The Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, located at the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh, are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the monsoon season, given the geographic exposure combined with the congested nature and fragility of the refugee camp infrastructure, the muddy and hilly terrain, and the lack of evacuation options. The mass influx has also further compounded the environmental degradation both within the refugee camps and in the surrounding areas, putting Cox's Bazar under further severe strain.<sup>46</sup>

## Evolution over time

The successive waves of refugee influx and population growth over the years, with significant spikes following violent attacks in 1978, 1991–1992, 2016 and by far

the largest influx in August 2017,<sup>47</sup> have changed the demographics in the Cox's Bazar area, and the balance of refugee and host populations at risk. Since the latest mass influx of 745,000 Rohingya refugees into Cox's Bazar from August 2017, the population in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar has tripled. Rohingya refugees continue to be sheltered in makeshift shelters in extremely congested settlements—the largest displaced population camp in the world—in areas that have minimal access to basic infrastructure and services and are prone to natural disasters.<sup>48</sup> Setting up of camps has led to rapid deforestation, further increasing vulnerability to disasters and monsoon rains.<sup>49</sup>

The Rohingya refugee crisis has had a profound impact on the communities of Cox's Bazar (where two southern Cox's Bazar sub-districts—Teknaf and Ukhiya—have borne the brunt of this crisis). The 2019 JRP for the Rohingya crisis includes up to 915,000 Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, 745,000 Rohingya from the most recent August 2017 influx plus those Rohingya who predate this,<sup>50</sup> and the 335,900 members of the host community in need of assistance,<sup>51</sup> bringing the total number of people at increased risk to over 1.2 million.

In 2019, the monsoon season in Cox's Bazar was characterised by high winds (the average daily wind speed in July was around 16 kilometres per hour, in recent years the maximum sustained wind speed has reached 104 kilometres per hour, the equivalent of around 64 miles per hour)<sup>52</sup> and heavy rain (peak monsoon month July 2019 average rainfall was 924.6 millimetres),<sup>53</sup> which resulted in flooding, damage to infrastructure, and injuries and loss of life.

47 UN OCHA, Rohingya Refugee Crisis, <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>

48 For example, Cyclone Mora affected over 3.3 million people in Bangladesh when it made landfall on May 2017, with Cox's Bazar the most severely affected area with approximately 17,000 residences damaged. The UNITAR–Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT) estimates that districts near Cox's Bazaar and Chittagong division were hit with gusts that topped 130 kilometres per hour.

49 The World Bank, Emergency Multi-Sector Rohingya Crisis Response Project, February 2019.

50 UNHCR, UNHCR in Bangladesh, 'Operational Dashboard: 2019 Indicators Monitoring', Operational Portal Refugee Situations, 30 September 2019.

51 The 2019 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya crisis estimates there are 335,900 members of the host community who are in need of assistance.

52 Weather2, local weather forecast in Cox's Bazar Climate Profile, <http://www.myweather2.com/>.

53 Weather Atlas, July weather forecast and climate Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

42 IARAN, 'The future of aid'.

43 *ibid.*

44 Chowdhury R et al, (2017), 'The association between temperature, rainfall and humidity with common climate-sensitive infectious diseases in Bangladesh', PLoS ONE

45 ACAPS NPM Analysis Hub: Rohingya influx overview, 'Key changes during 2018 monsoon season', ACAPS, NPS and Analysis Hub, October 2018.

46 Sharif AM et al, 'Rohingya refugees and the environment', American Association for the Advancement of Science, vol. 364, issue 6436, pp. 138, 2019.

It was estimated up to 175,000 Rohingya refugees were at risk from landslides and floods, where monsoon rains could trigger dozens of landslides, or flood low-lying areas, submerging thousands of shelters.<sup>54</sup> In the two weeks of July 2019 alone, flooding and landslides displaced nearly 6000 refugees, damaged over 3500 shelters and killed two people. The IOM reported over 400 landslides, 60 windstorms, and at least 28 incidents of flooding in the first 10 days of July 2019, affecting over 22,000 people.<sup>55</sup> The Basic Needs Gap index<sup>56</sup> illustrated that needs vary greatly across the camps, with some areas more affected than others by the monsoon season, with gaps in key sectors including access to health, water, sanitation, food and shelter, NFI services and supplies.<sup>57</sup>

Data gathered from reports and assessments indicates there are critical information gaps around potentially life-saving information, with the Rohingya population insufficiently informed about emergency preparedness and response in relation to the monsoon. An assessment conducted in Teknaf among Rohingya refugees and the host community found that information about emergency preparedness had not been systematically disseminated beyond the level of community leaders and local authorities. Few of the 592 respondents stated that they had attended awareness-raising sessions about emergencies; additionally, those who had participated in such sessions were unable to recall key messages, meaning there remains a critical information gap around potentially life-saving information.<sup>58</sup> There are fears future monsoon seasons in Bangladesh will imperil the thousands of Rohingya refugees in makeshift camps in Cox's Bazar.<sup>59</sup>

The political impasse of this crisis indicates that displacement will be protracted. There are legitimate concerns the monsoon season, with heavy rains and flooding, will increase the vulnerability of camps, elevate risk of waterborne disease outbreaks such as cholera, and threaten already precarious water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure and services, including

risk of contamination and access to latrines.<sup>60</sup> Many latrines were set up hastily with little consideration for placement and how they might be affected by heavy monsoon rains. Heavy rains and landslides could wreak havoc by flooding latrines and washing sewage into drinking water supplies, raising the threat of disease outbreaks.<sup>61</sup>

Bangladesh authorities have continued to leverage the impact of future monsoon seasons as a compounding risk to refugees, promoting relocation of refugees to Bhasan Char as a solution, despite the island also being at risk of complete submersion by a strong cyclone during high tide (refer to 2. Relocation to Bhasan Char, above).<sup>62</sup>

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54 Scarr, S & Weij, C, 'How the monsoon could devastate Rohingya camps', Reuters, 11 May 2018.

55 Human Rights Watch, 'Bangladesh: Rohingya face monsoon floods, landslides', July 2019.

56 This report covers changes recorded in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh during the monsoon season. It includes a review of secondary data, as well as the results of a multi-sector prioritisation tool developed by the Analysis Hub, called the Basic Needs Gap Index. This index is based on NPM Round 11 data and covers gaps in shelter and NFIs, food, health, sanitation and water supply, and is meant to illustrate the severity of need across camps and blocks in the Rohingya settlements.

57 ACAPS NPM Analysis Hub: Rohingya influx overview, 'Key changes during 2018 monsoon season', ACAPS, October 2018.

58 ACAPS NPM Analysis Hub: Rohingya influx overview, 'Key changes during 2018 monsoon season', ACAPS, NPS and Analysis Hub, October 2018. An assessment conducted in Teknaf among Rohingya refugees and host community found that information about emergency preparedness has not been systematically disseminated beyond the level of community leaders and local authorities.

59 Scarr, S & Weij, C, 'How the monsoon could devastate Rohingya camps', Reuters, 11 May 2018.

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60 Mehta, P & Kuschminder, K, 'Preventing a monsoon health crisis in Bangladesh', United Nations University, 25 April 2018.

61 *ibid.*

62 Human Rights Watch, 'Bangladesh: Rohingya face monsoon floods, landslides', 12 July 2019.

### Critical uncertainties:

- What will be the extent, pace and degree of changing patterns in extreme weather events causing increased level of varying needs across camps?
- Will there be adequate preparedness efforts that address needs gaps identified across the camps for all key sectors, including health, WASH, food and shelter, NFI services and supplies?
- Will there be adequate assessment of need variation across the most vulnerable Rohingya populations?
- Will following monsoon and cyclone seasons compound risk of disease outbreaks in Rohingya refugee camps?

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**Hypothesis 1** Future monsoon season exacerbated by intensified weather patterns, resulting in additional damage and loss in the Cox's Bazar areas, with a lack of sufficient preparedness efforts by the Bangladesh government and aid agencies to address information gaps in camps (health, WASH, shelter), with Rohingya population inadequately informed, leading to disease outbreak in camps, and increased stability and security concerns, encourages the Bangladesh government to accelerate plans of relocation to Bhasan Char and/or repatriation efforts to Myanmar.

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**Hypothesis 2** Some increased preparedness efforts in the camps that seek to address key sector gaps, limit the negative impact on the refugee population of intensified weather patterns, heavy rains and cyclones, while host communities still suffer devastating consequences, exacerbating inter-communal tensions and anti-INGO sentiments in the area.

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**Hypothesis 3** Investment in preparedness efforts in both host community and refugee camps, limits the negative impacts of intensified weather patterns, heavy rains and cyclones, minimising inter-communal tensions and anti-INGO discourse, lessening instability and security concerns.

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# ROLE OF CHINA AND 'ONE BELT, ONE ROAD' INITIATIVE

## Definition

China has a significant strategic interest in stability in the region, and, in particular, stability in Myanmar. China is Myanmar's biggest trading partner and source of foreign direct investment, with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) promising trillions of dollars for foreign infrastructure development and energy projects with Myanmar. China has so far provided significant and unconditional support to the government of Myanmar over the Rohingya crisis, including no pressure exerted from a human rights perspective, under the non-intrusion type of external diplomacy adopted by China.

## Evolution over time

In South Asia, geo-economics seems all set to shape the region's geo-politics with Beijing's ambitious US\$50 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), designed ostensibly to integrate economies of the restive Xingian and western provinces through to Pakistan. But its real strategic objective is to develop the sea ports of Pakistan's Baluchistan to enable western China and energy-rich Central Asian republics to gain unfettered access directly through to the Gulf and the Arabian Sea.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the significance of Chinese intervention is pointedly demonstrated in the growing Chinese influence in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Driven by security concerns, economic interests, and a desire for political influence, China is playing a key role in Myanmar's internal security and peace process.<sup>64</sup> China has important economic and geostrategic interests in Myanmar, including agreement in 2017 to establish the multi-billion-dollar China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) integral to the BRI, as well as attempts to progress the Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM). The 2800-kilometre BCIM corridor proposes to link Kunming in China's Yunnan province with Kolkata, passing through nodes such as Mandalay in Myanmar and Dhaka in Bangladesh before heading to Kolkata.

Myanmar is a least developed country with a GDP of only \$64.3 billion, a growth rate of 6.5% in 2016-17, and 70% of the population dependent on agriculture. It badly needs foreign investment, and China has been a major source.<sup>65</sup> The commissioning of 1060 kilometres of gas and oil pipelines from Kunming in China to Kyauk Phyu

port in Rakhine, in 2013 and 2015 respectively, involved the Chinese investment of US\$7.5 billion, and firmly established the Chinese strategic footprint in Myanmar, and in Rakhine specifically. A resource-rich country with a relatively low population of 50 million, Myanmar must strike a careful balance as it runs the risk of experiencing another neo-colonial "extractive" economic relation with China.<sup>66</sup>

The two governments announced the proposal to build the CMEC in November 2017,<sup>67</sup> signed the MoU in September 2018, and held the first meeting of the joint committee for the CMEC.<sup>68</sup> With a string of subsequent MoUs signed since aimed at strengthening cooperation,<sup>69</sup> the two countries have signed the Framework Agreement on Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Deep-sea Port Project and the MoU on Feasibility Study on Muse-Mandalay Railway Project, as well as negotiating on projects such as China-Myanmar border economic cooperation zone,<sup>70</sup> depicting ever-growing economic and trade ties between the two countries. Myanmar's ruling military junta decided to open up investment to the West in 2011 in order to reduce its dependence on China, but the Rohingya crisis has pushed Myanmar back toward China.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, Myanmar's fear of falling into a Chinese 'debt trap' has been palpable, and Myanmar will be cautious to avoid experiencing the economic dependence they once did, being beholden to China. This concern is highlighted when comparing the Kyauk Phyu port and SEZ projects—awarded to China's CITIC group—with the Thilawa and Dawei SEZs, being developed by Japanese investments. Unlike the Japanese projects where Myanmar retains controlling stakes, in Chinese investments, Chinese hold the 51% stake.<sup>72</sup>

China is also a major investor in Bangladesh with an estimated US\$31 billion in investments, mainly in the infrastructure and energy sectors, giving it significant leverage. China is making efforts to revive the BCIM economic corridor, which previously failed to make headway.<sup>73</sup> In July 2019, during talks between Chinese President Xi Jinping and the visiting Prime Minister Hasina, China and Bangladesh vowed to deepen their

63 Dutta, R, 'North East and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor', ISPSW Strategy Series: Focus on Defense and International Security, Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy, issue no. 529, 2018.

64 United States Institute of Peace, 'China's Role in Myanmar's Internal Conflicts', no. 1, 2018.

65 Dutta, R, 'North East and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor', ISPSW Strategy Series: Focus on Defense and International Security, Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy, issue no. 529, 2018.

66 *ibid.*

67 Tourangbam, M & Amin, P, 'China's dynamic grip on Myanmar', *The Diplomat*, 7 May 2019.

68 Myanmar Times, 'CMEC - Golden road for China-Myanmar cooperation in new era', 6 November 2019.

69 Yhome, K, 'Emerging dynamics of the China-Myanmar economic corridor', Observer Research Foundation, 15 May 2019.

70 Myanmar Times, 'CMEC - Golden road for China-Myanmar cooperation in new era', 6 November 2019.

71 Tourangbam, M & Amin, P, 'China's dynamic grip on Myanmar', *The Diplomat*, 7 May 2019.

72 *ibid.*

73 Business Standard, 'China, Bangladesh vow to deepen cooperation under BRI', 5 July 2019.

cooperation under the BRI. Prime Minister Hasina was quoted as saying, “Bangladesh is willing to actively participate in the BRI and accelerate the construction of the BCIM.”<sup>74</sup> The two countries signed nine agreements—five agreements, three MoUs and a document—across different sectors ranging from aid for the Rohingyas and economic and technical cooperation, investment, power, culture and tourism to consolidate bilateral ties.<sup>75</sup>

China advocated support for Myanmar and Bangladesh to deal with the Rohingya crisis bilaterally instead of being addressed in multilateral forums extending political and financial support to Myanmar in relation to the country’s ethnic conflict, and in the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly, protecting it from stronger Security Council action.<sup>76</sup> In July 2019, the Fact-Finding Mission revealed a network of businesses that are continuing to fund the Myanmar military, as well as countries supplying arms and military equipment.<sup>77</sup>

China has positioned itself to play the role of a mediator between Myanmar and Bangladesh in the current Rohingya crisis as demonstrated through their role in the Bangladesh–Myanmar agreement to a phased repatriation of the Rohingyas to Rakhine.<sup>78</sup> China was a key driver for instigating early returns attempts both in November 2018 and the most recent attempt in 22 August 2019, as well as funding and building construction on Bhasan Char island to facilitate relocation.

Domestic factors may continue to constrain Chinese influence. Myanmar, like other countries in Southeast Asia, seeks to avoid overreliance on any single country and to maintain a balance of power among large countries to enable it to maximise its leverage and defend against undue external influence in its affairs. Myanmar particularly worries about Chinese influence because of China’s size, power and proximity, as well as the way China’s economic development projects have been carried out without due consideration for the wellbeing of Myanmar’s population and ecology. At the same time, Myanmar wants to benefit from Chinese trade and investment, and recognises that geographically it must maintain a constructive relationship with its neighbour to secure its own long-term stability and development.<sup>79</sup>

To mitigate dependency on China, Myanmar may reach out to other regional actors. In the economic sphere, countries such as Japan and Singapore are

investing in Myanmar. Japan’s engagement with Myanmar is not only focused on trade and investment. For example, Japan International Cooperation Agency has been helping with capacity-building in areas like agriculture and information technology. Japan’s engagement with Myanmar categorically shows that its style of engagement could make it an attractive, alternative partner.<sup>80</sup> While Myanmar will try to limit their dependence on China, it is also likely to maintain this strategic alliance at all costs, as a critical shield in international forums.

In December 2019, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Myanmar and met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to progress the Belt and Road projects, and share support to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi ahead of her to trip to address the International Court of Justice genocide case, asserting that “China would stand firmly with Myanmar”.<sup>81</sup> Wang has mediated between Myanmar and Bangladesh in the Rohingya repatriation process since 2017. At the meeting, Wang said China had always been concerned about the situation in Rakhine State and was willing to continue to assist Myanmar in carrying out repatriation and resettlement, and promoting economic development in Rakhine State. Despite growing wariness among the public regarding unsustainable debt to China, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said the 70th anniversary should be used to build high-level cooperation over the BRI and developing the CMEC.<sup>82</sup>

A decade after Xi Jinping’s first visit to Myanmar in 2009, Naypyidaw is planning a banquet for another Xi visit on 17 January 2020; on the agenda is to speed up the construction of the projects within the CMEC and realisation of the BRI, and the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ), Beijing’s strategic window to the India Ocean. However, Chinese projects in Myanmar stalled after the suspension of controversial Myitsone Dam, which created uneasy relations with Beijing for the first time in 20 years and caused BRI capital injections to fall short of the hype. Kyaukphyu was not an exception; the project was significantly trimmed down with the fear of a debt trap. Naypyitaw has been courting Beijing again in recent months in order to seek quick cash and keep the back door secure. And Beijing will follow Naypyidaw’s blueprint for Rohingya issues, no matter where it leads, noting their strategic interests. Beijing’s decade-long plan is now set and with the green light from Xi’s upcoming visit, it will be in full swing.<sup>83</sup>

74 *ibid.*

75 The Indian Express, ‘Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina signs nine agreements with China’, 4 July 2019.

76 International Crisis Group, ‘Bangladesh–Myanmar: The danger of forced Rohingyas’, 12 November 2018.

77 UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, ‘UN IFFM on Myanmar exposes military business ties, call for targeted sanctions and arms embargoes’, UN Human Rights Council, OHCHR, July 2019.

78 Dutta, R, ‘North East and the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor’, ISPSW Strategy Series: Focus on Defense and International Security, Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy, issue no. 529, 2018.

79 United States Institute of Peace, China’s Role in Myanmar’s Internal Conflicts, no. 1, September 2018.

80 Singh, TS. & Sachdeva, S, ‘China faces increasing competition in Myanmar’, The Diplomat, November 2017.

81 Lwin, N, ‘Chinese Foreign Minister Visits Myanmar to Speed up Belt and Road Projects’, The Irrawaddy, 9 December 2019.

82 *ibid.*

83 Thiba, A, ‘Xi’s upcoming visit to Myanmar could reshape the Indian Ocean region’, The Diplomat, 4 January 2019.

### Critical uncertainties:

- What will be the impact as to the level of influence China will wield with the Myanmar and Bangladesh governments, especially relating to their handling of Rohingya repatriation and at UNSC levels?
- Will there be enough international political will to exert pressure on China to shift their position, decreasing support and protections to Myanmar at UNSC levels?
- Will Myanmar move to avoid being as economically dependent as it once was, as the BRI and CMEC projects develop? What will the impact be on China's protections of Myanmar at UNSC?

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**Hypothesis 1** China increases funding and continues to initiate/broker future repatriation attempts with the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar, sidelining UNHCR, and continues to protect Myanmar from stronger UNSC action, further increasing their level of influence.

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**Hypothesis 2** Myanmar reaches out to other regional actors (most notably Japan) to mitigate dependency on China vis-à-vis economic ties, in turn reducing political influence, China's influence is intentional more than effective.

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# ROLE OF SHEIKH HASINA

## Definition

Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, has been dubbed the 'Mother of Humanity' for allowing the Rohingya from the August 2017 influx to enter Bangladesh. However, she advocates strongly for Myanmar to 'take back' the Rohingya. Her resounding victory in elections at the end of 2018 has been marred by claims of lack of fairness and transparency.

As the 10th prime minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina has held current office since January 2009, having won her fourth term through a controversial, landslide victory for the ruling Awami League party in December 2018, securing 288 out of 300 seats in Parliament.

## Evolution over time

Sheikh Hasina became prime minister for the first time on 23 June 1996, and is the longest-serving prime minister of Bangladesh. Over the past decade, the disappearance, arrest, abuse and imprisonment of critics of Hasina's administration have been an open secret in Bangladesh. In the lead-up to the December 2018 election, efforts to silence critical views peaked,<sup>84</sup> and Hasina assumed current office on 7 January 2019 for the fourth time after her party, Awami League, won the 11th parliamentary elections.<sup>85</sup>

Hasina's political career has spanned over four decades, and her tenure as prime minister has been marred by several scandals and criticised for authoritarian practices. The international community voiced that the 2018 elections were far from free or fair, marred by election-related violence, where there were deaths and injuries, and widespread allegations of voter intimidation.<sup>86</sup> The Awami League's rivalry with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has led it to adopt increasingly harsh measures to target its political rivals, and indeed to suppress any form of criticism.<sup>87</sup>

The general consensus is that Prime Minister Hasina's position was strengthened by the August 2017 Rohingya crisis refugee influx, which overshadowed political developments and distracted attention from electoral politics, constitutional amendments and other such issues. It also enhanced Hasina's standing in the international community, with consequent positive

effects on her popularity at home.<sup>88</sup> The Bangladeshi prime minister has been able to present herself "as the humanitarian, while her Myanmar counterpart, Suu Kyi has been obviously demonised as henchwoman of the killer Myanmar army"<sup>89</sup>. By contrast, opposition leader Khaleda Zia was not very visible in the context of the refugee crisis, and her party was prevented from distributing relief.<sup>90</sup>

At the UN General Assembly (September 2017), Hasina proposed a five-point plan that called for creating UN-supervised safe zones inside Myanmar to protect Rohingya who are fleeing a military crackdown seeking refuge in Bangladesh,<sup>91</sup> met with criticism from human rights agencies.<sup>92</sup> Hasina has also been consistent in attempts to garner support for 100,000 Rohingya refugees to be relocated to Bhasan Char island, at the 74th UNGA calling on international organisations to join in those initiatives, as well as to help relocate the Rohingya to the facility.<sup>93</sup>

The Bangladeshi National Task Force (NTF) was established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to lead the overall coordination of the Rohingya response from the government side. Ultimately controlled by the prime minister, the NTF does not have individual decision-making power. The roles of the Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) and the Deputy Commissioner of Cox's Bazar district are critical for day-to-day coordination and information-sharing.<sup>94</sup> The approach of the Bangladesh government has been to provide short-term emergency response and a policy of non-integration, publicly confirming the 'temporary' nature of the refugee camps, and that returns MoU will be implemented. This has severely impacted the opportunity for Rohingya refugees to access medium to longer-term quality education, health and livelihood opportunities.

The Rohingya presence has become a politically contentious issue, and there is increasing pressure on Prime Minister Hasina from various stakeholders in Bangladesh to send Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar,<sup>95</sup> although Hasina publicly affirmed

84 Salomon, H, Wake, C, Jones, N & Quattri, M, 'Four priorities for Bangladesh's new government in 2019', Overseas Development Institute, 25 January 2019.

85 The Prime Minister's Office, 'Sheikh Hasina: Honorable Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh', viewed July 2019, <https://pmo.gov.bd/site/biography/e58c7488-d4ce-4986-8cbd-6d0b5366d23c>.

86 Paul, R, 'UN Calls for probe into Bangladesh elections', Reuters, 5 January 2019.

87 Idris, I, 'Rohingya refugee crisis: impact on Bangladeshi politics', Knowledge, evidence and learning for development, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, 2017.

88 Chowdhury, A, 'Myanmar crisis and its impact on Bangladesh's politics', South Asia Monitor, October 2017.

89 *ibid.*

90 *ibid.*

91 South China Morning Post, 'Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urges UN to help create safe zones for Rohingya refugee', September 2017.

92 Weir, R, "'Safe Zones' for Rohingya Refugees in Burma could be dangerous', Human Rights Watch, 23 September 2019.

93 74th UN General Assembly, 'Bangladesh: H.E. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister', 27 September 2018.

94 UNICEF, 'Bangladesh Humanitarian Situation report no. 25 (Rohingya influx)', March 2018.

95 Salomon, H, Wake, C, Jones, N & Quattri, M, 'Four priorities for Bangladesh's new government in 2019', Overseas Development Institute, 25 January 2019.

Bangladesh's commitment to not return Rohingya refugees to Myanmar until the conditions are conducive, including "guaranteeing protection, rights and pathway to citizenship for all Rohingyas" at her UNGA statement on 25 September 2018. As tensions mount between Bangladesh and Myanmar, and with the growing role of interventionist/mediation role of China, pressure continues for the impending implementation of returns MoU, and to expedite a returns process that may mean conditions are not conducive for voluntary returns.

Given the protracted nature of the conflict,<sup>96</sup> it is the time for the Bangladesh government to start preparing for the impact of long-term displacement involving continued response to urgent humanitarian needs, the mobilisation of resources to support a longer-term developmental response, and a significant shift in policy to enhance refugees' rights and freedoms. During the UN General Assembly 2018, Prime Minister Hasina talked about the importance of providing education for Rohingya children while they are in Bangladesh.

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96 Wake, C & Yu, Brenda, 'The Rohingya crisis: making the transition from emergency to longer-term', development, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Group, March 2018.



### Critical uncertainties:

- Given China's vast economic interests in Bangladesh, will Sheikh Hasina's decision-making continue to be influenced by China?
- Will this lead to premature, forced repatriation, without conducive conditions for returns in place? Or will Hasina work with the UN to ensure the creation conducive conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary Rohingya repatriation despite Chinese pressure?
- If Hasina prematurely implements the returns MoU through forced repatriation, without conducive conditions for returns in place, what will be the reaction from the UN and international donor community?
- What extent Hasina will continue to pressure the international community to support relocation to Bhasan Char island and other longer-term regional durable solutions?

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**Hypothesis 1** Internal/external political factors, and interventionist/mediation from China implement returns MoU, push the Prime Minister to conduct accelerated repatriation into Myanmar, without conducive conditions for return, with a continuation of 'no integration' policy in Cox's Bazar.

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**Hypothesis 2** Internal/external political factors push the Prime Minister to accelerate the relocation to Bhasan Char, without conducive conditions for relocation, with a continuation of 'no integration' policy in Cox's Bazar.

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**Hypothesis 3** The Prime Minister commits to working with UN to ensure conditions conducive, postpones relocations/ returns plans and supports some medium-term planning, though maintains a "no integration" policy.

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# ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND LIVELIHOODS

## Definition

More than two years after 740,000 Rohingya fled a violent military crackdown in Myanmar in August 2017, the crisis has shifted from emergency response to dealing with a protracted crisis. There are widespread concerns as to Rohingya refugees' limited access to adequate education and livelihoods opportunities in Bangladesh. Dimensions of the humanitarian response where operations previously focused on life-saving assistance have shifted to the need for protection and longer-term health issues, access to quality education, and livelihood opportunities in the refugee camps.<sup>97</sup>

## Evolution over time

The capacity of refugees in camps in Cox's Bazar—to meet their own immediate needs, establish livelihoods or pursue a durable solution—is highly constrained by government policies that limit their movement and rights. For example, while many Rohingya have the ability and desire to work, they are not legally allowed to.<sup>98</sup> National policy restrictions continue to impact on the rights of refugees, where many do not have access to quality education, and none are allowed to learn the Bangladesh curriculum.<sup>99</sup>

Despite the protracted nature of the crisis, the approach of the Bangladesh government has been to provide short-term emergency response and a policy of non-integration, publicly demonstrating the 'temporary' nature of the refugee camps. Humanitarian agencies have been limited to providing 'life-saving' interventions, constraining an ability to provide essential support such as quality education in emergencies and access to self-reliance and livelihood opportunities.

More than 55%, or nearly 500,000, of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar are children. Nearly a quarter of Rohingya refugee children in Bangladesh aged 3–14 have no access to regular learning opportunities (23%); the situation for children and youth aged 15–24 is even worse, with only 7 in 100 having access to education (7%).<sup>100</sup> Without quality, inclusive and certified education, there will be a lost generation of Rohingya children.

The education provided through Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs) in the camp consists of a few hours of very basic life skills, numeracy and literacy skills, and some

operate three shifts a day.<sup>101</sup> In 2018, Cox's Bazar Education Sector partners only received half of the required funds for education that were budgeted in the JRP. As of June 2019, the JRP Education funding requirement (US\$59.9 million) was only 35% funded.<sup>102</sup>

September 2018 saw an inroad to increased acceptance from the Bangladesh government on refugee education, with the government approving the use of a Learning Competency Framework and Approach (LCFA) delivered through informal learning programs across Cox's Bazar refugee settlements.<sup>103</sup> Despite improvements, the scale of the education challenge remains formidable—about 640 additional learning centres are still needed, mainly in the more densely populated camps, and education for girls lags even further behind.<sup>104</sup> There is still no system of recognised qualifications, nor is there any age-appropriate education for students older than 14—an estimated 97% of adolescents and youth aged 15–18 years are not enrolled in any type of learning facility. Shortages of qualified teachers are another problem, despite efforts by UNHCR, sister agencies and partners to boost teacher training.<sup>105</sup>

There is also widespread concern that the longer children are deprived of education, the greater the risk of exposure to exploitation and abuse, including child labour, child marriage, sexual exploitation and radicalisation. Cox's Bazar is host to diverse criminal networks, particularly those trading in drug and human trafficking, partly due to its location on both the coast and the border.<sup>106</sup> There is significant risk of radicalisation of Rohingya, or recruitment by international Islamism groups for terrorist activities. Looking at the refugees in Bangladesh, almost every factor identified by radicalisation experts can be found,<sup>107</sup> to a greater or lesser degree, including refugee camps in Bangladesh as potential breeding grounds for extremism.<sup>108</sup>

While initially welcomed by the Bangladesh host community, there has been increasing tension between refugees and host communities. This sense has been

97 Loy, I, Briefing: How the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh is changing, *The New Humanitarian*, 13 February 2019.

98 Wake, C & Bryant, J, 'Capacity and complementarity in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh', *Humanitarian Policy Group Working Paper*, Overseas Development Institute, December 2018.

99 Gluck, C, 'Young Rohingya refugees strive to keep dreams of an education alive', UNHCR, 2019.

100 Save the Children, 'Child refugees around the world draw their hopes and horrors', June 2019.

101 Gluck, C, 'Young Rohingya refugees strive to keep dreams of an education alive', UNHCR, 2019.

102 Inter-sector Coordination Group, 'Situation report Rohingya Refugee Crisis', June 2019.

103 UNICEF, 'Beyond survival: Rohingya refugee children in Bangladesh want to learn', UNICEF Advocacy Alert, August 2019.

104 *ibid.*

105 Gluck, C, 'Young Rohingya refugees strive to keep dreams of an education alive', UNHCR, 2019.

106 Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration, 'Avoiding a crisis within a crisis', March 2019.

107 Including historically harsh treatment of the Rohingyas, and as a result of their brutal expulsion from Myanmar, described by the UN as ethnic cleansing, and probably genocide.

108 Selth, A, 'The Rohingyas: a new terrorist threat?', *The Interpreter*, 6 September 2018.

reinforced by the government's focus on return and public messaging and presentation of displacement as temporary. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) found in focus group discussions with host community members that sources of tension centre on economic frustrations around increased employment competition, business competition driving down wages (for jobseekers) and profits (for shopkeepers), and strains on local infrastructure due to population density.<sup>109</sup> A January 2019 Ground Truth Solutions survey on social cohesion found that despite the fact that 61% of Rohingya refugees responded that there is harmony between the Rohingya and locals, only 30% of locals agree. Similarly, while 11% of Rohingya indicated that there are inter-community tensions, 48% of locals said tensions exist.<sup>110</sup>

Extending access and rights to work and to education—even if incrementally—can help mitigate negative impacts of the refugee influx and improve the local economy for everyone in Cox's Bazar. In turn, tensions between refugees and hosts are likely to wane, improving social cohesion. Extending access to work and education to enable self-reliance will need to be complemented by a multiyear plan and adequate support from the international community, as has been the case in other host countries that have adopted such policy reforms.<sup>111</sup>

Newly-appointed Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen said the ministry's focus this year will be to keep the global focus on the early repatriation of the Rohingya population unchanged. He made the remarks when members of Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh (DCAB) met him at his office congratulating him on his appointment. Masud said they will spend much time in public diplomacy, so that the global attention to the Rohingya issue does not shift. He said the issue draws international attention and all parties—including media, NGOs, INGOs, civil society and think tanks—will have to work together to keep the focus unaffected.

The foreign secretary termed Rohingya repatriation a “medium-term to long-term” situation, as it will take time to repatriate all Rohingyas even if the repatriation begins soon. This is the first time a Bangladesh government official has publicly acknowledged the real need for a medium-term solution. The foreign secretary said, “How we manage the situation depends on how quickly we can begin. We need to start, even if on a small scale. Our key target is to make sure Rohingyas return to their homeland voluntarily and with dignity.” He said there is a separate dimension of accountability—confidence-building measures— which will help expedite

the repatriation process. He termed China's engagement in the repatriation process a kind of extension of bilateral engagement, and also to some extent a trilateral approach in which ASEAN and Myanmar's neighbours may enter.

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109 Post, L, Landry, R & Huang, C, 'Moving beyond the emergency: a whole of society approach to the refugee response in Bangladesh', International Rescue Committee/Centre for Global Development, October 2019.

110 *ibid.*

111 Post, L, Landry, R & Huang, C, 'Moving beyond the emergency: a whole of society approach to the refugee response in Bangladesh', International Rescue Committee/Centre for Global Development, October 2019.

### Critical uncertainties:

- Given the protracted nature of the conflict, and congestion and varying level of needs in the camps, will the level of delivery of quality education, including rollout of the LCFA, vary drastically across refugee camps?
- With the high number of Rohingya refugee youths and adolescents out of education or livelihood activities, will there be an increased risk of negative coping mechanisms, violence and exploitation?
- With a lack of access to rights, services and livelihoods, will there be a rise in radicalisation of Rohingya, or recruitment by international Islamism groups for terrorist activities?
- What will be the psycho-social impact to a generation of Rohingya children, youths and adolescents, a generation without access to education, livelihoods and protection?

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**Hypothesis 1** Bangladesh government allows greater, although still insufficient, access to quality education and livelihood opportunities for Rohingya refugees, levels of negative coping mechanisms and violence decrease, though imbalance in programming and perceptions increases inter-communal tensions.

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**Hypothesis 2** Bangladesh government and aid agencies provide access to quality education and livelihood opportunities for both the Rohingya refugees and host communities in Cox's Bazar, improving inter-communal tensions, decreasing violence.

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**Hypothesis 3** Access to quality education or livelihood opportunities provided to Rohingya refugees does not improve, increases negative coping mechanisms, violence and mental health impacts on Rohingya.

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**Hypothesis 4** Despite the approval and rollout of a LCFA, education is not adequately funded, quality doesn't improve, vulnerability to negative coping mechanisms increases including sexual exploitation, child labour and violence, livelihood opportunities improve for Rohingya refugees only, exacerbating tensions between refugees and host communities.

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# ROHINGYA INFLUX IMPACT ON BANGLADESH COX'S BAZAR HOST COMMUNITY AND ECONOMY

## Definition

Existing Bangladeshi residents of the areas surrounding the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar. The host community can be viewed as both Bangladeshis whose communities are hosting Rohingya and residents of Cox's Bazar, who may not have Rohingya living directly within their community (as the vast majority of the Rohingya from the August 2017 influx are in camps) but whose livelihoods have been impacted by the Rohingya influx (for example, by the loss of agricultural or forest land, or impacts on the labour market). This variable is a push factor in terms of the desirability of Rohingya remaining, and has an impact on the domestic political dynamic in Bangladesh.

## Evolution over time

The 2019 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya crisis estimates there are 335,900 members of the host community in need of assistance.<sup>112</sup> Rising prices, alongside falling wages of low-skilled workers, environmental degradation, and loss of access to agricultural land and other livelihoods are adversely affecting host populations, as well as growing tensions among refugee and host communities. The perception of locals as to how the economy is impacted may influence levels of community acceptance towards the Rohingya, and contribute to host community tensions and anti-Rohingya sentiment; understanding the possible factors/actors which could prevent further violence/hatred discourse is key.

Cox's Bazar represents about 1.7% of the total area of Bangladesh, which makes it among the country's smallest districts. More than 60% is either forest or unavailable for cultivation, in comparison with 40% for the country as a whole.<sup>113</sup>

Socio-economic impacts on host communities are multi-dimensional, and encompass the micro-, meso- and macro-economic levels:

- At the microeconomic level, impacts of price changes and wages on poverty, including the sale of large quantities of in-kind assistance received as relief items, depressing prices of products. There are also impacts on vulnerabilities in that relatively minor shocks could push them below the poverty line, including women-headed households.

- Meso-economic impacts include impacts on land and agricultural production, impacts on fishing and related activities and to the environment.
  - » Between August 2017 and March 2018, at least 100 hectares of crop land in Teknaf and Ukhiya was damaged by refugee activities, in addition to 76 hectares of arable land that has been occupied by refugee settlements and humanitarian agencies. Around 5000 acres of land has been rendered useless because of sandy soil flowing down from the mountain slopes, which are being used for refugee housing purposes.
  - » This excessive dependence on groundwater is lowering the water levels in the area. The water levels around the camp areas are reported to have fallen and freshwater options in the affected areas are extremely limited. Irrigation wells are slowly drying up as the water table is falling as a result of watershed destruction and a significant reduction in the recharge of groundwater reserves.
  - » Environmental damage is among the worst effects of the influx. According to the Cox's Bazar Forest Department, the influx has destroyed about 4818 acres of forest reserves worth US\$55 million. Those who earn a living from forest resources have in many cases been deprived of their livelihood. Meanwhile, every day, around 750,000 kilograms of timber, vegetation and roots are collected as cooking fuel. Many species of wildlife are also coming under threat.<sup>114</sup>
- Macroeconomic impacts of the refugee influx: impacts on public service and goods delivery, governance, waste management, WASH, infrastructure and health and education services.
  - » To obtain a measure of the overall impact on the economy, UNDP constructed a Social Accounting Matrix (SAM) for 2017 using the data of three economies—Rohingya, immediate host (Teknaf/Ukhiya) and remote host (Cox's Bazar)—to assess the spill-over effects triggered by the refugees.
  - » UNDP simulated impacts on host communities based on 1) aid inflow to refugees; 2) aid inflow plus cost of deforestation; and 3) aid inflow plus the cost of both deforestation and depletion of groundwater specific to the host community.

112 UNHCR, '2019 Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis', January 2019.

113 UNDP, 'Impacts of the Rohingya Refugee Influx on Host Communities', November 2018.

114 UNDP, 'Impacts of the Rohingya Refugee Influx on Host Communities', November 2018.

- » When just aid inflows were considered, the economy-wide impact of US\$1 of aid is US\$2.70. When the costs associated with loss of forest and water resources were considered, this reduces to US\$2.30. The simulations suggest the deleterious impacts are more localised than the aid impact. Cox's Bazar and Bangladesh may be generating static gains in the short run. The losers are the host community.<sup>115</sup>

UNDP's developed repatriation scenarios of impacts on public services, assuming an unchanged refugee population, would require five years even under the optimistic scenario of full repatriation. Under a pessimistic scenario, it would take as long as 13 years. For example, increased demand for water is another important issue. Around 5.6 billion litres of water will be required just for the next year alone. Between the optimistic and the realistic repatriation scenarios, the water requirement is estimated to range between 16 and 26 billion litres by the end of 2023.<sup>116</sup> With or without the repatriation scenarios, the protracted nature of the Rohingya crisis in Cox's Bazar has, and will continue, to demand significant health, WASH, infrastructure and environmental needs.

An assessment report found that the conditions for high levels of trafficking, smuggling and related exploitation were present in Cox's Bazar and will only intensify with time, affecting both the Rohingya and Bangladeshi populations.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, a compounding lack of access to services and livelihoods, an increasingly strained economy in Cox's Bazar, or worse a recession, may be a significant push factor for economically motivated migration out of the area, for both the Rohingya population and host community. At the end of 2019, the JRP was only 69% funded.<sup>118</sup>

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115 *ibid.*

116 *ibid.*

117 Center for Policy Development, 'Avoiding a Crisis Within a Crisis: Assessment Report', March 2019.

118 Bangladesh: 2019 Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis (January – December), <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/719/summary>

### Critical uncertainties:

- Will tensions between the Rohingya refugees and host community continue to be exacerbated by economic, livelihood and/or political developments?
- Notwithstanding the underfunded nature of the crisis, will the JRP 2020 implementation have a more balanced investment distribution of aid between refugees and host communities, as well as across sectors, to invest/improve access to services and livelihoods?
- Will this deliver improvement to the Cox's Bazar economy and lessen the impact on Bangladeshi host community?
- Will major injections by large-scale international donors or multilateral organisations (that is, the World Bank) to Cox's Bazar/Bangladesh government significantly affect the Cox's Bazar economy?

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**Hypothesis 1** An already underfunded JRP, with unbalanced investment in supporting both host communities and Rohingya refugees and sectors, leads to decrease in level of health, livelihoods, protection, education quality and access, increases anti-INGO sentiment and inter-communal tensions, escalation vying for resources and livelihood opportunities, recession/depressed economy.

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**Hypothesis 2** A more balanced distribution of aid between refugees and host communities (though increasingly insufficient as JRP remains under-funded), economy improves/maintains, factors and actors identified, and addressed, preventing further deterioration of violence/hatred discourse against Rohingya.

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**Hypothesis 3** Aid investment in refugee camps and host community analogous, political and media narrative exacerbates anti-INGO sentiment and inter-communal tensions, people trying to leave the area at all costs/by any means because of the lack of opportunity with a potentially differentiated approach, that is who can leave, probably those from host communities, over Rohingya.

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