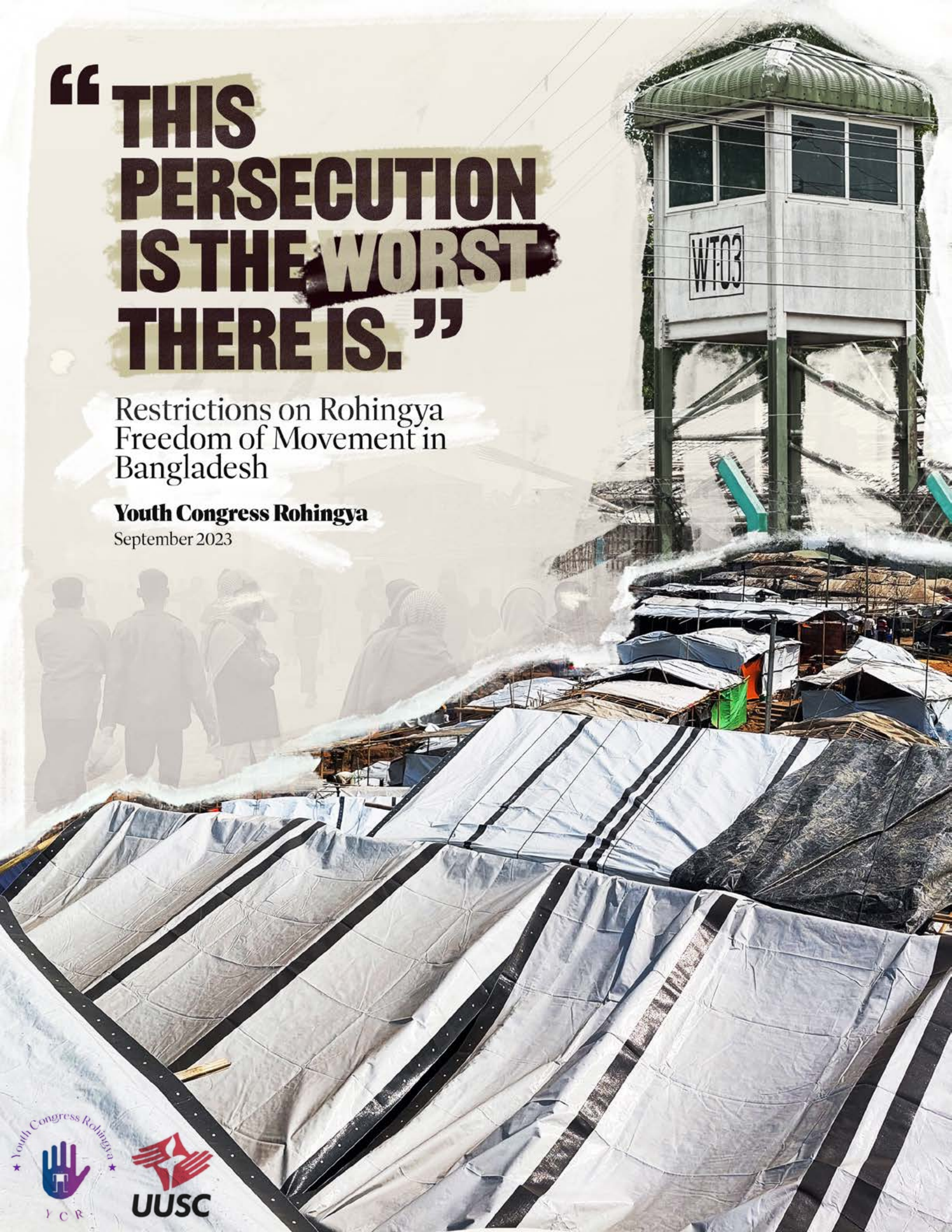


“ **THIS  
PERSECUTION  
IS THE WORST  
THERE IS.** ”

Restrictions on Rohingya  
Freedom of Movement in  
Bangladesh

**Youth Congress Rohingya**

September 2023





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# YCR ROHINGYA TEAM STATEMENT

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There is a saying in Rohingya, “Ugguá manshor zorurot noza niyore, hiba re modot gora nooza.” Meaning, “A person cannot be helped without knowing their need.” Unfortunately, our Rohingya communities have seen this very dynamic repeatedly played out in the refugee camps, as humanitarian actors and government officials administer aid to Rohingya communities while excluding our voices and leadership. This exclusion is particularly apparent for major programmatic and policy decisions. As a result of this lack of consultation and inclusion, Rohingya have found that the operations of the camps and the services provided are often ineffective. Low levels of capacity and education are generally the justifications given for this lack of consultation and lack of empowerment. These broad generalisations invalidate the skills, creativity, knowledge, and expertise possessed by the Rohingya community. The YCR team believes that the quality of this research not only sheds light on the important topics that we examine, but can also push back against the idea that Rohingya do not have the capacity to contribute to and lead on the humanitarian response for Rohingya in the camps.

In particular, YCR would like to highlight the following strengths of this project and other Rohingya-led projects. First, while international humanitarian organisations see frequent turnover and a consistent draining of institutional memory, Rohingya live in the camps permanently. We are experts on Rohingya community needs, the dynamics of the refugee camps, and the historical and cultural context of our people.

Second, because of this familiarity with the context, Rohingya-led efforts have the potential to be more effective in their operations. For example, Rohingya refugees generally do not feel comfortable speaking about sensitive topics in the camps. However, during this research, YCR prioritised cultural sensitivity and the use of Rohingya language when interacting with respondents and explained that the research was community led. Due to this approach, Rohingya were willing to share about incredibly sensitive topics including government restrictions, perspectives of armed groups, sexual violence, mental health, and others.

Third, because of intimate familiarity with camp dynamics, initiatives that are Rohingya led can adapt plans and programmes to an evolving security situation, safeguarding staff while continuing to be able to access areas that are difficult to reach, by recruiting localised staff in areas that are less safe or difficult to travel to.

Lastly, Rohingya CSOs can provide representation for the Rohingya community by collecting diverse Rohingya perspectives through representative, population-based research, such as this study. This is particularly important, as there is a lack of robust camp-based Rohingya institutions to represent our interests due to the suppression of these kinds of institutions both in Myanmar and in Bangladesh. Rohingya CSOs can assist in filling that void. The YCR team believes that Rohingya-led efforts such as this research should be expanded and could result in an improved service provision in many sectors of refugee life.

# REPORT CORRESPONDENCE

Because of the abuses detailed in this report perpetrated by government forces, no YCR members could be directly identified for fear of government backlash. For security reasons, YCR would like all correspondence related to this report to be directed to Andrew Riley (andrewkyleriley@gmail.com), an international researcher who assisted with this report.

## TERMS/ACRONYMS

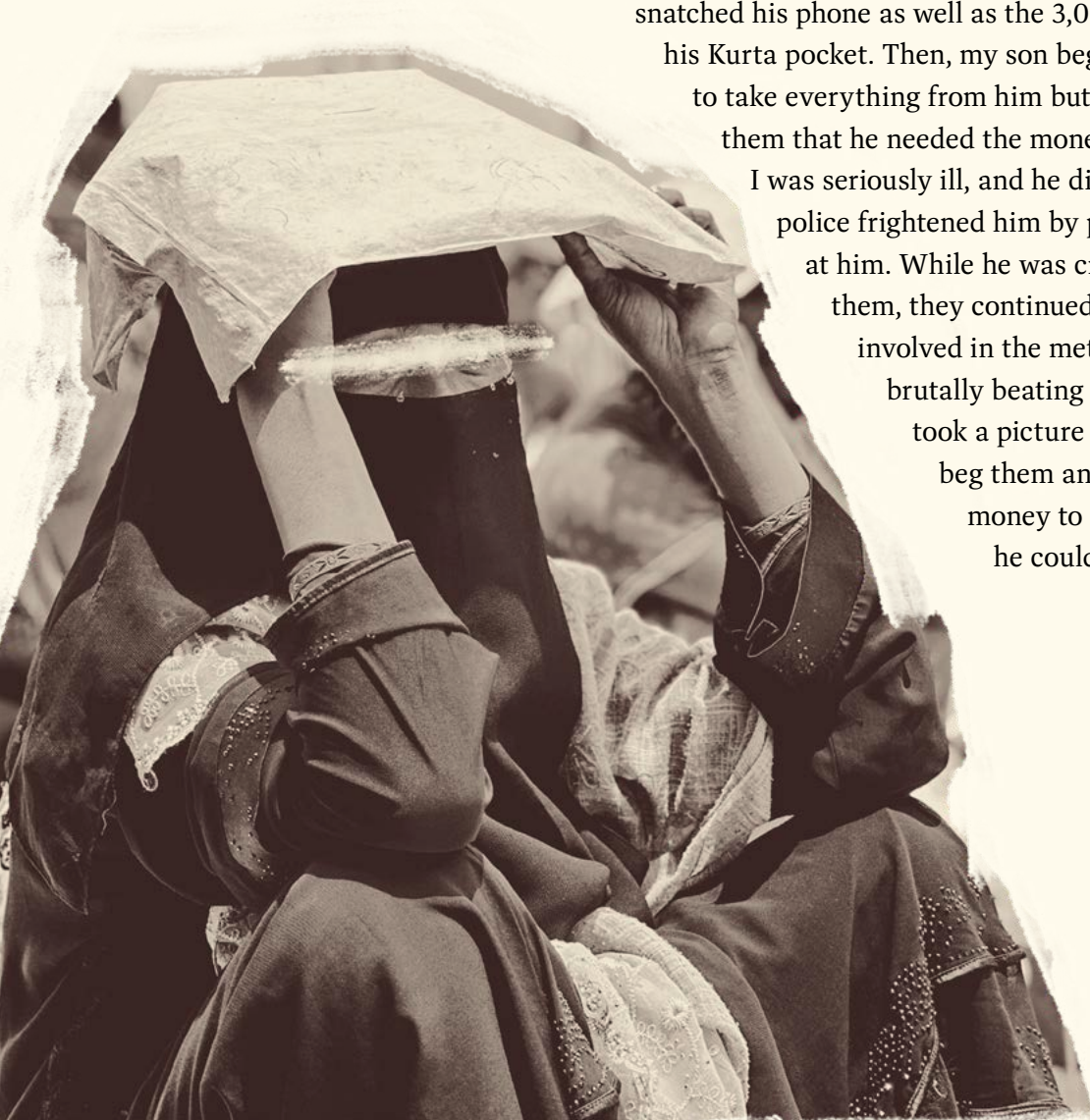
- APBn:** Armed Police Battalion: The police force primarily responsible for security in the camps.
- ARSA:** Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army: A Rohingya armed group operating in Myanmar and Bangladesh.
- BDT:** Bangladeshi Taka
- bKash:** Mobile money transfer application
- CIC:** Camp in Charge: Government-appointed leaders who are stationed in each refugee camp.
- CNG:** Small motorised transport commonly used in Bangladesh
- CSO:** Civil society organisation
- Eid al-Fitr:** An Islamic holiday that marks the end of the month-long Ramadan fasting.
- FDMN:** Forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals: The Government of Bangladesh does not refer to the Rohingya as refugees, and instead uses the term ‘forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals.’
- GoB:** Government of Bangladesh
- IDP:** Internally displaced person
- INGO:** International non-governmental organisation
- IPV:** Intimate Partner Violence
- Maji:** Government-appointed Rohingya leaders. The refugee camps are divided into small blocks, and each block has a maji that serves as its leader.
- MSF:** Médecins Sans Frontières: A humanitarian organisation providing medical services in the camps.
- NaSaKa:** A Myanmar border guard force composed of security forces, immigration, and customs officials tasked with imposing strict systems of draconian restrictions on the Rohingya population in Rakhine State, Myanmar.
- NSI:** National Security Intelligence: A GoB intelligence agency.
- NVC:** National Verification Card
- OIC:** Officer in charge: A high-level position in the Armed Police Battalion.
- RAB:** Rapid Action Battalion: An anti-crime and anti-terrorism unit of the Bangladesh Police.
- SGBV:** Sexual and gender-based violence
- SI:** Sub-inspector: A mid-level position in the Armed Police Battalion.
- UNHCR:** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: the United Nations refugee agency.
- USD:** United States Dollar
- WFP:** World Food Programme
- Yaba:** A drug made of methamphetamine laced with caffeine
- YCR:** Youth Congress Rohingya

# SAMIRA'S STORY

*Samira, a 45-year-old Rohingya woman, shared her experience with our team:* My husband was killed in Myanmar during the riot. I was terrified for my son's life because my husband had already been killed. I only came to Bangladesh to save his life. After moving to Bangladesh, I enrolled my son in an Arabic school. I'll never forget the terrifying incident that occurred in January of this year. That day, my world was turned upside down. I was critically ill and was referred to the MSF hospital in Kutupalong. After spending three days in the MSF hospital, I returned home. I requested that my relatives contact my son because I was missing him. He was coming home to see me after learning that I was very ill and had been admitted to the hospital. My son, who is 16 years old, wears a **Kurta (a loose collarless shirt worn by Islamic scholars)**, and is a successful **Hafiz (a Muslim who knows the Quran by heart)**. When he arrived at the checkpoint at Camp-8W, the police stopped him and began questioning him merely because of his Kurta. He told them where his house was, who his **Maji (local leader)** was, and where he was going. Two officers pointed guns at him from opposite sides, and another began beating him, accusing him of dealing meth. My son told them that he is not in any kind business and is only a student. Despite the fact that they

knew he was not involved, they beat and tortured him in an effort to get him to confess to being a part of the meth trade. They snatched his phone as well as the 3,000 BTD (28 USD) cash in his Kurta pocket. Then, my son began pleading with them to take everything from him but the cash, while telling them that he needed the money to care for me because I was seriously ill, and he didn't have a father. The police frightened him by pointing their weapons at him. While he was crying and begging with them, they continued to accuse him of being involved in the meth trade. Then, after brutally beating him to the ground, they took a picture of him. He continued to beg them and sob, pleading for the money to be returned to him so he could buy medicine for me.

**"IF I WERE TO PASS AWAY THAT DAY, NO ONE WOULD BE LEFT TO TAKE CARE OF MY CHILDREN.**





“ THIS PERSECUTION IS THE WORST THERE IS. ”

However, they gave him nothing in return (*Samira crying*). For more than two hours, they would not let my son leave. I had been calling him again and again. He abruptly revealed to me that the police had stopped him at the checkpoint. I called the police and informed them of my whereabouts and that I would be sending the *maji (local leader)* to them.

My son was then released. I had a stroke when my son told me what had happened to him there after he returned home. The stroke

could have killed me that day. Allah kept me alive. If I were to pass away that day, no one would be left to take care of my children. Their father is already gone. *This persecution is the worst there is.*

“DESPITE THE FACT THAT THEY KNEW HE WAS NOT INVOLVED, THEY BEAT AND TORTURED HIM IN AN EFFORT TO GET HIM TO CONFESS”



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five years ago, Samira's husband was killed in the brutal violence targeting the Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Hoping to find safety for herself and her young son, Samira crossed the border to create a makeshift home in the Bangladesh refugee camps. Although initially welcoming, Bangladesh has steadily implemented a growing web of restrictions on Rohingya living in the camps. Severe restrictions on freedom of movement have served as the basis for undermining other rights, including the ability to work, access education, assemble in groups, and participate in religious and cultural practices.

Bangladesh officials have forbidden Rohingya from leaving the camps and regularly prevent them from moving within the camps. To ensure compliance, the **Government of Bangladesh (GoB)** has surrounded the refugee camps with barbed wire fences and constructed checkpoints at the camp entrances and on the roads nearby. Those who do attempt to move often experience violence, harassment, extortion, and detention. Samira's son experienced this first-hand. As he was on his way to care for her after she was released from the hospital, he was detained by police at a checkpoint:

*"My son began pleading with them to take everything from him but the cash, while telling them that he needed the money to care for me because I was seriously ill, and he didn't have a father. The police frightened him by pointing their weapons at him... Then, after brutally beating him to the ground, they took a picture of him. He continued to beg them and sob, pleading for the money to be returned to him so he could buy medicine for me. However, they gave him nothing in return."*

This report reveals that experiences such as the one shared by Samira are commonplace in the refugee camps in southeastern Bangladesh. It is due to experiences such as Samira's that **Youth Congress Rohingya (YCR)**, a youth advocacy organisation, initiated a study to shed light on the existing restrictions on freedom of movement imposed in the camps by the government authorities. YCR initiated this study with the overall goal of collecting data that could be used to improve camp conditions. The research focused on how these restrictions are enforced and sought to understand the impacts of these restrictions on Rohingya life, including Rohingya livelihoods, education, healthcare, and relationships. Finally, YCR sought to understand Rohingya perceptions of these restrictions, including the reasons they exist. The study was conducted by a team of 14 Rohingya researchers, who facilitated 241 surveys and 58 in-depth interviews with Rohingya respondents from 30 different camps, as well as four interviews with police officers currently working in the camps. Based on this research, this report reveals important findings related to the following:

**POLICIES:** Ninety-nine percent of Rohingya survey respondents reported the existence of restrictions on freedom of movement in the camps, and 94 percent reported that these restrictions impact their daily lives. YCR documented government policies and practices that: 1) restrict Rohingya from leaving the camps unless they are granted explicit authorisation from camp authorities, 2) restrictions on movement inside the camps and when moving between camps, 3) the existence of a curfew that prevents Rohingya from moving in the evening, 4) restrictions on Rohingya ability to work both outside and inside the camps, 5) restrictions on Rohingya assembly, and 6) prohibitions on Rohingya ownership of smartphones and laptops. Armed Police Battalion (APBn) officers interviewed by YCR confirmed the existence and enforcement of the majority of these policies.



**ENFORCEMENT:** Sixty-two percent of Rohingya survey respondents reported that they had personally experienced punishments related to movement, and 96 percent reported that it was the **Armed Police Battalion (APBn)** that punished them. YCR documented several abuses perpetrated by APBn which are routinely utilised to enforce restrictions on freedom of movement, including arbitrary violence and detention, as well as forced labour and threats of forced relocation from their homes in the mainland camps to the undesirable Bhasan Char Island Camp.

**CORRUPTION:** This report reveals pervasive corruption of APBn and other camp authorities; 97.5 percent of survey respondents reported experience or knowledge of corruption in the camp security forces. Rohingya face relentless extortion when attempting to pass through checkpoints, transport goods and necessities, drive vehicles in the camps, circumvent checkpoints, participate in religious and cultural events, or avoid forced labour. YCR also documented the widespread practice of APBn falsification of evidence against Rohingya as an impetus for further extortion in the form of ‘fines’ for these falsified offences. In addition to committing extortion, this report demonstrates that APBn officers routinely confiscate money, market goods, and other valuable items being carried by Rohingya, including mobile phones and laptops.

**COMPARISONS TO MYANMAR:** Respondents often weighed their current situation in Bangladesh against the violence and discrimination experienced prior to 2017 when they lived in Myanmar. Rohingya staunchly emphasised the idea that APBn persecution and violence in Bangladesh was comparable to the persecution perpetrated by the Myanmar Government and military forces, often reporting that the restrictions on their basic rights in the camps were similar or worse than the systemic human rights violations experienced in Myanmar. This sentiment was supported by a majority of survey respondents, 65 percent of whom reported that they believed the restrictions on movement in Bangladesh are worse than those they experienced previously in Myanmar.

**REASONS FOR RESTRICTIONS:** Due to the fact that government restrictions violate Rohingya rights, the vast majority of Rohingya respondents rejected the government narrative that restrictions are necessary to protect Rohingya. The majority of respondents believed that restrictions were intentionally implemented by the government to produce a coercive environment that will force Rohingya to relocate to the undesirable Bhasan Char Island Camp or return to Myanmar. In fact, 72 percent of Rohingya survey respondents believed that the restrictions were in place to attempt to displace Rohingya from the camps.

**IMPACTS ON ROHINGYA:** The majority of Rohingya reported that movement restrictions have severe impacts precluding them from being able to access other basic rights, such as seeking out health-care, finding work or livelihood opportunities, accessing education, meeting with family or friends, acquiring daily necessities, and participating in religious practices or cultural events. Rohingya respondents reported that, for Rohingya who are in crisis, such as patients with emergency medical needs or those fleeing violence or seeking safety from fires in the camps, movement restrictions and infrastructure such as barbed wire fencing, have been life threatening. Moreover, Rohingya were not confident that humanitarian actors were effective in advocating with the government

to reduce restrictions and improve camp conditions. When survey respondents were asked if they believed organisations working in the camps are effective in advocating with the government to improve conditions for Rohingya, 93 percent said ‘not at all’ or ‘a little,’ and only 7 percent said ‘quite a bit’ or ‘extremely.’

**ROHINGYA REFLECTIONS:** Ninety-four percent of survey respondents reported that their mental health was highly impacted by movement restrictions. Rohingya expressed extreme hopelessness and despair due to the restrictions. Some respondents reported the desire to stop living or to die by suicide due to the suffering caused by restrictions. Many expressed feelings of dehumanisation and humiliation, and others expressed sorrow at the thought of their children and future generations continuing to suffer in the camps with no end in sight. Others expressed the belief that restrictions clearly violate their basic human rights.

*Samira offered her own sobering assessment, “This persecution is the worst there is.”*



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings detailed in this report, YCR offers 39 recommendations addressed to the Government of Bangladesh, the international community, and humanitarian organisations working in the camp, with the aim of improving freedom of movement and access to other basic human rights for Rohingya living in the refugee camps. Although a brief summary of the recommendations is provided here, please see the full list of detailed recommendations at the conclusion of the report.

## TO THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH

- Eliminate restrictions on freedom of movement within the refugee camps by re-voking official policies that restrict the movement of refugees.
- Remove refugee camp curfews.
- Immediately halt the current strategy of using restrictions to coerce Rohingya to relocate to Bhasan Char Island Camp or return to Myanmar.
- Remove policies that prevent Rohingya from working both inside and outside of the refugee camps.
- Ensure transparency and clarity in the communication of camp policies, restrictions, and laws.
- Consider replacing the APBn with the Bangladesh military as the force tasked with camp security as an immediate solution to combat violence, extortion, and other corrupt practices.
- Adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption, violence, SGBV, extortion, theft, and forced labour by government forces operating within the refugee camps.
- Investigate and prosecute APBn abuses against Rohingya, including cases of violence, extortion, theft, falsification of evidence, arbitrary detention, and arbitrary prohibitions against movement.
- Remove all barbed wire fences surrounding the mainland refugee camps.

## TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Donor governments and United Nations organisations should end the current approach of government appeasement by prioritising the rights of Rohingya living in Bangladesh and holding Government of Bangladesh officials accountable for abuses against Rohingya refugees.
- Donor governments should advocate with Government of Bangladesh officials for the removal of restrictions on Rohingya movement, work, and education and the immediate end to abuses used to enforce restrictions such as violence, extortion, and forced labour.
- The international community, including United Nations agencies, donor governments, media, and human rights organisations should raise awareness and engage

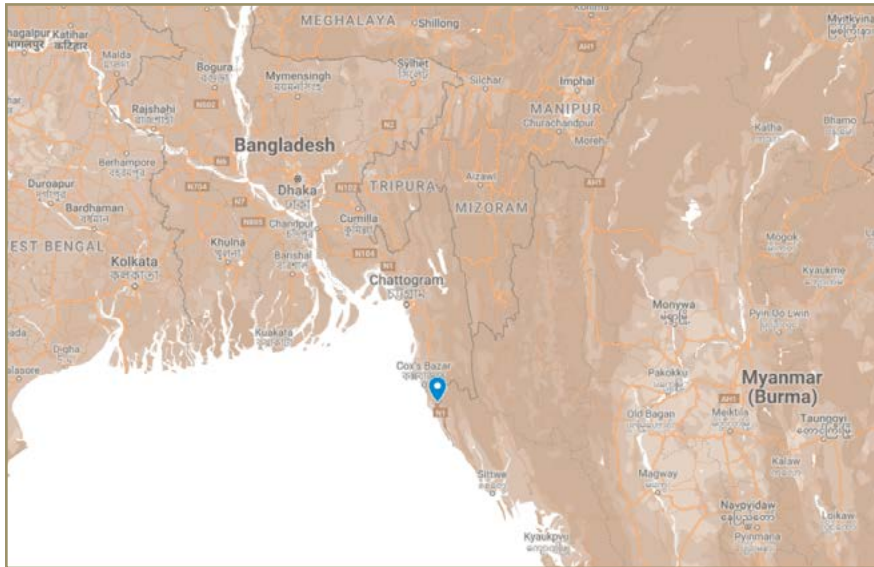


in efforts to put diplomatic pressure on the Government of Bangladesh to respect the right of Rohingya refugees to freedom of movement as recognized under international law.

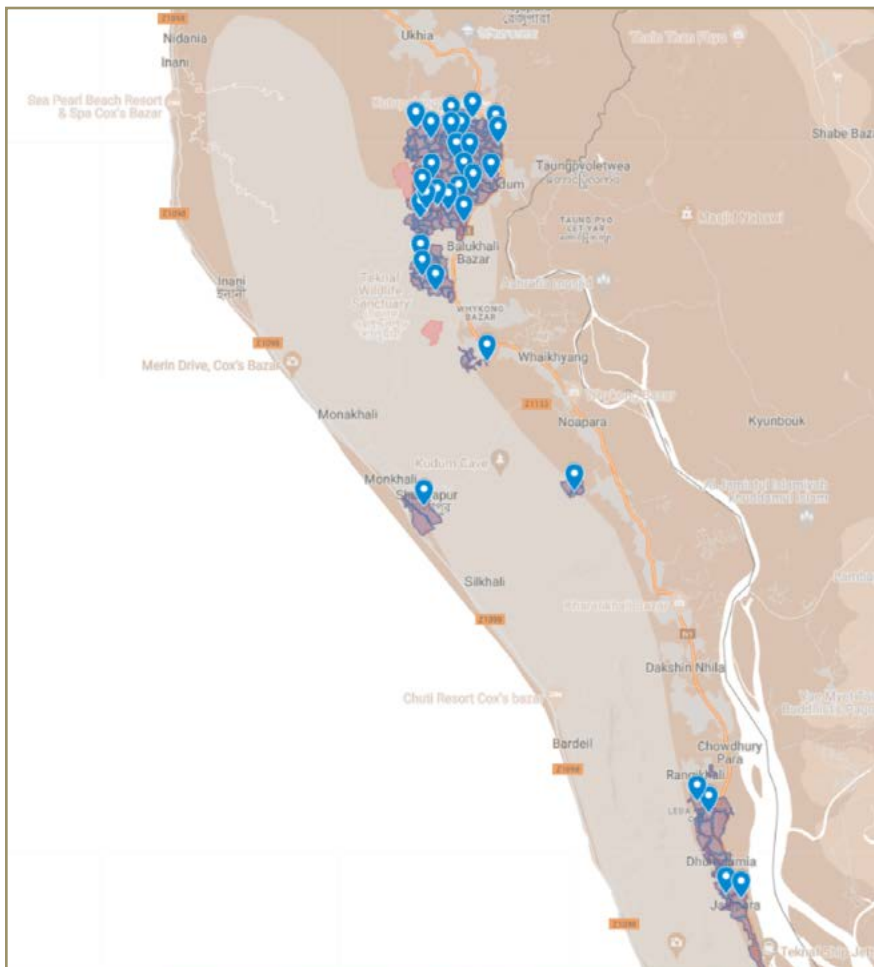
- Human rights organisations and international actors should investigate Bangladesh for violations of international covenants ratified by the Government of Bangladesh related to the treatment of Rohingya.
- International donors should provide financial support to Rohingya civil society organisations working on human rights, anti-corruption, and nonviolent resistance initiatives within the camps.

## TO HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS

- UNHCR and other humanitarian organisations should publicly state their limitations regarding the protection of Rohingya refugees and the inability of the humanitarian sector to fulfil the basic needs of Rohingya refugees. This will dispel the myth that the humanitarian response is able to effectively provide protection to Rohingya, or meet their basic needs and will undermine the incorrect GoB justification for restrictions, namely, that Rohingya refugees have all of their basic needs fulfilled by humanitarian organisations within the refugee camps.
- Collaborate with the government to develop and implement training programmes for **camp in charge (CIC)** staff and security forces on human rights principles, conflict resolution, rule of law, and effective communication strategies.
- Develop advocacy approaches that prioritise strategic, quiet advocacy related to the human rights situation of Rohingya. Provide information on the abuses committed by security forces to humanitarian headquarter offices, human rights organisations, embassies in Bangladesh, and journalists/media covering the Rohingya crisis.
- Develop and implement programmes that empower Rohingya youth with skills, knowledge, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.
- Strengthen food security measures to ensure an adequate and consistent supply of nutritious food for all refugees in the camp, addressing the persistent issue of hunger and malnutrition.
- Improve healthcare facilities, living conditions, and ease of travel for healthcare purposes within the camp, ensuring that refugees have access to necessary medical services and live in humane and dignified conditions.
- Respect the experience and qualifications of Rohingya in their roles working in the humanitarian sector by providing adequate payment and ensuring humane treatment without partiality or discrimination.



**LOCATION OF ROHINGYA REFUGEE CAMPS IN BANGLADESH**



**DATA COLLECTION SITES IN 30 DIFFERENT REFUGEE CAMPS**

## SYSTEMATIC RESTRICTIONS IN MYANMAR

The Rohingya in Rakhine State, Myanmar have been the target of systematic persecution by the Myanmar government through discriminatory policies and severe restrictions that have been in place for decades. In 1982, the former military junta passed a new citizenship law effectively stripping Rohingya of citizenship. By stripping their citizenship<sup>01</sup>, Myanmar effectively barred the Rohingya from their right to civil, political, economic, social, and cultural freedoms while exclusionary practices continued to escalate over the following years.

As part of a strategy to enforce more extreme restrictions, the Myanmar government deployed a special border guard force, ‘NaSaKa,’ to Rakhine State in 1992. NaSaKa, composed of security forces, immigration, and customs officials, was tasked with imposing strict systems of draconian restrictions on the Rohingya population<sup>02</sup>. These included restrictions related to documentation, freedom of movement, marriage, childbirth, work, education, religion, and healthcare<sup>03</sup>. Rohingya in Myanmar were not allowed to travel from township to township, limits were placed on the number of children they could have, and they were unable to build mosques or repair those that were damaged. Restrictions were enforced through checkpoints, extortion, arrest, torture, and violence<sup>04</sup>. Though NaSaKa was disbanded in 2013, as of 2023, these severe restrictions are still in effect in Rakhine State and are enforced by the police, army, and immigration officials<sup>05</sup>. Human rights organizations have determined that these restrictions amount to crimes against humanity, and a 2015 legal analysis by Yale Law School of the situation in Rakhine State found “strong evidence that genocide is being committed against Rohingya.”<sup>06,07</sup> Citing these restrictions as well as violence perpetrated against Rohingya in Myanmar, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar concluded that “the factors allowing the inference of genocidal intent are present,” and that “there is a serious risk that genocidal actions may occur or recur, and that Myanmar is failing in its obligation to prevent genocide, to investigate genocide and to enact effective legislation criminalizing and punishing genocide.”<sup>08</sup>

Over the last several decades, the Myanmar government also targeted Rohingya culture and identity both through their own policies of persecution and by supporting ultranationalist Buddhist organisations that used anti-Muslim messaging to spread hate towards Rohingya<sup>09</sup>. An investigation by The New York Times also found that the Myanmar military implemented a years-long covert operation to disseminate hate against Muslims and the Rohingya through popular lifestyle Facebook pages and profiles<sup>10</sup>. One Rohingya **civil society organisation (CSO)** conducting research on this matter has called the campaign targeting Rohingya identity ‘cultural genocide.’<sup>11</sup> A main feature of this identity erasure was to disenfranchise Rohingya as an ethnic group native to Myanmar. One strategy used to accomplish this was brand-

<sup>01</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. [Study on Community Perceptions of Citizenship, Documentation and Rights in Rakhine State](#). 2016.

<sup>02</sup> International Crisis Group. [Myanmar’s “Nasaka”: Disbanding an Abusive Agency](#). 2013.

<sup>03</sup> Fortify Rights. [The Torture in my Mind](#). 2020.

<sup>04</sup> Fortify Rights. [Policies of Persecution](#). 2014.

<sup>05</sup> Democratic Voice of Burma. [Rohingyas Continue to be Persecuted Despite Nasaka Disbandment](#). 2013.

<sup>06</sup> Fortify Rights. [Policies of Persecution](#). 2014.

<sup>07</sup> Fortify Rights. [Persecution of the Rohingya Muslims: Is Genocide Occurring in Myanmar’s Rakhine State](#). 2015.

<sup>08</sup> Human Rights Council. [Detailed Findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar](#). 2019.

<sup>09</sup> The Irrawaddy. [Ma Ba Tha is a Necessity: Military](#). 2019.

<sup>10</sup> The New York Times. [A Genocide Incited on Facebook, With Posts From Myanmar’s Military](#). 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Rohingya Language Preservation Project. [First They Targeted our Language and Culture: Threats to Rohingya Language, Culture, and Identity in Myanmar and Bangladesh](#). 2022.



ing the Rohingya as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. They began calling the Rohingya ‘Bengali,’ stating that Rohingya don’t exist, and often forced or coerced Rohingya to accept **National Verification Cards (NVCs)** that effectively identified Rohingya as foreigners. Human rights organisations have determined that the NVC process has violated customary international law and core human rights treaties.<sup>12,13</sup>

## RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT IN MYANMAR

For decades, Rohingya freedom of movement has been severely restricted by the Myanmar government. Specific restrictions included not being able to travel from village to village or town to town without specific documentation from the local administration, being barred from entering certain communities, and from accessing facilities such as local hospitals or markets. Rohingya who live in camps for **internally displaced persons (IDPs)** were often confined within the boundaries of the camp<sup>14</sup>. The consequences of these restrictions were far reaching, severely impacting Rohingya in their ability to access work, healthcare, and education, among other fundamental human rights. These restrictions were enforced through violence, checkpoints, arbitrary detention, curfews, and extortion.<sup>15</sup> The intentions underpinning these systematic human rights violations, including the restrictions on movement, have been to weaken the Rohingya community to the point that they wouldn’t be able to raise their voices or stand for themselves. Ultimately, they were used to expel Rohingya from Myanmar.<sup>16</sup>

## STATE-SPONSORED VIOLENCE IN MYANMAR

Waves of state-sponsored violence against Rohingya have accompanied these restrictive and discriminatory policies. Large scale attacks against Rohingya resulted in waves of refugees seeking shelter in Bangladesh in 1978, 1991, 2012, and 2016, leading to the largest and most recent of these attacks in 2017.<sup>17</sup> These attacks, dubbed “clearance operations” by the Myanmar military, were initiated in response to attacks on police checkpoints by a militant group known as the **Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)**.<sup>18</sup> As part of these clearance operations, the Myanmar military and civilian collaborators burned Rohingya villages, indiscriminately killed civilians, and raped and sexually assaulted both women and men throughout Rakhine State.<sup>19,20</sup> The extreme violence resulted in the deaths of at least 9,400 Rohingya and the destruction of 354 Rohingya villages.<sup>21,22</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Fortify Rights. [Tools of Genocide](#). 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Fortify Rights. [Genocide by Attrition](#). 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Independent Rakhine Initiative. [Freedom of Movement in Rakhine State](#). 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Fortify Rights. [Policies of Persecution](#). 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Fortify Rights. [The Torture in my Mind](#). 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Fortify Rights. [They Gave Them Long Swords](#). 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Legal Action Worldwide. [They Took Me To A Dark Place: The Experiences and Needs of Rohingya Hijra and Male Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence](#). 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Médecins Sans Frontières. [No One was Left: Death and Violence Against the Rohingya in Rakhine State, Myanmar](#). 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch. [40 Rohingya Villages Burned Since October: Satellite Imagery Shows New Destruction in Rakhine State](#). 2017.

Fleeing this violence, a wave of more than 700,000 Rohingya escaped across the border into South-east Bangladesh, where the majority now live in the largest refugee camp in the world.<sup>23</sup> Due to the atrocities perpetrated against the Rohingya in 2017, a case has been brought against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice for its failure to observe its obligations under the genocide convention.<sup>24</sup>

Research conducted with Rohingya who were displaced to Bangladesh one year after the 2017 violence documented extremely high levels of trauma, depression, and anxiety symptoms, and demonstrated that systematic human rights violations and violence in Myanmar were the drivers of distress.<sup>25</sup> Further research has demonstrated that substandard living conditions in the refugee camps in Bangladesh exacerbate this distress.<sup>26</sup>

In 2021, four years after the extreme violence against Rohingya, the Myanmar Military seized power in a coup d'état, overruling the landslide election victory of the ruling party, the National League for Democracy. The military brutally suppressed the ensuing demonstrations against the coup and met the growing resistance around the country with similar tactics to those used against the Rohingya, namely violence, arbitrary imprisonment, torture, rape and sexual assault, and the destruction of villages.<sup>27,28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> World Food Programme. [Rohingya Crisis: A Firsthand Look Into The World's Largest Refugee Camp](#). 2022.

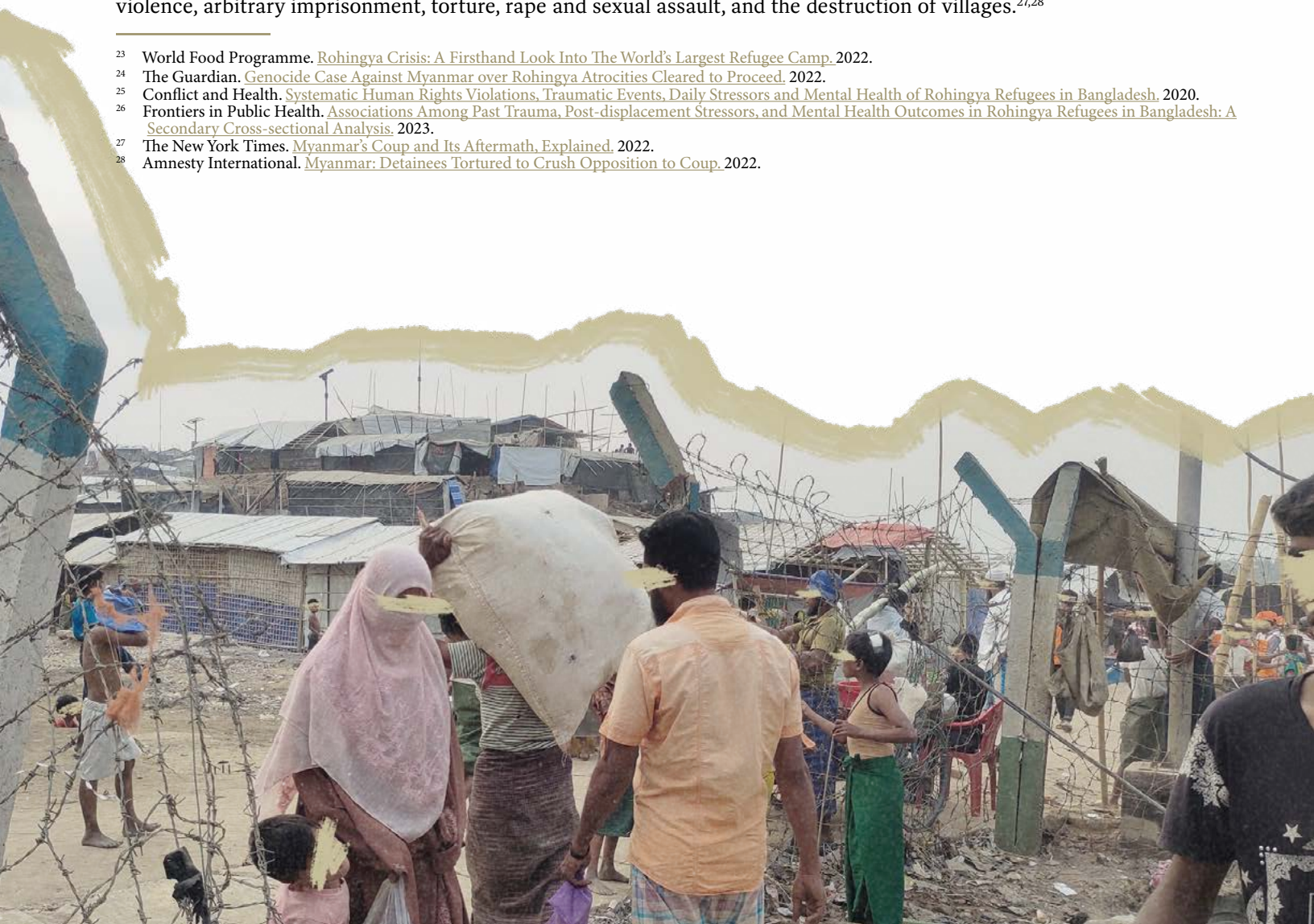
<sup>24</sup> The Guardian. [Genocide Case Against Myanmar over Rohingya Atrocities Cleared to Proceed](#). 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Conflict and Health. [Systematic Human Rights Violations, Traumatic Events, Daily Stressors and Mental Health of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh](#). 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Frontiers in Public Health. [Associations Among Past Trauma, Post-displacement Stressors, and Mental Health Outcomes in Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: A Secondary Cross-sectional Analysis](#). 2023.

<sup>27</sup> The New York Times. [Myanmar's Coup and Its Aftermath, Explained](#). 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Amnesty International. [Myanmar: Detainees Tortured to Crush Opposition to Coup](#). 2022.





## SUBSTANDARD LIVING CONDITIONS IN BANGLADESH

Since fleeing to Bangladesh in 2017, almost one million Rohingya continue to live in makeshift shelters constructed with bamboo and tarpaulin sheets.<sup>29</sup> The refugee camps are located in the hills of Cox's Bazar District in Southeast Bangladesh and on Bhasan Char Island in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>30</sup> The makeshift nature of the camps has made them vulnerable to natural disasters such as seasonal cyclones and the floods and landslides of the annual monsoon season. The camps are crowded and densely populated, and basic services such as healthcare, education, and protection are underfunded, under-resourced, poorly executed, and face a number of government barriers to implementation.

Since the latter part of 2019, the security situation in the camps has deteriorated as ARSA and other gangs and armed groups have controlled much of camp life. Killings and kidnappings have become common in the camps over the last few years, exemplified by the high-profile assassination of Mohib Ullah, a prominent Rohingya activist, in 2021.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Government of Bangladesh, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. [Joint Government of Bangladesh - UNHCR Population Factsheet - Block Level as of May 2023](#), 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Inter Sector Coordination Group. [2023 Joint Response Plan Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis](#), 2023.

<sup>31</sup> The New York Times. [Mohib Ullah, 46, Dies; Documented Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya](#), 2021.





While the situation of Rohingya in Bangladesh calls attention to the failures of the humanitarian system, the main challenges facing Rohingya may be those that have been imposed by the **Government of Bangladesh (GoB)**. Over the past few years, the GoB has been implementing many of the strategies utilised by former Myanmar governments and the military junta to make life miserable for Rohingya. Refugee camps have been surrounded by barbed wire fences, curfews have been imposed, checkpoints are ubiquitous, forced labour has become routine, and extortion and violence are everyday occurrences for Rohingya in the camps.

In 2022, Fortify Rights documented restrictions on freedom of movement and evidence of abuse by Bangladesh's **Armed Police Battalion (APBn)**, including beatings of refugees, and in 2023 they documented the torture of refugees by APBn.<sup>32,33</sup> Furthermore, in January 2023, Human Rights Watch found "rampant police abuse," of Rohingya refugees by APBn.<sup>34</sup> It is against this backdrop that **Youth Congress Rohingya (YCR)**, a Rohingya youth research and advocacy organisation, launched a research project to shed light on the existing restrictions on freedom of movement imposed in the camps by the government authorities. YCR initiated this study in August 2022 with the overall goal of collecting data that could be used to improve camp conditions. The research focused on how these restrictions are enforced and sought to understand the impacts of these restrictions on Rohingya life, including Rohingya livelihoods, education, healthcare, and relationships. Finally, YCR sought to understand Rohingya perceptions of these restrictions, including the reasons they exist. It is this research that underpins the findings presented in this report.

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<sup>32</sup> Fortify Rights. [Bangladesh: Investigate Refugee-Beatings by Police, Lift Restrictions on Movement](#). 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Fortify Rights. [Bangladesh: Ensure Accountability for Police Corruption, Torture of Rohingya Refugees](#). 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Human Rights Watch. [Bangladesh: Rampant Police Abuse of Rohingya Refugees](#). 2023.

## STUDY PURPOSE AND DEVELOPMENT

This Participatory Action Research is a Rohingya-led initiative launched by Youth Congress Rohingya.<sup>35</sup> Recognising the deteriorating situation in the refugee camps, YCR organised this study to collect information to be used for advocacy initiatives aimed at improving conditions for Rohingya in Bangladesh. Specifically, YCR investigated the following:

- The nature of restrictions on freedom of movement, including the specific restrictions themselves, the policies underpinning them, changes in restrictions in the past five years, the extent to which restrictions in Bangladesh compare to restrictions previously imposed in Myanmar, and the reasons that these restrictions exist.
- The enforcement of restrictions on freedom of movement, including understanding who is responsible for enforcing the restrictions, what punitive measures (e.g., violence, extortion, or detention) are used for enforcement, and how documentation status, fences, and checkpoints assist in enforcing the restrictions.
- The extent to which police and government corruption drive restrictions against Rohingya.
- The impact of movement restrictions on the safety, livelihoods, healthcare, education, food and material needs, and cultural and religious practices of Rohingya living in the camps.
- The gendered impacts of restrictions on freedom of movement, including **sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)** associated with restrictions.
- The impact of restrictions on Rohingya personal dignity, including feelings of dehumanisation and fears related to the consequences of restrictions for future generations.

YCR emphasised a participatory approach at every stage of the research process by including the full research team in the design, data collection, analysis, and reporting. All members of the team were involved to some extent at every stage.

## TEAM SELECTION AND TRAINING

The YCR team that conducted this study consisted of one Rohingya project coordinator, 10 Rohingya researchers, and three transcribers. YCR also recruited two international researchers to provide technical assistance and support with data analysis and report writing. Later, additional international volunteers were recruited to assist with data analysis. Most of the members of the YCR team were living in the camps at the time of the research, and all had previous experience conducting research in the camps.

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<sup>35</sup> **Participatory Action Research (PAR)** is a research approach that sees research subjects not only as active participants and researchers themselves, but also as the most knowledgeable and most suited to lead initiatives in their own communities. It is a bottom-up approach that positions vulnerable and marginalised groups as the most capable actors (and researchers) to change their lives. While there is no singular origin of the approach, it is rooted in grassroots movements from the Global South in the 1970s. See: [The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice](#).

Before beginning the data collection in the camps, the team met multiple times to thoroughly discuss how to collect data in a secure manner. Due to the situation related to movement in the camps, researchers created meticulous plans to minimise risk to themselves and participants during the research, particularly when crossing through police checkpoints. This included a wide array of considerations, from how data would be secured, to how much money they should carry and what types of clothing they should wear when accessing different camps.

International researchers worked with the YCR team in a participatory manner by co-creating strategies related to the technical aspects of research including do-no-harm perspectives, eliminating bias, and analysing data. International researchers provided technical training on the basic principles of these topics, and the YCR team adapted these principles to the refugee camp context.

## ETHICAL REVIEW

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, and to ensure the safety of both researchers and respondents, YCR recruited three ethical reviewers to review the study methods, informed consent protocols, quantitative questionnaire, and qualitative interview guides. These reviewers were humanitarian workers who held leadership positions in the Rohingya response; the reviewers also worked in protection and legal assistance positions. After reviewing the research and providing feedback, all reviewers agreed that the research should move forward.

## PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

The YCR team collected data from a total of 295 Rohingya respondents, including 241 individuals who completed quantitative surveys and another 54 who participated in in-depth interviews, from 30 camps across Cox's Bazar District. The team also conducted key informant interviews with four **Armed Police Battalion (APBn)** officers related to their experiences enforcing restrictions on freedom of movement in the camps.

Survey respondents were randomly selected. The YCR team used a random number generator to select two random blocks within each camp; once the blocks were selected, respondents for five surveys were selected by approaching every tenth household in the block to request participation in the interview.<sup>36</sup> Using this strategy, the team attempted to collect 10 surveys (five from each randomly selected block) from each camp; although, due to challenges encountered during the study, the team fell just short of this goal.

Purposive sampling was used to select qualitative interview respondents. To ensure a diverse set of responses related to movement restrictions, respondents were selected from each camp based on their positions in Rohingya society. YCR prioritised block **majis (block-level camp officials)**, **mullahs (religious scholars)**, community elders, daily labourers, **international non-governmental organisation (INGO)** volunteers, teachers, young adults, and housekeepers for inclusion in the study. Rohingya in leadership positions were selected due to their knowledge of overall community concerns and dynamics, while others were selected to ensure that the study captured diverse experiences related to movement.

<sup>36</sup> The refugee camps are further subdivided into smaller blocks that were used during the selection process to ensure representativeness.



The team attempted to maintain a gender balance throughout the research by collecting data from an equal number of female and male respondents in both surveys and interviews. However, there was a slight overrepresentation of men in the survey—47 percent female and 53 percent male, though interview respondents were evenly split—50 percent female and 50 percent male.<sup>37</sup>

## QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

The YCR team developed a 36-item quantitative survey questionnaire and a 29-item qualitative interview guide. Both questionnaires contained five sections related to the studies aims, including 1) demographics, 2) restrictions on movement, 3) enforcement of restrictions, 4) factors related to the situation in the camps, and 5) the impacts of restrictions on daily life, including the impact on Rohingya access to basic human rights.<sup>38</sup>

The YCR team also developed a qualitative questionnaire for interviews with APBn officers. This questionnaire included 18 open-ended items related to police policies on movement, as well as police perspectives related to the reasons for restrictions and the violence and extortion used to enforce restrictions.

These questionnaires were first developed by the YCR study coordinator based on observations of the situation in the camp and the impacts of restrictions on the Rohingya community. Members of the broader team reviewed the questionnaires, and items were added or modified based on feedback. The questionnaires were developed in English and then translated into **Rohingyalish (the Rohingya language modern writing system that uses the English alphabet and Latin letters)**. Questionnaires were piloted in the camps, and some modifications were made to the wording of questions based on participant feedback.

## DATA COLLECTION

To increase the security of the data collection team (particularly for female researchers), Rohingya researchers chose to travel through the camps in mixed gender pairs to conduct interviews in the selected blocks. Three pairs of researchers were responsible for conducting surveys and two pairs conducted interviews. The project coordinator supervised the team, oversaw interviews, and assisted with challenges as they arose during the study.

Both surveys and interviews took place in refugee homes. In order to show respect for cultural norms and ensure the comfort of respondents, female researchers conducted the interviews with female respondents, and the male researchers conducted interviews with male respondents. All surveys and interviews were conducted in Rohingya language, a crucial component to ensure the comfort and understanding of the respondents.

<sup>37</sup> All respondents identified as men or women, and the discussion related to gender in this report reflects those binary responses. However, it is important to note that there are large communities of nonbinary Rohingya, most notably the Hijra.

<sup>38</sup> Section five was designed based on the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#) and the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#). Bangladesh is a signatory to both of these covenants.

On average, surveys took about 15 minutes to complete, while interviews lasted about an hour. All respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and the potential benefits and risks of participating, and all respondents provided informed consent prior to participating. The research team noted that the informed consent process was crucial to building trust with respondents, who were generally wary of discussing these sensitive topics at the outset.

Data was collected on smart phones using the Kobo Collect data collection application. Qualitative interviews were audio recorded and sent to the project coordinator. Recordings were then immediately deleted from Rohingya researcher phones to ensure the security of responses. No names or identifying information were collected on survey forms.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

Quantitative data was exported from Kobo Collect and analysed using **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)**. Data was cleaned and coded, and the Rohingya project coordinator ran the initial quantitative analysis with support from international researchers. Qualitative data was transcribed and translated into English. A volunteer team, that included YCR team members and international volunteers, created a coding framework and coded all qualitative data. Codes were then reviewed and important themes and exemplary quotes were identified and recorded in code summaries.

**FINDINGS I:**

# **MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS IN BANGLADESH**





## EXISTENCE OF RESTRICTIONS

Rohingya respondents detailed a number of extreme restrictions on movement that impact all areas of daily life in the refugee camps; 99 percent of respondents said that restrictions on freedom of movement exist for Rohingya, and 94 percent reported that restrictions on movement are impacting their daily lives.<sup>39</sup> Interview respondents reported that restrictions on movement were implemented by the government-appointed **Camp in Charge (CIC)** officers. However, respondents also reported that the restrictions are unclear due to the inconsistent communication of restrictions and their arbitrary enforcement.

Only 46 percent of survey respondents were aware of official laws that restrict Rohingya movement, while almost all interview respondents reported the existence of arbitrary policies and unofficial enforcement practices that authorities use to restrict Rohingya movement in the camps.

*“The problem is that we don’t know about their laws,”* said Hassan, a 32-year-old Rohingya man. *“We think that most of their actions are outside of the [official] rules, as these various kinds of punishment are not in the true law. I haven’t heard of any law that allows them to take a person into custody and beat him and then release him by taking money. There is no law like that in Myanmar. I think that they do some things within the boundary of the law, and some other things outside the boundary of the law.”*<sup>40,41</sup>

Respondents reported that camp policies and restrictions are communicated through the CIC officers, albeit to a limited extent. The CICs pass information along to the **majis (Rohingya unelected leaders)** who are then responsible for communicating these rules with the residents of their blocks. However, due to insufficient and inconsistent communication, a number of respondents reported that this system is ineffective in informing Rohingya about the policies, restrictions, and laws that exist, and more importantly, the reasons they exist and the penalties for breaking them. Many respondents felt that restrictions were intentionally unclear to enable arbitrary enforcement by police and government officials. Many Rohingya reported a system of trial and error—not knowing the rules until they found themselves being punished for breaking them. Respondents frequently reported that clear rules and regulations are needed, and that the communication of these restrictions needs to be clear and public. *“We only learn about new rules after we are punished for breaking them,”* said Hamid, a 28-year-old Rohingya man. *“We wouldn’t break the rules if we knew what they were ahead of time.”*<sup>42</sup>

**“I HAVEN’T HEARD OF ANY LAW THAT ALLOWS THEM TO TAKE A PERSON INTO CUSTODY AND BEAT HIM AND THEN RELEASE HIM BY TAKING MONEY.”**

## POLICIES: PROHIBITIONS ON LEAVING CAMPS AND RESTRICTED MOVEMENT WITHIN CAMPS

The vast majority of interview respondents reported the existence of strict policies that prohibit Rohingya from exiting the camps to travel to other towns or villages. These regulations reportedly had very few exceptions, and many reported being denied exit even when attempting to leave the camps for an urgent

<sup>39</sup> The extent of this impact is discussed further in Section IV: Impacts of Restrictions.

<sup>40</sup> Interview C03M

<sup>41</sup> Note: all names of respondents, both Rohingya and APBn officers have been changed to protect their identities.

<sup>42</sup> Interview C21M

matter (i.e., health emergencies, or urgent family matters). Other respondents described facing resistance from authorities even when attempting to travel to other camps or within their own camp of residence.

*“Residents of one block can’t visit another block,”* said Kushida, a 32-year-old Rohingya woman. *“People from one house can’t visit another house. . . That’s the situation we can observe in the camps right now. It has become more difficult than before. The police beat and charge people when they try to visit other blocks. People are not allowed to spend the night at their relatives’ houses. These are the rules of the camp.”*<sup>43</sup>

Rohingya survey respondents reported that the most rigorously enforced restrictions were related to travelling outside the camps to Cox’s Bazar and other towns in Bangladesh; **40 percent of survey respondents reported that they could not travel outside of the camp at all.** Restrictions on travelling between camps or even within a single camp, exist but are less severe (See table below).

APBn officers who worked in the camp unanimously affirmed that these restrictions were official APBn policy, and that Rohingya were not allowed to travel outside of the camp, and were at times restricted from travelling within the camps.

*“We can only allow them to go outside if they have a permission letter from CIC,”* said Chowdhury (pseudonym), an APBn officer. *“If they don’t have it, we can’t allow them to go outside. They can normally move freely within the camp. But now the camp situation is very bad, killings and weapons in the camps are increasing. For this reason, sometimes we don’t allow them to go wherever they want to go, even within the camp.”*<sup>44</sup>

Rahman (pseudonym), another APBn officer, echoed these same sentiments, *“Rohingya people can’t go outside the camp. They can travel within the camp only. If they need to go outside the camp, they should have a CIC permission letter so that we can allow them to go. If they don’t have a permission letter to go outside, we won’t allow them to go. . . This is an official policy. We are doing and following what we were instructed to do by senior officers.”*<sup>45</sup>

YCR also received a government document that supports the accounts of Rohingya and APBn officers working in the camps. The document is from one of the CIC offices in the camps and allows for certain households to exit the camp to purchase cattle for the Eid al-Fitr celebration. However, the document explicitly notes the following conditions under which Rohingya can leave the camps: 1) **“FDMN (Forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals, i.e., Rohingya)** can’t engage himself in any labor work or any other activities [of] that purpose.” 2) **“FDMN movement will be limited within Ukhiya Upazila (this is the municipality near the camps).”** 3) **“FDMN are not allowed to stay overnight.”**<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Interview C04F

<sup>44</sup> Interview P03

<sup>45</sup> Interview P04

<sup>46</sup> Order from CIC. On file with YCR, June 25, 2023

## SURVEY RESPONSES: ROHINGYA FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

ABILITY TO MOVE...	UNABLE TO MOVE AT ALL	ABLE TO MOVE A LITTLE BIT	ABLE TO MOVE QUITE A BIT	ABLE TO MOVE EXTREMELY
OUTSIDE THE CAMP TO OTHER TOWNS .....	40.2%	53.9%	2.5%	3.3%
FROM ONE CAMP TO ANOTHER .....	3.3%	68.9%	22.4%	5.4%
WITHIN YOUR OWN CAMP .....	0.8%	8.7%	71.4%	19.1%

### POLICIES: PERMISSIONS AND DOCUMENTATION

Many interview respondents reported needing specific documentation or permission letters to be able to leave camps or travel within the camps. Depending on the situation, they may need to show a permission letter from the CIC, their **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** ID card, and/or specific documentation related to the nature of their travel. For example, to exit due to a medical reason requires a referral letter from a camp clinic to enable travel to a hospital. Some respondents reported that they also need to be escorted by majis to be able to cross checkpoints.

*“In order to cross the checkpoint, we need to carry our family data cards,”* said Ali, a 25-year-old Rohingya man, *“and we also need to take the sub-maji with us. Yet the police treat us rudely, and often ask us why we can’t get treatments from the health facilities which are inside the camp.”*<sup>47</sup>

### POLICIES: CURFEW

Respondents reported that Rohingya are not allowed to be outside of their shelters or cross checkpoints after 6pm, because of a curfew imposed by the authorities. They are also not permitted to spend the night in another shelter or keep shops open after 6pm.

Some respondents reported that being forced to stay inside their shelters in the evenings increased their distress associated with living in the camps. Aziza, a 38-year-old Rohingya woman, stated that it worsened her symptoms of trauma associated with violence in Myanmar: *“As we feel stressed out because of having flashbacks of what happened to us in Myanmar, we like to sit outside of our houses at night as it*

<sup>47</sup> Interview C1WM



is cooler. But, we cannot come out of our houses at night because of the curfew in place.”<sup>48</sup> Respondents reported that people who are caught outside of their shelters after curfew can face severe repercussions from the APBn including beatings, fines, detention, and confiscation of their goods or personal items.

The inability to stay the night in other shelters was reported as being particularly disruptive to Rohingya family and community life. If family members live far from each other, the curfew restrictions can entirely preclude them from being able to visit their family members. This can be particularly difficult when there are urgent family matters to attend to, such as health problems, funerals, or other emergencies. “A person from one household can’t visit another household,” said Rashida, a 20-year-old Rohingya woman. “One of my brothers lives in Camp 11, and according to police rules, someone from one camp can’t stay in another camp. It is very bad that my brother can’t visit me.”<sup>49</sup>

**“IF WE SIT TOGETHER, IT MEANS WE ARE BREAKING THE RULES. . . DISCUSSING OUR REPATRIATION AND OUR COUNTRY ALSO MEANS WE ARE BREAKING THE RULES.”**

#### **POLICIES: RESTRICTIONS ON ASSEMBLY**

In addition to the curfew, many respondents reported restrictions barring them from assembling in groups.<sup>50</sup> Rohingya reported restrictions on organising or participating in large events such as weddings, religious celebrations, or even commemorative days such as World Refugee Day or the annual commemoration of the genocide perpetrated against Rohingya in Myanmar. Aside from these larger events, Rohingya reported not being able to meet even informally with small groups of friends to have tea or play sports. “These security forces punish people who break camp rules,” said Farina, a 40-year-old Rohingya woman. “If we sit together, it means we are breaking the rules. . . Discussing our repatriation and our country also means we are breaking the rules.”<sup>51</sup>

#### **POLICIES: VEHICLE BAN IN CAMPS**

Another restriction recently implemented is the prohibition against Rohingya use of vehicles as a means of transport within the camps. This policy has had impacts on travel, transportation of goods, and access to emergency medical services, particularly for those with mobility difficulties. “They say that Rohingya people cannot use vehicles in the camp,” said Hassan, a 32-year-old Rohingya man, “so, we are forced to get out of the vehicles and walk wherever we need to go. Only the drivers, who give money to [the police] for permission can drive small vehicles in the camp. Others who cannot pay the bribe are not allowed.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Interview C25F

<sup>49</sup> Interview C11F

<sup>50</sup> Since the Covid-19 global outbreak, Bangladeshi authorities have increased restrictions on freedom of assembly. John Quinley wrote in the Financial Times, “Rohingya refugees worry that Bangladesh’s Covid-19 restrictions on gatherings could continue even after the pandemic. It is a well-founded fear. Bangladeshi authorities do not have a solid record on ensuring Rohingya rights to freedom of expression and assembly. On August 25, 2019, Rohingya massed to remember the two-year anniversary of the Myanmar military’s violence. It was the largest Rohingya-led demonstration ever, and it was wholly peaceful. . . [I]n response the authorities temporarily shut down the office of a prominent Rohingya-led human rights group, as punishment for its role in arranging the event.” Financial Times. [Rohingya Cry for Justice Deserves to be Heard](#), 2019.

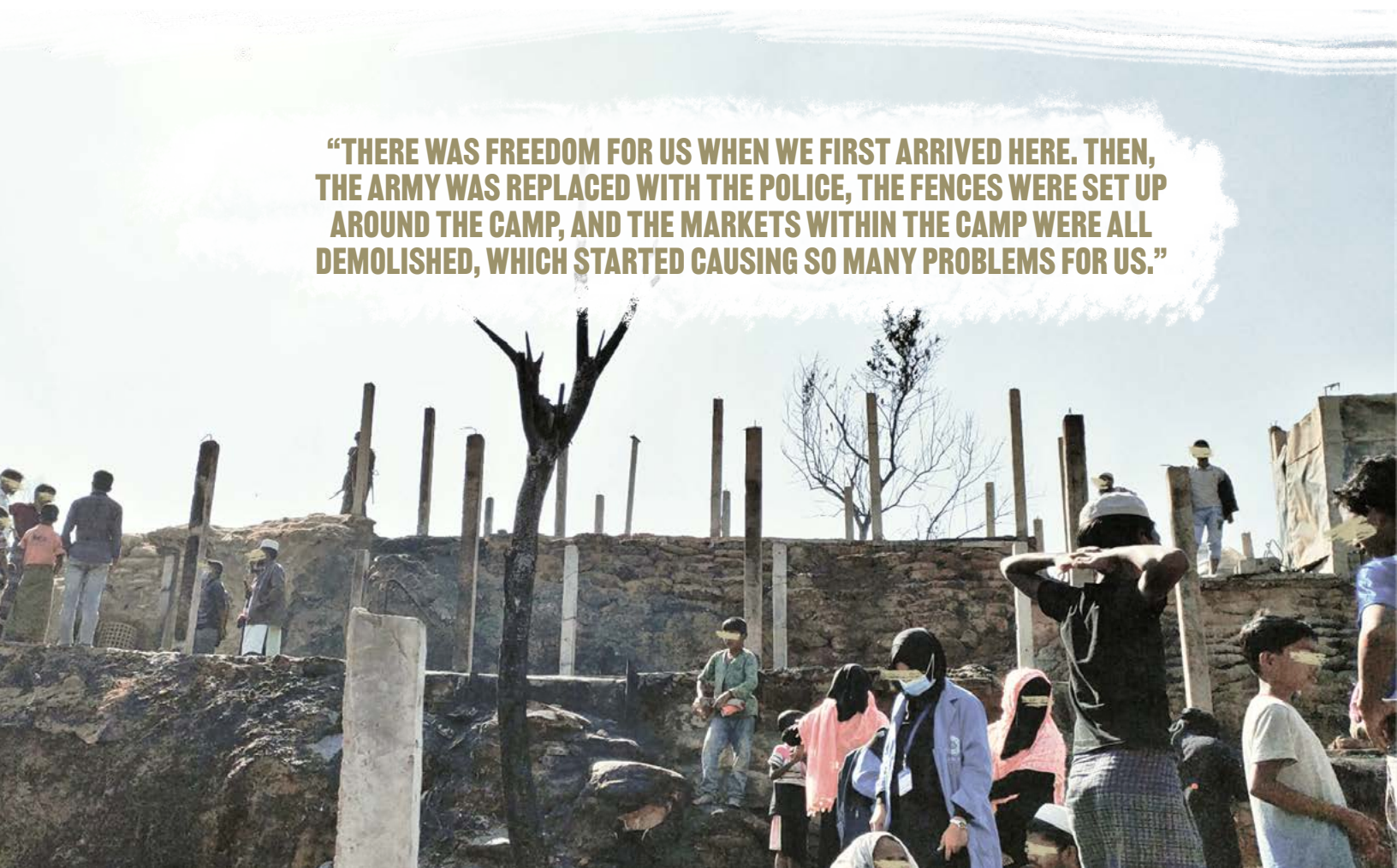
<sup>51</sup> Interview C15F

<sup>52</sup> Interview C03M

## CHANGES IN RESTRICTIONS

When asked if restrictions have changed in the past five years, 88 percent of survey respondents reported that restrictions have tightened over that time period. Interview respondents also described this shift, noting a distinct change in movement restrictions over the past five years. According to interview respondents, five years ago, when the Rohingya first arrived in Bangladesh after fleeing persecution in Myanmar, they were able to travel both outside of the camps and within the camps with much more freedom. They were able to go to markets, access medical services, leave at night for emergencies, and work outside the camps. The change to a stricter enforcement of movement restrictions reportedly occurred at the end of 2019 and the start of 2020. The majority of respondents attributed this change to the government's decision to shift control of camp security from the army to the APBn in the camps, and the construction of fencing around the camps to control movement.

Respondents reported that the army had been impartial in their decision making, while the APBn, by comparison, is corrupt and violent in their approach to securing the camps. Respondents report that the APBn often uses violence to enforce restrictions, and has sought out every opportunity to extort Rohingya, making movement difficult for some and impossible for those who are unable to afford the bribes required for movement.



**“THERE WAS FREEDOM FOR US WHEN WE FIRST ARRIVED HERE. THEN, THE ARMY WAS REPLACED WITH THE POLICE, THE FENCES WERE SET UP AROUND THE CAMP, AND THE MARKETS WITHIN THE CAMP WERE ALL DEMOLISHED, WHICH STARTED CAUSING SO MANY PROBLEMS FOR US.”**

*“There was freedom for us when we first arrived here,” said Samira, a 43-year-old Rohingya woman, “then, the army was replaced with the police, the fences were set up around the camp, and the markets within the camp were all demolished, which started causing so many problems for us.”<sup>53</sup>*

## RESTRICTIONS IN COMPARISON TO MYANMAR

In discussing the conditions in the camps, many respondents compared their current situation to the situation in Myanmar prior to the genocidal violence in 2017. Many reported feeling like the living situation in the camps has deteriorated to the extent that the conditions are worse than those they were experiencing previously in Myanmar. Respondents staunchly emphasised that APBn persecution and violence in Bangladesh is the same as or worse than the persecution perpetrated by the Myanmar Military and Rakhine civilians in Rakhine State. Respondents reported ubiquitous extortion, violence, threats, forced labour, false accusations, arbitrary arrest, and sexual violence at the hands of police. In addition to the violence and extortion from police, respondents also saw similarities between the restrictions on Rohingya daily life in the camps and the restrictions that they faced in Myanmar—often expressing that the restrictions on their basic rights in the camps were similar to or worse than the systemic human rights violations experienced in Myanmar. They specifically cited restrictions on movement, livelihoods, education, the enforcement of curfews, the inability to meet in groups or hold cultural events, substandard housing, and crowded conditions in the camp as being worse in the Bangladesh camps than previously in Myanmar. This sentiment was supported by a majority of survey respondents, 65 percent of whom reported that they believe the restrictions on movement they are facing now in Bangladesh are worse than those they experienced previously in Myanmar.

**RESPONDENTS STAUNCHLY EMPHASISED THAT APBN PERSECUTION AND VIOLENCE IN BANGLADESH IS THE SAME AS OR WORSE THAN THE PERSECUTION PERPETRATED BY THE MYANMAR MILITARY AND RAKHINE CIVILIANS IN RAKHINE STATE.**

*“In Myanmar, we were kept underprivileged by the government,” said Safika, a 35-year-old Rohingya woman. “Our children didn’t have a chance to study. We weren’t allowed to have income sources, neither did we have freedom of movement, and we couldn’t live there peacefully. We are going through the same discrimination and violence here as well. Our children are not allowed to study. We aren’t allowed to do any business or have income sources. If innocent people sit together to chat with one another, the police accuse them of being criminals, and they are imprisoned after being tortured. I think the government has imposed these restrictions and violence to make our life so miserable that we return to our country the same way we fled here.”<sup>54</sup>*

<sup>53</sup> Interview C8EF

<sup>54</sup> Interview C16F



## REASON FOR RESTRICTIONS

The majority of respondents reported that the stated government rationale for restrictions was to protect Rohingya by increasing control of the camps, therefore decreasing crime. However, the vast majority of respondents did not believe this securitisation narrative to be genuine. Respondents reasoned that the severe nature of restrictions prevents Rohingya from meeting their most basic needs. They believed that if the government cared for the wellbeing of refugees, they would be able to secure the camps without violating their rights. **Respondents also argued that restrictions are actually counter-productive to the goal of securitisation: If the government was trying to reduce radicalisation, why was it locking the Rohingya in a small area, removing any opportunity for work, education, travel, cultural events, or contact with family in other camps?** Multiple respondents reported they believed that the impact of these restrictions will only increase crime, radicalisation, and violence in the camps.

**“I THINK THE GOVERNMENT HAS IMPOSED THESE RESTRICTIONS AND VIOLENCE TO MAKE OUR LIFE SO MISERABLE THAT WE RETURN TO OUR COUNTRY THE SAME WAY WE FLED HERE”**

## REASON FOR RESTRICTIONS: FORCED RELOCATION/REFOULEMENT

The seemingly disingenuous government approach has left Rohingya to judge the motivations of the government based on their lived experiences in the camps. The vast majority of respondents from all areas of the camps believed that the primary goal of the government imposing such restrictions was to create a level of suffering that would render the camps unlivable; therefore, Rohingya could be coerced into “choosing” to either relocate to Bhasan Char or return to Myanmar. To this end, some respondents believed that police were allowing, or even collaborating with, armed groups in addition to implementing restrictions. **Survey respondents were asked if they believed the restrictions were in place to attempt to displace Rohingya from the camps; 72 percent said ‘yes.’**<sup>55,56</sup>

*“I believe they are torturing us,” said Nur, a 43-year-old Rohingya man. “[They are] causing various difficulties in our daily lives in an effort to get us to leave this location and seek refuge elsewhere. The reason the authorities are doing these things is so we will leave on our own and they can claim publicly that they did not order us to leave. That explains why they subject so many people to torture every day so that they will leave this place. If their only aim was to stop the crimes here, they would not torture us daily like they are doing. They are persecuting us so that we leave this place. In my understanding, their plan is to make us leave the camp without telling anyone.”*<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Although this was seen as a leading question by the Rohingya research team, they were aware from their experiences living in the camps that this was a common sentiment that they thought would be important to capture in the quantitative survey.

<sup>56</sup> Interview C8WM

<sup>57</sup> UNHCR has documented a “steep increase” in the number of Rohingya in Myanmar and Bangladesh risking their lives on dangerous boat journeys in attempts to access refuge in other countries. See: UNHCR, [Steep Increase in Deadly Boat Journeys Reflects Rohingyas’ Desperation](#), 2023.

### REASON FOR RESTRICTIONS: WEAKEN ROHINGYA COMMUNITY

A majority of interview respondents also reported that they thought the GoB was trying to suppress, weaken, or torture the Rohingya population. Many respondents thought that the reason for this could be to ensure that Rohingya continue to have fewer rights and a lower living standard than the host Bangladeshi population out of concern that the Bangladeshi host community would grow envious of the Rohingya population and put political pressure on the government if Rohingya had their rights intact.<sup>58</sup> Rohingya respondents also cited current restrictions that prevent Rohingya from earning as much as Bangladeshi staff when working for INGOs to support this idea of weakening the Rohingya community.

### REASON FOR RESTRICTIONS: OTHER

Some respondents simply thought that the restrictions were put in place for the police to make money, as more restrictions provide more opportunity for extortion.<sup>59</sup> Others thought movement restrictions were intentionally put in place to prevent Rohingya from integrating with Bangladeshi society so that future repatriation efforts would be easier for the government. Some respondents took a broader perspective, reporting that they believed the authorities were treating them in this way because they did not view them as human beings deserving of dignity and rights.

### REASON FOR RESTRICTIONS: POLICE PERSPECTIVES

When APBn officers were asked about the reasons for restrictions on Rohingya, they generally held the perspective that all Rohingya needs are met by humanitarian organisations and, therefore, they do not need to leave the refugee camps. Some also mentioned that Rohingya should not be allowed to achieve a higher standard of living in Bangladesh.

An APBN officer named Hossain (pseudonym) said, *“When they can work outside the camp they will have money, and they will want to live like the Bangladeshi people. According to the rules of the Rohingya response, all the needs of the Rohingya will be fulfilled by humanitarian organisations. Some people are in need of the extra money, and they want to work outside the camp. But, we can’t allow them to go there for work because of the rules and regulations. It is in our official rules that Rohingya people can’t be allowed to go outside the camp. Some people still go outside the camp to work by hiding from the police.”*<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> A 2020 study examining Bangladeshi perceptions of the Rohingya reported an increase in the cost of living and a decrease in income that the host community directly related to the influx of Rohingya and subsequent influx of humanitarian aid and assistance for the Rohingya. Many locals expressed feeling that their needs were being neglected by both the GoB and the international community. Nonetheless, a state’s inability to meet its citizens’ needs does not legitimise violating the rights of its denizens. Asian Journal of Comparative Politics. [The locals and the Rohingyas: Trapped with an uncertain future](#). 2020.

<sup>59</sup> This will be further discussed in Section III: Justice and Corruption.

<sup>60</sup> Interview P01

# INTERVIEW WITH APBN OFFICER, HOSSAIN (PSEUDONYM)

*Q: How much money can police make by taking money from Rohingya in a single month?*

*Hossain:* We get a fixed salary according to our position. But if a corrupted constable takes money from Rohingya, he can earn 200 to 500 BDT (2-5 USD) per day. Rohingya people reported to me that the police take 20, 30, or 50 BDT (.20-.50 USD) from them to bring their consumption or materials inside the camps. If a Sub Inspector (SI, mid-level police officer) tries to extort money, he can earn more than a constable because his level is higher than a constable. I think he can earn about 1,000 to 2,000 BDT (9-19 USD). If an Officer in Charge tries to extort, he can make more than a Sub Inspector. I'm not exactly sure of the amount, but I'm estimating it through information I received.

*Q: We heard that Rohingya are beaten at checkpoints, does this happen often, why?*

*Hossain:* Some police beat the Rohingya when the person can't tell the police why they are leaving the camp, or if the police find something illegal on the person. . . There are some Rohingya who verbally abuse the police when they are not allowed to go outside the camp. When Rohingya people respond badly, the police get angry and the police might hit them with a stick.

*Q: Have you ever beaten a Rohingya person before?*

*Hossain:* No, I never beat Rohingya. . . But, I threaten them sometimes.





# FINDINGS II:

# ENFORCING RESTRICTIONS ON MOVEMENT





The Bangladesh officials enforce restrictions on movement through infrastructure, such as fences and checkpoints, and through punitive measures, such as violence, extortion, threats, arrest, and threats of forcible relocation to the undesirable Bhasan Char Island Camp. Here we present findings related to the actors who enforce restrictions on movement, the punitive measure used in enforcement, the role of infrastructure, such as checkpoints and fencing, and other related violations, such as forced labour and threats of forced relocation.

### ENFORCEMENT ACTORS

Respondents reported that multiple actors are involved in enforcing the general restrictions in the camp, including the **Armed Police Battalion (APBn)**, **National Security Intelligence (NSI)**, the **Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)**, the **camp in charge officers (CICs)**, and the majis. However, respondents reported that the **APBn (commonly referred to as simply the police)** were the main actors enforcing restrictions on freedom of movement in camps. Of the survey respondents who reported experiencing some sort of punitive measure related to their movement, **96 percent reported that the APBn was the actor who punished them.**

The APBn officers patrol the camps and also work at the checkpoints located at the entrances to the camps and on the main roads. Respondents reported an overwhelming amount of information related to APBn corruption<sup>61</sup> and abuse while enforcing the restrictions. Respondents commonly reported abuse of varying severity including detaining Rohingya at checkpoints, confiscating identity cards, stealing smartphones and laptops, extortion, beatings, verbal harassment, as well as sexual harassment and abuse. Many respondents compared the violence perpetrated by police to the routine violence perpetrated by armed groups in the camps, stating that they felt the APBn was more of a threat to Rohingya than the armed groups who routinely terrorise camp residents. Fatima, a 35-year-old Rohingya woman, reported, *“Even the gang, ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army), is not anything bad to us. It is only the police who are torturing us intentionally. . . [The camp] has become like a prison only because of them.”*<sup>62</sup>

Rohingya perspectives on the police were in sharp contrast to their views of the Bangladesh Army, which was charged with the security of the camps in Bangladesh until about 2020. The vast majority of respondents viewed the army as being incorruptible, trustworthy, and just. Many strongly requested that the responsibility of camp security be returned to the Army.

<sup>61</sup> Corruption within the APBn will be discussed in further detail in Section III: Justice and Corruption.

<sup>62</sup> Interview C10F

## WHO PUNISHED YOU FOR MOVEMENT?

ACTOR	N	%
APBN	144	96%
ARMY	4	2.7%
NSI	4	2.7%
I DON'T KNOW	1	0.7%
OTHER	1	0.7%
RAB	0	0.0%

### ENFORCEMENT: VIOLENCE

Rohingya respondents reported a number of punitive measures taken by security forces aimed at preventing their movement. Most survey respondents (62 percent) reported that they had personally experienced punishments related to movement. Of the punitive measures reported, physical violence was by far the most common as it was experienced or witnessed by almost all interview respondents. Beatings with sticks or rods were reported as commonly occurring at checkpoints, along roads, or within the camps. Respondents reported that beatings could be extreme, resulting in severe or permanent injuries. Rohingya related that these beatings could occur for a wide range of reasons, including attempting to leave the camp, enter the camp, or transport items into the camps. Beatings could also be inflicted for something as innocuous as asking police the reason they were being denied exit from the camp, or even for fervently requesting to be allowed to exit the camp for an emergency. Respondents reported that there was little discrimination in terms of who was targeted for physical violence: women, men, and children all experience beatings from police related to attempted movement.<sup>63</sup>

**BEATINGS WITH STICKS OR RODS WERE REPORTED AS COMMONLY OCCURRING AT CHECKPOINTS, ALONG ROADS, OR WITHIN THE CAMPS. RESPONDENTS REPORTED THAT BEATINGS COULD BE EXTREME, RESULTING IN SEVERE OR PERMANENT INJURIES.**

<sup>63</sup> See Section V: Gender Impacts for further details related to enforcement measures and their gendered impacts.

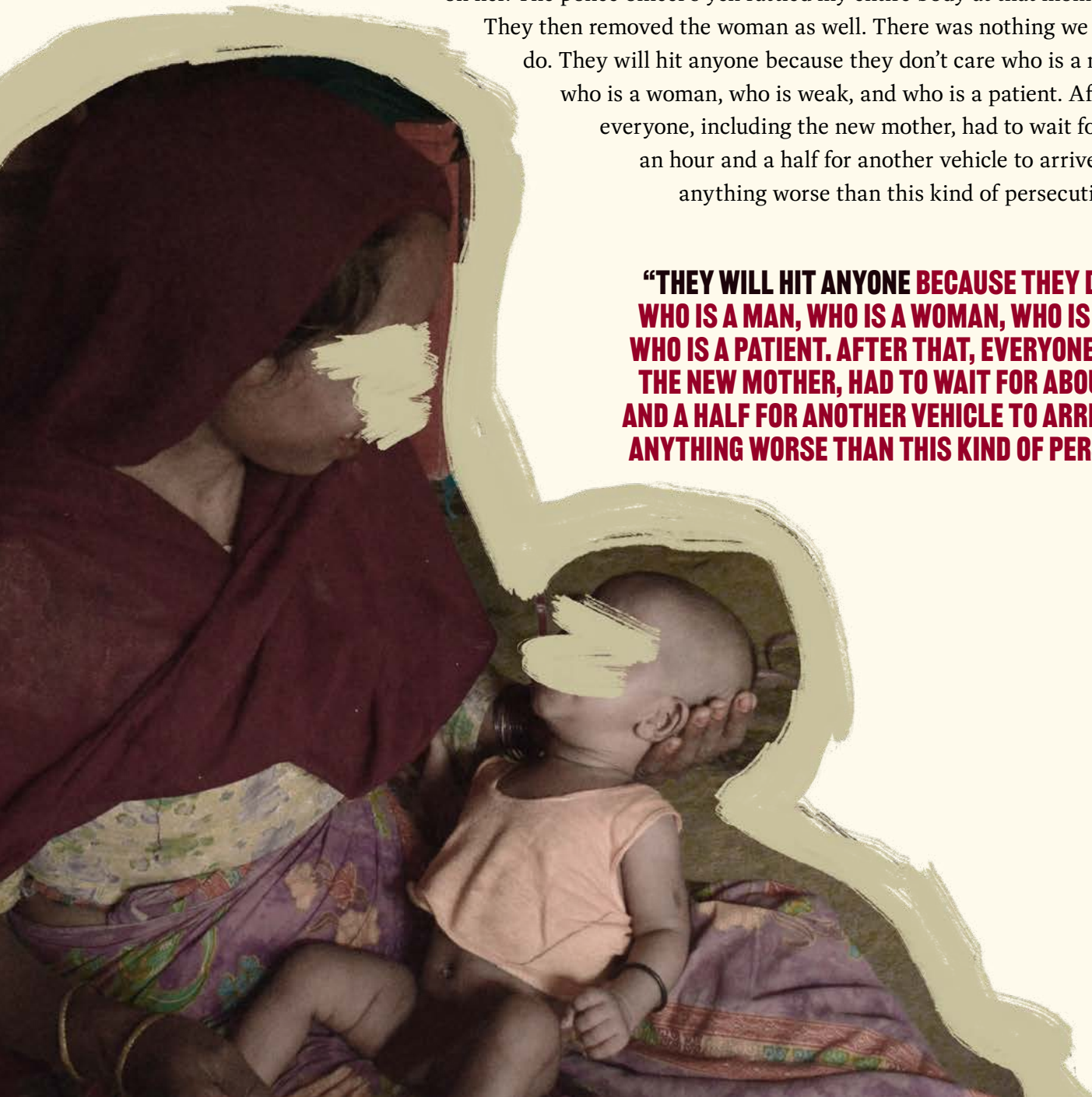


*Samira, a 45-year-old Rohingya woman, shared her experience with our team:*

“A new mother who had just given birth to her baby was placed in our vehicle as I was travelling to a clinic a few days ago. She was discharged from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital after labour without having her stitches removed and was told to go to Hope hospital to have them removed because it was closer. She was on her way to Hope Hospital that day to have her stitches removed. When we arrived at a checkpoint, a group of police officers stopped our vehicle and ordered all of us to get out. Because the new mother was still in poor health and unable to walk, the driver requested that the vehicle be let go for the sake of the woman. The police smashed his face with powerful slaps from both sides and dragged him out of the vehicle as soon as he said this to them. Everyone was brutally removed from the vehicle by hitting them on their heads. Seeing the woman in such critical condition, I bravely requested of the police that they release the vehicle carrying the woman so that she could reach the hospital and begged them to have mercy on her. The police officer’s yell rattled my entire body at that moment.

They then removed the woman as well. There was nothing we could do. They will hit anyone because they don’t care who is a man, who is a woman, who is weak, and who is a patient. After that, everyone, including the new mother, had to wait for about an hour and a half for another vehicle to arrive. Is there anything worse than this kind of persecution?”

**“THEY WILL HIT ANYONE BECAUSE THEY DON’T CARE WHO IS A MAN, WHO IS A WOMAN, WHO IS WEAK, AND WHO IS A PATIENT. AFTER THAT, EVERYONE, INCLUDING THE NEW MOTHER, HAD TO WAIT FOR ABOUT AN HOUR AND A HALF FOR ANOTHER VEHICLE TO ARRIVE. IS THERE ANYTHING WORSE THAN THIS KIND OF PERSECUTION?”**



**ENFORCEMENT: DETENTION, ARREST, AND OTHER PUNITIVE MEASURES**

In addition to beatings and extortion, respondents reported other punishments perpetrated by police, including being detained at checkpoints for several hours, being forced to wait in the sun, being forced to stare at the sun, and being forced to do time consuming, meaningless tasks. Some respondents emphasised that punitive measures were often accompanied by verbal abuse and insults from the police.

*“We can’t go outside of the home at night,” said Jabir, a 65-year-old Rohingya man. “If I go outside to use the toilet at night and the police who patrol at night see me, I’ll be arrested. They will beat me by justifying it with a fake allegation. They give us different kinds of punishments or torture such filling a water tank with a spoon, and force us to look at the sun during the day. They give such punishments that we can’t endure.”*<sup>64</sup>

**ENFORCEMENT: FENCING**

Many respondents spoke not only of the detrimental impact of the barbed wire fences on livelihoods, healthcare, and access to food, but also of the severe impact on emergencies and crises that the fences exacerbate or even cause. Several respondents reported not being able to access emergency medical services due to fences, and others spoke of the deaths caused when fires break out in the camps and the fences prevent people from fleeing to safety.

<sup>64</sup> Interview C25M





Many respondents reported having to climb over or crawl through holes in the fences to access crucial services, but also reported being beaten or extorted by police or local community members if they are found circumventing the fences. Additionally, when transporting necessities from the market back into the camp, respondents reported that it is difficult to bring them through the small holes in the fences that they use.

Respondents reported that the camps initially had no fences, but that construction of the fencing started in 2019 and was finished by 2021. Respondents related that the initial reason given for the fences was to decrease the movement of criminals, but respondents believe that the true motivation was to keep Rohingya confined to the camps. Rohingya respondents see the fences as creating a prison-like atmosphere in the camps. The fences are fundamental to treating Rohingya as prisoners, as opposed to asylum seekers fleeing genocide and in need of safety.

*“I think the purpose behind these restrictions is to keep us confined so that we can’t live here with ease,”* said Nasima, a 24-year-old Rohingya woman. *“We are very upset about why we have been surrounded with the fences and why we are being kept like in confinement. We don’t understand what fault we committed that we have been surrounded with the fences. Even prisoners are not kept the way we have been kept here. I think even the prisoners have more freedom than us. I think we are receiving the ration the way the prisoners get their regular meals.”*<sup>65, 66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Interview C18F

<sup>66</sup> See also: Fortify Rights. [Bangladesh: Remove Fencing That Confines Rohingya to Refugee Camps](#). 2020. and Human Rights Watch. [Bangladesh: Refugee Camp Fencing Cost Lives in Blaze](#). 2021.





**ENFORCEMENT: CHECKPOINTS**

In addition to the fencing, respondents reported that checkpoints are one of the key physical barriers controlling their freedom of movement. Checkpoints are staffed by the APBn and have increased over time. Respondents reported that, immediately after the influx, there was only one checkpoint between Cox's Bazar and the refugee camps. Now, respondents report that there are checkpoints guarding the entrance to every camp, and that refugees are often prohibited from exiting the camps, travelling between the camps, or at times, prevented from even moving within their own camp. To travel to a nearby market, hospital, or a different camp to visit family members, Rohingya are often required to cross five to six checkpoints. Many respondents reported having to regularly wait in long queues at each checkpoint, making a relatively short trip take several hours. These long waits were reported as particularly burdensome for pregnant women, parents with children, and those with serious medical problems.

A common theme reported by most respondents was confusion caused by the arbitrary nature of the enforcement at each checkpoint and the ambiguity around the requirements for passage. Several respondents reported travel experiences when they were able to cross several checkpoints only to be turned back at one of the final checkpoints for no apparent reason other than the individual decision of the APBn officer with whom they were interacting. Respondents reported needing a variety of documents and documentation to be able to cross checkpoints depending on the situation, including their UNHCR identification cards, birth certificates, identification cards from humanitarian employers, permission letters from doctors, and CIC documentation, among others. None of these were guaranteed to provide passage through a checkpoint, and some respondents reported that the APBn had confiscated their documents at checkpoints and then required them to pay bribes to have their documents returned.

Respondents reported that checkpoints also prevent vehicles from entering the camp, unless they make payments to the police. Vehicle drivers afford this regular extortion by increasing transportation costs. However, this has made journeys previously affordable for Rohingya now impractical.



### ENFORCEMENT: FORCED RELOCATION

Respondents reported official warnings from camp authorities stating that those who violate camp rules will be forcibly relocated to Bhasan Char Island Camp. Bhasan Char is a small, remote island in the Bay of Bengal where Bangladesh authorities have constructed a refugee camp that has been described as an “island jail” by Human Rights Watch.<sup>67</sup> The island faces a high risk of floods and severe storms, and Rohingya there experience the same restrictions and lack of services as the mainland camps, while being further isolated from mainland society.

Many respondents felt that the police have a quota for relocating people to Bhasan Char Island that they need to fulfil, which is why they use coercive tactics to compel people to “agree” to relocate. These tactics include many of the practices described above—increasing persecution by police and other authorities in the camps by enforcing punishments for breaking camp rules, punishments for voicing complaints over camp conditions, framing innocent people for crimes they have not committed, and promising freedom from unjust imprisonment if they agree to be relocated to Bhasan Char. The police will also extort money from people by threatening to relocate them to Bhasan Char if the bribes are not paid.

*“I feel like the police are here to torture us,” said Mohammed, a 28-year-old Rohingya man. “The way they are extorting money from us is like this is their duty to torture us. It is said to the world that they are here to preserve our security, but they are actually torturing us in reality. If we can’t pay the amount of money they demand, they often threaten us that we would be relocated to Bhasan Char Island.”*<sup>68</sup>



**“I FEEL LIKE THE POLICE ARE HERE TO TORTURE US,” SAID MOHAMMED, A 28-YEAR-OLD ROHINGYA MAN. “THE WAY THEY ARE EXTORTING MONEY FROM US IS LIKE THIS IS THEIR DUTY TO TORTURE US.”**

<sup>67</sup> Human Rights Watch. *An Island Jail in the Middle of the Sea: Bangladesh’s Relocation of Rohingya Refugees to Bhasan Char*. 2021.

<sup>68</sup> Interview C13M



### ENFORCEMENT: FORCED LABOUR

Rohingya respondents reported that camp authorities force them to guard the camps at night to provide additional security in the camps. Respondents described this as similar to how they were forced to serve as nightwatch in Myanmar. Rohingya respondents reported that five to seven people from each block are required to keep guard. Specifically, respondents reported having to guard the CIC office, the Head Maji, the police checkpoints, and the community in general. Respondents reported that one adult male from each household is required to complete sentry duty, serving from 6pm to 6am, every 10 days.

Rohingya understand the reason for this requirement as being to protect the community from security threats within the camp at night, and to protect and support the APBn in general. *“Five people are put on guard around the police check posts because the police are afraid,”* said Shabnam, a 24-year-old Rohingya woman. *“They are supposed to keep us safe, but they make us keep them safe instead.”*<sup>69</sup>

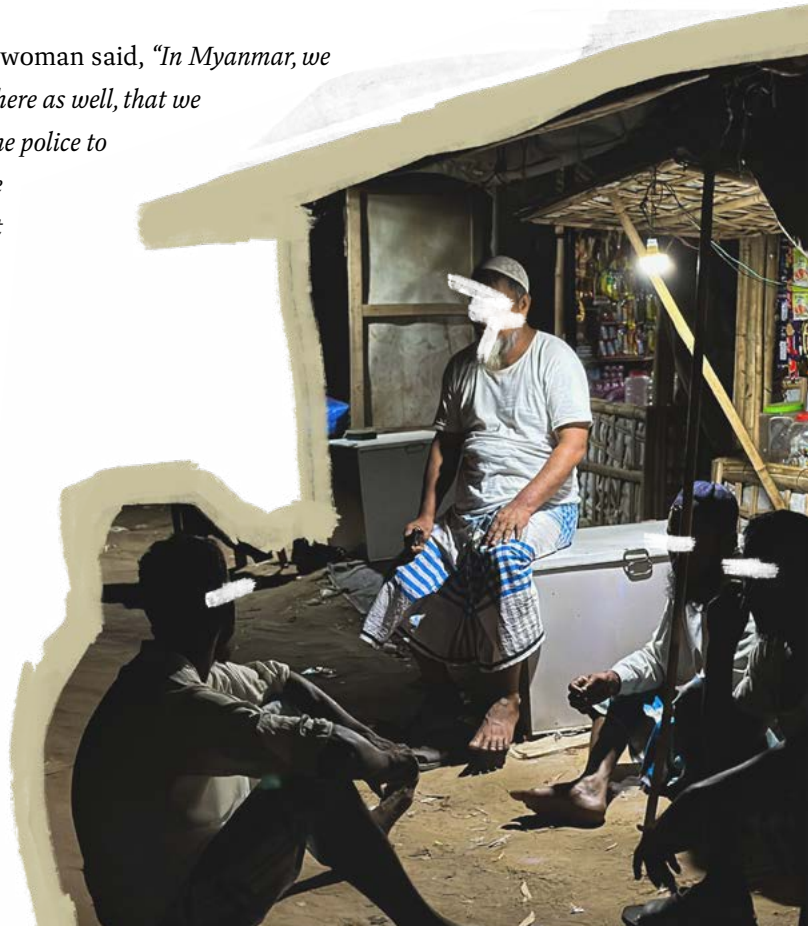
This was met with frustration as **Rohingya respondents viewed camp security as the role of APBn and camp authorities, not Rohingya refugees.** Respondents reported a number of negative consequences associated with failing to carry out their sentry obligations, including beatings and fines from the police. If someone scheduled for sentry is sick or has to miss their shift for other reasons, they are responsible for hiring a replacement for 200-300 BDT (2-3 USD). This sentry work is unpaid and some respondents reported a general sentiment of feeling like they are serving as “slaves” for the government. Respondents also felt that sentry duty puts them at risk because they are unarmed and not able to respond if faced with a violent situation.

Reflecting on the situation, Fatima, a 35-year-old Rohingya woman said, *“In Myanmar, we used to be forced to serve as night guards. A new rule has been set here as well, that we are also forced to serve the night guard. Actually, it is the duty of the police to maintain security, as they are in charge of the security, but they are forcing us to do their duty. They tell us, ‘You have to serve the night guard and provide security for us because your people are bad.’ We are very upset with this rule of serving the night guard.”*<sup>70</sup>

**“FIVE PEOPLE ARE PUT ON GUARD AROUND THE POLICE CHECK POSTS BECAUSE THE POLICE ARE AFRAID,” SAID SHABNAM, A 24-YEAR-OLD ROHINGYA WOMAN. “THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO KEEP US SAFE, BUT THEY MAKE US KEEP THEM SAFE INSTEAD.”**

<sup>69</sup> Interview C05F

<sup>70</sup> Interview C10F





# FINDINGS III: JUSTICE AND CORRUPTION



**Corruption by authorities is commonplace in the camps. In fact, an overwhelming number of survey respondents (98 percent) reported some level of corruption in the operation of security forces in the camps.** The APBn was most frequently reported by interview respondents as being the most corrupt actor. However, corruption by the majis and CICs was also reported regularly. Corrupt acts reported include extortion, theft, illegitimate fines, rape and sexual abuse, and wrongful imprisonment.

*“They stop us, check our bodies and interrogate us,”* said Kushida, a 32-year-old Rohingya woman. *“They tell us that we should stay inside the Rohingya camp because we are Rohingyas. When they blatantly talk like this, we have to keep silent; otherwise, they beat us. They persecute people at the checkpoints and snatch anything people carry and the cash with the people. That’s how we have to endure difficulties here.”*<sup>71</sup>

The police interviewed acknowledged the corrupt acts alleged against them. They reported that, despite knowing that there are policies in place against abuse of Rohingya by authorities, physical abuse, extortion, and the illegitimate confiscation of Rohingya money and market goods are still committed by APBn.

*“No, we can’t [take] money from the Rohingya,”* said Hossain (pseudonym), an APBn officer in the camps. *“We have rules and regulations, and we can’t go beyond it. There might be some such incidents in other refugee camps. According to my working experience in the camp, I have heard such things happen in other camps. But, I have never taken from them, and they never offered me money. However, sometimes we have to treat them badly in some particular situations. When they don’t listen to us, they don’t allow us to do our job, we have to treat them badly.”*<sup>72</sup>

**“WHEN THEY BLATANTLY TALK LIKE THIS, WE HAVE TO KEEP SILENT; OTHERWISE, THEY BEAT US. THEY PERSECUTE PEOPLE AT THE CHECKPOINTS AND SNATCH ANYTHING PEOPLE CARRY AND THE CASH WITH THE PEOPLE. THAT’S HOW WE HAVE TO ENDURE DIFFICULTIES HERE.”**

### **FALSIFYING EVIDENCE**

The police are reported to fabricate evidence to justify their abuses, such as planting **yaba (a illicit drug made of methamphetamine laced with caffeine)** on someone or accusing them of involvement with ARSA or other illegal activities. To cover up their corruption, the police frequently force Rohingya, under threat of further violence, to say on video that the police did not take anything from them.

*“They looted everything [from him] including his phone so that he cannot contact anyone through the phone,”* said Shafika, a 35-year-old Rohingya woman. *“After snatching everything, they made him say on a video that they didn’t harm him or take anything from him. He had to say whatever they wanted. Otherwise, he would be beaten up and brutalised.”*<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Interview C04F

<sup>72</sup> Interview P01

<sup>73</sup> Interview C16F

## EXTORTION

Police fines and extortion were reported by a vast majority of respondents as being ubiquitous when attempting to move through the camps or outside of the camps. These fees could be levied as punishment for breaking rules related to movement, such as travelling outside the camp for work, or circumventing checkpoints by crawling under fences, or they could be requested as bribes at checkpoints to allow for travel outside of the camps or between camps.

Feedback from respondents indicates there is widespread belief that the police are in the camps in order to make money from the Rohingya, rather than to protect them. Criminal activity has not decreased, and many believe that the police even encourage crime because they are able to make money off bribes from both the victims and the perpetrators.

*“If a criminal is punished, another 10 criminals stop committing crimes due to fear,”* said Hassan, a 30-year-old Rohingya man. *“So that would decrease the crime rate here. But now, there are some officers who encourage crimes in the camp so that they can exploit and take extortions. They encourage bad people to commit more crimes so that they can get bribes. They want to increase the crime rate among us. They don’t want to decrease it at all.”*<sup>74</sup>

According to respondents, victims must also pay bribes in order for the police to take their case. Simultaneously, perpetrators pay bribes to escape punishment. In short, justice goes to whoever can pay the most. *“No one gets justice here without the use of money or bribe,”* said Rahim, a 24-year-old Rohingya man. *“If we’re able to give money as bribe to police or CIC staff then they will help us to win the case whether or not he is a criminal.”*<sup>75</sup> Moreover, bribes must be paid for everything, including, but not limited to, crossing checkpoints, working, shopping, seeking healthcare, and driving a vehicle. They are also needed to participate in important cultural activities, such as weddings, funerals, and holidays. The police are reported to target people wearing nice clothes as they think that they will be able to extort them for more money. Rohingya respondents reported varying amounts of money extorted, ranging from 20-150,000 BDT (0.20-1,500 USD).

**THERE ARE SOME OFFICERS WHO ENCOURAGE CRIMES IN THE CAMP SO THAT THEY CAN EXPLOIT AND TAKE EXTORTIONS. THEY ENCOURAGE BAD PEOPLE TO COMMIT MORE CRIMES SO THAT THEY CAN GET BRIBES. THEY WANT TO INCREASE THE CRIME RATE AMONG US. THEY DON'T WANT TO DECREASE IT AT ALL.”**

<sup>74</sup> Interview C10M

<sup>75</sup> Interview C22M



The police interviewed corroborated this and also added further clarification, stating that the amount of money an APBn officer can expect to make by extorting Rohingya varies based on officer rank:

*“If a corrupt constable takes money from a Rohingya [person], he can earn 200 to 500 BDT (2-5 USD) per day,”* said Hossain (pseudonym), an APBn officer. *“Rohingya people reported to me that the police take 20, 30, or 50 BDT (.20-.50 USD) from them to bring their consumption or materials inside the camps. If a Sub Inspector (SI, mid-level police officer) tries to extort money, he can earn more than a constable because his level is higher than a constable. I think he can earn about 1,000 to 2,000 BDT (9-19 USD). If an Officer in Charge tries to extort, he can make more than a Sub Inspector. I’m not exactly sure of the amount, but I’m estimating it through information I received.”*<sup>76</sup>

APBn officers confirmed that the Rohingya are extorted by police on a regular basis for crossing checkpoints, bringing items into the camps, running shops, driving vehicles, and otherwise bypassing any of the other camp restrictions in place.

*“I’m not denying that we don’t take money at all,”* said Hossain (pseudonym), an APBn officer. *“Such extortion issues happen, I think. All the officers are not good, and it doesn’t mean that all the officers are bad. There might be some police officers who are torturing Rohingya. For example, the officers will take some goods of Rohingya, and they will ask for money to return the goods. They also take money when any Rohingya try to bring something (goods, materials, furniture, etc.) inside the camp. I have received some reporting messages on extortion issues. I also heard that the officers take money from Rohingya by giving excuses after checking them. . . I have not taken money directly from the Rohingya. Sometimes my colleagues take money from them, and they give me some of it, or we spend that money on snacks and coffee costs.”*<sup>77</sup>

**“I HAVE NOT TAKEN MONEY DIRECTLY FROM THE ROHINGYA. SOMETIMES MY COLLEAGUES TAKE MONEY FROM THEM, AND THEY GIVE ME SOME OF IT, OR WE SPEND THAT MONEY ON SNACKS AND COFFEE COSTS.”**

<sup>76</sup> Interview P01

<sup>77</sup> Interview P01



Furthermore, the police interviewed alleged that this extortion is systemic throughout the APBn, reporting that some officers have ordered their constables to extort the Rohingya. *“We got another incident report that an officer ordered his constables to extort money from the people,”* said Hossain (pseudonym), an APBn officer. *“The constables had to follow the order because they wanted to be close with their senior.”*<sup>78</sup>

## CONFISCATION

In addition to extortion, respondents reported often being questioned and physically searched by APBn at checkpoints. If Rohingya are found with money, smartphones, or laptops they are often stolen by APBn officers. Rohingya reported that, at times, officers justify these thefts by saying that Rohingya are not allowed to have smartphones or large amounts of money.

Mohammed, a 71-year-old Rohingya man, shared his experience of police extortion and confiscation with the YCR team: *“When I was going to Balukhali Market to buy some vegetables and fresh fish, the police stopped our CNG (small motorised transport) at their check post and they asked us to get out of the car. We were then taken to a room, and they snatched our money and smartphones and fined each of us 5,000 BDT (47 USD) without any reason. After giving the money, I asked the officer why did you take money from us, as you all know we are innocent and you didn’t get any illegal things from us? He said you’re a Rohingya and that it’s illegal to go outside of the camp with money.”*<sup>79</sup>

Other times they take issue with certain applications installed on smartphones, such as the money transfer application bKash, or use the fact that a phone has multiple SIM cards (particularly Myanmar SIM cards) as a justification for stealing them. Respondents reported that at times police will take their phones and then install bKash themselves to fabricate reasons to steal phones from Rohingya.

*“They check our bodies and cell phones,”* said Dilshad, a 37-year-old Rohingya woman. *“They charge us if they find anything that they think is illegal for us. Even if they don’t find anything, they install Bangladeshi money transfer apps on our phones, such as bKash, by themselves and charge us money. They even snatched our phones many times.”*<sup>80</sup>

Police respondents confirmed that the confiscation of Rohingya mobile phones happens often due to official prohibitions against Rohingya being allowed to own and use mobile phones in the camps. Hossain (pseudonym), an APBn officer, said this about the matter: *“Using mobile phones and electronic devices is prohibited for the Rohingya according to the rules. However, the CIC internally permits majis (block-level officials) to use mobile phones in order to support the CIC. The rest of the population is not allowed to use mobile phones, but many people are using them now. However, we try to reduce the number of refugees using mobile phones in the camp. In such situations, some bad or corrupted officers extort money to allow them to continue to use mobile phones. Allowing Rohingya to use mobile phones is not in the rules of Rohingya response and CIC rules.”*<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Interview P01

<sup>79</sup> Interview C09M

<sup>80</sup> Interview C03F

<sup>81</sup> Interview P01

## MARKETPLACE AND WORK INTERFERENCE

According to respondents, police are confiscating more than just money and other valuable items such as smartphones. Respondents reported that if they manage to leave the camp and return with necessities purchased in the local markets, police often confiscate these items. Alternatively, if the police do not confiscate them, they will take the items and immediately throw them away. Respondents believe this is to prevent Rohingya from retaining the basics that they need to survive. At other times, they will require bribes to allow Rohingya to bring the items into the camp.

Respondents related this specific type of extortion to the destruction of the Rohingya markets inside the camps by authorities. While previously Rohingya could buy essential items and supplemental food in the camps, the destruction of the markets has forced Rohingya to pass through the checkpoints more often with essential items bought in the local markets outside the camps.

Kushida, a 32-year-old Rohingya woman, shared her thoughts about goods being confiscated by APBn, *“The markets are now very far from us because of the demolition of the camp markets by the police and the CIC, but we still need to visit the markets to buy the things we need on a daily basis. Even if we manage to sneak into the markets by passing through holes in the fences, we will still have to walk in front of the police when we return with our groceries and pass through the checkpoints because the fence openings are too small for us to pass through carrying the grocery bags. The police snatch our groceries when they notice while we pass the checkpoints. They even beat us. So, these restrictions are clearly having a negative impact on our daily lives.”*<sup>82</sup>

**“THE POLICE SNATCH OUR GROCERIES WHEN THEY NOTICE WHILE WE PASS THE CHECKPOINTS. THEY EVEN BEAT US. SO, THESE RESTRICTIONS ARE CLEARLY HAVING A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON OUR DAILY LIVES.”**

Moreover, because Rohingya-run markets inside the camp were previously destroyed by camp authorities, ad-hoc vendors or temporary markets were created in their place. However, these are only allowed after bribing the authorities. Respondents reported violent police raids on these temporary markets, with the police not only destroying property, but also physically beating anyone in the markets at that time.

*“When we arrive at the temporary market because the original markets have been destroyed, the police appear out of nowhere and brutally smash everyone they come across,”* said Anwar, a 46-year-old Rohingya man. *“At the temporary market, some people pay off the police to sell goods for a while, but then a different group of police show up, break everything, and beat everyone. Once, I had to carry a person to the hospital after he was hit just twice with a stick by the police at the market. He was in critical condition.”*<sup>83</sup>



<sup>82</sup> Interview C04F

<sup>83</sup> Interview C2WM



Leaving the camps in search of work is also very difficult because the bribe money needed to pass safely through checkpoints is often more than a Rohingya can expect to make in a day's work. Many Rohingya respondents expressed that, although they desired to work, it was counterproductive to do so because they could not make a profit.

*"I am stopped at the checkpoint on my way back when I go to bring some supplies from outside the camp," said Hamidullah, a 35-year-old Rohingya man. "They demand 700 BDT from me in order to let the goods into the camp, which I purchase for 500 BDT. I get 600 BDT after selling the goods; that means I have a loss of 100 BDT. How can I do business like that? How can I feed my family? How can I survive if that goes on?"*<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, because work is not possible, people have begun selling their food cards in order to afford the constant extortion. *"Due to the extortion of the police, some people need to pawn their food cards to manage to pay the police, and they can't even have food for that reason,"* said Nasima, a 24-year-old Rohingya woman.<sup>85</sup> One way Rohingya have found to circumvent police corruption has been to send food and money with their children, as children are scrutinised less intensely at checkpoints. However, this puts children at greater risk of violence if they are caught.

### MISTRUST OF AUTHORITY

The rampant corruption that Rohingya experience has led to a deep-seated mistrust of authority, especially of the APBn. Specifically, bribes and extortion were frequently reported as reasons to mistrust any authority figure. There is also a general distrust of the Government of Bangladesh. Citing their poor living situation in the camps and the differential treatment they witness between themselves and Bangladeshi nationals, many respondents believed that the government has ordered the police to mistreat them, because, despite reporting police misconduct, nothing changes.

*"Whatever we are facing here is because of the government,"* said Rabia, a 32-year-old Rohingya woman. *"I think the government has ordered the police to torture us like this. We have reported many complaints against the police for torturing us unreasonably, but we haven't gotten any response from anywhere."*<sup>86</sup>



**"DUE TO THE EXTORTION OF THE POLICE, SOME PEOPLE NEED TO PAWN THEIR FOOD CARDS TO MANAGE TO PAY THE POLICE, AND THEY CAN'T EVEN HAVE FOOD FOR THAT REASON,"**

<sup>84</sup> Interview C4EM

<sup>85</sup> Interview C18F

<sup>86</sup> Interview C1EF

The majority of respondents believed that the army can be trusted and have expressed that they wish for the police to be replaced with the army in the camps. Other camp actors, such as the CICs, humanitarians, and majis, are trusted to varying degrees. For some, the CICs and majis are not to be trusted because they either accept bribes, collaborate with the police, or both. Others report that the aforementioned can be trusted because they act justly and work with the Rohingya to solve their problems. Some respondents expressed a mistrust of the INGOs working in the camps because of reported corruption, embezzlement, and discrimination in service distribution.

**THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS BELIEVED THAT THE ARMY CAN BE TRUSTED AND HAVE EXPRESSED THAT THEY WISH FOR THE POLICE TO BE REPLACED WITH THE ARMY IN THE CAMPS.**

*“It’s true the NGOs are working hard to support us with food assistance and other services,” said Sabira, a 21-year-old Rohingya woman. “But there is some corruption and embezzlement even among the field-level humanitarians. We sometimes see discrimination in distribution of the services. We also see abuses of funds and services.”<sup>87</sup>*

The UNHCR and other United Nations agencies are the most trusted aid organisations within the camps as they are reported to not accept bribes, but they are still slow to respond to reported problems and, despite protection being one of their main responsibilities, they are perceived as ineffectual in improving camp safety and security.



<sup>87</sup> Interview C14F

## ACCESSING JUSTICE

Only a minority of survey respondents were familiar with actors that are involved in working on issues related to justice (including the police, CIC, majis, and humanitarian organisations). The majority of respondents (59 percent) were not aware of any channels available to seek justice or report issues. For the survey respondents that were aware of these channels, the vast majority (93 percent) reported that they were not sufficient. In fact, most interview respondents reported that the current processes in place often do more harm than good due to high levels of corruption, long waiting times to receive responses, or inaction.

Increases in restrictions have been justified as a way to increase safety and decrease crime in the camps. However, as detailed above, the justice system is riddled with corruption, enforced through bribes and extortion that has resulted in impunity for criminals. Additionally, many respondents thought it unjust that all Rohingya are suffering in the camps due to the actions of a smaller group of criminals.

*“All of us are not bad,”* said Kamal, a 29-year-old Rohingya man. *“Because of one bad person, 10 people are suffering. Not only Rohingya, but also there are bad people around the world and because of one person, the remaining 10 people have to suffer. Not all Rohingya are bad. . . Because of this, we are having such difficulties with movement.”*<sup>88</sup>

**“WHATEVER WE ARE FACING HERE IS BECAUSE OF THE GOVERNMENT,” SAID RABIA, A 32-YEAR-OLD ROHINGYA WOMAN. “I THINK THE GOVERNMENT HAS ORDERED THE POLICE TO TORTURE US LIKE THIS. WE HAVE REPORTED MANY COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POLICE FOR TORTURING US UNREASONABLY, BUT WE HAVEN’T GOTTEN ANY RESPONSE FROM ANYWHERE.”**

<sup>88</sup> Interview C20M





# FINDINGS IV:

# IMPACT OF MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS



Respondents made it very clear that restricting their movement impedes on all other facets of life: freedom from violence, access to healthcare and healthy living conditions, one's ability to work and have an income, access to education, access to food and material needs, and one's ability to fully participate in religious and cultural life. Each of these, as they apply to the Rohingya situation in Bangladesh, are discussed in further detail below. Restricting Rohingya movement has been presented by the Government of Bangladesh as a security measure and justified underneath claims that the Rohingya community's basic needs are fully met in the camps via government services and international aid. Our research suggests otherwise. **As things are now, Rohingya report that they must leave the camps to access the resources and opportunities necessary for them to survive.** However, current policies restricting movement have criminalised this, creating a difficult choice for Rohingya: break the law and risk extortion and violence at the hands of the authorities, or continue to endure needless suffering created by the Government of Bangladesh.

## SURVEY RESPONSES: IMPACT OF MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

THE REPORTED LEVELS OF IMPACT OF FOM RESTRICTIONS ON...	HIGH IMPACT FROM RESTRICTIONS (% OF RESPONDENTS)	LOW IMPACT FROM RESTRICTIONS (% OF RESPONDENTS)	NO IMPACT FROM RESTRICTIONS (% OF RESPONDENTS)
...EXPERIENCING <b>EMOTIONAL DISTRESS</b>	93.7%	5.8%	0.4%
...ABILITY TO <b>EXPRESS OPINIONS OPENLY AND PUBLICLY</b>	89.2%	6.6%	4.1%
...ABILITY TO ACCESS <b>HEALTHCARE</b>	83.4%	10.4%	6.2%
...ABILITY TO ACCESS <b>WORK OR LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES</b>	82.6%	10.4%	7.1%
...ELEVATING THE <b>RISK OF DISEASES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES</b>	82.5%	10.0%	7.5%
...ABILITY TO <b>MEET FAMILY AND FRIENDS</b>	81.3%	14.1%	4.6%
...ABILITY TO MEET <b>DAILY CONSUMPTION NEEDS</b>	71.2%	18.8%	10.0%
...ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN <b>CULTURAL TRADITIONS AND PRACTICES</b>	69.7%	25.7%	4.6%
...ABILITY TO ACCESS <b>EDUCATION</b>	62.2%	22.8%	14.9%
...ABILITY TO PRACTISE <b>RELIGION</b>	48.1%	36.1%	15.8%
...ABILITY TO ACCESS <b>WATER AND SANITATION</b>	31.1%	41.9%	27.0%



## SECURITY AND VIOLENCE

Violent acts perpetrated by individuals, gangs, and authorities are ubiquitous throughout the camps. *“Rohingya people are being murdered, subjected to torture, assassinated, split in two, having their nails and eyes pulled out, kidnapped, taken to jail, and being dragged out on the road and shot,”*<sup>89</sup> said Aisha, a 60-year-old Rohingya woman. Accounts of physical assault, abduction, murder, theft, SGBV, and arson were reported repeatedly by respondents. Eighty-one percent of survey respondents reported feeling ‘not at all safe’ or ‘a little bit safe’ in the camps, while only 19 percent reported feeling ‘quite a bit safe’ or ‘extremely safe.’ Complicating the security situation further, Rohingya noted that reporting such acts to authorities is dangerous because retributive violence is commonplace. *“When such criminals are released, they cause chaos killing people in the camp when they return,”* said Hamidullah, a 35-year-old Rohingya man. *“They become more violent than before. If one was arrested for torturing people and gets released from jail, he becomes a murderer after his return.”*<sup>90</sup> According to camp authorities, restrictions on movement have been put in place as an attempt to curb the uncontrollable violence in the camps. In reality, many respondents believe that these restrictions have instead further destabilised camp security, as corruption among authorities has allowed criminals and gangs to act with impunity while the restrictions prevent innocent Rohingya from seeking safety.<sup>91</sup>

**“ROHINGYA PEOPLE ARE BEING MURDERED, SUBJECTED TO TORTURE, ASSASSINATED, SPLIT IN TWO, HAVING THEIR NAILS AND EYES PULLED OUT, KIDNAPPED, TAKEN TO JAIL, AND BEING DRAGGED OUT ON THE ROAD AND SHOT,”**

*“They are causing riots, beating and killing people, looting houses, torturing us,”* said Kushida, a 32-year-old Rohingya woman. *“In the camp, people are usually abducted, slaughtered and cut into pieces. So, the police claim that restrictions are put in place to stop them. How can these things keep happening despite the presence of the CIC, the police, and the guards at night? Thinking logically, we can understand that government officials have united with the bad guys to cause all these problems in our lives.”*<sup>92</sup>

Feelings of insecurity related to camp violence were pervasive among Rohingya respondents. Unstable living conditions combined with restrictions on movement exacerbate these feelings as the flimsy construction of their shelters does not afford safety from criminals and, without freedom of movement, they are not able to seek safety elsewhere. These findings were affirmed by feedback from survey respondents, the vast majority of whom (86 percent) reported that the restrictions on movement made them feel less safe in the camps, while 14 percent felt that the restrictions made no difference in safety, and less than 1 percent reported feeling more safe due to restrictions. The recent murders of Mohib Ullah and other Rohingya leaders also contribute to general feelings of insecurity among respondents.

Many reported being afraid to leave their shelters alone and that the fear of violence prevented them

<sup>89</sup> Interview C09F

<sup>90</sup> Interview C4EM

<sup>91</sup> Corruption, police violence, and access to justice are discussed in greater depth in Section II: Enforcement and Section III: Justice and Corruption.

<sup>92</sup> Interview C04F



from leaving their shelters after dark. For women, going to the latrine has become especially dangerous due to increases in SGBV. Some have compared the security situation in Bangladesh to that of Myanmar:


*“No, I don’t feel safe in the camp,” said Sabina, a 30-year-old Rohingya woman. “We feel the same here as we did under the threat of the Myanmar Military. At night, we feel very worried that the police, thugs, or thieves can come to us. It’s more worrisome if we have a beautiful daughter or some more savings. It’s like we feel more unsafe here than we did in Myanmar.”*<sup>93</sup>

## HEALTH

<sup>93</sup> Interview C26F

*Karim, a 27-year-old Rohingya man, speaks of the impact that restrictions have on Rohingya health and well-being:*

“If a foreigner comes to visit the Rohingyas here, he will find that the Rohingya people are very thin and with faces resembling the impacts of their poor mental state because people without good mental health don’t look good physically and they can’t grow physically as well. You can spot the difference immediately. If you bring ten Rohingya and ten Bangladeshis closely standing together, you can immediately say who are the Rohingya by their poor physical appearance, because the difference between the two groups is; one has a country that they can call home and have all the rights as human beings, and the other has nothing like that.”



**“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS IS; ONE HAS A COUNTRY THAT THEY CAN CALL HOME AND HAVE ALL THE RIGHTS AS HUMAN BEINGS, AND THE OTHER HAS NOTHING LIKE THAT.”**

Current camp conditions do not support good health, and many respondents believe that the oppressive conditions are a fundamental cause of both physical disease and mental distress for the Rohingya living there.<sup>94</sup> This effect is intensified by restrictions on movement, as they prevent Rohingya from accessing food, proper hygiene, education, employment, safety, and quality healthcare—all of which are necessary to support good health. A majority of survey respondents (83 percent) reported that restrictions on movement created significant challenges in accessing healthcare, and 82.5 percent reported that restrictions on movement make them significantly more at-risk to diseases and their consequences. Moreover, the burden of mental disorder is substantial as many Rohingya have experienced extreme levels of trauma in Myanmar, and feel deeply distressed over current conditions in the camps. This distress is further exacerbated by the current restrictions on movement; 94 percent of survey respondents reported that restrictions on movement caused significant negative impacts related to how they felt emotionally.

*“We had no diseases while we were living in the open places in Myanmar,” said Amin, a Rohingya man living in the camps. “After coming here, because there is no freedom in the camp, skin diseases, mental illness, and various other diseases are occurring because of the difficult living conditions and the fact that most people live together in a small area. I don’t think these kinds of diseases will happen if we have freedom of movement. I think it’s because of the poor conditions that people here are suffering from such diseases. Every day we have worries, sorrows, and thoughts. I think that due to all of these, we are getting weak, weakness of brain and disability of body.”*<sup>95</sup>

Respondents reported that healthcare is becoming increasingly difficult to access because of restrictive camp policies and a patient population that is far bigger than camp clinic capacities.

<sup>94</sup> Fundamental causes of disease is a public health concept stating that, unless the underlying cause of a health disparity, such as racism or socioeconomic status, or as in this case, severe human rights violations, is addressed, the disparity will not be remediated by any intervention targeting another part of the causal pathway. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. [Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease](#). 1995.

<sup>95</sup> Interview C16M



Because there is so little availability, Rohingya patients are forced to wait in long lines for care, often waiting for hours at a time with no guarantee of service that day. Healthcare access is further limited by the family-based data card system used in the camps. Respondents reported that one data card is issued per family and the same data card cannot be used for medical aid twice on the same day, meaning that only one family member can receive care per day. Proper emergency response is hindered by restrictions on movement as camp clinics are not open at night, vehicles are not allowed inside the camp, and leaving the camp often requires prior permission from the CIC. **This has become a serious problem as multiple respondents reported knowing someone who has died because they were unable to access proper emergency healthcare services.**

**EVERY DAY WE HAVE WORRIES, SORROWS, AND THOUGHTS. I THINK THAT DUE TO ALL OF THESE, WE ARE GETTING WEAK, WEAKNESS OF BRAIN AND DISABILITY OF BODY.”**

*“As we are not allowed to travel freely, we can’t arrive to receive medical treatments on time,” said Anwar, a 46-year-old Rohingya man. “There is a clinic in Kutupalong where we visit when we have health problems, but we either arrive late or can’t go at all because the police stop us at the checkpoints. They only let us go past the checkpoint if they wish. When they don’t want to let us go, they don’t, even though the patient dies right there.”<sup>96</sup>*

The healthcare that is purportedly available to Rohingya in the camps is neither quality nor accessible. The in-camp clinics are under-resourced and they only provide treatment for “low-level diseases” such as coughs, fevers, or headaches. Many report that they are only given paracetamol regardless of their complaint. Disrespectful and discriminatory treatment from Bangladeshi staff was reported frequently, many connecting this treatment to an increase in the mental distress they experience.

*“Different NGOs have implemented health facilities, and they are led by the Bangladeshi staff,” said Sahar, a 45-year-old Rohingya woman. “It doesn’t matter how respectful a person goes there to seek healthcare, the health staff treat us there as if we are dogs. They treat us quite disrespectfully. We are already sick and depressed with the refugee life. We go there in search of healthcare and mental relief. But their bad and disrespectful communication makes us more serious and depressed.”<sup>97</sup>*

**THEY ONLY LET US GO PAST THE CHECKPOINT IF THEY WISH. WHEN THEY DON’T WANT TO LET US GO, THEY DON’T, EVEN THOUGH THE PATIENT DIES RIGHT THERE.”**

<sup>96</sup> Interview C2WM

<sup>97</sup> Interview C2EF



When prescription medication is needed, patients are unable to access it because it is not provided by the clinics and there is limited pharmacy access inside the camps. Therefore, accessing prescription medication requires leaving the camps, but restrictions on movement has made this increasingly difficult.

*“If we ask for proper healthcare besides paracetamol capsules at the free health facilities, the health workers say that there is no proper healthcare for us, and they just send us back home,”* said Amina, a 30-year-old Rohingya woman. *“Now, it’s like we should die of the diseases here as we neither access proper healthcare from the free health facilities, nor can we access medicines from the local pharmacies.”*<sup>98</sup>

According to respondents, permission from the CIC to leave the camps for health-care is only given for very serious cases and is frequently denied underneath the false notion that adequate healthcare is available in the camps.

*“If we are not getting proper treatment from the hospital inside the camp, then we need to go out of the camp to seek proper treatments,”* explained Hassan, a 32-year-old Rohingya man. *“If you need to go outside of the camp, then you need to get permission from CIC. He gives permission if he likes. Or else, he does not. If the patient is very serious, then they are given permission. If the patient has Hepatitis C or B or AIDS, then they are not given permission, and are told to seek treatment from the hospitals inside the camp.”*<sup>99</sup>

As noted by Hassan, this has created a wide treatment gap for Rohingya patients. Therefore, many attempt to leave the camps without permission in search of healthcare. However, even if someone is able to leave the camp, healthcare access is still not guaranteed. Respondents reported that most private clinics are costly and can require Bangladesh national identification cards.

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<sup>98</sup> Interview C20F

<sup>99</sup> Interview C03M



If official permission has been obtained, respondents reported that it is often not respected by police, and that they are subjected to violence and intimidation at checkpoints regardless of permission status.

**Police intimidation has deterred some respondents from seeking the healthcare that they need.**

*“I don’t even go out anymore because I am afraid of the check posts and what they do to us when they see us at the check post,”* said Mohammad, a 71-year-old Rohingya man. *“Once I went there for medical treatment and it was also very difficult to manage with them to go outside to the hospital. Now, I hardly ever go there for medical examinations. I feel very bad to see the police, what they are doing with us and that they are playing with us like we are a football.”*<sup>100</sup>

Police violence has serious consequences for Rohingya health. Beyond blocking access to care, the police also exhibit a profound lack of sympathy and compassion for even the most vulnerable Rohingya in the camps, including children, pregnant women, and the elderly.

Zahir, a 25-year-old Rohingya man, shared his family’s experience of seeking healthcare for his grandmother: *“The guard told us to go and die in our place. And, the other day, we brought our grandma to HCR hospital to get treatment, and when we were returning from the hospital by CNG (small motorised vehicle), suddenly the police arrived in front of us and stopped our vehicle. And the police beat us with a stick, including our grandma whose age is around 80. It is really very hard to survive here as a refugee.”*<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Interview C09M

<sup>101</sup> Interview C26M





## LIVELIHOODS AND INCOME

Rohingya reported that movement restrictions severely curtailed their ability to work both outside of and within the camps. Eighty-two percent of survey respondents reported facing severe challenges accessing work due to restrictions on movement. Checkpoints and fencing create physical barriers to seeking jobs, and respondents reported that even if they are able to navigate these barriers and secure work outside of the camp or in other camps, they often lose their jobs due to being absent from work or late to work because of delays at checkpoints or being refused exit from the camp. Respondents reported that official camp policies prevent Rohingya from holding jobs outside of the camps or even selling goods inside of the camp—the primary example being the destruction of the markets within the camp, and the prohibitions against selling items within the camp.

*“The situation was not this bad in the past here,” said Dilshad, a 37-year-old Rohingya woman. “Only in the past three years have we seen restrictions here. People are not allowed to move because they put fences on all sides, and shops and markets are not allowed to open. Since the markets and businesses have been destroyed, people’s financial struggles started.”*<sup>102</sup>

Comparing the situation to their lives in Myanmar, some respondents reported that the livelihood situation is much worse in Bangladesh:

*“Due to the restrictions on our movement, we can’t access the market properly,” said Sabina, a 30-year-old Rohingya woman. “When we were in Myanmar, we used to own fishing lakes. We were able to fish there at night. We could breed poultry as well as cattle there. Since we are Rohingya refugees here, restrictions have been imposed even on our livelihoods. As we are displaced people, we should live as if we are stateless. We can’t own or do anything. We can neither own a fishing lake nor breed any poultry here. Due to the restriction, we are facing all these challenges.”*<sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Interview C03F  
<sup>103</sup> Interview C26F





Rohingya reported that they often hear justifications from the police and host community related to the confiscation of wages and the prohibitions against work. Namely, that Rohingya are receiving rations and all of their other needs are met by the humanitarian community, therefore they do not need to work. Rohingya respondents, on the other hand, reported that support received from the humanitarian community is not enough to meet their most basic needs.

*“[The Government of Bangladesh] says to us, ‘You are not citizens of this country. Refugees don’t have rights to any occupation or any income sources. You should live only on humanitarian assistance,’”* said Hassan, a 30-year-old Rohingya man. Later in his interview, he elaborated on this sentiment, stating, *“It’s obvious that our family can’t live on humanitarian assistance only. A family has different types of needs in order to manage livelihoods. If we get all of our necessities through humanitarian assistance, we would never want to work. The reason we want to work and make money now is because all of our needs aren’t fulfilled with humanitarian assistance.”*<sup>104</sup>

Those respondents who were able to find work had negative feelings associated with being forced to break the rules related to restrictions on movement and livelihoods in order to try to survive and provide for their families. Moreover, many reported facing discrimination, exploitation, and abuse by employers. It was often reported that employers in the local host community will refuse to pay promised wages, or that Rohingya workers will make much less than those from the host community doing similar tasks.

**“IT’S OBVIOUS THAT OUR FAMILY CAN’T LIVE ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE ONLY.”**

*“We do some labour in the villages of the host community,”* said Hassan, a 30-year-old Rohingya man. *“We are paid 300 BDT (2.75 USD) per day, while a host community labourer is paid 1,000 BDT (9.25 USD). Though we face discrimination, we don’t have other options except doing the work with 300 BDT daily. Even earning 100 BDT is so useful for us. If I can work with 100 BDT daily, I get 3000 BDT (27.50 USD) in a month, and I can somehow fulfil my needs with that money. We are really struggling to live. If the government made it easier for us to live, we could live easily and peacefully. Because of the restrictions, even a good person is becoming bad. When he doesn’t get any chance to work, he stays upset and broken.”*<sup>105</sup>

Even Rohingya employed in INGO positions reported facing discrimination and have recently seen their wages cut in half from what they previously earned working for INGOs. Respondents have noted a marked decrease in the INGO jobs that are available in the camps, and reported that new rules prevented them from travelling to other camps for INGO jobs, further decreasing their livelihood opportunities. *“People have lost their NGO jobs because people from one camp are not allowed to work in another one,”* said Kushida, a 32-year-old Rohingya woman. *“All these are difficulties in our daily lives. We don’t know why the government is doing this.”*<sup>106</sup>

The lack of livelihood opportunities caused by restrictions on movement has had a profound impact on

<sup>104</sup> Interview C10M

<sup>105</sup> Interview C10M

<sup>106</sup> Interview C04F

**“IF THE GOVERNMENT MADE IT EASIER FOR US TO LIVE, WE COULD LIVE EASILY AND PEACEFULLY. BECAUSE OF THE RESTRICTIONS, EVEN A GOOD PERSON IS BECOMING BAD. WHEN HE DOESN’T GET ANY CHANCE TO WORK, HE STAYS UPSET AND BROKEN.”**

Rohingya respondents. Rohingya reported that, due to restrictions on movement and work, they are not able to provide sufficient food to their families, purchase essential medicines, or provide for childrens’ education expenses. *“We feel helpless when clinics simply give us a prescription,”* said Aziza, a 38-year-old Rohingya woman. *“We run out of food for the rest of the month after selling some of the rations to buy medicines.”*<sup>107</sup>

Many respondents reported that the stress from lack of work has put the community on a dangerous path as many connect it to increases in domestic violence, crime, and gang activity in the camps.<sup>108</sup>

*“If we had opportunities and income sources to live here, murders or conflicts wouldn’t appear among us,”* said Hassan, a 30-year-old Rohingya man. *“There would not be any issues among us, and our people wouldn’t be imprisoned for any crimes. We could stay peacefully. People don’t have problems once they are busy with their respective work.”*<sup>109</sup>

A few respondents, reflecting on the situation related to livelihoods and the impacts of the restrictions on their community, reported that the extreme restrictions were a clear violation of their basic human rights. *“Since I am not allowed to have any income sources, it’s a kind of violence and a rights violation on me,”*<sup>110</sup> said Yusuf, a 36-year-old Rohingya man.

<sup>107</sup> Interview C25F

<sup>108</sup> Other research conducted previously with Rohingya in the Bangladesh camps has demonstrated significant associations between access to employment and decreases in mental distress. Allowing Rohingya to work has the potential to both improve Rohingya health and make the camps a safer place to live. *Frontiers in Public Health. Associations Among Past Trauma, Post-displacement Stressors, and Mental Health Outcomes in Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: A Secondary Cross-sectional Analysis. 2023.*

<sup>109</sup> Interview C10M

<sup>110</sup> Interview C11M



## FOOD AND MATERIAL NEEDS

Rohingya reported severe problems accessing food and other necessary items due to restrictions on movement. In fact, when asked about challenges providing for daily consumption because of restrictions on movement, 71 percent of survey respondents reported that restrictions severely impacted their ability to acquire necessities. Although Rohingya refugees receive rations from humanitarian agencies, respondents universally reported that these rations are insufficient in terms of the amount, quality, and diversity of food they receive. To make matters worse, in the months following data collection for this research, the **World Food Programme (WFP)** has twice cut funding for Rohingya rations. Individual Rohingya, who were originally allocated an insufficient 12 USD per month, now only receive 8 USD per month; less than .09 USD per meal.<sup>111</sup>

Rohingya also reported a number of problems with food distribution including long queues, difficulties transporting their food back to their shelters, and verbal abuse by humanitarian workers at the distribution centres. Importantly, Rohingya report that, over time, both the amount of food, and oil and gas for cooking have been reduced, creating a gap between the services and actual needs of Rohingya refugees. Previously, Rohingya filled this service gap by accessing makeshift markets in the camps to purchase food, a practice that continued until the markets were destroyed by camp authorities.

*“The eggs are very stale and the chillies and other items they provide are unclean,”* said Aisha, a 60-year-old Rohingya woman. *“If we keep the eggs at home for 4-5 days, they begin to rot. We try to eat the eggs as long as possible, but they get rotten so quickly. How are we going to feed our kids like this? The police also destroy our home’s small shop when we open it.”*<sup>112</sup>

A limited number of items are still sold in the camps either door-to-door or in ad-hoc markets that appear when police are not present. However, the selection and quality of the goods sold is poor, and respondents reported that vendors face the risk of repercussions from police if they are found selling goods. Due to these risks, vendors in the camps charge much higher prices for their goods, making them inaccessible to Rohingya with less money. This dynamic further highlights the restrictions on employment that prevent Rohingya from providing their families

<sup>111</sup> World Food Programme. [Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh Face Grim Choices as More Cuts to Food Assistance Imminent](#). 2023.

<sup>112</sup> Interview C09F





with even their most basic needs. Rohingya respondents reported that they and their families often go hungry. The lack of food in the camps is also impacting other areas of Rohingya life. As Rohingya are forced to spend more money on food, they have reported having to cut back on other basic needs including education for their children, as well as necessary clothing and other supplies.

*“We are in such a bad situation that we are unable to meet our basic needs,”* said Hamid, a 28-year-old Rohingya man. *“We lack water when we manage food, and we lack food when we manage water. We also have a scarcity of household items, such as drinking glasses. Even when we are given pots, we still need small pots (for use in toilets)... Those rations are not enough for us, but we have to manage to survive by staying hungry at times, and wearing fewer clothes.”*<sup>113</sup>

**“WE ARE IN SUCH A BAD SITUATION THAT WE ARE UNABLE TO MEET OUR BASIC NEEDS”**

## EDUCATION

Rohingya reported that they were prohibited from enrolling their children in the local schools outside of the camps due to ethnic discrimination and movement restrictions. In fact, 85 percent of survey respondents reported facing challenges accessing education because of movement restrictions. Respondents also overwhelmingly reported a lack of education opportunities for Rohingya students within the camps. While education services—such as learning centres—are being operated in the camps by INGOs, respondents reported that the education programming amounts only to informal education and play activities, while the much needed formal education is lacking. Some respondents reported that even informal education programming was unavailable in their block of residence, and that they were restricted from sending their children to centres in the neighbouring blocks.

*“The schools in this camp don’t offer anything educational to our kids,”* said Aisha, a 60-year-old Rohingya woman. *“The teachers at those schools stop showing up after three months of each season. These teachers only instruct in English, which they are not proficient in. They do not teach Bangla. They lack professional qualifications; some of them only passed class three. They are unable to instruct the students, so they simply visit the school to pass the time. Sadly, only Bangladeshi teachers, who are not qualified teachers, are permitted to be hired by the authorities for schools. So, the future of these children is uncertain as they are growing up without having an effective education. We are very concerned about this.”*<sup>114</sup>

Since arriving in Bangladesh, Rohingya have attempted to take charge of the situation by starting their own formal schools that teach Burmese curriculum. However, these Rohingya-led education efforts have faced constant pushback from authorities, and, according to respondents and a government document received by YCR, these schools have been prohibited.<sup>115</sup> Rohingya who have the financial means are able to pay for individual private tuition for their children, but the vast majority of respondents reported that they were unable to afford these types of tutors. Another alternative to the informal education system provided by INGOs is the madrasa-based religious

<sup>113</sup> Interview C21M

<sup>114</sup> Interview C09F

<sup>115</sup> Bangladesh Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner’s Decision Closing Schools. On file with YCR, December 13, 2021.


## FINDINGS IV: IMPACT OF MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

education.<sup>116</sup> However, due to restrictions on movement and gathering, religious education has also faced periodic shutdowns from camp authorities, as well as restrictions on the hours they are allowed to teach students.

*“After spending the first two to three years [here], we didn’t see any facilities for formal education in the humanitarian-led learning centres, [so] some of our community teachers have established some community-led schools in order to provide formal education,”* said Yusuf, a 36-year-old Rohingya man. *“But the government authorities have recently declared that community-led schools should be shut down where community teachers are using Myanmar national curriculum without legal authorisation. Now, leading these types of learning centres is like something illegal.”*<sup>117</sup>

### RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

The Rohingya community can legally practise their religion and are not explicitly limited from doing so. However, restrictions on movement are impeding Rohingya in their ability **to fully practise** their religion: 84 percent of survey respondents reported facing challenges practising their religion due to restrictions. In this sense, they are restricted from carrying out the full extent of their religious obligations and duties. For instance, there are five prayer sessions during the day (known as **salat**), the last of which (known as **Isha**) is held at 8pm in the mosque. Due to curfews at 6pm and restrictions on gatherings, people cannot practise at the mosque and congregate as prescribed by their religious practice.



**“THE GOVERNMENT  
AUTHORITIES HAVE  
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DOWN... NOW, LEADING  
THESE TYPES OF LEARNING  
CENTRES IS LIKE  
SOMETHING ILLEGAL.”**

<sup>116</sup> A ‘madrassa’ is an Islamic religious school, and the content is taught by religious leaders.

<sup>117</sup> Interview C11M

These restrictions have reportedly increased since arriving in Bangladesh after the clearance operations. In the beginning, they could admit their children to madrassas to practise memorising the Quran (known as hafiz), but now group religious discussions (known as Tabligh) are not allowed. Furthermore, pursuing the full extent of their religious practice by gathering at the camp mosques has been perceived by authorities as posing a risk of increased violence and extremism among Rohingya living in the camps.

Respondents emphasised that the inability to fully practise their religion has also had social and cultural impacts, as religion facilitates community building, and provides spaces for communal gathering, socialisation, and education. *“If we were allowed to form a cohesive society and build a mosque to perform salat (prayers) and worship, we could have better relationships with one another,”* said Farid, a 52-year-old Rohingya man. *“But due to these restrictions, we aren’t allowed to keep those relationships among us. Since we don’t have a mosque in our block, our relationships are getting weaker.”*<sup>118</sup> With these restrictions on gathering and practising, the community is forced to compromise its religious obligations, and is left with one less opportunity for social cohesion.

Furthermore, restrictions on movement have prevented Rohingya from holding or attending other important cultural community events, such as weddings and funerals, due to difficulties caused by checkpoints and not being allowed to gather in groups. The restrictions related to weddings were particularly emphasised as a source of distress. Respondents reported that permission from the CIC is required for marriages to take place, and that these permissions often require the payment of large sums of money that are inaccessible for the majority of Rohingya. If these bribes aren’t paid, couples may wait for months or years to receive permission, sometimes never receiving it at all.

**“THE CIC DOESN’T GIVE PERMISSION WITHOUT PAY. IT TAKES ABOUT THREE YEARS TO GET PERMISSION WITHOUT MONEY. AS LONG AS THEY DON’T GIVE US THE PERMISSION DOCUMENTS, WE CAN’T GET MARRIED.”**

*“When we have to arrange a girl’s marriage, we have to get the permission of the CIC,”* said Dilshad, a 37-year old Rohingya woman. *“The CIC doesn’t give permission without pay. It takes about three years to get permission without money. As long as they don’t give us the permission documents, we can’t get married.”*<sup>119</sup>

In order to circumvent this system, couples are often secretly married without permission from the CIC. **This can lead to harmful repercussions upon discovery by camp authorities, such as being forcibly relocated to Bhasan Char Island Camp.**

<sup>118</sup> Interview C19M

<sup>119</sup> Interview C03F



## AID AGENCIES

While respondents reported that the assistance provided by aid agencies and other INGOs present in the camps is appreciated, many respondents feel that improvements in camp life could be achieved if humanitarian organisations spent more time and effort advocating for Rohingya rights. Many respondents expressed repeated frustration that INGOs bear witness to the restrictions and persecution that Rohingya are experiencing daily in the camps, yet do nothing about it. However, some respondents acknowledged that aid organisations and other actors are limited in their ability to speak out against abuses for fear of retribution from the government.

*“There are no organisations who can stand up against the government for us because they are afraid of the government policy and their organisation’s future,”* said Zahir, a 25-year-old Rohingya man. *“It would be risky for any organisation to go against the government. That’s why everyone kept silent at this moment, they aren’t trying to improve the situation. We are a very unlucky people that we are close to Bangladesh as a country.”*<sup>120</sup>

When survey respondents were asked if they believed organisations working in the camps are effective in advocating with the government to improve conditions for Rohingya, 39 percent said ‘not at all,’ while 54 percent said ‘a little,’ and only 7 percent said either ‘quite a bit’ or ‘extremely.’ Responses were similar when respondents were asked if they believed the same organisations were working to improve the situation on freedom of movement; 89 percent of respondents said ‘not at all’ or ‘a little.’ It is widely believed that if the aid agencies wanted to do something, they would, and that this would be evident by improved policies and living conditions for Rohingya.

**“THERE ARE NO ORGANISATIONS WHO CAN STAND UP AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT FOR US BECAUSE THEY ARE AFRAID OF THE GOVERNMENT POLICY AND THEIR ORGANISATION’S FUTURE,”**

*“There are UNHCR and other different NGOs, but they aren’t doing anything to change the conditions of the camp,”* said Shirin, a 29-year-old Rohingya woman. *“The humanitarians themselves are witnessing how hard our life has become due to these restrictions and how brutally our people are being tortured by the police. Yet, the humanitarians do nothing to change these problems. The Bangladeshi humanitarians come here and take our pictures. They spread our pictures around the world. These aren’t benefiting us at all. We want support in the world, not sympathy from the world.”*<sup>121</sup>

**THE BANGLADESHI HUMANITARIANS COME HERE AND TAKE OUR PICTURES. THEY SPREAD OUR PICTURES AROUND THE WORLD. THESE AREN’T BENEFITING US AT ALL. WE WANT SUPPORT IN THE WORLD, NOT SYMPATHY FROM THE WORLD.”**

<sup>120</sup> Interview C27M

<sup>121</sup> Interview C12F

# FINDINGS V: GENDER IMPACTS





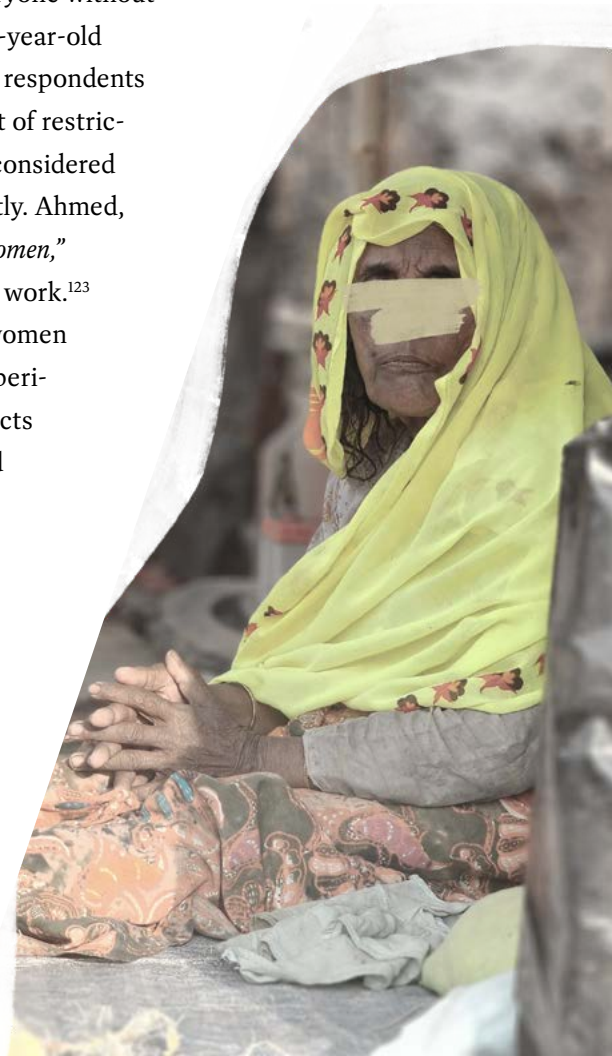
While gender discrimination is not explicitly outlined within the official restrictions on movement imposed by Bangladeshi officials, it is undoubtedly felt by the Rohingya in terms of impact. Responses in this study reflect disproportionate gendered impacts on the ways both Rohingya men and women experience the restrictions: 83.4 percent of survey respondents answered “yes” when asked if men and women are affected differently by restrictions. Respondents reported that gendered differences exist related to the extent to which violence is perpetrated against different genders, and the ways in which the restrictions have further domestic and societal repercussions.

This report has integrated gender considerations throughout the analysis to demonstrate that gender does not exist in isolation, nor is it an afterthought in understanding the impact of movement restrictions. However, this section underscores gendered impacts of restrictions, including increased **sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)**. The purpose of a gender-focused section is to highlight important findings related to gender and provide context for policy recommendations that accommodate both men’s and women’s specific needs.

### **GENDERED IMPACTS OF MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS**

The overall consensus from respondents was that the restrictions target everyone without regard for gender. “*They don’t differentiate between men and women,*” Aisha, a 60-year-old Rohingya woman stated, “*instead, they brutalise anyone they come across.*”<sup>122</sup> Yet, respondents reported that men and women had distinct experiences related to the impact of restrictions and their enforcement. While there was variation in how respondents considered each gender to be impacted, the majority agreed they were affected differently. Ahmed, a 38-year-old Rohingya man remarked, “*The restrictions affect men more than women,*” because men move outside of the camps more often than women to look for work.<sup>123</sup> While some female respondents agreed that men were targeted more than women when travelling for work, they also clearly detailed that Rohingya women experience more harassment, SGBV, and shame related to restrictions. These impacts are intensified by societal constraints on Rohingya women. The violence and harassment at checkpoints combined with these societal constraints create unique impacts for Rohingya women that are not experienced by men.

**“THEY DON’T DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN,  
INSTEAD THEY BRUTALISE ANYONE THEY COME ACROSS”**



<sup>122</sup> Interview C09F  
<sup>123</sup> Interview C15M



Many respondents highlighted other gendered impacts experienced by Rohingya women, including harassment at checkpoints, unwanted and repeated phone calls from police who have forcibly taken their phone numbers, inappropriate body searches, and being chased away from checkpoints.<sup>124</sup> Additionally, because of physical limitations related to being pregnant or because they often have children alongside them, many Rohingya women expressed that they often cannot take the alternate, precarious routes through the fences that men would take to avoid checkpoint harassment, thus highlighting the way compounding vulnerabilities create different impacts regardless of “equal treatment.”

*“The restrictions affect both men and women in the same way,”* said Kushida, a 32-year-old Rohingya woman, *“but women are not physically strong like men; they tend to have babies with them or be pregnant. Having to wait for two to three hours to cross the checkpoints is extremely difficult for women. Men can run away in times of emergency to save themselves, but women can’t do that. It is very disrespectful to women’s dignity when they are taken into the checkpoint office to have their bodies inspected.”*<sup>125</sup>

### SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV)

Respondents, male and female, emphasised the frequent violence and harassment that occurs at checkpoints as a result of being questioned and searched, although their experience of violence differed. Female Rohingya spoke of a range of SGBV perpetrated by APBn at checkpoints, from inappropriate and disrespectful searching techniques involving the removal of clothing and inappropriate touching, to rape and sexual assault.<sup>126</sup> Respondents reported that women are supposed to be searched by female police officers, yet respondents reported that this protocol is not always followed which can then lead SGBV at checkpoints via the body “searching” techniques used by the APBn.

While Rohingya women and men both reported being searched, women reported a higher level of vulnerability to SGBV coupled with feelings of shame and disgrace associated with being inappropriately touched in public, feelings that are intensified by the religiously conservative culture.

**“MALE POLICE OFFICERS PROBING THE BODIES OF MEN ARE OKAY, BUT DOING IT TO WOMEN IS ABSOLUTELY DISGRACEFUL. THEY TAKE WOMEN INSIDE POLICE CAMPS AND RUN THEIR HANDS ALL OVER THEIR BODIES,”**

*“Male police officers probing the bodies of men are okay, but doing it to women is absolutely disgraceful. They take women inside police camps and run their hands all over their bodies,”* said Samira, a 45-year-old Rohingya woman. *“It is degrading to women’s dignity when other men passing on the roads see it. Women are sensitive beings, they don’t deserve this type of treatment. It is disrespectful what they do to us in public. . . Women, unlike men, are fragile beings.”*<sup>127</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Respondents reported that the police chase women away from the checkpoints on the road, which female respondents explained is culturally very humiliating to run in front of men.

<sup>125</sup> Interview C04F

<sup>126</sup> It is important to note that sexual and gender-based violence is inclusive of men as a gender-based issue. Men, as well as other gender minorities, can and do also experience SGBV. See: Legal Action Worldwide. They Took me to a Dark Place: The Experiences and Needs of Rohingya Hijra and Male Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. 2021.

<sup>127</sup> Interview C8EF

Aisha, a 60-year-old Rohingya woman, also expressed the same discomfort, *“We get terrified and our tears start running down our cheeks when we see them [doing checks]. I think it is not a big deal to check on men like that, but the way they check on women’s bodies in public is not appropriate at all.”*<sup>128</sup>

Kamal, a 29 year old Rohingya man shared occurrences of more serious sexual violence by APBn and others explaining that, *“there are some incidents that have happened where women were raped when they were taken inside the office to check them at the check post. If a woman is travelling alone, the driver will beat her and loot her things by taking her close to the forest. Women are more vulnerable than men because of restrictions.”* He also pointed to the SGBV that men experience but often don’t disclose, *“Men also face such things, but the men don’t express it.”*<sup>129</sup>

Sexual violence and abuse not only occurs at checkpoints. Rohingya women have reported that APBn officers routinely single out and abuse Rohingya women in their shelters. *“The police come here at night and knock on the doors of our shelters,”* said Amina, a 30-year-old Rohingya woman. *“If they see any beautiful girl in a shelter once, they keep going to that shelter repeatedly and abuse her.”*<sup>130</sup> This abuse and harassment also extends to sexual manipulation, intimidation, and coercion. *“They force us to meet with them even though they know we have husbands,”* explained Sabina, a 30-year-old Rohingya woman. *“Moreover, they threaten us that they would harm our husbands if we don’t meet them... They harass us sexually and force us to have physical relationships with them.”*<sup>131</sup>

Rohingya women also reported harassment when interacting with the host community, which has created a general feeling of insecurity and fear related to movement outside the camps. *“When a girl reaches puberty and looks a bit grown up here, she is at risk of being harassed,”*<sup>132</sup> said Aziza, a 38-year-old Rohingya woman.

<sup>128</sup> Interview C09F

<sup>129</sup> Interview C20M

<sup>130</sup> Interview C20F

<sup>131</sup> Interview C26F

<sup>132</sup> Interview C25F



### INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV)

Women and girls not only experience violence and abuse perpetrated by the APBn and host community, but they also experience **intimate partner violence (IPV)** in their own homes. Rohingya women reported that this violence is amplified by camp restrictions including restrictions on freedom of movement.

Respondents seemed to attribute current levels of IPV to the poor mental well-being and economic conditions in the camps. *“If a man doesn’t have any income and he cannot support his family, there is always domestic violence between him and his wife,”* said Sahar, a 45-year-old Rohingya woman, *“domestic violence turns into heinous crimes.”*<sup>133</sup>

Other respondents reported that financial stressors, stemming from the restrictions on movement and work, are inextricably linked to instances of IPV. Respondents reported overlapping challenges including poverty, mental health distress, a lack of education, a lack of empowerment, and IPV. Sultana, a 31-year-old Rohingya woman, revealed: *“Our husbands beat us for money. They snatch any money we get from our parents.”*<sup>134</sup>

Respondents also mentioned that the chronic food insecurity has caused tension in the home and led to physical abuse between domestic partners and parents and their children. Others reported that marriages are not lasting due to rising tensions and violence.<sup>135</sup>



<sup>133</sup> Interview C2EF

<sup>134</sup> Interview C21F

<sup>135</sup> For further reading on Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse against Rohingya refugee women in Cox’s Bazar see: [Intimate Partner Abuse Among Rohingya Women and its Relationship with their Abilities to Reject Husbands’ Advances to Unwanted Sex](#), 2021.



### IMPACT OF RESTRICTIONS ON TRAFFICKING AND CHILD MARRIAGE

The deteriorating conditions in the camps, caused in large part by government restrictions, have also led to trafficking of women and girls and an increase in child marriage. Families increasingly fear that their unmarried daughters will face assault and abuse in the camps. To avoid the personal and cultural impacts associated with SGBV, families see child marriage as one of the only routes available to safeguard their daughters, effectively making the decision to trade one form of SGBV for another.

Some respondents reported that the rise in desperate attempts to find marriage partners for daughters has led to an increase in trafficking. Khadija, a 24-year-old Rohingya woman, said, *“Many people take our girls with the promise of taking them to Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, but those girls are trafficked and sold. . . they don’t actually marry the girls and [after] abusing them for some days, they are sent back here.”*<sup>136</sup> Despite the dangers of trafficking, families are willing to take the risk because *“Our single daughters are unsafe living here,”* said Aziza, a 38-year-old Rohingya woman.<sup>137</sup>

**TO AVOID THE PERSONAL AND CULTURAL IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH SGBV, FAMILIES SEE CHILD MARRIAGE AS ONE OF THE ONLY ROUTES AVAILABLE TO SAFEGUARD THEIR DAUGHTERS, EFFECTIVELY MAKING THE DECISION TO TRADE ONE FORM OF SGBV FOR ANOTHER.**

The societal consequences are severe for Rohingya women who experience sexual abuse. *“Some Bangladeshi humanitarians are exploiting our girls,”* said Khadija. *“They offer our girls to marry or provide jobs and take the girls out of the camp by lying. They don’t actually marry the girls and after abusing them for some days, they are sent back here. Such girls lose dignity, and she can’t get married ever again and she is not viewed properly by the society.”*<sup>138</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Interview C17F

<sup>137</sup> Interview C25F

<sup>138</sup> Interview C17F





## FINDINGS V: GENDER IMPACTS

### LACK OF GENDERED PROTECTIONS AND RESOURCES

Rohingya women report that compounding vulnerabilities, both as women and as refugees facing severe restrictions, have not been sufficiently accounted for by the humanitarian sector in the design of shelters and services in the camps. One of the gender-related factors that contribute to the vulnerability of women in their daily movement is the design and location of sanitation facilities. Globally, the absence of gender considerations in the design of sanitation facilities is known to place women at-risk of harassment and assault.<sup>139</sup> Rohingya women reported experiences of SGBV while moving to sanitation facilities and the resulting fear of using these facilities. *“We feel very unsafe to go out to use the latrine,”* said Sabina, a 30-year-old Rohingya woman. *“We always need to wear burqas to go to the latrine because many people keep walking along the road.”*<sup>140</sup>

Additionally, One Rohingya woman reported experiencing inappropriate treatment perpetrated by male doctors in the camps. Sabina, a 30-year-old Rohingya woman, shared: *“When we go to the health facilities, the male doctors take advantage of sickness. They make us take off our clothes and touch us improperly which makes us feel very cheap and shy.”*<sup>141</sup> Female respondents also reported being unable to receive treatment for female-related medical conditions, as there are a limited number of female healthcare workers, and socio-cultural taboos surrounding gender and sexuality prevent them from disclosing complaints to male providers.



<sup>139</sup> DEVEX. [WASH Facilities Can Prevent Gender-Based Violence, Experts Say](#). 2021.

<sup>140</sup> Interview C26F

<sup>141</sup> Interview C26F



**FINDINGS VI:**

# **ROHINGYA REFLECTIONS ON MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS**





## FEELINGS RELATED TO FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Rohingya respondents expressed a number of feelings and reactions experienced as a result of the restrictions on movement imposed by camp authorities. When survey respondents were asked if restrictions on movement negatively impacted how they felt emotionally, **94 percent reported that the restrictions negatively impacted them ‘quite a bit’ or ‘extremely.’**

Feelings of overwhelming stress, pressure, sadness, depression, and hopelessness were expressed frequently. Many respondents reported feeling like they were trapped or imprisoned in the refugee camps with no escape or alternative. In fact, multiple respondents reported feeling like it would be better to die than continue to live in an environment of such extreme restriction and persecution. “*We are stuck in a situation like hell,*” said a Rohingya man, Amin. “*We don’t have any income source to support our families; we think it’s better to die than stay alive in this situation.*”<sup>142</sup>

Fatima, a 35-year-old Rohingya woman, shared a similar sentiment: “*They said that these restrictions are in place because we are provided with rations and we don’t need to move [outside the camps] or make money for ourselves. I think the purpose of the restrictions is to force us to commit suicide and die here.*”<sup>143</sup>

Others shared that they have no one to express these feelings to, and that outsiders do not understand how dire their situations truly are. Many respondents expressed a chronic fear and anxiety of impending violence and persecution at the hands of APBn when needing to travel to meet basic needs.

**“WE THINK IT’S BETTER TO DIE THAN STAY ALIVE IN THIS SITUATION.”**

**“I THINK THE PURPOSE OF THE RESTRICTIONS IS TO FORCE US TO COMMIT SUICIDE AND DIE HERE.”**

## DIGNITY AND DEHUMANISATION

Rohingya respondents frequently shared feelings of humiliation and dehumanisation due to restrictions. Although not explicitly asked about dehumanisation, respondents often expressed feeling like they were treated like animals, often due to their basic human rights being violated. Some respondents shared the perspective that Bangladesh authorities and police did not view them as human beings, while many shared stories of abuse and humiliation by the local Bangladesh host community.

“*[The police] have started treating us as if we are not human beings, but dogs,*” said Sabina, a 30-year-old Rohingya woman. “*They always try to strike us with sticks. We feel very insecure because of them. We feel like we need to live like dogs in front of the Bangladeshi citizens. We can’t even look up.*”<sup>144</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Interview C16M

<sup>143</sup> Interview C10F

<sup>144</sup> Interview C26F

Shirin, a 29-year-old Rohingya woman, shared a similar sentiment, *“The police and authorities don’t even consider us to be humans. They consider us to be animals who should be kept like a bird in a cage.”*<sup>145</sup>

Respondents also noted that dehumanising and humiliating treatment was not only inflicted by the police and host community, but also by humanitarian aid workers in the camps.

*“The humanitarian staff at the food centre taunt us,”* said Sultana, a 31-year-old Rohingya woman. *“[They say] that we have a lot of babies and we have a lot of babies in order to receive more rations and [they say] that we Rohingya women are like animals, that’s why we give birth to so many children.”*<sup>146</sup>



## FUTURE GENERATIONS

Respondents expressed concern related to the impact of the current restrictions on their children and future generations. They expressed particular concern related to lack of education for Rohingya children, who are precluded from accessing formal education due both to restrictions on formal schooling in the camps and not being allowed to travel outside of the camps to access education elsewhere.

*“Though our children could not access education legally, we had made efforts to hire private teachers for our children,”* said Khadija, a 24-year-old Rohingya woman. *“If we had income sources, we could educate them by hiring private teachers. . . They are growing up, and remaining illiterate, and this makes us worry about them.”*<sup>147</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Interview C12F

<sup>146</sup> Interview C24F

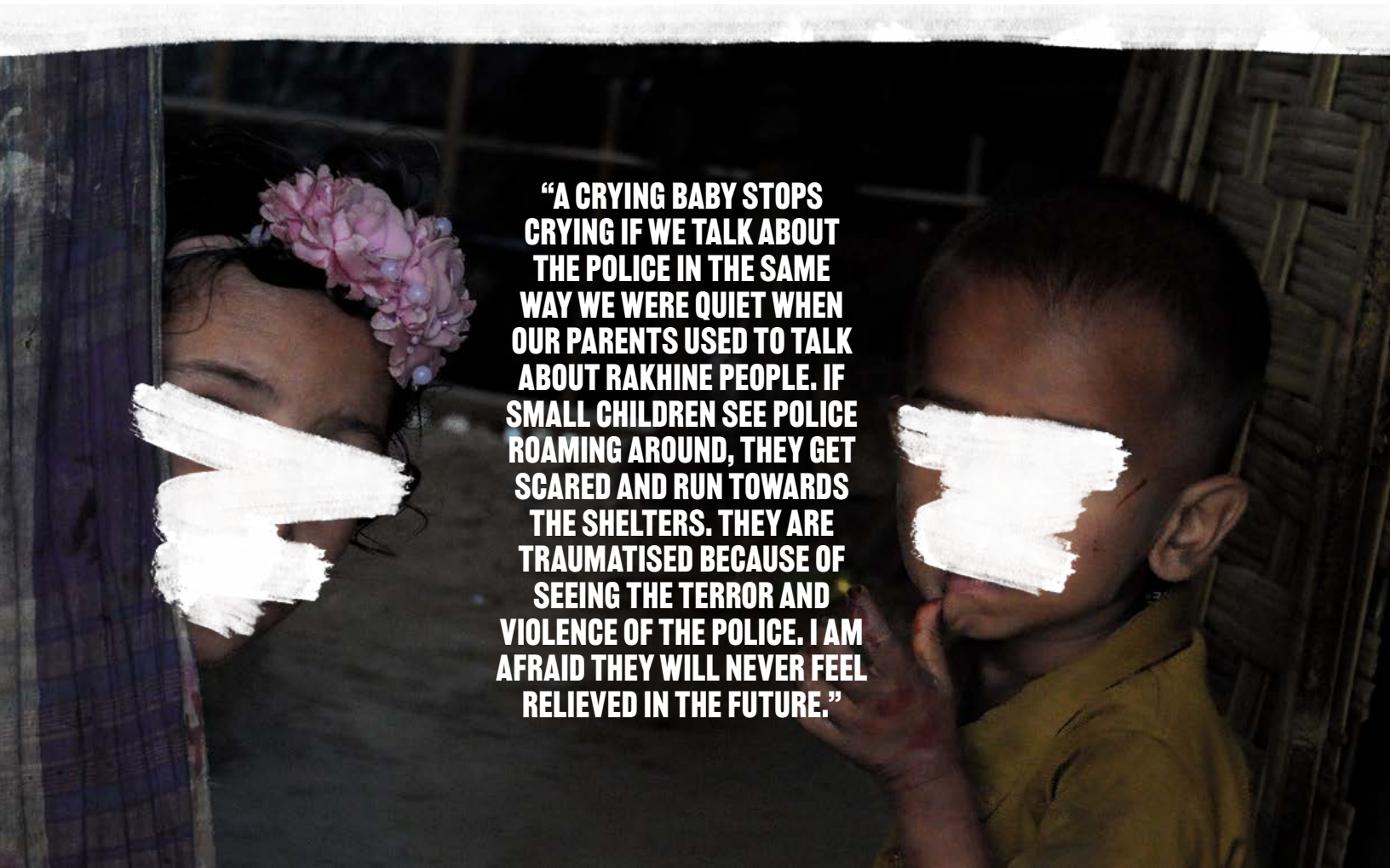
<sup>147</sup> Interview C17F

Respondents expressed additional concern related to the impact of restrictions, persecution, and violence on the mental and social well being of future generations. Mohammed, a 28-year-old Rohingya man, spoke about the long-term psychological and emotional toll of police terror on children: *“A crying baby stops crying if we talk about the police in the same way we were quiet when our parents used to talk about Rakhine people. If small children see police roaming around, they get scared and run towards the shelters. They are traumatised because of seeing the terror and violence of the police. I am afraid they will never feel relieved in the future.”*<sup>148</sup>

Respondents reported that their children experience increased feelings of loneliness and lack of opportunity to socially engage in healthy ways with other children (i.e exercise, sports, and other social interactions) due to restrictions. Parents expressed an overall sense of dismay related to not being able to set a positive example for their children or provide them with the tools they will need for a successful future. Many felt that time is being wasted, and the longer children go uneducated, the deeper the impacts will be. Hamid, a 28-year-old Rohingya man, said, *“my children ask me what they would do when they grow up here, as they can see that I have become nothing. I had nothing to reply to them, so I just said the only way out is to become rebels and hold weapons.”*<sup>149</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Interview C13M

<sup>149</sup> Interview C21M



**“A CRYING BABY STOPS CRYING IF WE TALK ABOUT THE POLICE IN THE SAME WAY WE WERE QUIET WHEN OUR PARENTS USED TO TALK ABOUT RAKHINE PEOPLE. IF SMALL CHILDREN SEE POLICE ROAMING AROUND, THEY GET SCARED AND RUN TOWARDS THE SHELTERS. THEY ARE TRAUMATISED BECAUSE OF SEEING THE TERROR AND VIOLENCE OF THE POLICE. I AM AFRAID THEY WILL NEVER FEEL RELIEVED IN THE FUTURE.”**



# CONCLUSIONS



# CONCLUSIONS

For decades now, the Rohingya have been forcibly displaced from Myanmar into Bangladesh, resulting in the formation of the world's largest refugee camp. However, in recent years the **Government of Bangladesh (GoB)** has increasingly tamped down on the Rohingya people living within their borders, enforcing severe restrictions on their freedom of movement that have begun to mirror the very policies that compelled them to flee Myanmar in the first place. This report demonstrates that draconian restrictions on freedom of movement in the Bangladesh camps are being enforced via rampant police corruption and violence, and that these restrictions have far-reaching impacts on all areas of Rohingya life.

**Rohingya respondents detailed strict and pervasive restrictions of movement enforced by the GoB that have grown progressively tighter since 2019. These claims have been substantiated by APBn officers. Reported restrictions include:**

- Prohibitions on leaving the camps
- Increasing difficulty moving within camps
- Fencing surrounding the entire camp. Respondents report that these have turned the camp into an open-air prison
- Curfews from 6pm to 6am
- Restrictions on assembly
- Vehicle bans within the camps
- Prohibitions on work outside of the camp and at times within the camp

**The GoB purports that these measures are in place for Rohingya protection: to crack down on crime and reduce radicalisation and violence. However, they have had the opposite effect.** The camps are becoming increasingly unsafe due to violence by both the armed groups and the APBn. Rohingya respondents overwhelmingly compared their current situation in Bangladesh to being as bad, if not worse, than their treatment in Myanmar. Many believe the true reason that these restrictions are in place is to weaken the Rohingya community and coerce them to “voluntarily” repatriate to Myanmar. The current restrictions on movement, although framed as protection, are instead creating the same oppressive environment from which they fled.

**These restrictions are violently enforced by both the physical infrastructure put in place by the GoB and through intimidation, physical abuse, and extortion by the APBn.** Fencing constructed around the entirety of the camp prevents people from moving freely, forcing them to pass through checkpoints where they are subjected to the mercy of the APBn officers who enforce movement restrictions on a seemingly arbitrary and ambiguous basis. This system has severely curtailed the ability of Rohingya to access food, healthcare, and other necessities, as well as finding safety during emergencies, such as fires and monsoons. Checkpoints have become places of routine violence where Rohingya experience physical and sexual abuse from the APBn and confiscation of food, money, and phones. Arbitrary arrest and detention occurs

frequently. APBn officers largely confirmed the widespread existence of these practices. Moreover, the threat of forced relocation to Bhasan Char Island is increasingly being used to further deter Rohingya from violating movement restrictions. Finally, the Rohingya have endured forced labour at the hands of the APBn, being forced to serve night guard as they had previously experienced in Myanmar. It is difficult to justify the APBn presence as protection when they outsource their security duties to the community they are meant to serve while simultaneously perpetrating violence against them. It was noted repeatedly by respondents that conditions were not like this when the army was in control of the camp. Our results suggest that Rohingya are experiencing mass forced detention at the hands of the GoB, a clear violation of their human rights that is having dire consequences on Rohingya lives.

**Extortion and other forms of corruption by the APBn and other authorities are commonplace in the camps.** APBn officers will often fabricate evidence to justify their actions, such as planting yaba on innocent Rohingya or accusing them of membership in ARSA or one of the other armed groups. The only way to escape punishment is by paying bribes. This has resulted in an extortive system of justice; justice will go to whoever can afford the highest bribe, whether criminal or innocent. Moreover, bribes must be paid to accomplish many aspects of basic functioning in the camps, including, but not limited to, crossing checkpoints, working, transporting necessities, seeking healthcare, carrying a mobile phone, holding weddings or funerals, and participating in religious life. These claims have been corroborated and clarified by APBn officers: although they report that practices of extortion are not taught as official policy, extortion is widespread and has, at times, been ordered by senior officers. One APBn officer reported that the amount one can extort will depend on their rank. Among Rohingya, many share the sentiment that police are in the camps to make money, not for their protection. In fact, as the fees and bribes continue while work opportunities dwindle, some Rohingya have had to resort to selling their food ration cards in order to afford the constant extortion. Understandably, the Rohingya's trust in authority has deteriorated as Rohingya experience consistent abuse by those in power and have limited, if not non-existent, avenues for seeking justice.

**Our results emphasise the right to freedom of movement as a foundational human right: when movement is restricted, access to all other rights are also restricted.** Movement restrictions have increased violence and security concerns throughout the camp as violence by armed groups has increased and Rohingya are left unable to escape. Rohingya health is also compromised by restrictions on movement as they prevent Rohingya from accessing food, proper hygiene, education, employment, safety, and quality healthcare—all of which are necessary to support good health. Rohingya are unable to leave the camps for work to make an income, so, because humanitarian aid is not sufficient, this means that most Rohingya are not able to meet their basic food and material needs. Access to education has also been limited as Rohingya children are prohibited from enrolling in local schools and Rohingya-led schools in the camps have been repeatedly shut down by authorities. Furthermore, current restrictions prevent Rohingya from fully practising their religion, as well as participating in important cultural events such as weddings and funerals. The GoB has justified the validity of these restrictions underneath the assumption that the Rohingya's basic needs are met by the humanitarian organisations



operating within the camps. This assumption is incorrect: humanitarian organisations in the camps are unable to meet Rohingya needs. However, even if this assumption was valid, it would not legitimise restricting the human right to move freely, and, by extension, the right to self-determination–rights also repeatedly denied to the Rohingya while in Myanmar. Additionally, UNHCR and other humanitarian aid organisations have not been able to provide sufficient protection to Rohingya or to effectively advocate with the GoB to reduce/remove these restrictions or improve conditions in the camp.

**Although policies related to Rohingya movement are not specifically gendered, their enforcement has impacted Rohingya differently based on their gender identity.** Women are more likely than men to experience SGBV by the police at checkpoints, and cannot evade checkpoints as easily (e.g., crawling under or climbing over the fences) due to reasons such as pregnancy, childcare, or not being physically strong enough. Furthermore, experiencing SGBV often causes great shame for survivors and can result in important social consequences, such as losing the ability to marry. Restrictions on movement have also exacerbated IPV among Rohingya. Many women have connected the repressive environment and distress their men experience from being unable to work with the increased domestic violence towards them and their children. Despite this, marriage is seen as one of the only ways to protect their daughters from SGBV within the camps, putting them at increased risk of child marriage and human trafficking. Our results highlight the need for aid organisations and the GoB to design programmes and policies sensitive to the gendered needs of Rohingya so that effective safeguarding can be implemented.

**Restricting the Rohingya people’s right to freedom of movement has caused severe humiliation and dehumanisation.** In the Bangladesh camps, Rohingya describe being treated worse than animals and feeling a community-level violation of their human dignity. This has severely impacted the mental health of the population. Suicidal ideation is common and many have expressed that death would be a more humane option than what they are currently enduring. There is a pervasive loss of hope for the future of Rohingya, as many fear the effects of an entire generation growing up illiterate, without education, and without opportunity. As is true of many different peoples forced into desperate situations, resistance is increasingly being seen as their only option for liberation.<sup>150</sup>

**This study demonstrates that Rohingya-led initiatives can and do produce rigorous, high quality research.** As the affected population, the Rohingya refugees themselves are best placed to not only conduct this research within their community but also to present policy recommendations to change their circumstances. In fact, due to the current restrictions, this study would not have been possible without Rohingya leadership, emphasising the need for continued efforts towards a full decolonization of humanitarian aid. The central role of Rohingya voices in this study points to the increasing need to decolonize humanitarian aid processes by supporting, funding, and facilitating refugee leadership.

<sup>150</sup> It is crucial to note here that acts committed while resisting oppression, such as violating policies restricting movement, are not the same thing as criminal acts. Because oppression dehumanises both the oppressed and the oppressor, resistance is an act of liberation for both parties, while the persecution by the oppressor maintains violence against both. Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 1970.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**TO THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH,  
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY,  
AND HUMANITARIAN ACTORS**



## TO THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH

01. **Eliminate restrictions on freedom of movement** within the camp by revoking official policies that restrict movement, and by replacing these with policies that allow for Rohingya freedom of movement within and outside of the camps in Cox's Bazar District. Publicly announce the changes to these policies.
02. **Remove camp curfews** and publicly announce their removal.
03. **Immediately halt the current strategies aimed at coercing Rohingya to relocate to Bhasan Char Island Camp or return to Myanmar** by ending policies that limit Rohingya rights and contribute to the deteriorating camp conditions. Respect the rights of Rohingya to choose their place of residence within the camps.
04. **Replace policies that prevent Rohingya from working both inside and outside of the camps** with policies that permit Rohingya to work. Publicly announce these changes to ensure that Rohingya refugees will have the opportunity to earn a living and support themselves and their families.
05. **Ensure transparency and clarity in the communication of camp policies, restrictions, and laws.** Publish official regulations in a clear and accessible manner, preferably in multiple languages, to ensure Rohingya residents are aware of their rights and obligations. Additionally, improve communication between the government authorities, CIC officers, and the Rohingya population to clearly define policies related to movement.
06. **Replace policies that restrict Rohingya from meeting with each other** and holding religious/cultural events with policies that allow for these events. Publicly announce these changes.
07. **Implement minimum education requirements for majis in the camps** by requiring all majis to have passed the matriculation exam. Appointed majis should also be required to have demonstrated leadership skills in the community. Additionally, the government should provide salaries to majis to decrease incentives for extortion and corruption.
08. **Consider replacing the APBn with the Bangladesh military as the force tasked with camp security**, as an immediate solution to combat violence, extortion, and other corrupt practices. Rohingya in this study overwhelmingly emphasised the superiority of the Bangladesh army in maintaining camp security.
09. **Ensure that police and security personnel receive training on human rights, ethics, anti-corruption, and respectful and non-discriminatory treatment of refugees.** In parallel with training initiatives, develop and enforce codes of conduct for the respectful treatment of refugees.
10. **Develop and implement gender-sensitive policies and guidelines to address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of Rohingya women.** This includes measures to prevent and respond to **sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)** and sexual harassment perpetrated by security forces. Ensure that the enforcement of movement restrictions takes into account the safety and dignity of women.



11. **The Government of Bangladesh and APBn leadership should adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption, violence, SGBV, extortion, theft, and forced labour by government forces operating within the camps.** This should include strict disciplinary measures.
12. **The Government of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Anti-Corruption Commission, and the APBn should investigate and prosecute APBn abuses against Rohingya,** including cases of violence, extortion, theft, falsification of evidence, arbitrary detention, and arbitrary prohibitions against movement. Considering the limitations and partiality of internal investigations, along with reports by Rohingya in this study that existing reporting mechanisms are ineffective, the GoB should also initiate an external impartial investigation of APBn abuses against Rohingya.
13. **Enhance camp safety and security** by implementing robust operations to apprehend criminal gangs operating within the camps. Ensure that these operations are humane and do not involve violence, torture, arbitrary arrest, falsification of evidence, or bribery/extortion to secure release from custody.
14. **The government should prioritise and invest in providing access to formal education** using Myanmar curriculum for Rohingya children within the camps by collaborating with Rohingya-led private schools, humanitarian organisations, and educational experts. Provide training and support for teachers working within the camps to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver quality education to Rohingya children. Allow Rohingya students to pursue higher education in Bangladesh and international universities.
15. **Establish fair, accessible legal frameworks for Rohingya** to ensure the protection of refugee rights and promote justice and equality within the camp.
16. **Consult with Rohingya to facilitate the dignified repatriation of refugees to their home country,** ensuring their rights are respected and providing necessary support for their successful reintegration when the conditions are right.
17. **Remove all barbed wire fences surrounding the camps,** to ensure that Rohingya do not face hazards or barriers that impede them from fleeing danger or seeking emergency assistance.
18. **Remove prohibitions that prevent Rohingya from owning or carrying smartphones or laptops, and publicly announce the change of policy.** Allow Rohingya to possess sim cards from both Myanmar and Bangladesh, and allow Rohingya to install and use money transfer applications such as bKash on their devices. Investigate APBn officers who confiscate Rohingya devices, money, or other possessions and hold perpetrators accountable.

## TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

01. Donor governments should end the current approach of government appeasement, prioritise the rights of Rohingya living in Bangladesh, and hold Bangladesh government officials accountable for the abuses of Rohingya refugees.
02. Donor governments should advocate with the Government of Bangladesh officials for the changes above being petitioned by Rohingya in the camps, including the removal of restrictions on movement, work, and education and the immediate end to abuses used to enforce restrictions such as violence, extortion, and forced labour.
03. The international community, including United Nations agencies, donor governments, media, and human rights organisations should **raise awareness and engage in diplomatic efforts to put diplomatic pressure on the Government of Bangladesh to respect the rights of Rohingya refugees** to freedom of movement as recognized under international law.
04. **Human rights organisations should conduct legal analyses of available evidence to identify the violations committed by the Government of Bangladesh against the Rohingya under international law.** Potential violations of international covenants that Bangladesh has ratified include the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**, the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)**, the **Convention Against Torture (CAT)**, and the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**, among others. Additionally, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Working Group on Arbitrary Detention should investigate GoB for the mass arbitrary detention of Rohingya refugees.
05. **International donors should provide funding for organisations and programmes** (prioritising those that are Rohingya-led) that monitor and report instances of mistreatment, harassment, or discriminatory practices by APBn and other government officials.
06. **International donors should provide financial support to Rohingya civil society organisations in the camps working on initiatives related to Rohingya human rights.** Donors should also consider providing funding for Rohingya CSOs that implement nonviolent resistance programming as a means of resisting both government restrictions and providing an alternative to the forces of radicalisation in the camps. These CSOs can play a crucial role in advocating for the rights of the Rohingya and decreasing radicalisation and violence in the camps.
07. **The international community should advocate for the rights of Rohingya children to access quality education** and raise awareness about the importance of education for their future well-being by engaging with the Government of Bangladesh to support and facilitate formal education opportunities for Rohingya children within and outside the camps.

08. **The international community and donors should establish scholarship programmes and support mechanisms** to enable Rohingya students with exceptional abilities or aspirations to pursue higher education.
09. **As an alternative to repatriation, which is not viable at this time, donor governments should increase their quota of Rohingya refugees accepted for third country resettlement.** As Rohingya face long-term hostilities in both Bangladesh and Myanmar, third country resettlement efforts should be expanded, particularly for Rohingya that are vulnerable in the camps. Host countries should increase capacity to accept these refugees, ensuring quality reception and integration of Rohingya in the host country.
10. **The international community should provide long-term support for the repatriation of Rohingya refugees,** ensuring that the specific needs of both men and women are considered and met throughout the process.

## TO HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

01. **UNHCR and other humanitarian organisations should publicly state their limitations regarding the protection of Rohingya refugees and the inability of the humanitarian sector to fulfil the basic needs of Rohingya refugees.** This will dispel the myth that UNHCR and other actors are able to effectively provide protection to Rohingya, effectively advocate for their rights, or meet their basic needs. This will clarify limitations of the humanitarian response and could motivate other international actors to take a more active role in engaging with the GoB on human rights issues related to the Rohingya. It will also undermine the incorrect GoB justification for restrictions, namely, that Rohingya refugees have all of their basic needs fulfilled by humanitarian organisations within the refugee camps.
02. **Collaborate with the government to develop and implement training programmes for CIC staff and security forces on human rights principles, conflict resolution, rule of law, and effective communication strategies.** Such programmes can contribute to fostering a more humane and accountable environment within the camps.
03. **Develop advocacy approaches that prioritise strategic, quiet advocacy related to the human rights situation of Rohingya.** Provide information on government/police abuses to humanitarian headquarter offices, human rights organisations, embassies in Bangladesh, and journalists/media covering the Rohingya crisis. The risk of losing access is not a sufficient justification to not engage in quieter advocacy efforts, which should be aimed at remedying clear abuses that the humanitarian community is witnessing daily in the camps.



04. **Consult with the Rohingya community regularly to identify instances of abuse by humanitarian staff and hold them accountable.** Reporting mechanisms are not sufficient to hold agencies accountable, as many Rohingya do not know of their existence or how to use them, or do not trust that they function well.
05. **Develop and implement programmes that empower Rohingya youth with skills, knowledge, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.** This can include vocational training, entrepreneurship initiatives, and mentorship programmes to enhance their prospects for the future.
06. **Strengthen food security measures** to ensure an adequate and consistent supply of nutritious food for all refugees in the camp, addressing the persistent issue of hunger and malnutrition.
07. **Improve healthcare facilities, living conditions, and ease of travel for health-care purposes within the camp,** ensuring that refugees have access to necessary medical services and live in humane and dignified conditions.
08. **Provide safe spaces, counselling, and support services for survivors of SGBV.** Engage men and boys in awareness and prevention efforts to challenge harmful gender norms and promote respectful relationships.
09. **Conduct awareness campaigns within the camps to educate Rohingya refugees about their rights,** the importance of reporting abuses, and the avenues available for seeking justice and empower them with knowledge to resist and report corruption and extortion.
10. **Respect the experience and qualifications of Rohingya in their roles working in the humanitarian sector** by providing adequate payment and ensuring humane treatment without partiality and discrimination.
11. **Create employment and livelihood opportunities for Rohingya in all camps with the goal of reducing crime and gang activity.**

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