



THE COST OF WAITING:  
INTERGENERATIONAL  
IMPACTS OF PROTRACTED  
**ROHINGYA DISPLACEMENT**



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**The Cost of Waiting:**

Intergenerational Impacts of Protracted Rohingya Displacement

**Published by**

International Rescue Committee (IRC)

**Published on**

30 October 2025

**Study conducted by**

Centre for Local Governance Discourse (CLGD)

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**Cover Photo Caption:**

Rohingya Children studying in the Learning Center of the Refugee Camp

# PREFACE

The Rohingya crisis in Cox's Bazar remains one of the most complex and protracted humanitarian challenges globally. Eight years after the large influx of 2017, over one million refugees continue to live in conditions of uncertainty alongside host communities who share the burden of displacement.

This study, commissioned by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), seeks to understand what both Rohingya refugees and host communities think and feel about the current situation, their perceptions, priorities, and lived realities. It does not compare trends over time but focuses on the present context shaped by years of displacement.

We covered a wide range of respondents across age, gender, and inclusion, including children, youth, elderly persons, men, women, and persons with disabilities, ensuring diverse voices and perspectives were represented.

The findings reveal insightful impacts on rights, protection, and resilience, with women, children, and youth bearing the greatest risks. Host communities face economic strain and environmental degradation, while refugees remain restricted from education and livelihoods, perpetuating cycles of dependency and vulnerability.

The report calls for a strategic shift from short-term crisis management to integrated, rights-based approaches that bridge humanitarian and development efforts. It emphasizes inclusive programming, equitable investment in host infrastructure, and meaningful participation of affected communities in decision-making.

As IRC, we reaffirm our commitment to working with the Government of Bangladesh, our donors, and partners to translate these recommendations into action, restoring dignity, strengthening resilience, and creating pathways toward durable solutions for all.

Hasina Rahman

Country Director  
International Rescue Committee Bangladesh



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We thank the Rohingya refugees and host communities for sharing their voices. We express our gratitude to Professor Dr. Mohammad Tarikul Islam, Department of Government and Politics, Jahangirnagar University; Zaki Faisal; and the research team of CLGD for their dedication and support in conducting this study.

Special thanks to Hamah Hosen from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Regional Technical Advisors Naima Iqbal Chohan, Caroline Tatua, Jeffrey Dow, and Naim Frewat for their early engagement, technical review, and guidance; along with country colleagues Samuel Komakech, Shakh Jahidur Rahman, Subarma Barma, and M. Rafiqul Islam. We also appreciate Rebecca Oketcho and Hasina Rahman for their oversight, and Shabira Sultana Nupur for initiating and leading this study.

We extend our thanks to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for their generous support, and to IRC colleagues, partners, and the Government of Bangladesh for their cooperation. Finally, we honor all humanitarian actors in Cox's Bazar for their tireless efforts.

### Disclaimer

This publication has been funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views expressed in this publication are the author's alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCR	Canadian Council for Refugees
CFE-DMHA	Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance
CGD	Center for Global Development
COVID	Coronavirus disease
CRP	Country Refugee Response Plans
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EC	Executive Committee
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HDP	Humanitarian Development Peace
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IRI	International Republican Institute
ISCG	Inter Sector Coordination Group
JRP	Joint Response Plan
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NVC	National Verification Card
PGRN	Projected Global Resettlement Needs
PRS	Protracted Refugee Situation
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
PWD	Public Works Department
RRRC	Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
RSO	Rohingya Solidarity Organisation
SC	Standing Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIM	Subscriber Identity Module
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNWOMEN	United Nations Women
WFP	World Food Programme

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Years after the mass influx of 2017, the Rohingya crisis in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, has transitioned from an acute emergency into a deeply entrenched Protracted Refugee Situation (PRS), hosting over one million stateless refugees, with the registered population standing at 1,006,107 as of February 2025 (RRRC, 2025). This study aims to generate evidence on how Displacement has affected rights, protection, and resilience, while identifying critical policy and programming gaps. Specifically, it assesses the multidimensional impacts on both Rohingya and host communities, examines factors shaping social cohesion, explores the feasibility of repatriation, and provides evidence-based recommendations to strengthen protection, resilience, and empowerment for all affected groups. This report finds that the crisis is now defined by a fundamental policy paradox: a framework fixated on short-term containment and repatriation is actively undermining long-term stability and exacerbating the very vulnerabilities it aims to manage.

This study was based on a mixed-methods design combining both secondary literature review and primary data collection. The primary research consisted of a representative survey of 500 households across Rohingya camps and host communities, alongside 30 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 20 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). This allowed the team to complement existing literature with grounded evidence and voices from affected communities.

The policy of restricting formal education and livelihood opportunities for refugees, intended to underscore the temporary nature of their stay, has created a "lost generation" of youth facing hopelessness and idleness, forcing many to rely on negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and child labour to survive (Humanitarian

Action, 2024). This desperation, in turn, fuels recruitment by armed and armed/organized groups, contributing to a severe deterioration in camp security that affects both refugees and host communities, thereby making the crisis a more significant and intractable challenge for Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2024).

The prolonged Displacement has had severe, multidimensional impacts on both communities. For the host community, this includes a documented 24% decrease in average annual income between 2016 and 2020 and a sharp depression of daily wages due to competition in the unskilled labor market (Siraj, 2025). For Rohingya refugees, a policy of containment has created a state of near-total dependency on humanitarian assistance, which is itself precarious due to chronic funding shortfalls (Siraj, 2025). The crisis disproportionately harms women, children, and youth. Women and girls face heightened risks of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and severe mobility restrictions that lead to profound isolation. Youth are confronting the reality of becoming a "lost generation," with an estimated 96% of those aged 18-24 unemployed and systematically excluded from formal, accredited education. Primary findings from this study highlight that over 70% of surveyed households reported children dropping out of school, while 50% noted children forced into labor.

“ A Rohingya girl explained:  
**When I see my younger brothers go to learning centers, I feel happy for them but sad for myself.**

Such testimonies underscore the intergenerational transmission of vulnerability.


The initial solidarity from the host community has given way to a state of "peaceful coexistence under strain". This erosion of social cohesion is driven by tangible pressures, including intense competition for natural resources, environmental degradation, and overburdened public services, which approximately 90% of survey respondents cited as a top source of tension. The camps have become fertile ground for organized crime and armed groups, leading to a 48% increase in verified security incidents in 2024, including 75 killings (UNHCR, 2024). This violence creates a climate of pervasive fear for refugees and spills over into adjacent host communities, fueling their anxiety and resentment.

Respondent voices illustrate this strain:

“ A host community woman shared,  
**Before 2017, we could go to the clinic quickly. Now we wait for hours—it is not only us, but also our Rohingya brothers.**

“ Rohingya youth stressed livelihood restrictions:  
**“If we could work legally, we would not compete for aid. That would reduce many problems.**





Despite this, foundations for coexistence remain. Instances of cooperation, such as during floods or informal labor arrangements, reflect shared vulnerabilities and opportunities for resilience. A gap revealed by this research is the limited awareness among host communities about the extent of aid benefits directed to them. While humanitarian programs often adopt a 50/50 host-refugee distribution model, host respondents frequently perceive these benefits as invisible.

The prospect of a full, voluntary, safe, and dignified repatriation of Rohingya refugees is fundamentally infeasible, a fact underscored by the slow pace of past efforts, where out of a list of 829,036 refugees submitted to Myanmar, only 90,506 have been cleared for return to date (RRRC, 2025). The primary obstacle is the political and security reality in Myanmar, where the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic armed group, has seized de facto control over most of Rakhine State, rendering bilateral agreements negotiated with the military junta logistically and politically unworkable (Rejwan, 2025). The diplomatic process is caught in a "sovereignty trap," where the only formally legitimate interlocutor (the junta) lacks ground control, and the de facto authority (the AA) lacks international legitimacy. Furthermore, refugees themselves have consistently articulated non-negotiable conditions for their return—including the restoration of citizenship, guarantees of physical safety, and the return of their land—with over 90% of respondents identifying these as essential (HRW, 2025).

Primary data shows that over 90% of Rohingya respondents identified full citizenship, safety guarantees, and land restitution as non-negotiable for return.

“As one participant put it:  
**We want to go home — but only as citizens, not as strangers.**”

This report's findings point to the urgent need for a strategic shift away from a crisis-management footing toward a long-term, development-oriented approach that fosters rights, resilience, and stability for both communities.

The primary recommendation is to undertake a strategic policy pivot from short-term containment to a medium-term strategy that acknowledges the Protracted nature of the Displacement. This includes progressively lifting the restrictive prohibitions on formal, accredited education and livelihood opportunities for refugees. Such a shift would foster self-reliance, reduce aid dependency, mitigate negative coping mechanisms like child marriage and engagement in crime, and ultimately enhance the long-term security of Bangladesh. Besides, Key community recommendations include: (i) expanding skills training for youth, (ii) ensuring maternal healthcare and disability access in host areas, and (iii) enhancing women's safe mobility to access services.

“A host community youth emphasized:  
**We see new shops and roads for the camps, but our own roads are broken.**”

Donors must urgently reverse aid cuts and provide robust, predictable, multi-year funding for the Joint Response Plan (JRP) to meet immediate life-saving needs (Siraj, 2025). Concurrently, the international community should actively support and finance a "compact-style" agreement that provides Bangladesh with significant development assistance, concessional financing, and trade incentives in exchange for policy reforms that grant refugees access to education and work (Charles, et al., 2018). Expanding third-country resettlement opportunities is also a critical act of international responsibility-sharing and a vital durable

solution for the most vulnerable, though progress remains limited with only 4,897 refugees resettled to third countries as of February 2025 (RRRC, 2025).

Programming must bridge the humanitarian-development nexus by designing integrated, conflict-sensitive initiatives that create shared benefits for both refugees and hosts. This includes joint economic programs, shared infrastructure projects, and collaborative environmental restoration efforts. It is imperative to systematically and meaningfully include affected communities—especially women, youth, and persons with disabilities—in all stages of program design, implementation, and monitoring to ensure accountability and effectiveness. Addressing these gaps through inclusive program design and transparent communications is critical to strengthening trust and social cohesion.

# Introduction

## 1.1 Situating the Crisis: From Emergency to Protracted Displacement

The forced Displacement of the Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh represents one of the world's most acute and complex humanitarian crises. In Myanmar, the stateless Rohingyas have experienced persecution for decades with deeply etched restrictions on access to services, and enjoyment of rights. This situation contributes to a cycle of identity denial, systematic discrimination, and Displacement. The absence of legal status and recognition result in heightened vulnerabilities and exposure to threats including harassment, and significant restrictions on their freedom of movement, and ability to curtail their efforts to access humanitarian services.

The Myanmar junta has ramped up its "scorched earth" tactics against civilians in response to the growing armed resistance and territorial losses. The military's atrocities committed since the February 2021 coup amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, fueled by decades of impunity. Ethnic Rohingya are currently facing the gravest threats since the military's 2017 atrocities. Refugees from the conflict are increasingly fleeing to neighboring countries and elsewhere in Southeast Asia (HRW, 2025). The Junta's conscription, repression, and

surveillance strategy. On February 10, 2025, facing depleted ranks in the military, the junta activated the 2010 People's Military Service Law, enabling the conscription of men ages 18 to 35 and women ages 18 to 27 for up to five years. Myanmar's military has a long history of employing abusive recruitment tactics. Rates of arrests and of people fleeing the country both increased in response. Military authorities have since used abductions and detention of family members to carry out conscription, including of children. Conscripts have been used as human shields and porters on the front lines. In August, the junta announced it would recruit men ages 35 to 65 to join the newly developed "people's security and counterterrorism teams." The UN verified the military's recruitment and use of over 1,100 children in 2023 (HRW, 2025). Notwithstanding the devastating earthquake, armed conflict persists and is deepening the crisis in Myanmar.

Following a campaign of targeted violence and crimes against humanity, a massive influx of over 700,000 people fled to Bangladesh in August 2017, joining previous waves of refugees who have sought safety in the country since the 1970s (Humanitarian Action, 2024). This has created the world's largest refugee settlement in Cox's Bazar, which now hosts a registered population of 1,006,107 stateless Rohingya as of February 2025, residing in 33 camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf, as well as on the island of Bhasan Char (RRRC, 2025). What began as an emergency response has now evolved into a classic Protracted Refugee Situation (PRS). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a PRS as one in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five or more consecutive years in a given asylum country, a definition the Rohingya in Bangladesh clearly meet, with some having been in the country since 1992 (RRRC, 2025).



To achieve this, the study pursued following primary objectives:

It first looks at how long-term Displacement has impacted rights, protection, and resilience on economic, social, and cultural, environmental, and psychological levels, focusing specifically on intergenerational vulnerabilities among women, children, and youth. These factors involve access to basic services like health care, education, livelihoods; unequal effects to particular communities; transformation of the traditional systems and culture; psychological response to Displacement; coping and resilience measures and the environmental outcomes that lead to the well-being of the community.

Second, the research examined the type of relations between the Rohingya refugees and the host communities, what contributes to the strain and strengthening of the social cohesion, trust, and peaceful coexistence. It takes into consideration the notions that each set of people may believe, how competition over material goods and services takes place, the efforts of women, youth, and community leaders in strengthening or destabilizing relationships. The study also aims to find the examples of community-developed movements that may be used as models of mutual resilience.

Third, the research evaluated the viability of the promise between the Secretary General of the UN and Chief Advisor of Bangladesh to bring all the Rohingya to their home before Ramadan of 2026. This will involve an exploration of bilateral, multilateral and tripartite channels, assessment of policies and incentives which it is deemed could make repatriation faster; as well as discussion of the terms which need to be satisfied in order to assure safe, dignified and humane repatriation, including citizenship laws, access of lands, security and freedom of movement.

Lastly, the paper established significant gaps in the policy as they have evolved throughout the crisis and provides evidence-based policies. That includes assessing the quality of the existing interventions, identifying service delivery and protection gaps, how humanitarian and development work can be more aligned, and what policy change is required to testimony the emerging needs in the community particularly those of women, children, and youth.

This technical definition carries profound real-world implications. It signifies that refugees are trapped in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo, devoid of immediate prospects for one of the three durable solutions: voluntary repatriation, local integration, or third-country resettlement (UNHCR, 2020). Life in a PRS is often characterized by confinement to camps, restrictions on freedom of movement and legal employment, dependency on international assistance, and immense psychological distress stemming from an uncertain future (Milner, n.d.). The shift from an "emergency" to a "Protracted situation" is not merely a change in timeline; it is a fundamental reframing of the problem that demands a corresponding shift in policy. A response that concentrates on life-saving emergency assistance in the short term is not only unsustainable, but also the wrong way to tackle the long-term, structural issues of a population in the process of a long-term exile (UNHCR, 2020).

## 1.2 Rationale, Purpose, and Research Objectives

This study was initiated in response to the growing disconnect between the on-the-ground reality of Protracted Displacement in Cox's Bazar and a policy and programmatic response that remains largely oriented around a short-term, emergency framework. Generally, the idea behind this report is to present a sound evidence-based picture of the extended effects of the crisis on the Rohingya refugees and their host communities in Bangladesh. This is to produce actionable information that can shape the formulation of better, rights-respecting, and sustainable policies and programs to all afflicted populations. The scope of this study is limited to the situation in Cox's Bazar district, focusing on both Rohingya refugees and host communities. It does not attempt to provide a full regional or global analysis of Displacement but instead concentrates on the lived realities, protection risks, and resilience strategies within the Cox's Bazar context. Its findings are therefore intended to inform humanitarian and development actors, policymakers, and donors engaged in this specific setting.



## Chapter 02

# Methodological Overview

In order to develop a strong and subtle study, a mixed-methods research was used where both quantitative and qualitative data were used. The quantitative symbolled a well-organized survey provided to a representative sample of 500 households comprising 250 Rohingya refugee households and 250 host community households. This was the context that was demographicizing and also measured the prevalence of various impacts and perceptions.

The qualitative component offered deep insights into lived experiences and the underlying reasons behind the quantitative findings. This was conducted through 30 Key Informant Interviews (KIs) with government officials, UN agency staff, community leaders, and local businesspersons, and 20 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with diverse groups including men, women, youth, and persons with disabilities from both Rohingya and host communities. These qualitative methods enriched the analysis by highlighting community voices, narratives, and contextual factors not easily captured through survey data.

The study was conducted in the Cox's Bazar district, covering the refugee camps and surrounding host communities in the areas of Ukhiya, Teknaf, Ramu, and Chakaria. By dividing the total sample into two main strata —Rohingya households and host community households — the research guaranteed balanced representation between the groups most affected by prolonged Displacement. Stratification further allowed the inclusion of different sub-groups. For the host community, the sampling strategy was designed to

### Kutupalong Area:

- Camp 1 East
- Camp 1 West
- Camp 2 East
- Camp 2 West
- Camp 3
- Camp 4

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### Balukhali Area:

- Camp 11
- Camp 12
- Camp 18
- Camp 19

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### Unchiprang Area:

- Camp 22.

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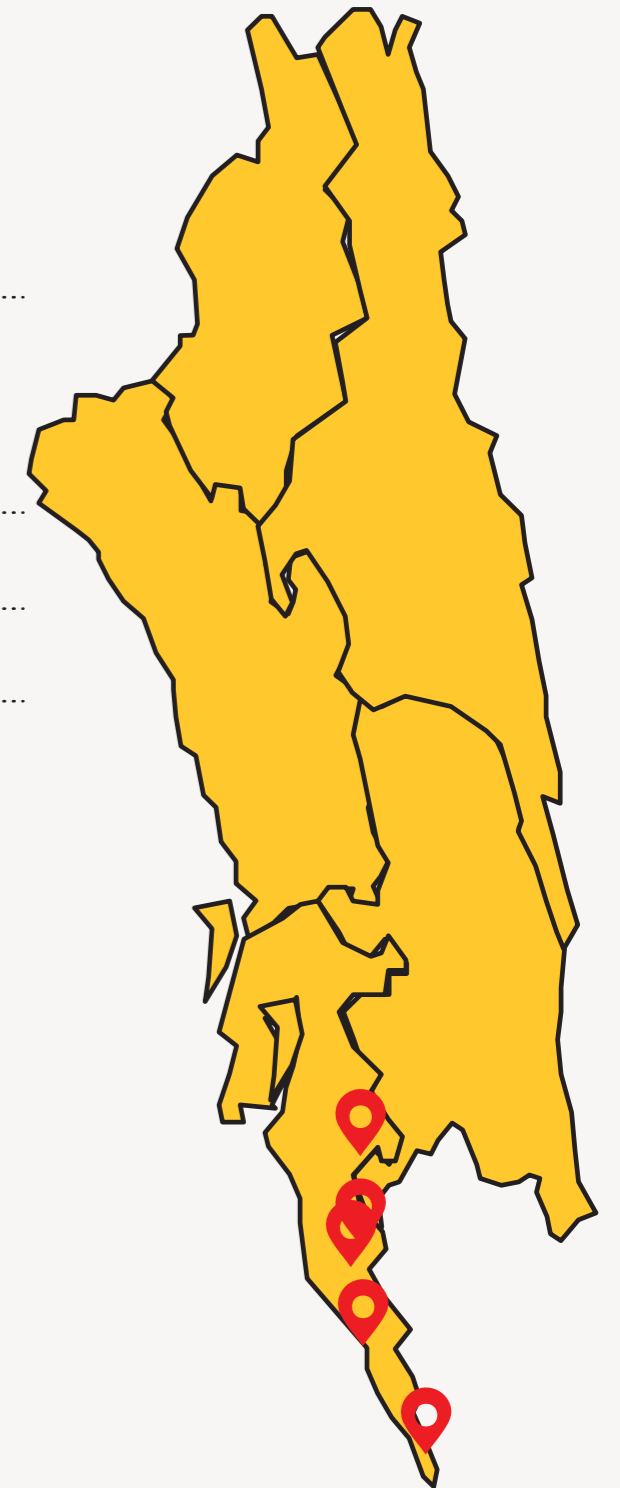
### Shamlapur Area:

- Camp 23.

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### Teknaf Area:

- Camp 24



capture the populations most directly impacted by the crisis. Consequently, household sampling was conducted in locations within a 2km radius of the refugee camps across Ukhiya, Teknaf, Ramu, and Chakaria.

The survey respondents are predominantly young and working-age adults, with 79% aged between 19 and 50, indicating a demographic highly capable of economic activity but potentially under-supported in terms of elderly and child representation.

For the Rohingya community, the study selected camps from both Ukhiya and Teknaf, ensuring representation from major registered sites. The data collection specifically covered the following locations:

The study was also helped by strict ethics standards such as the informed consent of the adult participants and parental consent and child assent of the minors. To protect participant privacy and safety, all data were anonymized, and the research team adhered strictly to the safeguarding policies and core principles of the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

# Literature Review

## 3.1 The Multidimensional Impact of Protracted Displacement

### 3.1.1 Economic Dimensions: Livelihoods, Aid Dependency, and Market Dynamics

The region's economy has been fundamentally altered by the crisis. The Government of Bangladesh's policy denies Rohingya the right to formal work, aiming to underscore the temporary nature of their stay (Bhatia, et al., 2018). This has led to near-total dependency on humanitarian aid and severely curtails their economic agency (UNHCR, 2025; IRC, 2019). Despite these restrictions, a precarious informal economy has emerged, with about one-third of refugee households engaging in activities like running small shops or working as day laborers for below-market wages, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation (IRC, 2019).

For the host community, the economic impact is twofold. A large segment of the local population, already among Bangladesh's poorest, has suffered significant economic decline. One study documented a 24% decrease in average annual income for host households between 2016 and 2020, with unskilled laborers experiencing a 38% drop (Ullah, et al., 2021). This is driven by competition from a refugee workforce willing to accept lower wages (Khan, 2024). Security measures, such as a fishing ban on the Naf River, have reportedly left 30,000 to 35,000 local fisherman unemployed (Khan, 2024). Conversely, the massive humanitarian response has injected millions of dollars into the local economy, creating a "humanitarian economy" (Jeon & Yoon, 2025). This has generated formal sector jobs with NGOs for educated locals and stimulated demand for housing and services (Etang Ndip, et al., 2024). This has created a bifurcated reality, benefiting some while pushing others deeper into poverty (Khan, 2024).

The entire regional economy is perilously dependent on humanitarian aid, which is increasingly unreliable due to donor fatigue (DAIRA, 2025). In 2023, the World Food Programme (WFP) was forced to cut monthly food rations from \$12 to \$8 per person, pushing the population toward a nutrition crisis (EU, 2025). These funding cuts affect all sectors, scaling back critical services in health, sanitation, and protection for both communities (TBS, 2025).

### 3.1.2 Socio-Cultural Fabric: Cohesion, Conflict, and Shifting Norms

The prolonged cohabitation has strained the region's socio-cultural fabric. For the Rohingya, Displacement severed ties to their traditional community structures (Davis, et al., 2020). Inside the camps, a contested Majhi governance system, appointed by Bangladeshi authorities, often lacks community legitimacy (TWB, 2022; Sullivan, 2020). The camp environment has also spurred shifts in gender norms. Economic necessity and NGO programming have increased women's mobility and participation outside the home, which, while empowering for some, has challenged patriarchal structures and led to household friction (Davis, et al., 2020; Parray, et al., 2022).

Security has severely deteriorated, with the camps becoming grounds for organized crime and armed groups like Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and RSO. In 2024, UNHCR verified a 48% increase in security incidents, including 75 killings (UNHCR, 2024). These groups engage in turf wars, extortion, and forced recruitment, creating a climate of fear that spills into host communities (TBS, 2025). The region is now a hub for narcotics and human trafficking, corroding social order for all (Khan, 2024). Initial cultural solidarity, based on shared faith and language, has frayed under demographic pressure, with locals now a minority in their own sub-districts, causing social anxiety and friction over differing social practices (Khan, 2024).

### 3.1.3 The Environmental Footprint: Resource Depletion and Climate Vulnerability

The settlement's creation precipitated an environmental crisis. To accommodate the influx, 8,001 acres of hilly forest land were cleared, leading to habitat loss, human-elephant conflicts, and severe soil erosion. Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DMHA), 2022; UNDP, 2018). The denuded slopes now pose an acute risk of landslides during monsoons. Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DMHA), 2022).

The immense population has over-strained water resources, with thousands of tube wells depleting the shallow groundwater aquifer for both communities (Khan, 2024). Furthermore, poor sanitation infrastructure has led to widespread fecal contamination of water sources, with high levels of E. coli posing a constant threat of disease (Ahmed, et al., 2021). The camps generate an estimated 10,000

tons of solid waste monthly with no comprehensive management system, choking drainage systems and worsening floods (Khan, 2024). These issues are compounded by climate change, which acts as a "threat multiplier" in this disaster-prone region. The refugees, living in flimsy shelters on degraded land, are extremely vulnerable to cyclones and flooding, which intensifies competition over scarce resources and fuels inter-community tension (UNHCR, 2025; Danish Refugee Council (DRC), 2024).

### 3.1.4 The Psychological Toll: Trauma, Stress, and Mental Health

The crisis has inflicted a staggering mental health burden. Rohingya refugees carry trauma from genocidal violence in Myanmar, compounded by the chronic stressors of Displacement (Islam, et al., 2024). Studies show staggering rates of distress: one found over 80% of Rohingya women were depressed and 60% met the criteria for PTSD (Islam, et al., 2024). Another survey identified moderate to severe depressive symptoms in 30% of refugees and PTSD in 5% (Ritsema & Armstrong-Hough, 2023). These conditions are

including intimate partner violence and trafficking (ISCG, 2019; IRC, 2021). Conservative norms and safety fears severely restrict their movement, limiting access to services and increasing health risks from indoor cooking smoke (ISCG, 2019; UNDP, 2018). Child marriage is increasingly used as a negative coping mechanism (Guglielmi, et al., 2020).

Rohingya youth face becoming a "lost generation," with an estimated 96% of those aged 18-24 unemployed and systematically excluded from formal, accredited education (UNB, 2025; NRC, 2022). While recent policy shifts show greater openness to education, the current lack of opportunity fuels deep frustration and makes youth vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups (Sullivan & Karim, 2025; ICG, 2025). For children, vulnerability starts at birth with the perpetuation of statelessness (Bhatia, et al., 2018). They suffer from high rates of malnutrition (25% acute, 38% stunted) and are highly susceptible to disease outbreaks and psychological trauma (Islam, et al., 2024; Ahmed, et al., 2021). Failing to address these intergenerational vulnerabilities through development-oriented solutions like formal education and livelihoods perpetuates a cycle of negative coping mechanisms, aid dependency, and instability (Islam, et al., 2024).



A mother leaving with her child from a CP center after consultation

exacerbated by ongoing stressors like food insecurity, lack of protection, and hopelessness, with direct exposure to camp violence more than doubling the risk of depressive symptoms (Danish Refugee Council (DRC), 2024; Ritsema & Armstrong-Hough, 2023).

The host community also suffers significant psychological strain from economic decline and rising insecurity, which worsens inter-community relations (Khan, 2024). Despite the immense need, access to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is limited for both populations, hindered by cultural stigma and a lack of awareness (EIRayes, et al., 2025).

### 3.1.5 Intergenerational Vulnerabilities: The Disproportionate Impact on Women, Youth, and Children

The crisis disproportionately harms the most vulnerable. Women and girls (52% of the population) face compounded risks of Gender-Based Violence (GBV),

## 3.2 Inter-Community Relations: Perceptions, Tensions, and Coexistence

### 3.2.1 Evolving Perceptions: From Sympathy to Strain

The initial response of the Bangladeshi host community in 2017 was characterized by remarkable generosity and "everyday humanitarianism," driven by shared faith and cultural similarities (Khan, 2024). Locals were first responders, providing essential aid to traumatized Rohingya refugees. However, this goodwill has significantly eroded under the pressures of Protracted Displacement, leading to a documented loss of social cohesion and rising resentment among the host population (Khan, 2024). This shift is reflected in local media, which moved from stories of solidarity to reports on the negative economic and security impacts of the refugee presence (Kamruzzaman, et al., 2024). Quantitative data illustrates this starkly: a 2020

survey showed that while 72% of hosts held positive views of refugees in 2017, this number plummeted to 18% by 2020, with 60% expressing explicitly negative attitudes (Ullah, et al., 2021). Host communities now widely report that their lives have worsened and strongly desire the refugees' swift repatriation (IRI, 2022).

### 3.2.2 Drivers of Conflict and Social Friction

The decline in relations is rooted in tangible grievances. Key drivers of tension consistently identified in the literature include:

- **Economic Competition:** The refugee workforce, willing to accept very low wages, has depressed the local labor market, displaced host community workers, and contributed to rising costs for food and rent (Ullah, et al., 2021).
- **Resource Strain:** Daily friction arises from competition over scarce natural resources like water and firewood, aggravated by environmental damage from the camps that undermines local livelihoods (Khan, 2024).
- **Security Concerns:** A documented increase in crime, drug trafficking, and violence linked to armed groups in the camps has created a perception among hosts that the refugees are a direct threat to their safety (Khan, 2024).
- **Perceived Preferential Treatment:** Host community members, who are also impoverished, express a strong sense of injustice, believing that refugees receive comprehensive aid from international organizations while their own needs are overlooked (Kamruzzaman, et al., 2024).

### 3.2.3 Foundations for Peaceful Coexistence

Despite these significant tensions, the relationship is not one of constant conflict. A "miracle of social cohesion" has, for the most part, prevented large-scale violence (Miah, et al., 2024). Foundations for peaceful coexistence persist through shared religious and cultural ties and a degree of economic interdependence in local markets (Miah, et al., 2024; Jeon & Yoon, 2025). Research suggests that managing "spatial and psychological proximity" is key; carefully managed interfaces between communities can enhance peace (Khan, 2024).

The international aid operation plays a paradoxical role. While it provides a lifeline to refugees and jobs for some

hosts, the visible distribution of aid fuels host community resentment and perceptions of inequality. Thus, the mechanism designed to alleviate suffering can inadvertently generate new grievances if not paired with robust communication about the shared benefits (Kamruzzaman, et al., 2024).

### 3.2.4 Role of Community Actors in Shaping Social Ties

Specific groups play pivotal roles in shaping social ties. Women are at the forefront of grassroots peacebuilding through initiatives like the UN Women-supported Young Women Leaders Network (UNWOMEN, 2021). However, their changing roles and employment with NGOs can also be a source of social friction among conservative community members (IRC, 2021). Youth can act as a bridge but are also a volatile demographic, as their exclusion from education and work makes them vulnerable to frustration and instability (Miah, et al., 2024). Rohingya community leaders (Majhis) are a key interface with authorities but are often hampered by questions of legitimacy and representation (TWB, 2022; Sullivan, 2020).

### 3.2.5 Models for Social Cohesion

Several initiatives offer models for promoting peaceful coexistence. The UNDP's 'Strengthening Community Cohesion' project demonstrated that combining shared economic benefits (like cash-for-work) with peacebuilding infrastructure (like mediation groups) can yield positive results (Government of Canada, 2025). Other models, like the UN Women's Young Women Leaders Network and Caritas's 'Barefoot Counsellors' project, show the value of empowering community volunteers to deliver services and build social capital (UNWOMEN, 2021; Caritas Bangladesh, 2025). These cases highlight that "social cohesion" in this context is not about integration, but rather the management of peaceful coexistence. Effective interventions must minimize friction, create common interests in stability, and establish mechanisms for non-violent dispute resolution.

## 3.3 The Repatriation Dilemma: Assessing Feasibility

### 3.3.1 A History of Failed Agreements and Weak Multilateralism

Bilateral repatriation agreements between Bangladesh and Myanmar, including those in 1978, 1992, 2017, and 2018, have uniformly failed to produce meaningful returns (Abrar, n.d.; DAIRA, 2025). These failures stem from two core issues: the agreements were made without the free, prior, and informed consent of refugees, and Myanmar has shown no genuine political will to create the necessary conditions for a safe return (ICG, 2018; DAIRA, 2025). Consequently, these deals often appear as exercises in performative diplomacy (Parvez, 2025).

Multilateral mechanisms have proven equally ineffective. A tripartite MoU between UNHCR, UNDP, and Myanmar signed in 2018 was systematically obstructed by Myanmar authorities, who refused to grant UN agencies the unhindered access needed to independently verify conditions in Rakhine State (UNHCR, 2018). Regional actors like Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China, and India have been constrained by policies of non-interference or have prioritized their own geostrategic interests over resolving the crisis (DAIRA, 2025).



### 3.3.2 Unstable Ground and Shifting Power in Rakhine State

The situation in Rakhine State has been fundamentally altered by the rise of the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic armed organization that has seized control of most of the state since late 2023, including the areas from which the Rohingya fled (ICG, 2025). This new reality makes any repatriation plan negotiated solely with Myanmar's military junta politically and logistically unworkable, as a sustainable solution now requires engagement with the AA as the de facto authority (Parvez, 2025). The state remains an active, multi-sided conflict zone, with civilians caught between the junta, the AA, and Rohingya insurgent groups, making a safe return impossible (The New Humanitarian, 2025; ICG, 2025).

### 3.3.3 Core Conditions for Return and Final Assessment

Rohingya refugees have been consistent in their demands for return, which include the restoration of full citizenship, guarantees of physical safety under international protection, justice for atrocities, the right to return to their original lands, and freedom of movement (DAIRA, 2025; HRW, 2018). Without credible progress on these fundamental issues, particularly citizenship, the community will not consent to return, and any forced repatriation would violate international law (ICG, 2018).

Given these insurmountable barriers—the lack of a viable political solution for citizenship, pervasive insecurity from active conflict, the absence of a legitimate diplomatic partner with control on the ground, and guaranteed refugee refusal—a safe and voluntary repatriation by 2026 is impossible (Parvez, 2025; ICG, 2025). This reality highlights a growing disconnect between the policy focus on repatriation and the aspirations of younger refugees, who increasingly look toward third-country resettlement or other migration pathways for their future (Parvez, 2025; UNHCR, 2025).

## 3.4 Research Gaps

While existing literature provides a robust overview of the Protracted Rohingya crisis, it reveals critical gaps in qualitative, community-centered research.<sup>1</sup> The current understanding of impacts, inter-community relations, repatriation prospects, and policy effectiveness relies heavily on macro-level data and expert analysis, often overlooking the nuanced experiences of the affected populations.

This review identifies four key areas for further inquiry. First, there is a need to understand the lived experience of intersecting vulnerabilities, moving beyond siloed data to explore how households simultaneously navigate compounded economic, environmental, and psychological shocks, and what informal coping strategies they employ for survival.

Second, research must go beyond quantitative surveys to explore the qualitative dynamics of social cohesion. This requires an ethnographic understanding of the specific narratives, rumors, and daily interactions that either fuel conflict or build bridges between refugee and host communities.

Third, with the political landscape in Myanmar fundamentally altered by the Arakan Army, there is a critical gap in understanding refugee perceptions of the new realities in Rakhine. Research is needed to explore how refugees view the new actors and how these evolving perspectives shape their aspirations for repatriation versus other durable solutions.

Finally, while expert policy recommendations are plentiful, there is a lack of systematically captured community-led policy recommendations. Further study is required to elevate the "bottom-up" solutions proposed by Rohingya and host communities themselves, ensuring their voices can directly inform a more effective and rights-respecting response.





A Learner (PWD) from IRC's Learning enters are in his classroom

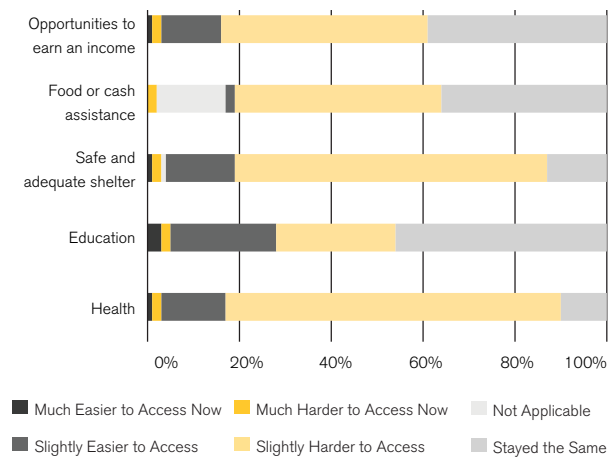
## Chapter 04 Findings and Results

### 4.1 Impacts of Prolonged Displacement on Rights, Protection, and Resilience

#### 4.1.1 Access to Basic Rights and Services

The survey results indicate that access to fundamental rights such as education, healthcare, shelter, and livelihood opportunities has been significantly strained for both Rohingya refugees and the host community, though in different ways.

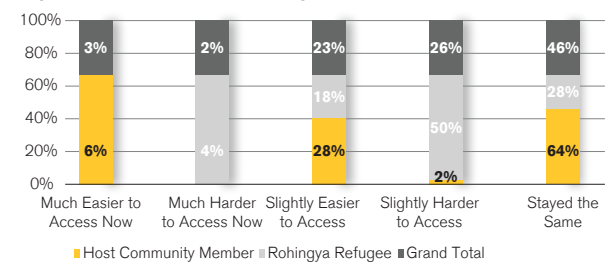
Figure 1: Access to Basic Rights and Services (Overall)



#### Education-A Tale of Two Realities:

Education access paints an uneven picture: in general, 28% of households reported an adverse change, 26% reported improvements and 46% reported no change. Rohingya mentioned restrictions, overcrowding and a lack of higher education pathways, and hosts talked of overstretched schools; Improvements were associated with the Myanmar Curriculum Framework, and the NGO learning centres.

Figure 2: Access to Basic Rights and Services (Education)



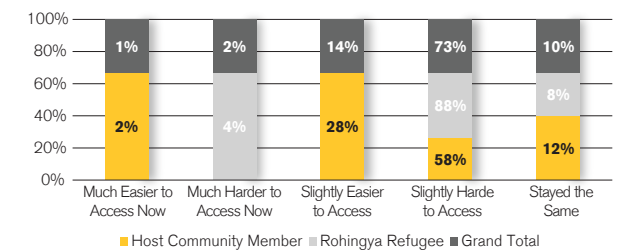
**Host Community:** Access is stable. 64% say it "Stayed the Same," and 34% say it is "Easier." Only 2% find it harder.

**Rohingya Refugees:** Access is deteriorating. 54% say it is harder to access, while only 18% say it is easier. FGDs and KIs corroborated these tendencies, and highlighted continued service strain for both communities.

A Rohingya community leader explained:  
**“Our children sit under the tarpaulin roofs to learn. Sometimes the rains flood the floor. Teachers change often, and we feel the quality is not the same as before.”**

**Healthcare-A Critical Bottleneck:** Overall three-quarters of households (75%) in surveyed reported worsening access to healthcare; improvements were reported by only 15%. Funding cuts have resulted in the closures of camp health posts meaning less service points, longer wait times, over crowdedness and greater dependence on stretched-thin host clinics.

Figure 3: Access to Basic Rights and Services (Healthcare)



**Host Community:** Opinions are divided. While 30% say it is easier, the majority (58%) report it is harder to access healthcare now.

**Rohingya Refugees:** The situation is dire. 92% report it is harder to access, with 0% reporting it is easier. This represents a near-total collapse of accessible healthcare for the refugee population in their view.

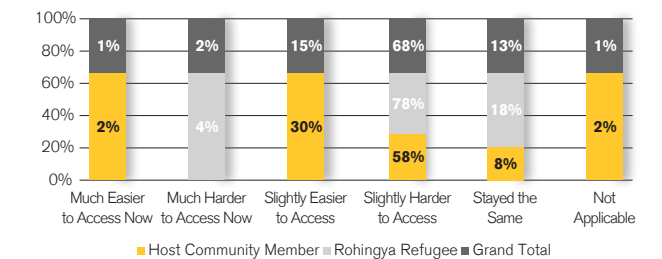
Host community male participants similarly noted increased pressure on local schools and health facilities:  
**“Before 2017, we could go to the clinic and see a doctor quickly. Now we wait for hours. It is not only us, but also our Rohingya brothers who need care.”**

Women in both communities highlighted challenges in maternal and reproductive health access:  
**“In pregnancy, we have to travel far for proper check-ups. If there is no money for transport, we just wait and pray nothing goes wrong.”**

– Host community woman, KI

**Shelter:** Overall seven in ten households (70%) reported greater difficulty accessing safe and adequate shelter, while only 16% noted improvements and 13% saw no change. Rohingya FGDs highlighted repeated relocations and lack of durable materials, while hosts pointed to rising land prices and housing competition. A small minority reporting improvements linked this to NGO-supported shelter upgrades, though these remain limited.

Figure 4: Access to Basic Rights and Services (Safe and Adequate Shelter)



**Food and Cash Assistance:** Overall nearly half of households (47%) said they found it harder to access food or cash assistance since the last time they were surveyed - with 2% improving and 36% finding no change. FGD of association with ration reductions, longer intervals between distribution and falling host support, and many are left supporting irregular incomes. The 15% "not applicable" responses represent households - principally hosts, who are not receiving any direct assistance.

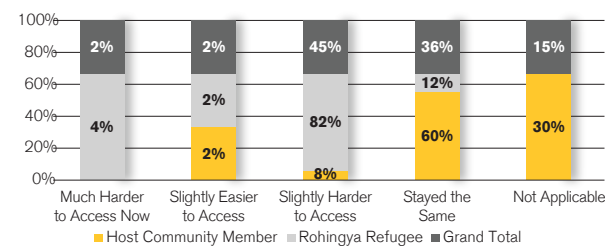


IRC's Health working checking Malnutrition in Camp



Flood in the Refugee Camp, A family of four standing outside their almost flood affected shelter

Figure 5: Access to Basic Rights and Services (Food or Cash Assistance)

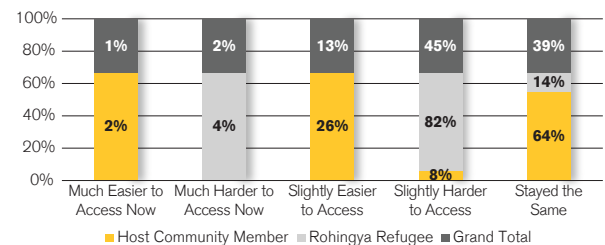


**Host Community:** Stable. 60% say it stayed the same.

**Rohingya Refugees:** 86% report it is harder to access. This is a critical finding given that "Food" was identified as their second highest priority need in other sections.

**Livelihood Opportunities:** Overall almost half of households (47%) reported fewer income opportunities, while only 14% saw improvements and 39% no change. FGDs linked this to Rohingya work restrictions and hosts' wage depression and livelihood loss. A small minority noted gains from NGO training, cash-for-work, or seasonal jobs, though these remain limited.

Figure 6: Access to Basic Rights and Services (Livelihood Opportunities)



**Host Community:** Largely stable. 64% say income opportunities stayed the same, and 28% say they are easier. Only 8% report increased difficulty.

**Rohingya Refugees:** Extremely restricted. 86% report it is harder to earn an income, likely due to movement restrictions or policy changes barring formal work.

Youth groups from the Rohingya community stressed lack of livelihood pathways as a direct barrier to accessing services:

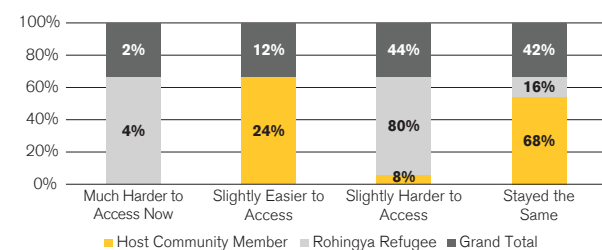
**"If we cannot work, we cannot pay for medicine or books. The aid is not enough for everything."**

**Legal Help / Dispute Resolution:**

**Host Community:** Stable (68% Same, 24% Easier).

**Rohingya Refugees:** 84% report it is harder. This lack of access to justice correlates with the high levels of reported internal tension and feelings of unfairness.

Figure 7: Access to Basic Rights and Services (Legal Help)



**Access to Basic Services During Disasters:** Floods, cyclones, and landslides disrupt health, water, food, and education services for both Rohingya and hosts. Nearly nine in ten respondents cited pressure on local services, with FGDs noting contaminated water, closed markets, and repeated evacuations. A host leader observed, "Our hospital is small. When both communities come, it is impossible to serve everyone well." Yet respondents also described solidarity, such as hosts sharing water and clothes during floods.

**4.1.2 Disproportionate Impacts on Women, Children, and Youth**

Data shows women, children, and youth face acute risks from prolonged displacement. Education is heavily disrupted, with 69% reporting dropout and 49% child labor. Youth recruitment into armed groups is seen as a major threat by 73% of households, while trafficking (68%) affects women and youth lacking livelihoods and mobility. Gendered risks remain severe: 65% cite mobility restrictions for women and girls, 42% report GBV, and 25% note child marriage.

In FGDs, Rohingya girls described a loss of aspirations due to restrictions on mobility and education:

**"When I see my younger brothers going to learning centers, I feel happy for them but sad for myself. People say it is not safe for us to go far."**

**Host community women noted increased household financial pressure pushing children into work:**

**"Boys are working in the fish markets instead of studying because families need the income."**

Youth FGDs in both communities emphasized the psychosocial toll of prolonged uncertainty:

**"We hear about repatriation but see no change. It feels like our life is paused, and we don't know when it will start."**

– Rohingya youth.

Beyond gender-based violence, key protection gaps include lack of access to legal assistance and reliable information, which forces people to rely on rumors to make critical decisions, which make them potentially even more vulnerable to exploitation.

Children are at an especially high risk such as being forced to become associated with armed groups and criminal networks. Adolescent girls are at risk of premature and coerced marriage, boys Risk recruitment, dangerous labor and substance abuse

Human smuggling and trafficking are increasing threats as well. Smugglers use promises of work or marriage and destructive attempts to turn any vulnerable household with forced labor. With no safe path to migrate to, desperate smuggling led to trafficking often occurs.

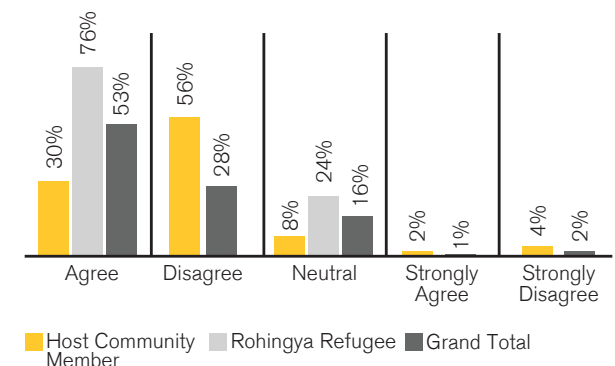
Finally, there is more insecurity at night, including an increased risks of theft, extortion, and violence. Socially isolated households are disproportionately targeted in that they lack the protection networks of the community.

**4.1.3 Influence on Traditional Social Structures and Cultural Practices**

The collapse of social structures in communities leads to isolation and lack of protection, affecting refugees, hosts, and marginalized groups. This undermines trust, solidarity, and vulnerability, affecting women, children, and other vulnerable groups.

In aggregated findings, more than half of all households (54%) recognize an erosion of traditional leadership structures, which historically played a central role in conflict resolution, social cohesion, and protection within both Rohingya and host communities.

Figure 8: Erosion of traditional leadership structures



This weakening has important protection implications: households reported that without trusted community leaders, they feel less able to resolve disputes fairly, and isolated families, women, and youth face greater exposure to exploitation and abuse. At the same time, nearly one in three households (30%) disagreed that traditional leadership has weakened, suggesting that in some areas, cultural practices and local authority figures continue to play a stabilizing role.

Cultural activities remain strong in some areas — over 90% reported participation in religious and family gatherings — but these are increasingly constrained by economic hardship, safety concerns, and reduced opportunities for collective cultural expression.

**Rohingya Refugees: A Crisis of Governance:** A massive 76% of Rohingya Refugees "Agree" that their traditional leadership has weakened. Strikingly, 0% of refugees disagreed with the statement. The remaining 24% were "Neutral." This indicates a near-total consensus within the refugee community that their social fabric is eroding. The displacement crisis has likely shattered the authority of traditional elders or leaders (Majhis), leaving a governance vacuum that contributes to the high levels of internal tension and stress observed in other sections.

**Host Community: Resilience and Continuity:** In sharp contrast, the majority of the Host Community (60%) disagrees with the statement (56% "Disagree" + 4% "Strongly Disagree"). Only 32% agreed that leadership is weakening. For the Host Community, traditional social structures remain largely intact and functional. Their community hierarchy has survived the strain of the influx, providing a buffer of stability that the refugees lack.

Host community elders expressed concern that younger generations no longer look to village leaders first:

**"Now people go to NGO staff or police before coming to us. Our role is weaker."**

In Rohingya camps, cultural activities remain central but are adapted to constraints:

**"We celebrate Eid and weddings, but on a smaller scale, with less food and music. It is not like home."**

– Rohingya woman

A child Marriage survivor sitting inside of her home in the refugee camp



#### 4.1.4 Psychological Well-Being

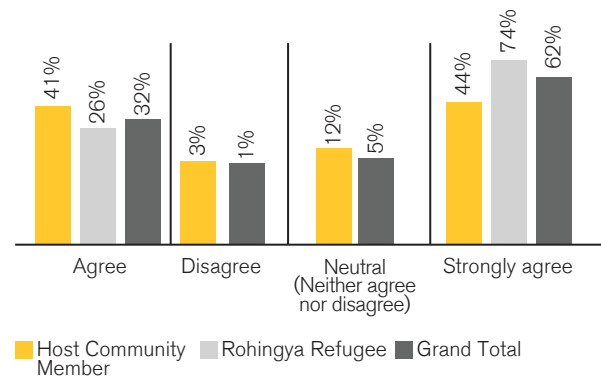
Aggregatedly, stress and anxiety are common with a staggering 94% (62% and 32%) of households admitting that prolonged uncertainty erodes the psychological well-being of themselves in a severe manner. This constant anxiety breeds feelings of hopelessness, tension within the family and appears in harmful ways to cope (i.e. early marriage, child labor, risky attempts to migrate, etc.).

Regarding the Universal Distress, both communities overwhelmingly agree with the situation. Among the Rohingya Refugees, 100% of respondents agreed to some extent (74% "Strongly Agree" + 26% "Agree"). There was zero disagreement or neutrality recorded. On the other hand, Host Community respondents 85% agreed (44% "Strongly Agree" + 41% "Agree"). The key difference lies in the intensity. The proportion of refugees who "Strongly Agree" is extremely high at 74%. This suggests that for three out of four refugees, this stress is not just present but acute and overwhelming. In terms of Host Severity, while high (44%), the intensity is significantly lower than that of the refugees, reflecting that while they are stressed by the protracted crisis, they likely have more stability (citizenship, permanent homes) than the stateless refugee population. It is telling that 0% of Refugees and only 3% of Host Community members disagreed with the statement. This indicates that the psychological toll of "uncertainty" is a universal experience in this context, affecting virtually every family.



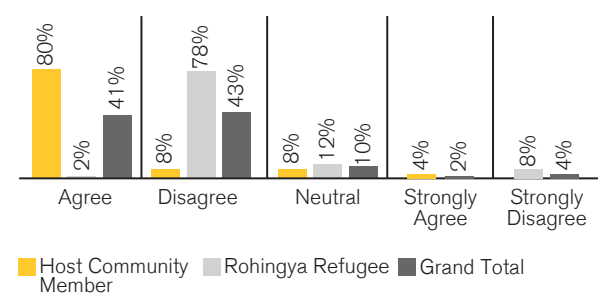
A GBV Survivor posing for a portrait in the Rohingya Camp

Figure 9: Prolonged uncertainty severely undermines their psychological well-being



Hope for children's futures is split, with nearly equal proportions expressing optimism and pessimism, indicating a deep divide in community morale. Aggregatedly, while 43% of households disagreed (and 4% strongly disagreed) with having hope for their children's future, 41% agreed and 2% strongly agreed, showing that optimism persists among some despite prolonged displacement.

Figure 10: Hopeful about the future for the children over the years



This findings provides perhaps the most devastating metric in the entire study: the "Hope Gap."

#### The Collapse of Hope for Refugees

- **Near-Total Despair:** Only 2% of Rohingya Refugees agree that they feel hopeful about their children's future.
- **Overwhelming Pessimism:** A staggering 86% of refugees expressed a lack of hope (78% "Disagree" + 8% "Strongly Disagree").

This quantifies the psychological impact of being stateless and trapped in a protracted crisis. Without the right to work, move, or plan, refugees see no viable pathway for the next generation, leading to a profound sense of hopelessness.

#### Host Community Optimism

- **High Hopes:** In sharp contrast, 84% of the Host Community agreed that they feel hopeful (80% "Agree" + 4% "Strongly Agree").
- **Stability:** Only 8% disagreed.

Despite the challenges identified elsewhere (e.g., healthcare access), the Host Community retains a fundamental belief in the possibility of a better future, likely anchored in their citizenship, rights, and long-term residency.

FGD participants described stress as a constant companion. Rohingya men linked this to economic dependence and lack of future prospects:

**"If you are not allowed to work, every day you feel small. Even if food comes, it is not the same as earning it."**

Host community youth mentioned resentment from economic stagnation:  
**"We see new shops and roads for the camps, but our own roads are broken. This makes people angry."**

Children's FGDs revealed both innocence and awareness:  
**"I want to be a teacher, but I don't know if I can. My father says we have to wait for Myanmar to take us back."**

– Rohingya boy, 13

#### 4.1.5 Coping Mechanisms and Resilience Strategies

Households employ a combination of social, economic, and survival strategies: The data reveals that the most common coping strategies are social reliance (neighbors and relatives, both at 67%). However, negative coping mechanisms are widespread:

- Half of households (50%) cut meals, directly affecting nutrition;
- Over one in five (22%) remove children from school, exposing them to child labor risks;
- 51% take on hazardous or exploitative work, increasing protection risks.

On the positive side, 17% reported strengthening community/religious participation, suggesting that social cohesion remains an important resilience factor.

While social networks remain a vital support system, the prevalence of negative coping strategies points to erosion of long-term resilience.

Women in both communities spoke of borrowing and sharing food as an unspoken norm:

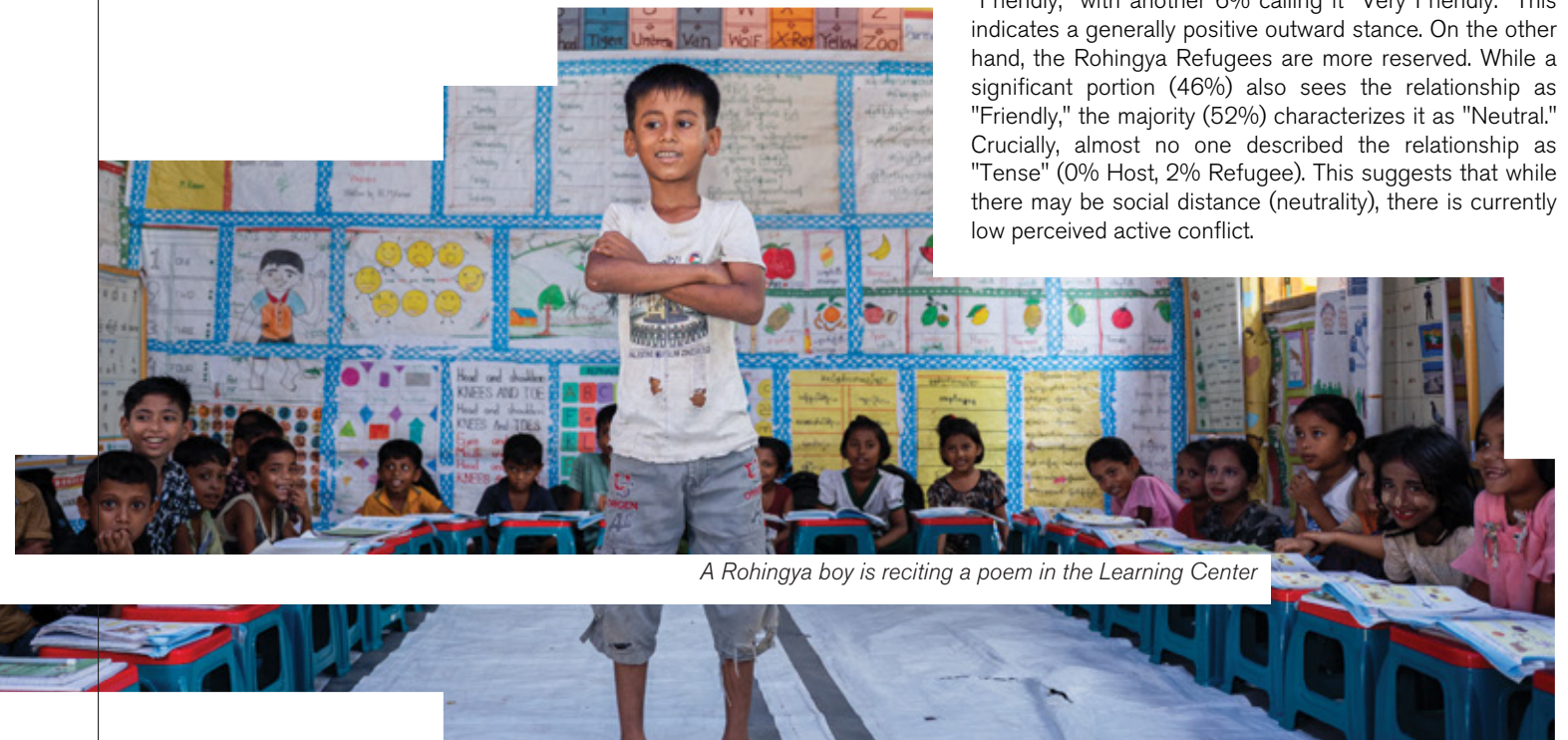
**"If my neighbor has rice, she will share. Tomorrow, I will do the same. We survive like this."**

However, negative coping strategies such as reducing meals or selling assets were often described with quiet resignation:

**"We sold my daughter's gold for medicine. Now there is nothing left to sell."**

– Host community man.

Families are using many harmful coping mechanisms to help survive. These include taking to child labor to supplement aid and taking up dreams of early or forced marriage for adolescent girls to take up household burdens. Some also pastoralize young people across borders in search of work, exposing them to high risks of human smuggling and trafficking. While these strategies provide short-term relief, in the long run they fuel enduring vulnerabilities and promote cycles of exploitation.



A Rohingya boy is reciting a poem in the Learning Center

#### 4.1.6 Environmental Impacts

Environmental degradation is one of the most universally acknowledged consequences of the crisis. The findings show that nearly nine in ten households perceive severe environmental decline, particularly in water availability (90%) and forest loss (89%), which aligns with FGD/KII narratives about deforestation due to firewood collection and shrinking water resources. High percentages citing heatwaves (86%), floods (77%), landslides (82%), and cyclones (72%) reflect the acute disaster-prone nature of Cox's Bazar, exacerbated by displacement pressures.

Rohingya elders recalled the loss of green cover:

**"When we first came, there were trees. Now the hills are bare. The sun feels hotter, and the soil washes away in the rain."**

Host community farmers linked environmental damage to declining livelihoods:  
**"We used to collect firewood from the forest and sell it. Now it is forbidden, and there is nothing to collect anyway."**

#### 4.2 Relationships Between Rohingya Refugees and Host Communities

##### 4.2.1 Perceptions of the Other Community

Perceptions between the two groups are mixed but not outright hostile.

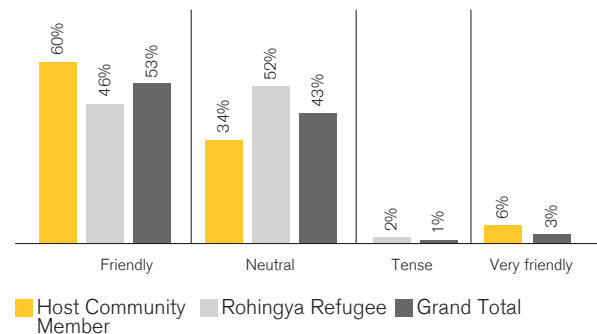
Overall, the results show that over half of households (56%) characterize relations as either friendly or very friendly, while 43% take a neutral view, and only 1% describe relations as tense. This suggests that, despite the strains of displacement, large-scale hostility is not the dominant perception among either community.

Specifically, the findings suggests a relationship characterized by caution rather than conflict. The majority of the Host Community (60%) describes the relationship as "Friendly," with another 6% calling it "Very Friendly." This indicates a generally positive outward stance. On the other hand, the Rohingya Refugees are more reserved. While a significant portion (46%) also sees the relationship as "Friendly," the majority (52%) characterizes it as "Neutral." Crucially, almost no one described the relationship as "Tense" (0% Host, 2% Refugee). This suggests that while there may be social distance (neutrality), there is currently low perceived active conflict.



South Mithachori Chor Para Under Water due to flood

Figure 11: Relationship between host community and Rohingya community



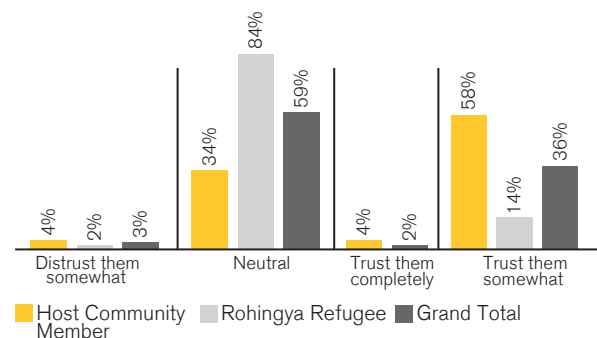
Again, aggregatedly, trust levels are moderate — under four in ten respondents (38%) express trust in the other community (either completely or somewhat), while a majority (59%) remain neutral. Only 3% openly expressed distrust.

But to be specific, the result reveals the hidden fragility behind the "Friendly/Neutral" labels.

**The Trust Gap:** There is a massive disparity in trust. Mong Host Community, 62% express some level of trust (58% "Trust somewhat" + 4% "Trust completely"), while Rohingya Refugees, Only 14% express trust ("Trust somewhat").

The vast majority of Refugees (84%) selected "Neutral." In the context of a vulnerable population, "Neutral" often serves as a safe, non-committal answer that masks underlying fear or lack of safety. The fact that only 14% affirmatively trust the hosts is a significant red flag for social cohesion.

Figure 12: Trust level between host community and Rohingya community



FGD discussions revealed that surface-level coexistence masks deeper uncertainties. Host community women described interactions as "polite but distant":

**“ We greet each other in the market, but we don't visit each other's homes. Life is separate. ”**

In Rohingya male FGDs, several participants said they respected host community members but felt looked down upon:

**“ They see us as guests who have stayed too long. We feel it in their eyes, even when words are kind. ”**

– Rohingya boy, 12

Children's groups on both sides described curiosity but also segregated play:

**“ We see them play football, and we watch from far away. ”**

– Rohingya boy, 12

These findings suggest a coexistence dynamic in which interactions are tolerated but often lack deeper trust or collaboration.

#### 4.2.2 Factors Driving Tensions

The main sources of tension are structural and resource-based:

- **Pressure on local services** — cited by about 9 in 10 respondents (90%) — is the top source of strain.
- **Competition for natural resources** (wood, water) was almost as high (86%), followed by **restrictions on Rohingya work opportunities (47%) and feelings of insecurity (41%)**.
- Cultural and language differences were mentioned by roughly 4 in 10 respondents (39%), while direct competition for jobs was a less common but still notable factor (15%).

Qualitative insights suggest these tensions are **driven more by structural pressures than personal animosity**. Host community stakeholders emphasized **service strain**:

**“ Our hospital is small. When both communities come, it is impossible to serve everyone well. ”**

– Rohingya boy, 12

Rohingya youth FGDs often framed tensions in terms of restricted livelihoods:

**“ If we could work legally, we would not compete for aid. That would reduce many problems. ”**

Some host youth expressed resentment about perceived aid imbalance:

**“ They get regular food, shelter support, and water. We have to buy all of it ourselves. ”**

Interestingly, a small minority reported no tensions at all, suggesting that perceptions vary depending on personal experiences and local conditions.

#### 4.2.3 Positive Interactions and Collaboration

It is evident that joint problem-solving is rare but valued when it occurs. Rohingya women recalled moments of solidarity during crises:

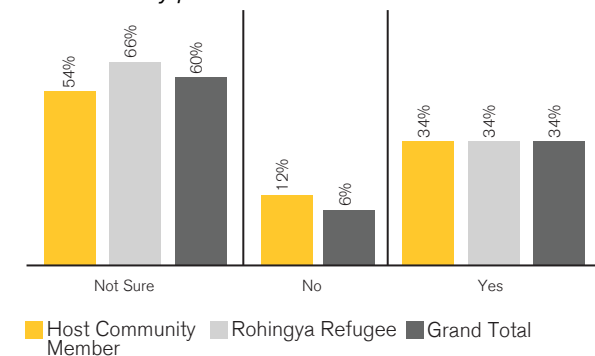
**“ When the floods came, some host families gave us dry clothes and water. That is real friendship. ”**

Host community men noted cooperation in informal labor arrangements:

**“ Sometimes Rohingya men help us harvest faster. We pay them quietly. ”**

In line with that, overall, there is evidence of inter-community collaboration: About one-third reported (34%) having worked with members of the other community to solve problems.

Figure 13: Status of both communities worked together on community problems



Religious gatherings (93%) and family events (88%) remain shared cultural touchpoints, with over 9 in 10 reporting participation in such activities in general, though these are often within — rather than across — communities. Yet, most participants admitted these moments are episodic, not routine, and heavily shaped by necessity.

**Specifically,** The dominant response for both groups is "Not Sure" (54% Host, 66% Refugee). This indicates that inter-community collaboration is not highly visible or formalized for the average person. Despite the low trust levels identified in section 4.2.1, 34% of both communities report that "Yes," they have worked together. This 34% figure is important. It shows that functional cooperation is happening and is recognized equally by both sides. This suggests that while abstract "Trust" is low (especially for refugees), practical "Collaboration" on shared problems is a viable entry point for building relationships.

#### 4.2.4 Feelings During Encounters

When encountering members of the other group outside the camps:

- Around 8 in 10 (79%) reported feeling neutral or normal.
- A smaller group (15%) expressed sympathy, while very small proportions reported feeling anxious, wary, or afraid.

This reflects a general absence of overt hostility but also a lack of strong warmth in everyday encounters.

#### 4.2.5 Perceptions of Fairness in Services

Regarding the perceptions of fairness in services, FGDs revealed that **uncertainty fuels suspicion**.

Host community leaders explained:

**“ We do not know how aid is decided. Lack of information makes people think it is unfair, even when it may not be. ”**

Rohingya respondents also felt **left out of decision-making**:

**“ Aid comes from above. We do not know who decides how much or who gets what. ”**

Perceptions of fairness in aid and service distribution are low:

### The "Fairness" Deficit

**Universal Lack of Validation:** The most striking finding is how few people believe the system is "Fair." Only 28% of the Host Community believes services are distributed "Somewhat Fairly or very fairly." For Rohingya Refugees, this number drops to a negligible 2%. When 96% of a population does not perceive the distribution of aid as fair or unfair, the legitimacy of humanitarian actors and local governance is severely undermined. This creates a fertile ground for grievance narratives to take root.

### The Dominance of "Neither Fair nor Unfair" (Uncertainty)

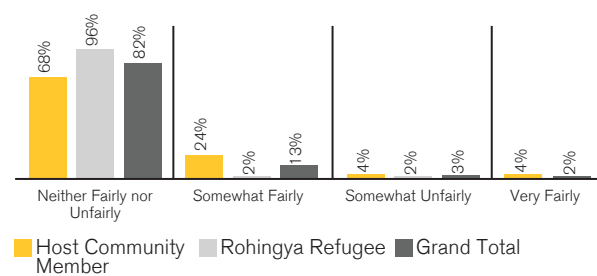
**The "Silent" Majority:** The overwhelming majority of respondents (**68% of Hosts and 96% of Refugees**) selected "Neither Fairly nor Unfairly." While this might look neutral on paper, in a conflict-sensitive context, this high level of "neutrality" often signals:

- **Lack of Transparency:** People simply do not know how decisions are made, so they cannot judge if they are fair.
- **Resignation:** A feeling that the system is opaque and beyond their influence.
- **Hidden Grievance:** "Neutral" is often a safer answer than "Unfair" for vulnerable populations like refugees (who depend on aid). The fact that only 2% felt safe enough or confident enough to say "Fair" is the telling statistic.

### Host Community vs. Refugee Perception

The Host Community has a slightly higher (though still low) perception of fairness (28%). However, they also have a visible "Unfair" sentiment (4%). The Refugee response is almost monolithic (96% Neutral). This suggests a total disconnect between the service providers and the recipients. They receive what they receive, but they do not feel the process is just or transparent.

Figure 14: Perceptions of fairness in aid and service distribution



In FGDs and KIIs, host communities voiced that aid is visibly concentrated in camps, leaving them feeling "invisible" or inadequately supported. Conversely, Rohingya respondents described frustrations with restrictions on mobility that prevent them from accessing services outside camps. This lack of clarity can erode trust and provide fertile ground for rumors and resentment.

### 4.2.6 Internal Community Cohesion

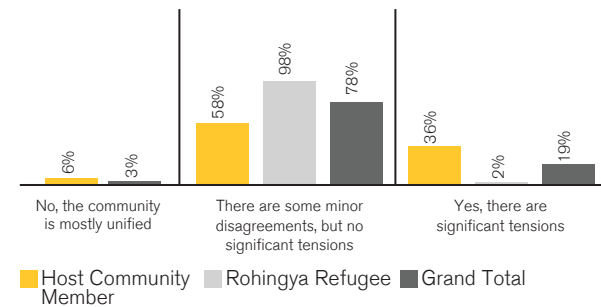
Internal unity is generally high, but notable divisions exist:

#### Host Community: A Divided House

A significant **36%** of the Host Community reports that "Yes, there are significant tensions" within their own group. Only **6%** describe their community as "Mostly Unified." This contradicts the common assumption that the host community is a monolithic, stable block. The strain of the prolonged crisis—likely over resources, land, or labor competition—is creating deep fractures among the locals themselves, not just between them and the refugees. Rohingya Refugees: "Quiet" Disagreement

**The "Minor" Consensus:** An overwhelming **96%** of Refugees describe the situation as having "Minor disagreements, but no significant tensions." This response pattern (near 100% clustering) is unusual. It could indicate strong social pressure to present a united front to outsiders (data collectors). However, given the earlier finding that 76% believe their leadership is weak (Section 4.1.3), this "minor disagreements" label likely masks a low-level, simmering instability that lacks a mechanism for resolution, rather than true harmony.

Figure 15: Leadership in resolving internal community cohesion



### 4.2.7 Host community youth

**“Our elders think we should wait for solutions, but we want to take action now.”**

Rohingya PWD group participants expressed feelings of exclusion even within their own camp blocks:  
**“When there is a meeting, no one calls us. They say it is not for us.”**

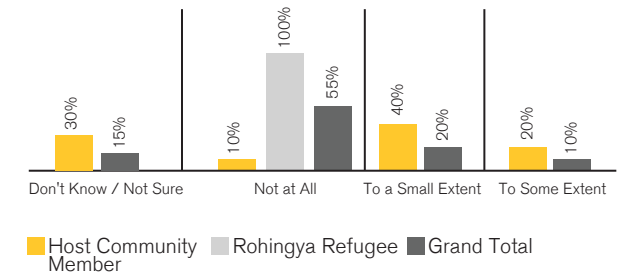
Dispute resolution remains tied to trusted intermediaries. Rohingya leaders explained:  
**“We try to solve small matters ourselves to avoid trouble with camp authorities.”**



### Host Community- Participation with Uncertainty:

- **Graded Participation:** The Host Community responses are more distributed.
  - 40% say women participate "To a Small Extent."
  - 20% say "To Some Extent."
  - 10% say "Not at All."
- **High Uncertainty:** Notably, 30% of Host respondents selected "Don't Know / Not Sure." This suggests that while women are not totally excluded, their participation is not highly visible or formalized enough for a significant portion of the community to be aware of it.

Figure 17: Role of Women in important decision-making processes

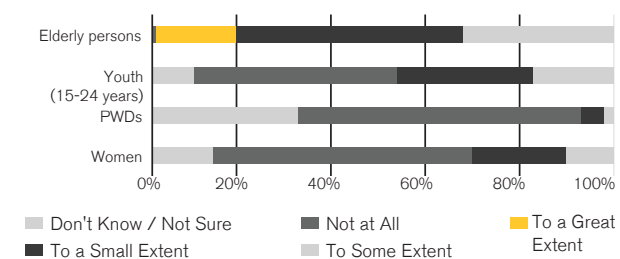


### 4.2.8 Role of Women, Youth, PWDs and Elderly Person

#### Women and youth have limited formal decision-making power in both communities:

For women and persons with disabilities, the most common response was "no participation at all or don't know" in community decisions. Both covers 70% for female and 93% for PWDs. Youth are slightly more engaged but still mostly report limited influence. Among the youth group, who participated in decision making process "small or some extent (46% of the total youth group)", almost 74% of them are male and 26% are female. Elderly persons are relatively more involved, often to a "small" or "some" extent (80% of the total) and 17% in a great extent. Among them almost 86% are male and 14% are female.

Figure 16: Role of Women, Youth, PWDs and Elderly Person in decision-making processes



But if we think about community wise, then picture is different.

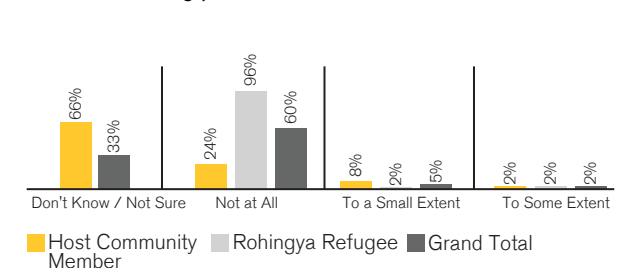
#### The findings reveals a stark contrast in the perceived role of women between the two communities.

**Rohingya Refugees- Total Exclusion:** The data shows a monolithic response from the Rohingya Refugee community. 100% of respondents selected "Not at All". This is a critical finding. It suggests that, in the eyes of the refugee population surveyed, women are completely absent from the public decision-making sphere. This absolute exclusion points to deeply entrenched cultural barriers or a rigid patriarchal structure within the camps that has not been shifted by humanitarian interventions.

### Persons with Disabilities (PWDs): Invisible and Unknown

- The data paints a bleak picture of exclusion. **96%** of Rohingya Refugees report that PWDs participate "Not at All." This is a near-total marginalization from public life and decision-making.
- For the Host Community, the dominant response is ignorance. **66%** said "Don't Know / Not Sure," indicating that PWD participation is likely non-existent or so invisible that the wider community is unaware of it.
- Both communities fail to include PWDs, but in different ways: active exclusion in the camps and passive invisibility in the host community.

Figure 18: Role of Person with Disabilities in important decision-making processes

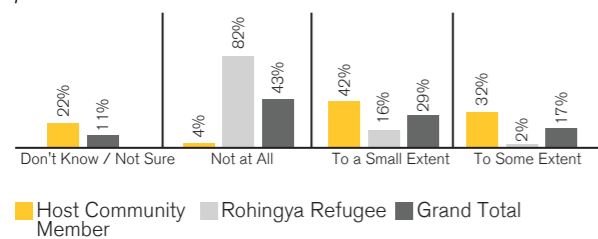




### Youth (15-24 years): The Generation Gap

- There is a significant blockage for refugee youth. 82% of refugees say youth participate "Not at All." This disenfranchisement is risky, as idleness and lack of voice can fuel frustration and negative coping mechanisms.
- In contrast, Host youth are moderately engaged. 74% report some level of participation (42% Small Extent + 32% Some Extent). Only 4% reported total exclusion.
- Host youth have a seat at the table (however small), while refugee youth are largely shut out.

Figure 19: Role of Youth in important decision-making processes

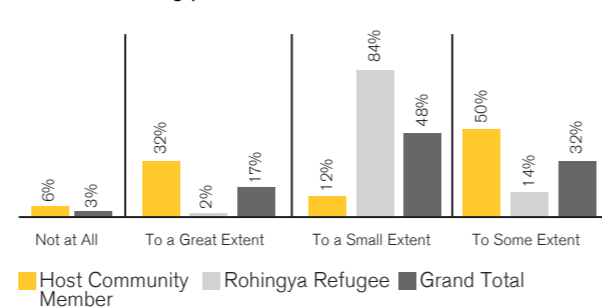


### Elderly Persons: The Last Bastion of Authority

- Rohingya Refugee Leadership:** This is the only group among the vulnerable categories (Women, Youth, PWDs) where Refugees report significant participation. 98% say the elderly participate to some degree (84% Small Extent + 14% Some Extent). While they participate, the fact that 84% is only to a "Small Extent" aligns with the earlier finding (Section 4.1.3) that traditional leadership is weakening. They are present, but perhaps less powerful than before.
- The Host Community grants the elderly significant power. 82% report participation, with a substantial 32% saying "To a Great Extent"—the highest "Great Extent" rating for any group in this study.
- Gerontocracy (rule by elders) remains the dominant social structure for the Host Community. For Refugees, while elders are the most included group, their influence appears to be waning compared to the robust authority of host elders.

As the education in the camp is not that adequate, children can often be seen playing on the street during the class hour

Figure 20: Role of Elderly Person in important decision-making processes



### 4.3 Feasibility of Full Repatriation

#### 4.3.1 Readiness and Conditions for Return

Across the surveyed Rohingya respondents, **the willingness to return to Myanmar is universal in principle as 100% of the Rohingya Community respondents have shown their interest of returning home**, but it is conditional on meeting specific guarantees.

For all major conditions — **full citizenship rights, physical safety from violence, return of original land and property, and freedom of movement and work** — over 9 in 10 (Over 90%) identified them as essential. Education rights for children were also prioritized, with a near-total consensus on their importance.



Rohingya Youth Are singing their local song using handmade instruments in the Rohingya Camp



Two Learners from IRC's Learning Centers looking through the window

“ Narratives show that the aspiration to return is deeply emotional and tied to identity. Rohingya male FGDs often began with the statement:

**We want to go home — but only as citizens, not as strangers.**

“ Women in the camps emphasized **security and dignity** as non-negotiables: **If we return without rights, it will be the same as running from one fire into another.**

“ Children's groups linked return to **personal dreams**: **If we go back, I want to see my village and study in a real school there.**

– Rohingya girl, 14

This demonstrates that while repatriation is desired, return without rights guarantees is not acceptable to the community.

#### 4.3.2 Trust and Documentation Concerns

Findings revealed **widespread distrust** of the National Verification Card (NVC) process.

“ A Rohingya community leader explained: **We have heard stories — the NVC is not citizenship. It is a way to say we are foreigners in our own land.**

Even those who did not know the process could go through it because the persistent memory of unfulfilled promises made them suspicious. The knowledge of the National Verification Card (NVC) process is divided as about a half (52%) has heard of the process. But hope that the NVC will lead to citizenship is very limited. More than 9 out of 10 (92%) people who are aware of the NVC are skeptical that it would be a genuine means on the way to the citizenship and safe returns.

#### 4.3.3 Information Channels on Repatriation

When seeking updates about Myanmar and repatriation, findings indicate that information on repatriation is overwhelmingly mediated through informal networks rather than official or humanitarian sources. More than half (52%) depend on friends and relatives within camps or host communities, while nearly half (48%) rely on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Although refugees are officially restricted from owning SIM cards in the camps, this apparent contradiction reflects widespread reliance on informal access through shared devices, borrowed SIMs, and host community networks. Formal channels, such as humanitarian actors or government offices, appear to play a limited role in shaping perceptions.



Community leaders confirmed heavy reliance on **informal networks**:  
**“Most news comes from relatives who call from Myanmar or from social media. Sometimes it is true, sometimes it is not.”**

This dependency on unverified channels has led to rumor-driven expectations, as one youth participant put it:  
**“One day someone says we go back next month, the next day they say it will never happen. It makes us confused and tired.”**

The heavy reliance on informal and social media sources increases the risk of **misinformation** influencing community expectations and decisions.

#### 4.3.4 Barriers for the repatriation

Several barriers emerge from the findings:

1. Security guarantees remain unmet, with no credible assurance of protection from violence in areas of return.
2. Citizenship and documentation issues are unresolved, and the NVC process is widely distrusted.
3. Livelihood and freedom of movement restrictions in Myanmar have not been lifted, making sustainable reintegration questionable.
4. Lack of credible communication channels means that communities are operating with limited or unclear information about political negotiations and bilateral/multilateral processes.

Community feedback aligns strongly with quantitative concerns, identifying **security, rights, and livelihoods** as critical barriers.

Host community stakeholders also voiced **concerns about rushed repatriation**:  
**“If they go back without safety, they will come again. It must be permanent this time.”**

Some Rohingya women feared family separation risks:  
**“What if my husband’s name is on the list but mine is not? We cannot be split apart.”**

#### 4.3.5 Community Sentiment on Process

While there is no direct survey question about the bilateral, multilateral, or tripartite approaches, the patterns of skepticism toward existing mechanisms — especially the NVC — indicate that repatriation efforts will face significant trust deficits unless accompanied by tangible, visible changes in Myanmar’s legal and security environment.

### 4.4 Policy Gaps and Long-Term Needs for Rights Protection, Resilience, and Empowerment

#### 4.4.1 Perceived Effectiveness of Current Policies and Interventions

Findings reveal a perception gap between policy intent and on-the-ground outcomes.

Host community leaders often framed interventions as unevenly distributed:  
**“Projects come with good ideas, but they leave quickly or only focus on certain areas.”**

Rohingya PWD group participants expressed frustration at being invisible in program design:  
**“They say services are for everyone, but the path to the clinic is not accessible for us. How is that equal?”**

Survey responses suggest that existing interventions are seen as only partially effective in addressing long-term needs. FGD participants expressed neutral or uncertain views when asked about the accessibility and fairness of services. This uncertainty signals a lack of transparency and limited community involvement in decision-making.

Humanitarian and development programs have provided essential aid but have not significantly shifted the dependency dynamic, especially for Rohingya communities, who remain restricted from formal employment. Host communities, while benefiting from some economic opportunities, report that local infrastructure and public services are increasingly overburdened.

#### 4.4.2 Key Gaps in Service Delivery and Protection

Several gaps stand out clearly from the data:

**Economic Opportunities** – Across both communities, overall the most urgent need identified was increased income and job creation. Over half (55%) prioritized livelihoods as the single most important improvement for their families.

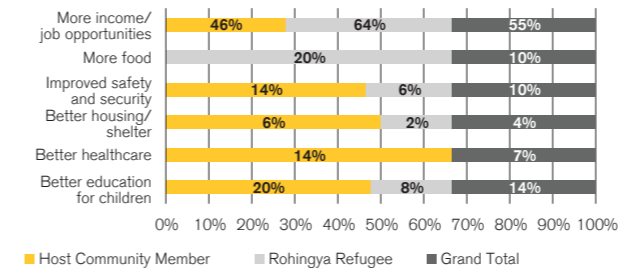
The findings shows that "More income/job opportunities" is the single most urgent need for both communities.

- Rohingya Refugees: **64%** cited this as their top priority.
- Host Community: **46%** cited this as their top priority.

#### The Survival Divergence:

- **Rohingya Community:** The second highest priority is **"More food" (20%)**, highlighting a basic survival struggle. Education (8%) and Shelter (2%) rank much lower.
- **Host Community:** Their priorities are more diversified. **"Better education" (20%)** and **"Improved safety" (14%)** follow income, suggesting a focus on development and security rather than just subsistence.

Figure 21: Key Gaps in Service Delivery and Protection - Economic Opportunities



Rohingya men stressed the link between livelihoods and dignity:  
**“We do not want only food. We want to work, to stand on our own feet.”**

Host community youth emphasized the need for skills to compete in a changing local economy:  
**“NGOs give training in the camps, but we also need training here, otherwise we are left behind.”**

**Youth Engagement** – Drug abuse, lack of education, and unemployment were the top challenges facing youth, indicating a need for targeted interventions combining skills development, vocational training, and protection programs.

Rohingya youth identified boredom and idleness as a driver of risky behaviors:  
**“With nothing to do, young people fall into bad habits.”**

Host youth groups echoed this, calling for sports, cultural, and vocational programs.





**Gender Equality in Access** – Nearly half (46%) reported that women and girls do not have equal access to services and support, reflecting persistent barriers in mobility, safety, and cultural norms. Rohingya women cited **mobility restrictions** and safety concerns as barriers to participation:

*"Even if a program is good, if it is far, we cannot go without a male relative."*

*Refugee women and girls from the camp taking part in IRC's tailoring initiatives*

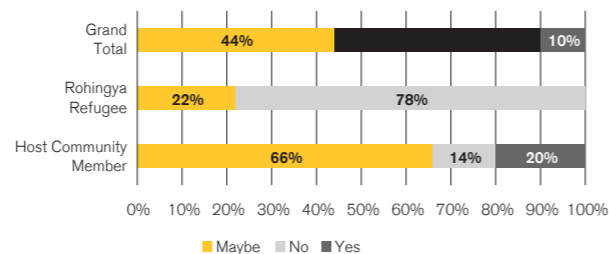
**The Rohingya Community "No":** There is a stark denial of gender equality among Rohingya Community. 78% of Rohingya Community explicitly said **"No"**, women do not have equal access.

**The Host "Maybe":** The Host Community response is characterized by uncertainty. The majority (66%) selected **"Maybe"**, with only **14%** saying "No" and **20%** saying "Yes."

This huge gap (78% vs 14% for "No") indicates that gender-based barriers are either far more severe in the camps, or the refugee population is much more acutely aware of them.

*Rohingya Youth from the camp participated in the IRC's 120hrs Skill Development training to learn Solar Panel Repairing, gas stove Repairing and swing*

Figure 22: Key Gaps in Service Delivery and Protection- Gender Equality in Access



**Participation in Decision-Making** – Women, youth, and persons with disabilities are largely excluded from community decision-making processes, limiting their ability to influence policies and programs that affect them. Host women noted that meetings are often tokenistic:

*"They invite us to listen, but the decisions are already made."*

**Accountability Mechanisms** – In total, a majority (69%) either did not know about reporting channels for misconduct, among them who are aware of the system, only 28% found them effective. This undermines trust and deters survivors of abuse or exploitation from seeking redress. Both communities described reporting systems as distant and unclear:

**“ If we complain, maybe they listen, but nothing changes. So why complain? ”**

– Host man, Kil.

**Universal Ignorance:** The dominant finding here is a lack of awareness.

- **Host Community: 76%** said "I don't know."
- **Rohingya Community: 62%** said "I don't know."

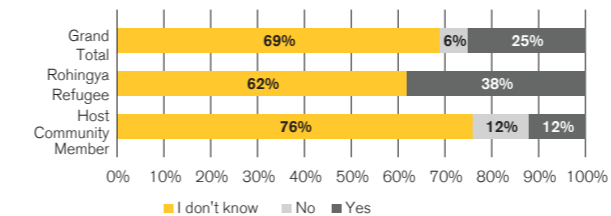
**A Broken Feedback Loop:** If the majority of the population does not know these mechanisms exist, then the mechanisms are functionally useless. This explains the "Perception of Fairness" deficit seen in other sections—people cannot trust a system they don't know how to engage with.

**Refugee Awareness:** Interestingly, 38% of Refugees said "Yes," they are aware, which is higher than the Host Community (12%). This might be due to the high density of aid organizations in the camps conducting awareness campaigns, even if they haven't reached everyone.



Refugee youth from the camp taking part in IRC's Vocational Training (Welding) Initiative

Figure 23: Key Gaps in Service Delivery and Protection- Accountability Mechanisms



Protection gaps don't stop with gender. Children are at risk of child labor, early marriage, unsafe learning and pressures to join armed groups. Youth face risks of drugs, harassment and recruitment at nighttime in the context of weak security. Elderly persons identified neglect in terms of healthcare, mobility and basic support, and PWDs identified with exclusion in education, training and in decision-making. In the communities in question, insecurity after sundown, vulnerability to crime exposure, and lack of legal assistance or dependable information delays resilience.

#### 4.4.3 Alignment Between Humanitarian and Development Efforts

While humanitarian actors remain central in-service provision, there is a disconnect between short-term aid delivery and longer-term development strategies.

- Most households reported only partial or occasional consultation by aid organizations.
- Where feedback mechanisms exist, the most common outcome is "listened to but no change," highlighting a gap between consultation and actual responsiveness.

Findings show that communities perceive a lack of coordination between short-term relief and long-term planning.

**“ Host community stakeholders pointed to overlapping projects with little continuity: Every year a new NGO comes, starts something, then leaves. There is no follow-through. ”**

**“ Rohingya leaders emphasized the need for programs that build independence: If we keep depending on aid, we will never be ready to stand after repatriation. ”**

#### 4.4.4 Community Perspectives on Policy Priorities

From community perspectives, several priority areas emerged which will reinforce the need for integrated, multi-sectoral policy approaches:

- **Livelihoods & Self-Reliance** – Seen as the foundation for dignity and reduced tension. Job creation and income-generating opportunities were the most common priority for both host and Rohingya respondents.
- **Education & Skills Training** – Demand is high for expanded schooling for children and vocational skills programs for adults, especially youth and women. Called "the only inheritance we can give to our children" by one Rohingya mother.
- **Healthcare & Infrastructure** – Access to quality health services, better housing, clean water, and road improvements were cited as core needs. Especially maternal care and disability access.
- **Safety & Protection** – Enhanced physical security and stronger GBV prevention measures were key concerns, particularly for women and girls.

#### 4.4.5 Integration of Intergenerational Perspectives

The findings underscore those intergenerational vulnerabilities are not being systematically addressed in current policy frameworks:

- For children, educational access and protection from exploitation remain pressing concerns. Rohingya children fear lifelong statelessness:

**“ Will I still be called a refugee when I am a man? ”**

– Rohingya boy, 15

- For youth, unemployment and exposure to risky behaviors pose long-term social stability risks. Host youth worry about lost opportunities due to resource competition:

**“ We miss scholarships and jobs because the area is seen as already getting aid. ”**

- For women, lack of equal access and participation perpetuates dependency and marginalization. Rohingya women fear their daughters will inherit their restrictions:

**“ We dream of a different life for them, but it is the same as ours ”**



# Discussion

## 5.1 Rights, Protection, and Resilience

The results indicate an evident decline in access to vital services including education, healthcare, shelter, food, and livelihoods for both Rohingya refugees and host communities. These trends resemble protracted refugee situation patterns outlined in the literature, whereby long-term displacement saturates infrastructure and reduces the quality and equity of service delivery.

Protection challenges are severe and multidimensional. Disproportionately, women, children, and youth remain negatively affected, facing heightened risks of school dropout, economic exploitation, restricted mobility, child marriage, and gender-based violence. Qualitative findings also reveal intimate partner violence and sexual exploitation, including reports of harassment and rape, as pressing but under-addressed concerns.

Prolonged displacement has led to significant protection risks with children and youth who are particularly at risk of recruitment by armed groups, trafficking, and exploitation. Abductions, extortion and movement restrictions further restrict safety and card to services, leaving a lot reliant on aid. This are exacerbated by weak justice systems and exclusion of less-connected households. Insecurity is at its most acute at night when risks of violence, theft and harassment are greatly enhanced.

Psychological stress is intensified by long-term uncertainty, lack of long-lasting solutions, and aid dependency, eroding dignity and resilience. While social networks are helping to cope, their weakening has led to negative coping strategies such as meal reduction, early marriage, child labor, and unsafe migration. Environmental degradation-deforestation, water scarcity and disasters-compounds livelihoods, protection, and adaptive capacity.

## 5.2 Social Cohesion and Relationships

There is mostly a neutral or friendly interrelationship between Rohingya and host communities, with not much frank enmity. Trust is however eroded by lingering tensions, which are based on the competitions over resources, pressure on services and perceived inequities in the distribution of aid. Such dynamics are in line with other pieces of literature that posit that resource scarcity and perceived unfairness units are primary sources of tension in protracted displacement circumstances.

Solidarity moments especially during the period of crisis (like during floods) serve as evidence of the possibilities of relations of cooperation. Nevertheless, such interactions are frequently ad hoc and act as necessity-driven as opposed to being part of regular social life. Mutual support in each community tends to be high, although conflicts, particularly between or among leaders or between generations, may dilute this.

The low level of women, young, and people with disabilities in the decision-making process, also hinders the possibility of developing inclusive social cohesion and resilience among individuals.

## 5.3 Feasibility of Repatriation

A desire to return to Myanmar is common to all Rohingya respondents however, this should occur under the condition that they can obtain citizenship, security, ownership of land rights and movement. The conditions have been in line with the international legal provisions of safe, voluntary and dignified return.

The suspicion against the National Verification Card (NVC) exercise is general because of past resentments and a lack of trust of Myanmar wanting to give full rights. Sources involved in information about repatriation mainly include relatives and social media thus augmenting the chances of misinformation and variable expectations.

With no currently verifiable security guarantees, outstanding citizenship concerns and ongoing restrictions on livelihoods in Myanmar, the full repatriation goal would seem implausible without high-order political process and ongoing international efforts to engage.

## 5.4 Policy Gaps and Pathways for Action

Humanitarian support has held back collapse but failed to target structural impediments to self-reliance, and sustainable stability. Some of the gaps are lack of economic opportunities, poor youth participation, gender inequality in access of services, and poor accountability measures. Coordination between humanitarian and development actors remains insufficient, with fragmented interventions and limited follow-up. Policies rarely incorporate intergenerational perspectives, missing opportunities to break cycles of vulnerability for children and youth.

The findings point to the need for an integrated humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) approach, aligning immediate relief with long-term capacity building. This requires equitable investment in host community infrastructure, targeted livelihood programs for both communities, gender- and age-responsive service delivery, and strengthened community participation in decision-making.

## 5.5 Perspectives on Durable Solutions: Beyond Repatriation

While policy deliberations about durable solutions are often narrowly cast about repatriation, the survey data require a broader understanding of durable solutions that includes safety, dignity and self-reliance. The data suggests that for the Rohingya community, the idea of a 'solution' is inherently associated with risk. An overwhelming 100% of the refugee respondents agreed (of whom 74% strongly agreed) that having no real solution to their situation in the

long run, whether that be repatriation, resettlement or integration, is one of the main reasons that creates psychological stress and vulnerability. This confirms the present state of affairs 'limbo', is structurally damaging regardless of the ultimate geographic outcome.

In terms of the processes needed to bring about a durable solution, on the basis of the priorities expressed by the refugees, it appears to have strong preference for economic empowerment as a prerequisite for stability. When surveyed about their highest priority needs, 64% of the refugees responded with 'More income/job opportunities', which is much higher than the other categories. This means that for refugees, 'durability' means not only their physical return to Myanmar, but will also restore their agency and ability to help themselves. Therefore, any solution process that is viable must have as a priority the legalization of livelihoods and the skills development process, turning the waiting time from one of dependence into one of preparation.

Regarding the actors who are expected to be at the forefront in these efforts, the data brings to light a complex vacuum. With 76% of refugees reporting that traditional forms of community leadership have become weak and only 14% trust the host community there is a distinct lack of faith in local or traditional structures to deliver these solutions. Consequently, the need for international humanitarian actors is critical. However, a gap remains: 62% of the refugees do not know of accountability mechanisms, which seems to suggest that, while they are dependent on these international actors, the means by which to actively participate or express their specific preferences for repatriation or resettlement is opaque. A truly durable solution means not just a political agreement, but the creation of a transparent, refugee-led consultative process that overcomes this trust gap.



## Chapter 06

# Recommendations

The following recommendations are directly derived from the evidence gathered through surveys, FGDs, and KIs. Each proposed action corresponds to a documented challenge in the findings — particularly those affecting women, youth, and children — and aims to operationalize community-identified priorities within the present humanitarian and development realities of Cox's Bazar. The recommendations are thus framed not as abstract aspirations but as actionable responses to the documented erosion of rights, protection gaps, and intergenerational vulnerabilities.



## 6.1 Short-Term (1–2 years)

### Humanitarian Community, UNHCR, Donors

- **Strengthen community health strategies** by expanding basic service delivery points, restoring closed health posts, and improving referral linkages between camp health facilities and host health centers. Prioritize maternal care, disability-inclusive services, and psychosocial support.
- **Enhance child protection systems** by scaling up safe spaces, community child protection committees, and monitoring mechanisms to address child labor, early marriage, and recruitment risks.
- **Youth engagement programs** to reduce idleness and risky behaviors (e.g., drug use, recruitment) through sports, vocational training, and cultural initiatives in both camps and host areas.
- **Ensure gender-sensitive programming** by creating safe mobility options (escort services, transport subsidies) for women and adolescent girls to access health, education, and skills programs.
- **Promote transparent information systems** — establish community helpdesks and use radio/megaphones/WhatsApp groups for timely, accurate updates on services, repatriation, and rights.
- **Targeting Intergenerational Needs**— In alignment with the study's findings, all short-term interventions should explicitly target intergenerational groups. For instance, livelihood training should pair youth employment support with adult mentorship models to strengthen social cohesion; maternal health outreach must include adolescent reproductive-health education; and community child-protection mechanisms should integrate elder support roles to bridge generational trust and caregiving.



## 6.2 Medium-Term (3–5 years)

Given current resource and operational constraints in Cox's Bazar, the following actions are prioritized based on feasibility and cost-effectiveness. They focus on scaling existing initiatives rather than launching new parallel structures. Priority should be given to actions that can demonstrate measurable impact within 24–36 months, using existing local government and NGO delivery channels.

### Government of Bangladesh (GoB), Humanitarian & Development Partners, Donors

- **Livelihoods and self-reliance:** Pilot market-linked vocational training, home-based businesses, and skills certification programs for refugees and hosts. Survey findings show >50% of households prioritize livelihoods as their top need.
- **Education pathways:** Expand the Myanmar Curriculum Framework, provide non-formal education for out-of-school youth, and establish bridge programs for host students to mitigate service strain.
- **Accountability mechanisms:** Reform feedback and complaints systems by making them child- and gender-sensitive, accessible in evenings, and delivering visible follow-up.
- **Environmental resilience:** Launch joint host-refugee reforestation and soil conservation projects, linked to disaster risk reduction and local employment.
- **Community leadership training:** Build the capacity of women, youth, and PWDs to take part in decision-making through structured governance and leadership programs.
- **Leveraging Existing Programs:** Medium-term actions should build on established platforms such as the Joint Response Plan (JRP), ISCG sectoral coordination, and local government structures (Union Parishads and Upazila administrations). Rather than introducing new frameworks, scaling up successful ongoing initiatives – such as UNDP's "Strengthening Community Cohesion" initiatives and IRC's Economic Empowerment initiatives – would maximize efficiency and ensure continuity of outcomes.

**Conflict Sensitivity and Trust-Building:** All mid-term interventions should be underpinned by conflict-sensitive approaches that acknowledge aid-related grievances and social tensions. Actions include:

- Establishing joint Community Dialogue Platforms where host and Rohingya representatives discuss service concerns and rumor control.
- Developing trusted communication hubs in camps and unions to dispel misinformation on aid, security, and repatriation.
- Embedding peace education and mediation training in youth and women's programs to prevent rumor-driven conflict escalation.

**Stakeholder Responsibility Framework:** Each recommendation is accompanied by clear implementing responsibility:

- **Government of Bangladesh (GoB):** Policy authorization, regulatory reforms, and coordination with local government institutions.
- **Humanitarian and Development Agencies:** Program design, delivery, and community engagement aligned with GoB policy.
- **Donors:** Multi-year financing, monitoring support, and alignment with the Joint Response Plan (JRP).
- **Local Communities (Rohingya & Host):** Participation in decision-making, community feedback, and accountability mechanisms.

**Implementation Risks and Mitigation:** While the recommendations are designed to be pragmatic, operational constraints such as security incidents, night-time mobility restrictions, and shrinking humanitarian budgets may limit implementation. Programs should therefore:

- Conduct risk mapping before rollout, ensuring conflict-sensitive site selection.
- Enable accessible complaint and feedback systems that operate beyond daylight hours.
- Maintain contingency funds to sustain essential services during funding gaps or security lockdowns.

## 6.3 Long-Term (5+ years)

Government of Bangladesh, Government of Myanmar, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), UNHCR, and broader humanitarian and development agencies including IOM, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, and key INGOs

- **Comprehensive Refugee Policy Framework for Bangladesh:** Develop a national refugee strategy aligned with international standards (Global Compact on Refugees) that formalizes rights to education, health, and livelihoods, while recognizing host community needs.
- **Rights-based repatriation framework:** Engage Myanmar, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and UNHCR to ensure guarantees on citizenship, land restitution, freedom of movement, and safety before large-scale return.
- **Sustainable host-refugee development approach:** Integrate refugee assistance into local government planning (e.g., SDG-linked programs, local health and education budgets).
- **Regional cooperation:** Engage Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and neighboring countries to prevent trafficking/smuggling networks, support cross-border aid, and create regional burden-sharing mechanisms.
- **Multi-year funding commitments:** Donors to shift to predictable, long-term funding that bridges humanitarian and development needs, reducing aid dependency while investing in resilience.

## Chapter 07

# Conclusion

This study set out to examine the impacts of prolonged displacement on the rights, protection, resilience, and empowerment of Rohingya refugees and host communities in Cox's Bazar. The integrated quantitative and qualitative analysis demonstrates that the crisis has moved far beyond its initial humanitarian phase into a complex, protracted situation with deep social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

The facts reveal that both communities have increasingly become deprived of their access to the necessary services both in education and health, shelter, food, and ways of earning the livelihood. Women, children, and youth are the most vulnerable sections of the population. Constant limitations imposed on the livelihoods, environmental degradation, and an overworked infrastructure are weakening resilience and exposing people to aid dependency.

Rohingya-host relations are generally cordial by nature, though there is the strain of the race to resources and the feeling of inequality in receiving aid. Despite the times of solidarity, the trust is weak and the possibility to cooperate on a routine basis is also limited.

All Rohingya, however, aspire to repatriation on the condition of strict guarantees of citizenship, security, land rights, and free movement. Without any plausible promises and continued political development in Myanmar, the full-scale repatriation goal within a short time is unrealistic.

Gaps in policy and program delivery are evident: livelihoods remain restricted, service quality uneven, participation in decision-making limited, and accountability mechanisms underutilized or ineffective. Current interventions, though vital for preventing immediate collapse, are insufficient to address the structural barriers that perpetuate cycles of dependency and vulnerability.

Addressing these challenges will require a decisive shift from short-term humanitarian relief to integrated, rights-based strategies that combine humanitarian assistance with long-term development, social cohesion initiatives, and peacebuilding. Multi-sector coordination, equitable investment in host community development, and the active participation of both communities—especially women, youth, and marginalized groups—will be critical to building a future based on dignity, opportunity, and mutual respect.

Without such an integrated approach, the conditions that sustain vulnerability and tension will persist, locking both communities into a protracted humanitarian limbo. However, if the recommendations outlined in this report are acted upon—through coherent program development, targeted advocacy, and strategic policy engagement—there is an opportunity to foster resilience, restore rights, and create the foundations for durable solutions.

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