

The Rohingya Dilemma_ Human Rights, Repatriation, and Refugee Challenges in Bangladesh - Nuzhat Nawar.pdf

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Submission date: 13-Oct-2025 11:50PM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 2779992764

File name: The_Rohingya_Dilemma_Human_Rights_Repatriation_and_Refugee_Challenges_in_Bangladesh_-
_Nuzhat_Nawar.pdf (170.88K)

Word count: 2225

Character count: 13216

IARCO RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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Research Topic: Human Rights, Repatriation, and Refugee Challenges in Bangladesh

Title: The Rohingya Dilemma: Human Rights, Repatriation and Refugee Challenges in Bangladesh

Introduction:

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The Rohingyas, an Indo-Muslim ethnic group from Myanmar (Burma)'s Rakhine State, have been identified as the world's largest stateless refugee community since 1982. They have faced brutal violence & persecution by their own state, as an unwanted population of illegal immigrants, since Myanmar achieved independence in 1948. More than 1.3 million Rohingya were displaced as a result of attacks in Rakhine State in 2016, causing a refugee crisis, aggravating the Rakhine refugee camps from previous violence. The largest wave came in 2017, when approximately 745,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh to take shelter in the Teknaf Rohingya camps. But just 50,000 hold refugee status. But repatriation had effectively failed under bilateral agreements between Bangladesh and Myanmar amid deep-seated doubts in the Rohingya camp over their security condition due to a lack of trust, fear of persecution & denial of citizenship rights from Myanmar. The crisis is causing human and socio-political challenges, such as environmental destruction, health risk & also increased pressure on local resources.

Repatriation complications occur not only at the bilateral table between Bangladesh and Myanmar. It involves issues of injustice, impunity, citizenship rights & sustainable development in Rakhine State. Failed repatriation efforts in 2018 and 2019 demonstrated the wide disparity between official policy on paper versus practice on the ground reality without ensuring citizenship rights, safety and freedom of movement. This paper examines these multidimensional challenges, as well as the international community's role in facilitating dignified, voluntary and sustainable repatriation while also considering alternative solutions under present political constraints. Despite a vast literature on the issue of the Rohingya crisis, comparatively little has been explored about what exactly is required to ensure safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation. This research will examine the local as well as the global political economy involved in repatriating Rohingya refugees and will document the struggles the Bangladeshi government, INGOs, and NGOs experience in this process, with the aid of primary data that will be collected from within refugee camps.

Research Question:

- How have successive waves of Rohingya influxes impacted Bangladesh socially, economically and environmentally?
- What are the main forms of human rights violations experienced by Rohingyas in Myanmar since 1981 and how have these violations affected their access to basic rights and security?
- What factors have contributed to the failure of Rohingya repatriation attempts?
- What strategies implemented by NGOs and the Bangladeshi government have been most successful in improving living conditions and supporting repatriation efforts?
- In what ways can international cooperation reduce the burden on Bangladesh while ensuring the rights and welfare of refugees?

Literature Review:

Human Rights Violations and Statelessness

The Rohingya, an ethnic and religious minority (muslim) hailing from the Rakhine state of Myanmar, have faced decades of discrimination, statelessness and violence with no end in sight [1]. The Rohingya were denied Myanmar citizenship under a 1982 law and arbitrarily confined from movement, education, healthcare, religion & other elements of life, resulting in a violation of fundamental rights [2]. In Bangladesh, refugees continue to struggle under a legal framework with no formal status as refugees, allowing them no basic rights and protection according to international law [3]. This stateless condition further compounds their vulnerability and denies them access to education, healthcare and legal support [4].

Living Conditions and Humanitarian Concerns

Bangladeshi Rohingya refugees have been living under extremely difficult conditions (overcrowding, insufficient sanitation, starvation and limited access to education and health care) after being settled in Cox's Bazar [5]. The children have been the most affected, facing malnutrition, diseases and mental trauma; as their fundamental rights like education and development were compromised as refugees. Mental health problems are common with high prevalence of PTSD, anxiety and depression related to both prior trauma experienced in Myanmar as well as persistent stressors faced within camps [6]. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened these challenges, having surfaced a lack of tailored policy responses and deepening health and livelihood insecurity [7].

Host Community and National Challenges

Nevertheless, accepting more than a million Rohingya, though being non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, has overloaded Bangladesh's social, economic and environmental capacity [8]. As a result of the influx, there has been deforestation, environmental destruction and resource scarcity, causing conflict with local communities [9]. Security concerns are also being triggered, such as by reports about increasing crimes and trafficking (methamphetamine, which is known as Yaba), as well as with fears for radicalization within the camps [10]. The prolonged crisis has created increased reluctance among the host communities to continue carrying the burden, underscoring the need for permanent solutions to the Rohingya crisis [9].

Repatriation, Resettlement, and Durable Solutions

Attempts to repatriate the Rohingya to Myanmar have repeatedly failed as Myanmar has declined to ensure safety, citizenship and rights for returning people [11]. Two large-scale attempts at repatriation in 2018 and 2019 did not result in any voluntary returns, as refugees were apprehensive of further persecution and did not have guarantees of legal status or protection [12]. Efforts to relocate, such as sending refugees to Bhasan Char island, have faced skepticism and resistance due to safety concerns, isolation and a lack of livelihoods [5]. The international responses have been described as insufficient, with little progress on burden sharing "third country resettlement" [13]. Some propose that a long-term resolution will depend on the convergence of safe and voluntary return with guarantees of citizenship, international burden-sharing and enhanced legal protection within Bangladesh [14].

Policy and Legal Gaps

There is a clear dichotomy between international legal frameworks and the realities on the ground. Bangladesh is not a signatory to the refugee conventions, which limits formal protections, while international mechanisms have failed to force Myanmar to create pressure

for safe & dignified repatriations [3]. The absence of a robust national policy for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh has impeded their inclusion & posed an obstacle to effective humanitarian response [7].

Methodology:

This research will use a mixed-methods design, using both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative part of the study will be supported by secondary sources (journal articles, books, and reports published by national and international organizations, newspaper writings and relevant websites) to develop a detailed profile regarding the conceptual setting context, history and socio-political context surrounding the targeted Rohingya refugees. The quantitative section will rely on primary data from structured interviews with 200 Rohingya who were purposively sampled for age, sex and camp location to provide full coverage of the phenomenon. A structured questionnaire will be designed by following all ethical guidelines, security concerns & sociocultural dimensions of the Rohingya community. Expert feedback will be incorporated and instruments will be revised and pilot-tested by the project team in the Rohingya camps. All research assistants and local volunteers will receive training, and ethical approvals, and fieldwork permissions will be obtained to safeguard participants' rights, privacy and well-being. Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS, including one-sample t-tests and hypothesis testing, while qualitative data will be thematically coded to identify patterns and insights.

Project Practicalities:

This research will be conducted over 12 weeks, with careful attention to ethical, logistical, and field-level considerations. Research assistants and local volunteers will receive training in cultural sensitivity, ethical data collection, and confidentiality protocols. Ethical approvals and fieldwork permissions will be obtained prior to the start of primary data collection.

- **Week 1:** Finalizing research objectives, refining research questions, and designing research instruments (questionnaires and interview guides).
- **Week 2:** Reviewing instruments with experts, revising based on feedback and pilot-testing in Rohingya camps.
- **Week 3:** Conducting comprehensive secondary research: reviewing books, journal articles, NGO/INGO reports, newspapers, and online resources.
- **Week 4:** Conducting additional training for research assistants and local volunteers on ethical data collection, confidentiality, and field safety.
- **Week 5:** Beginning primary data collection: interviewing Rohingya refugees while monitoring ethical and security protocols.
- **Week 6:** Continuing primary data collection and adjusting instruments or procedures as needed.
- **Week 7:** Completing primary data collection and performing preliminary data cleaning and organization.
- **Week 8:** Conducting quantitative analysis (statistical tests, hypothesis evaluation) and qualitative analysis (thematic coding).
- **Week 9:** Integrating primary data with secondary sources and identifying trends, patterns, and policy implications.

- **Week 10:** Drafting the research report, including methodology, analysis, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.
- **Week 11:** Reviewing and revising the report internally, incorporating feedback for accuracy and clarity.
- **Week 12:** Finalizing the research report and preparing submission or presentation materials.

Potential Limitations:

Access to certain Rohingya camps may be restricted due to security or government regulations. Refugees may feel hesitant or fearful, which could affect how openly they respond. The sample size might not represent all Rohingya experiences, and time and resource constraints could limit the depth of primary data collection. Language barriers and cultural differences may also influence data accuracy.

Conclusion:

The crisis over the repatriation of the Rohingya is a reminder of how international protection and diplomacy are unable to settle one of the world's worst cases of persecution. This research will critically analyze the contributions of local NGOs, INGOs and the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), particularly in the areas of education, health care, and livelihood support. Primary data for this research will be collected from selected Rohingya refugee camps, and a structured questionnaire will be used to reveal concerns about health, nutrition, education, and shelter. Based on research findings, sustainable and voluntary repatriation strategies will be developed.

Effective repatriation requires international cooperation and legal protections. Barriers will be highlighted and practical, as well as feasible solutions proposed by both qualitative and quantitative analyses. The safety, dignity and rights of the people in the Rohingya community will remain at the forefront & a comprehensive approach to regional initiatives and global efforts will be considered for their future. Any sustainable settlement will ultimately hinge on political change in Myanmar, reform of its citizenship laws and the existence of credible human rights protections. Anticipated results of this research will be: better identified policy recommendations on helping refugees, concrete guidance for safe return and resettlement strategies, and deeper knowledge of refugee needs.

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