

Forum: Security Council

Issue: Addressing the ongoing Rohingya crisis in Myanmar

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Introduction

The Rohingya crisis in Myanmar stands as a humanitarian issue that has seized the attention of the global community, prompting deep concern within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). This crisis, rooted in complex historical, ethnic, and political contexts, has led to significant displacement, violence, and human suffering within the Rakhine State of Myanmar, predominantly affecting the Rohingya Muslim minority population.

Myanmar, a Southeast Asian nation marked by a diverse ethnic landscape, has seen long-standing tensions between the Buddhist-majority government and the Rohingya, a stateless ethnic minority group residing primarily in Rakhine State. The Rohingya have faced systematic discrimination, marginalization, and denial of basic rights, including citizenship, healthcare, and education. This longstanding persecution escalated dramatically in 2017, when a military crackdown resulted in a mass exodus of Rohingya fleeing violence, torture, and reported atrocities, seeking refuge in neighboring Bangladesh and other countries in the region. Since its escalation in 2017, an estimated 700,000 Rohingya refugees fled Myanmar due to violence and persecution, seeking refuge primarily in Bangladesh. This mass exodus compounded the already significant refugee population with over 1 million Rohingya refugees residing in overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Tragically, reports and investigations have revealed harrowing statistics regarding the crisis. According to various sources and human rights organizations, thousands of Rohingya lost their lives during the military crackdown in 2017. The precise death toll remains a subject of contention due to challenges in accessing conflict zones and gathering accurate data, but conservative estimates indicate a significant loss of life. As the Rohingya crisis enters its sixth year, the prolonged displacement and suffering of this community underscore the protracted nature of the humanitarian emergency. The ongoing plight of the Rohingya, including limited access to basic necessities, education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities, illustrates the enduring impact of this crisis on individuals and families who continue to face uncertainty and precarious conditions.

The plight of the Rohingya community has been a focal point for the international community, garnering widespread condemnation for the human rights violations and humanitarian crisis it represents. Within the UNSC, the crisis has been a recurring subject of discussion and debate, reflecting the diverse perspectives and interests of its member states. The Council, tasked with maintaining international peace and security, has grappled with finding

effective means to address the multifaceted dimensions of this crisis while navigating the complexities of sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs.

Efforts within the UNSC to address the Rohingya crisis have been multifaceted, encompassing diplomatic negotiations, calls for accountability, humanitarian aid initiatives, and efforts to engage with the government of Myanmar. Resolutions and statements issued by the Council have underscored the urgency of addressing the humanitarian needs of the displaced Rohingya population, calling for the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of refugees to their places of origin. Additionally, the Council has emphasized the necessity of ensuring accountability for the reported human rights violations and atrocities committed against the Rohingya community.

Definition of Key Terms

Systematic Discrimination

The deliberate implementation of policies, practices, or attitudes within a system or institution that systematically marginalize, exclude, or disadvantage a particular group based on factors such as ethnicity, religion, race, or other characteristics. It involves forms of bias or prejudice that restrict the rights, opportunities, and access to resources for the targeted group.

Rohingya Muslims

The Rohingya Muslims are an ethnic and religious minority group primarily residing in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. They have faced long-standing persecution, discrimination, and marginalization within Myanmar, including restrictions on citizenship rights, access to basic services, and freedom of movement. The Rohingya have been subject to violence and displacement, leading to a significant refugee crisis.

Refugee Camps

Temporary settlements or facilities established to accommodate individuals or groups who have fled their homes due to conflict, persecution, natural disasters, or other life-threatening situations. These camps provide basic shelter, food, water, and essential services to displaced populations while they await durable solutions, such as repatriation, resettlement, or integration into host communities.

Ceasefire Agreements

Formal agreements between conflicting parties to halt hostilities temporarily or permanently. These agreements aim to establish a cessation of violence, often outlining conditions and terms for a truce, including the withdrawal of forces, the demarcation of boundaries, and the facilitation of humanitarian access for affected populations.

Cyclone Mocha

Cyclones are intense tropical storms characterized by strong winds and heavy rainfall, causing potential devastation, flooding, and damage to infrastructure, homes, and livelihoods. Cyclone Mocha is the most powerful storm to hit Myanmar in a decade, causing more than 100 Rohingya's death while thousands had their homes shattered and their lives upended, rendering them even more vulnerable.

Humanitarian Access

Humanitarian access refers to the ability of humanitarian organizations, aid workers, and agencies to reach and provide assistance to affected populations in crisis-affected areas. It involves ensuring safe and unimpeded passage, as well as the ability to deliver essential aid, including food, water, medical supplies, shelter, and protection services, to those in need.

Military Coup

Sudden and illegal seizure of power by a military or a faction within the armed forces to overthrow an existing government or authority.

Citizenship & Civil Documentation

Citizenship and civil documentation encompass legal recognition and documentation of an individual's citizenship status and identity within a country. It involves the provision of official documents, such as birth certificates, national identification cards, and passports, that confer rights, access to services, and protection under the law to individuals within a nation-state. Lack of proper documentation can significantly impact access to rights and services for marginalized populations.

Background

History and Cause to Conflict

The Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority group primarily residing in the Rakhine State of Myanmar, have faced systematic exclusion and persecution for decades. The roots of the crisis can be traced back to the post-independence period of Myanmar (formerly Burma) in the late 1940s. The early years saw a relatively peaceful coexistence between various ethnic groups, but tensions gradually escalated as political instability and ethnic conflicts emerged. Notably, the 1962 military coup led by General Ne Win marked a turning point. The subsequent military junta enforced policies that centralized power, suppressed dissent, and institutionalized discrimination against ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya.

In 1978, the 'Operation Dragon King' military campaign was initiated, resulting in the mass exodus of approximately 200,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh due to widespread human rights abuses and forced relocations. This exodus was followed by the first of several waves of repatriation agreements between Myanmar and Bangladesh. However, these agreements often failed to address the root causes of the Rohingya's marginalization and did little to improve their situation within Myanmar.

The situation further deteriorated in the late 20th century, culminating in the outbreak of violence in the early 21st century. The 2012 Rakhine State riots were a significant catalyst, sparking communal violence between the Buddhist Rakhine population and the Rohingya, resulting in numerous deaths and the displacement of thousands. This marked a resurgence of ethnic tensions, fueling the cycle of violence and further marginalization of the Rohingya community.

The pinnacle of the crisis unfolded in August 2017 when the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), an insurgent group, launched coordinated attacks on security forces in Rakhine State. In response, Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, carried out a brutal crackdown labeled by the United Nations as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing." This military offensive led to widespread atrocities, including killings, rapes, and the burning of Rohingya villages, driving over 700,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh within months. The violence left a trail of devastation and trauma, exposing the depth of the crisis to the international community.

Myanmar's government, led by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), faced global condemnation for its handling of the crisis, prompting allegations of complicity in the military's actions against the Rohingya. Despite international pressure and calls for accountability, the situation remained dire for the Rohingya both within Myanmar and in refugee camps in Bangladesh. The lack of citizenship rights, restrictions on movement, and the denial of access to basic services and education persisted, exacerbating the plight of this marginalized population.

The ongoing Rohingya crisis in Myanmar represents a complex web of historical grievances, political strife, and ethnic tensions that have resulted in one of the most significant humanitarian catastrophes of the 21st

century. Successive events and policies have entrenched the marginalization of the Rohingya, leaving them without legal recognition, protection, or fundamental rights within their own homeland.

Forced Displacement

Forced displacement remains a critical aspect of the Rohingya crisis, with the UN estimating that over 700,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar since 2017. This mass exodus, driven by violence and persecution, led to one of the largest refugee camps in the world, with more than a million Rohingya refugees residing in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district. These displacements have upended lives, creating immense challenges in accessing basic necessities and exacerbating vulnerability among the displaced population.

“Older children and adolescents who are deprived of opportunities to learn or make a living are at real risk of becoming a “lost generation” (UNICEF)



Figure 1. UNHCR Refugee Agency Statistics on Rohingya Children

Lack of legal identity or citizenship

The Rohingya have long faced systematic denial of legal identity and citizenship rights in Myanmar. Denied citizenship under the country's discriminatory laws, the Rohingya are rendered stateless, lacking official recognition and access to fundamental rights. Statistics from the UNHCR indicate that around 600,000 Rohingya remain trapped in Myanmar's Rakhine State, deprived of citizenship and subjected to severe restrictions on movement, employment, and access to essential services.

Lack of shelter and problems with refugee camps

The overcrowded and under-resourced refugee camps in Cox's Bazar pose significant challenges for Rohingya refugees. With makeshift shelters and limited access to adequate sanitation and healthcare facilities, these camps present immense health and safety risks. UNICEF reports indicate that more than half a million Rohingya

children in these camps lack proper access to education, with infrastructure limitations hindering their well-being and development.

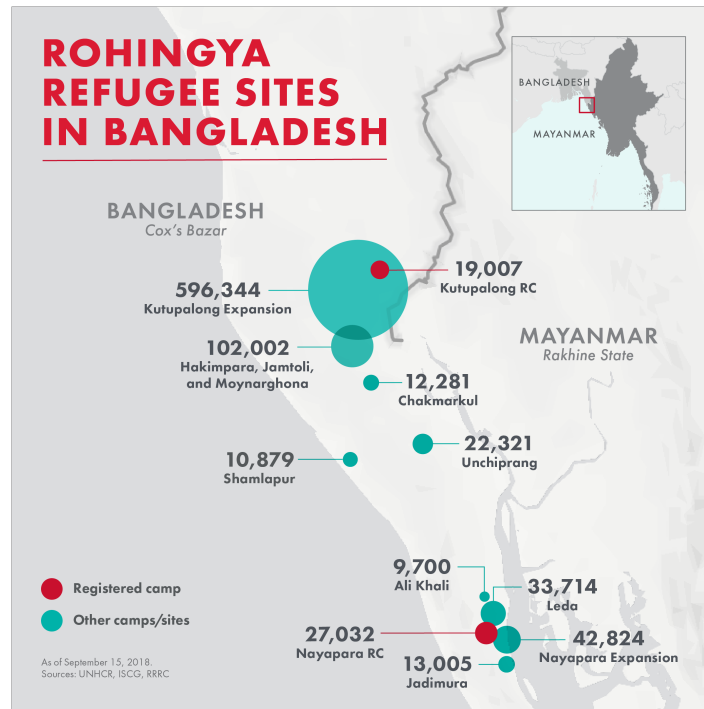


Figure 2. Rohingya Refugee Sites in Bangladesh

Traveling to Other Places (Risks and Deaths)

The perilous journey undertaken by Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar often involves crossing the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, fraught with life-threatening risks. According to UNHCR, in 2021 alone, over 1,000 Rohingya refugees attempted these perilous sea routes, facing treacherous conditions. However, not everyone reaches safety, with reports citing that approximately 200 individuals lost their lives in these attempts. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) highlights the dangers of human trafficking, exploitation, and the prevalence of unseaworthy vessels contributing to these fatalities.



Figure 3. Rohingya Crisis in Maps Travel Routes

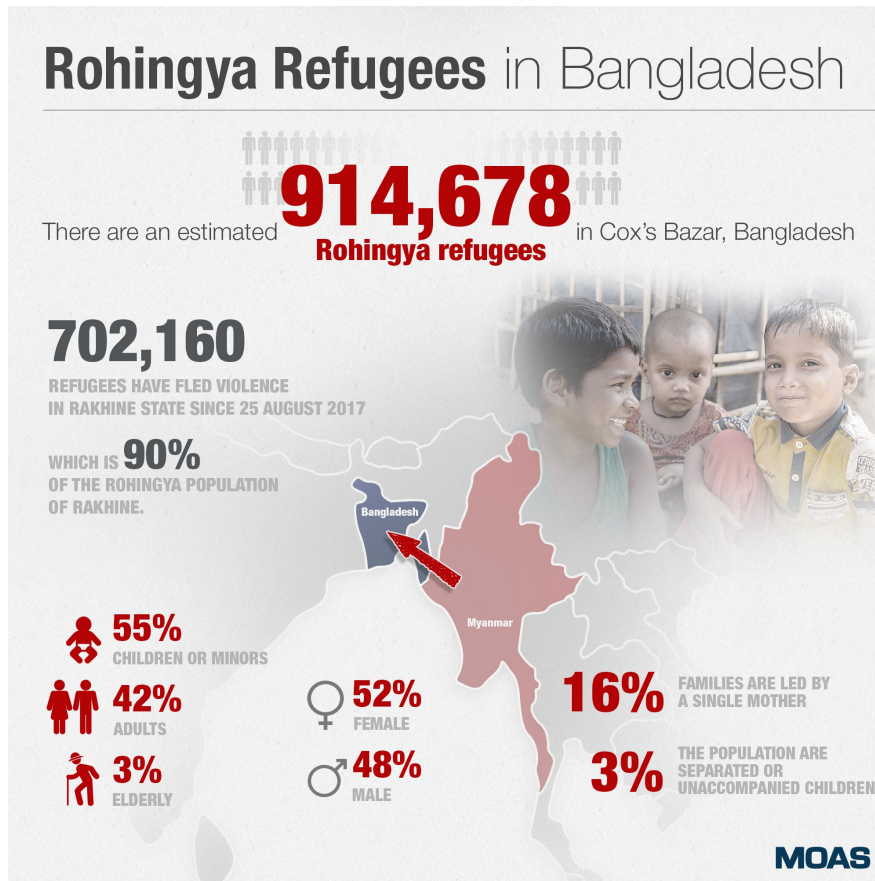


Figure 4. Rohingya Crisis in Maps Travel Routes

Violence (political and sexual)

The Rohingya crisis is marked by severe and pervasive violence, both political and sexual, perpetrated against the Rohingya population. The UN Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar documented widespread and systematic acts of violence, including killings, torture, and sexual violence committed by the Myanmar military. Reports from human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch corroborate these findings, detailing the targeted and brutal nature of the violence, with an estimated 25,000 Rohingya killed and over 18,000 Rohingya women and girls subjected to sexual violence during the 2017 crackdown.

Further challenges (diseases, natural disasters, children)

Rohingya refugees face additional challenges, including the spread of diseases and vulnerability to natural disasters in the overcrowded camps. Diseases like cholera, respiratory infections, and malnutrition remain prevalent. Moreover, the vulnerability of children in these settings is pronounced, with reports by Save the Children indicating that nearly 60% of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are children, facing risks of exploitation, lack of education, and mental health issues due to trauma and displacement.

Major Parties Involved

Myanmar (Formerly Burma)

Myanmar's government has faced widespread criticism for its treatment of the Rohingya population. The country has been accused of human rights violations, including ethnic cleansing and genocide, against the Rohingya. Myanmar's government has denied allegations of systematic persecution and violence, often viewing the Rohingya issue as an internal matter of national security. The country's stance on granting citizenship to the Rohingya and addressing their rights remains a contentious and unresolved issue.

Bangladesh

As the primary host country for Rohingya refugees, Bangladesh has provided shelter and assistance to a vast number of displaced individuals. Despite the burden on its resources and infrastructure, Bangladesh has shown support for the Rohingya. However, the country faces challenges in accommodating such a large refugee population, and there have been occasional tensions over the issue of repatriation and the long-term presence of Rohingya refugees.

United States (US)

The United States has condemned the atrocities committed against the Rohingya and has provided significant humanitarian aid to assist Rohingya refugees. The US government has imposed targeted sanctions on Myanmar military leaders and entities implicated in human rights abuses. The country continues to push for accountability and a resolution to the crisis through diplomatic channels and multilateral engagement.

European Union (EU)

The European Union has been vocal in condemning the violence against the Rohingya and advocating for their rights and safety. The EU has provided substantial humanitarian aid to support Rohingya refugees and has called for accountability for human rights violations in Myanmar. The EU has supported various initiatives aimed at addressing the crisis and facilitating the safe return of Rohingya refugees.

China

China maintains a complex stance regarding the Rohingya crisis, emphasizing non-interference in Myanmar's internal affairs while supporting bilateral dialogue and peaceful solutions. China has strategic interests in Myanmar, including economic investments and infrastructure projects. It has generally opposed international intervention and sanctions, advocating for a negotiated settlement within Myanmar's domestic framework.

India

India has expressed concerns about the Rohingya crisis, citing security implications and potential links to extremism. While providing some humanitarian aid, India has emphasized the importance of addressing the root

causes of the crisis within Myanmar and advocated for the safe, voluntary, and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees. India's approach is influenced by its regional security considerations.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

ASEAN has taken a somewhat cautious approach to the Rohingya crisis, prioritizing non-interference in member states' internal affairs. While expressing concern, ASEAN has called for dialogue and diplomatic solutions, emphasizing the importance of regional cooperation. ASEAN's response reflects its adherence to the principle of non-interference while encouraging Myanmar to address the issue through dialogue.

OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation)

The OIC has been vocal in supporting the Rohingya cause, expressing solidarity and advocating for the protection of Rohingya rights. As a collective organization of Islamic countries, the OIC has condemned the violence against the Rohingya and called for international action to address the crisis. The OIC has provided humanitarian assistance and support to Rohingya refugees.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
June 3, 2012	Ethnic violence erupts in Rakhine State, Myanmar, between Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists after the rape and murder of a Rakhine woman. This violence leads to the displacement of thousands of Rohingya.
October 9, 2016	Rohingya militants attack border posts, resulting in a security crackdown by the Myanmar military. This escalates tensions and triggers a wave of violence and displacement, forcing Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh.
August 25, 2017	The Myanmar military launches a widespread crackdown in Rakhine State following alleged attacks by Rohingya insurgents. Reports emerge of mass killings, sexual violence, and the torching of Rohingya villages, leading to a massive exodus of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh. This event marks the peak of the crisis.
September 13, 2017	The UN Security Council holds its first public meeting on Myanmar in eight years, discussing the Rohingya crisis.
November 23, 2017	Myanmar and Bangladesh agree on a repatriation deal for Rohingya refugees, outlining a process for their return to Myanmar. However, concerns about safety and citizenship rights hinder the repatriation process.
August 25, 2018	The anniversary of the military crackdown sees protests and memorials worldwide, marking one year since the mass exodus of Rohingya refugees began.
November 11, 2019	Myanmar faces legal proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) following a case filed by The Gambia accusing Myanmar of genocide against the Rohingya.
December 12, 2019	The ICJ orders Myanmar to take emergency measures to protect Rohingya Muslims from genocide, despite Myanmar's denial of the accusations.
August 25, 2020	Three years after the crisis peaked, Rohingya refugees and activists commemorate the anniversary by demanding justice and recognition of their rights.
February 1, 2021	Myanmar's military stages a coup, overthrowing the civilian government and detaining political leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi. The coup creates further uncertainty for the Rohingya crisis amidst the country's political instability.
June 23, 2021	The UN Human Rights Council adopts a resolution condemning Myanmar's military coup and calls for an immediate end to the violence against Rohingya and other minorities.
September 21, 2021	A leaked government memo in Myanmar reveals plans for the resettlement of Rohingya in Rakhine State, sparking concerns about forced relocation and lack of safeguards for their rights.
January 18, 2022	The International Court of Justice begins hearings on the genocide case against Myanmar filed by The Gambia, further bringing attention to the ongoing Rohingya crisis.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

UN Resolutions

UN General Assembly Resolution 72/284 (2018)

UN Security Council Statements: While there have been discussions and statements made by the UN Security Council on the Rohingya crisis, including expressions of concern and calls for action, no formal resolutions were passed due to disagreements among member states on the severity of the situation and the degree of intervention required.

Diplomatic Efforts

The Bangladesh-Myanmar Agreement facilitates the repatriation of Rohingya refugees. However, these attempts faced challenges due to concerns about the safety and rights of returning refugees and the lack of concrete measures to address the root causes of the crisis.

The case filed by The Gambia at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accused Myanmar of genocide against the Rohingya. While the court ordered provisional measures to protect Rohingya, the legal proceedings are ongoing and aimed at holding Myanmar accountable for alleged atrocities.

Possible Solutions

Safe Repatriation and Rights Assurance:

Countries may want to establish a framework ensuring the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. This will ensure that repatriation efforts guarantee the protection of returnees, including their citizenship rights, safety, and access to essential services.

Accountability and Justice

It is also imperative to establish mechanisms for accountability, including independent investigations into alleged human rights violations and ensuring those responsible face justice. This may mean collaborating with international bodies like the International Criminal Court (ICC) or international tribunals to prosecute individuals involved in perpetrating crimes against the Rohingya.

Citizenship Rights and Legal Recognition

Another solution may be to press Myanmar's government to grant full citizenship rights to the Rohingya, ensuring their legal recognition and access to basic services, education, and employment and work towards amending discriminatory citizenship laws in Myanmar to ensure the inclusion of Rohingya as equal citizens.

Sustained Humanitarian Support

Economically developed countries should increase humanitarian aid and support to Rohingya refugees in host countries, focusing on healthcare, education, shelter, and livelihood opportunities. They can collaborate with international humanitarian agencies to enhance support and sustainable development initiatives in both refugee camps and returnee communities while establishing partnerships for capacity-building, resource-sharing, and collaborative strategies aimed at resolving the crisis and promoting stability in the region.

Rohingya "Ethnic Cleansing" Leads to Refugee Crisis

Figures related to the forced displacement of Myanmar's Rohingya population

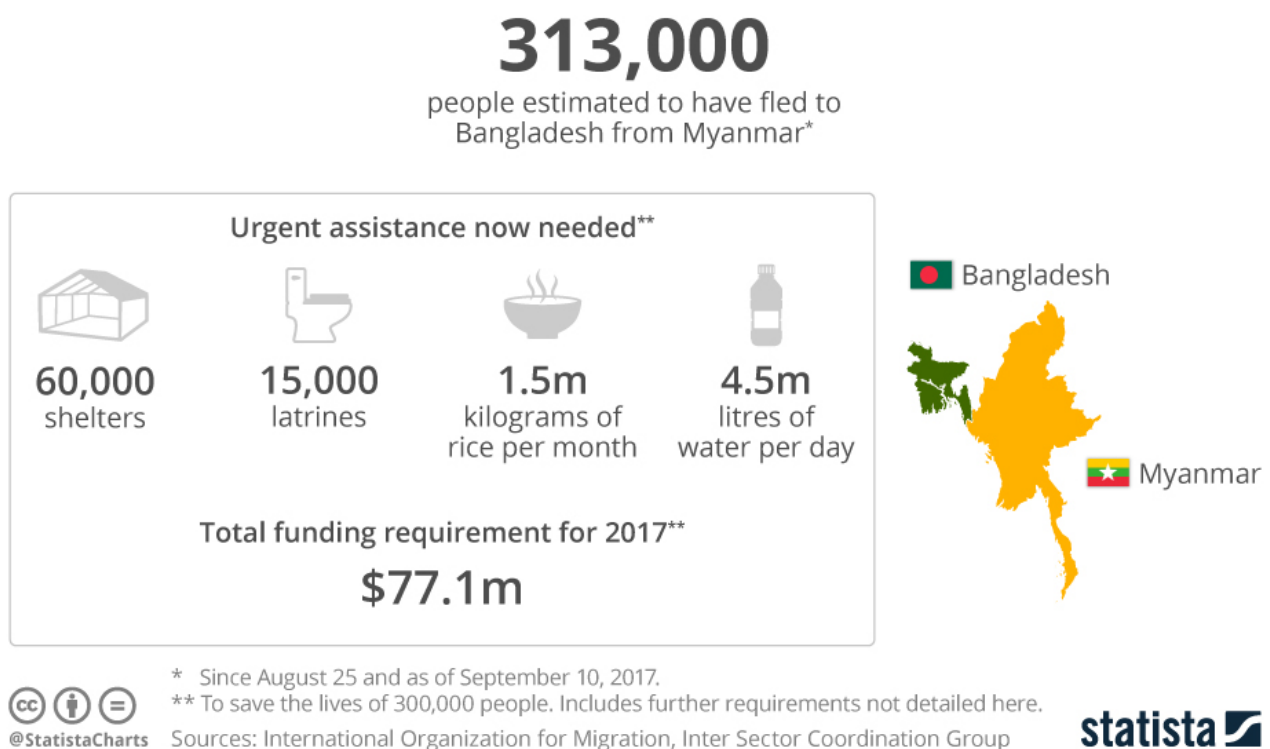


Figure 5. UNHCR Refugee Agency Statistics on Rohingya Children

Empowerment and Inclusion

Finally, governments should focus on supporting initiatives that empower Rohingya communities, particularly women and youth, through education, skills training, and community development programs. This will ensure the inclusion of Rohingya representatives in discussions and decisions concerning their future, allowing their voices to be heard in finding sustainable solutions.

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