

# Understanding the Impact of Forced Migration on International Relations: Myanmar as A Case in Point

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## Abstract

The Rohingyas are a persecuted minority group in Myanmar who are subjected discrimination and violence at the hands of the Myanmar government. This has resulted in a massive refugee crisis in the region with millions of refugees fleeing to Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. This paper aims to identify the challenges these refugees create and the issues that cause them. While International organisations like the United Nations have played an important role in spearheading the humanitarian responses, this study has found that there remains a need for collective action by regional nations.. The study has also highlighted the importance of acknowledging the proactive nature of Rohingya community and their contributions to the nation building of Myanmar has been as dominant

**Keywords:** Forced Migration, Conflict, Refugee, Asylum Seekers

## Introduction

This research paper uses the Rohingya issue in Myanmar as a case study to investigate the effects of forced migration on international relations. Since 2017, more than 700,000 members of Myanmar's Muslim minority, the Rohingya, have been forced to flee their homeland due to harsh persecution due to discrimination on the basis of race and religion. The difficulties with human rights, international relations, and regional stability have been brought to light by this crisis. This article investigates the causes of the forced migration of the Rohingya people, including the military crackdown and persistent prejudice. It also looks at the humanitarian reactions, especially in Bangladesh, and the challenges that refugees encounter in their new nations. Diplomatic relations and regional security have been complicated by the crisis, which has affected Myanmar's connections with other nations and international organisations. The article highlights potential solutions while highlighting the significance of forced migration.

The Rohingya Muslim community in Myanmar have faced extreme persecution for many years, making them one of the most vulnerable groups in the world. This persecution, driven by both ethnic and religious discrimination has forced many Rohingya to flee their homes, creating a significant humanitarian crisis. The migration of the Rohingya has not only highlighted the severe challenges they face but has also raised broader concerns about regional stability, international relations, and human rights. This topic is crucial because the Rohingya crisis is not just a problem for Myanmar or its neighbouring countries it has caused global implications and created misunderstanding with many other countries. The forced displacement of the Rohingya has also strained Myanmar's relationships with other countries, particularly in Southeast

Asia, and has presented major challenges for international organisations like the United Nations, which are responsible for providing aid and advocating for the rights of refugees.

This paper will explore the factors that have led to the forced migration of the Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar. Firstly providing background on the discrimination against the Rohingya, focusing on the ethnic and religious tensions that have fueled their persecution. Examine significant events, including the military campaign in 2017 that led to extensive violence and the forced migration of more than 700,000 Rohingya to neighbouring nations.

The paper will also look at the humanitarian responses to the crisis, both regionally and internationally. This includes the efforts of the United Nations non-governmental organisations, and countries like Bangladesh, which have received large numbers of Rohingya refugees. The difficulties these organisations and countries face, such as limited resources and opposition from Myanmar's government, will also be explored in this paper. In addition, the harsh realities faced by the Rohingya in their host countries, including low wages, poor health conditions, and ongoing human rights abuses. The impact of being stateless and the additional challenges posed by their religious identity will be considered.

The analysis will further delve into how the Rohingya crisis has influenced Myanmar's diplomatic ties with surrounding nations and global institutions. It will discuss how these relationships have been strained by the refugee crisis and what this means for regional stability and international cooperation. Finally, the paper will suggest potential solutions to the crisis, emphasising the need to address the root causes of forced migration and the role of the international community in protecting and supporting displaced populations. It will highlight the importance of peace initiatives and the protection of basic human rights as key elements in resolving the Rohingya crisis. Its main objective is to present a clear and understandable overview of the Rohingya crisis, highlighting the various problems that have contributed to their forced migration and proposing solutions.

## Literature review

Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar face severe persecution due to religious and ethnic reasons.

In her work (Faye, 2021) highlights Rohingya Muslim communities' long standing dispute with Myanmar's government. This paper suggests that the main factors inducing forced migration among the Rohingya community from Myanmar are armed clashes, military occupation, and extreme vulnerability (Faye, 2021). Facing severe discrimination and violence from conflict and natural disasters, many Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh. The UNHCR has provided aid and set up refugee camps but faces challenges like limited resources and resistance from Myanmar. The focus remains on supporting the rights and well-being of Rohingya refugees, highlighting human rights violations and humanitarian responses. The migrants face serious consequences throughout the displacement. Firstly they incur massive wage differences owing to their statelessness in the host country, which is exacerbated by their religious identity. Not only that, they also face severe violations against human rights like health disparities, and unemployment (Faye, 2021). They don't have access to hospitals and basic necessities like medical assistance. The research article (Berg, 2019) showcases how seven thousand Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh, where they received support from Gambia and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation. Their objective was to hold Myanmar accountable for its actions against the Rohingya. Human Rights Watch has praised Gambia's initiative, which aims to prompt international action (Berg, 2019). Gambia went on to sue Myanmar for genocide against Rohingya Muslims (Besheer, 2019). Myanmar has been accused of committing genocide against the Rohingya refugees, leading to 10,000 Rohingya

deaths(Besheer, 2019). In response, Myanmar denied the genocide accusations, claiming they were politically motivated. These allegations have affected Myanmar's reputation globally, including its relations with other countries. China Furthermore this represents the use and abuse of forced migration and displacement as a weapon of war. It focuses on forced migration and displacement as direct results of conflict through war and political violence, highlighting how humanitarian crises are used as a weapon of war to achieve military objectives (Besheer, 2019). It underscores the importance of global stability and the protection of fundamental human rights, noting that forced migration is often a deliberate strategy. The escalation of refugee numbers is closely linked to ongoing wars. Ultimately, the article advocates for peace initiatives to address these issues (Besheer, 2019).

This research paper reveals how International migration affects destination countries by filling jobs and boosting the economy. Although there are short-term costs, such as public service expenses, these often turn into long-term growth benefits (Joseph-Simon, 2022). Migrants bring new skills and contribute to overall economic growth. However, they can face issues like lower wages, health problems, unemployment, and discrimination (Joseph-Simon, 2022). Migration often happens within the same region, like in the Middle East or Asia. Remittances sent home by migrants also support their families (Khin, Thazin, 2024) This article discusses the trickle down effects of deteriorating conditions in Myanmar on migrant workers in Singapore from all races. This article talks about how it becomes a worldwide problem and creates an external cost (Khin, Thazin, 2024). One of the major contributing factors is The COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 military coup with Owing to which Myanmar workers in Singapore are to send money home, further increasing their vulnerability (Khin, Thazin, 2024) . The article also discusses how employers in Singapore are having issues with these workers. It also highlights global inequality in labour migration back then in specific when COVID was severe. Many women from Myanmar come to Singapore to do low-wage jobs, despite the risks and challenges they face .

### **Forced Migration and its factors**

*Forced migration happens when people are compelled to leave their homes and move elsewhere due to factors beyond their control* or any person migrating to "escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human-made disasters, ecological degradation, or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood". This type of migration is different from voluntary migration, where people choose to move for better opportunities or lifestyle reasons. Forced migration often occurs because of serious threats like war, persecution, or natural disasters, which make staying in their home regions unsafe or impossible. Forced migration should be stopped as everyone should have their own will on whether they want to move to another country or not. Each individual should not be forced out of their country to another where they don't feel safe. Instead everyone should be provided with basic human rights like food, shelter and basic necessities (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019).

Discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or other identities can also lead to forced migration. Groups facing persecution or discrimination may be targeted with violence, thereby then leaving to seek safety somewhere else. Violation of human rights also causes people to flee to other countries. Economic reasons such as extreme poverty, lack of job opportunities, and economic collapse can also force people to leave their homes. In some cases, entire communities are displaced when economic conditions make it impossible to sustain livelihoods. For example, in parts of Central America, high levels of poverty and violence have driven many to seek better economic prospects in neighbouring countries or the United

States. This leads to better life conditions and living standards however cause people to face serious issues in the long run (United Nations, 2021).

Several factors can lead to forced migration. Conflict and war are major causes, as seen in places like Syria. The Syrian Civil War, which started in 2011, forced millions to flee due to violence and destruction. The Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, where Rohingya Muslims faced persecution and violence, pushing hundreds of thousands to seek safety in neighbouring Bangladesh (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). It's an example where ethnic and religious persecution forced hundreds of thousands to flee. Moreover, political instability, such as in Ukraine, can force people to leave their homes. Since 2021, conflict in Eastern Ukraine has led to displacement as people flee fighting and seek refuge in safer parts of the country or other countries nearby.

Forced migration can be solved by understanding its causes, the international community plays an important role in protecting the displaced people and taking care of them. Governments and non-governmental organisations can work together to provide shelter, food and medical care (European Commission, 2023).

### **Forced migration in the context of Myanmar**

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is a Southeast Asian country with a rich history of Buddhism and colonialism. One of the major events happening in Myanmar under colonial rule were that the The British annexed Myanmar through three Anglo-Burmese Wars, culminating in 1885, and made it a province of British India, abolishing the monarchy and exiling the last king, Thiba. Another one of the major events was a incorporation of a Western-style education system, creating a new class of educated elites who often joined the colonial civil service, undermining traditional Buddhist monastic education. There was also a religious and social impact where the British severed the ties between the state and Buddhism, weakening the Sangha and altering the social fabric of Burmese society (Harvard Divinity School, 2023). Myanmar gained independence from British rule on January 4th 1948. Myanmar has over 135 recognized ethnic groups, each with its own distinct culture, language, and traditions. The largest ethnic group is the Bamar, making up about 68% of the population and predominantly inhabiting the central regions. The Shan, the second-largest group, mainly in the Shan State in the northeast. The Karen people, primarily found in the southeastern regions who have a rich cultural heritage and peace agreements with the government. The Mon, one of the earliest settlers, are known for their influence on early Burmese culture. Lastly the Rohingya, a Muslim minority primarily residing in Rakhine State. They often worked in the agriculture and fishing industry in particular, cultivating crops and working as farmers, some were also involved in fishing trading.

In recent years, Myanmar has faced significant challenges, particularly the plight of the Rohingya, a Muslim minority group. In 2017, a military crackdown led to widespread violence, causing over 700,000 Rohingya to flee to neighbouring places such as Bangladesh. This crisis has highlighted issues of ethnic discrimination and forced displacement. The conflict has had an impact on the country's reputation and stability. They have been persecuted as Myanmar's government does not recognize the Rohingya as citizens, considering them illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, despite their long history in the region. There are also religious reasons where they are muslims predominantly in a buddhist country, creating tensions with the rest of the population ( BBC, 2020).

The Burma government publicly restricts Rohingya Muslims to having two children. Implementation of this policy violated international human rights protections, endangering women's physical and mental

health. Couples had to take permission from governments, which made them wait up to 2 years to have children. This is just one way in which the Government has intervened and negatively impacted the lives of the Rohingya community. Myanmar security forces killed more than 600,000 men, women and children, harming and torching villages consisting of Rohingya people. (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019)

Bangladesh, one of the countries that hosts the largest number of rohingya refugees does imply many policies both for displacing rohingyas and to keep them welcomed. They put humanitarian efforts to immediate needs rather than addressing long-term challenges like durable shelters, self-reliance programs, and supporting host communities. Recently, Bangladesh imposed new restrictions on refugees' movement, access to mobile phones, this helps to increase communication to families within and without the camp and NGO operations like education and livelihood programs. However they have also put measures that include fencing camps, building watchtowers, this is there to ensure rohingya refugees aren't allowed to move freely outside the designated camps, limiting their access to work, education, and healthcare. They are relocating refugees to a vulnerable silt island in the Bay of Bengal which is prone to severe flooding and weather conditions. Harsh security measures are also put to ensure safety and law enforcement to focus on long-term issues. (Human Rights Watch, 2022)

### **Influence on Myanmar's Bilateral and Multilateral Relations**

International organisations like the United Nations have provided humanitarian aid to refugees and criticised Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya. In January 2020, the UN's top court ordered Myanmar to protect Rohingya from genocide. Some countries, like the United States, have imposed sanctions on the Myanmar military, in particular they put asset freezes, travel bans and restrictions on financial services. Canada has imposed sanctions through its special economic measures including restrictions on armed exports. Australia has maintained sanctions since 1990.

The crisis has also strained Myanmar's relations with ASEAN countries and further complicated transnational issues. Though Myanmar joined ASEAN in 1997 prior to the Rohingya crisis, the country's relationship with the regional group was always complex and challenging, primarily due to its political situation, governance under military rule and poor human rights record. The Rohingya crisis has contributed to complicating existing issues it has made it difficult for the bloc to effectively human right violations between member states. Internal divisions have widened as a result of this, pushing some members to advocate for stronger action. This has underestimated ASEAN as an organisation, being unable to handle challenges and global issues. Moreover the crisis has also complicated relationships between Myanmar and other member states, particularly those dealing with refugee influx (Melissa Crouch,)

Bangladesh has been most affected by the Rohingya refugee crisis. Since August 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya have fled to Myanmar, joining hundreds of thousands already there from previous years (Rajeev Bhattacharyya, 2024). This has led to several issues like overcrowded refugee camps and depletion of resources. While Bangladesh has repeatedly urged Myanmar to create safe conditions for refugees to return, the progress remains slow. This has caused frustration and worsening relations between the two countries. Other countries in the region, such as Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and India, have also been affected by refugee movements. India has around 40,000 Rohingya refugees (Rajeev Bhattacharyya, 2024).. They are termed as 'illegal immigrants' by the Indian government which has led to tighter restrictions on their movement, education, healthcare, and jobs. community. India put a stop to the free movement regime, they allowed both Myanmar and India residents to cross the border without visas. The



Indian government also plans to put advanced smart fencing to enhance security and to control the movement of individuals. India has also been involved in the military and humanitarian engagement supplying arms and equipment, however there has been a call for stopping sales as there has been talks on human right abuses against civilians (Rajeev Bhattacharyya, 2024). Many Rohingya in India experience growing fear of being deported. The Indian government plans to deport some refugees (Rajeev Bhattacharyya, 2024). This has created tension with some domestic state governments that support granting asylum to the Rohingya. Thailand is another nation affected by the Rohingya crisis, especially regarding human trafficking and illegal migration. In 2015, Thai authorities found links to the trafficking of Rohingya refugees. This situation has strained Thailand's relations with Myanmar and further complicated regional issues. A stark reminder of this is the financial crisis 1997 in Thailand. Also known as the Tom Yang Kung Crisis. The country was announced to have a current account deficit reaching 14 billion prior to the crisis due to a significant decrease in exports in 1996. They had also faced a foreign debt which increased to 109,276 million. Thailand's fixed exchange rate also contributed to this as it risked associating with capital inflows (Bank of Thailand, 2023). However, like other countries in the region, Thailand struggles to balance humanitarian needs with its own political and security concerns. The crisis has also aggravated massive religious tensions in the region. In countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, there have been protests against Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya where leaders have called for intervention to prevent further instability. The ASEAN group has faced pressure to address the crisis, but efforts have been complicated by differing national interests of non-interference in member states' internal affairs.

## **Conclusion**

The Rohingya crisis is a layered crisis rooted in deep ethnic and religious tensions in Myanmar. This paper has explored the reasons behind the forced migration of the Rohingya Muslims, their struggles as refugees, and its trickle down impact of the crisis on regional and international relations. For many years, the Rohingya Muslims have faced harsh persecution in Myanmar, largely due to ethnic discrimination and religious differences in a mainly Buddhist country. Myanmar's government continues to not recognize the Rohingya as citizens, rendering them stateless and vulnerable to severe human rights abuses. The situation worsened in 2017 when a military crackdown forced over 700,000 Rohingya to flee to nearby countries like Bangladesh.

The response to the crisis, both within the region and globally, has been significant but challenging. Bangladesh has taken in many refugees, providing shelter and aid despite its limited resources. International organisations, such as the United Nations, have helped advocate for Rohingya rights and provided essential support. However, the response has faced obstacles, including political resistance from Myanmar's government and the sheer scale of the crisis. Refugees continue to live in difficult conditions in host countries, with limited access to healthcare, low wages, and ongoing discrimination.

The crisis has also strained Myanmar's relationships with its neighbours and the global community. Tensions have risen between Myanmar and Bangladesh, and other countries in Southeast Asia, such as India, Thailand, and Malaysia, have also been affected by the refugee movements. This has created internal political tensions and security concerns in these countries. The crisis has exposed the challenges faced by international organisations in addressing large-scale human rights violations and has emphasised the need for better global cooperation. To address the Rohingya crisis, it is crucial to focus on both immediate humanitarian needs and long-term solutions. The international community must continue to press

Myanmar to recognize the rights of the Rohingya and ensure their safe return. Stronger global mechanisms are needed to protect populations and hold those responsible for human rights violations accountable.

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