WHERE WILL MOST OF THE ROHINGYA BE BY 2022?

A Scenario Analysis

February 2020

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Government-led small-scale returns to Myanmar without favourable conditions for conducive return in place sparks fear among the Rohingya, a massive spike in trafficking, and escalation of violence in Rakhine State.

Probability: low | Impact: high

Scenario 2: A Regional Approach

Registration in Bangladesh for a portion of the Rohingya community as part of regional arrangement which sees large-scale investment for longer-term development funding mechanisms from international financial institutions and relocation pathways to other countries in the region. Relocation to Bhasan Char increases protection and freedom of movement concerns.

Probability: low | Impact: high

Scenario 3: Impasse

Continued desolation of camps, deterioration of the status quo and a decline in funding spurs increase in people on the move (relocation; migration), attempts at repatriation, and increased negative coping strategies.

Probability: high | Impact: medium

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A large-scale weather event causes significant loss of life, prompts expedited relocation to Bhasan Char, and sparks rise in trafficking and onward flight to third countries.

Probability: medium | Impact: high

INTRODUCTION

Critical question

The four scenarios consider the question, 'Where will most of the Rohingya be by 2022?' The scenario analysis was developed at the request of Save the Children's Bangladesh country office in order to support operational and advocacy planning for its response to the most recent and large-scale influx of Rohingya into Bangladesh, which started in August 2017.

2022 will mark the fifth anniversary of the August 2017 influx. Working on these scenarios across 2019 and 2020, it also corresponds to a future close enough to be relevant for forward planning and not so distant as to make foresight analysis more challenging. In essence, the time horizon provides a timeframe with enough elements of stability to allow for a certain degree of confidence in our projections while focusing the analysis on key structural issues, away from the day-to-day (constantly changing) news.

The geographic scope of the question is framed in a broad way, and could encompasses Rohingya living in Myanmar, Rohingya living in Bangladesh, as well as smaller Rohingya communities living in other countries throughout the region. However, we have focused the scenarios on Bangladesh given that the majority of Rohingya are currently located there and the question of their relocation is posed most pressingly at the moment.

How to use this document

The scenarios set out in the analysis are not predictions of the future, nor are they intended to be exhaustive. Instead, they offer plausible versions of the future development of the so-called Rohingya crisis, with a Bangladesh-centred perspective. These plausible versions are intended to provoke thought and discussion among humanitarian actors who operate in the sub-region (in particular, Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, Thailand and Indonesia); they are also meant to support anticipatory planning for decision-makers, be they working in aid organisations, UN agencies or even governments, from both an operational and advocacy perspective.
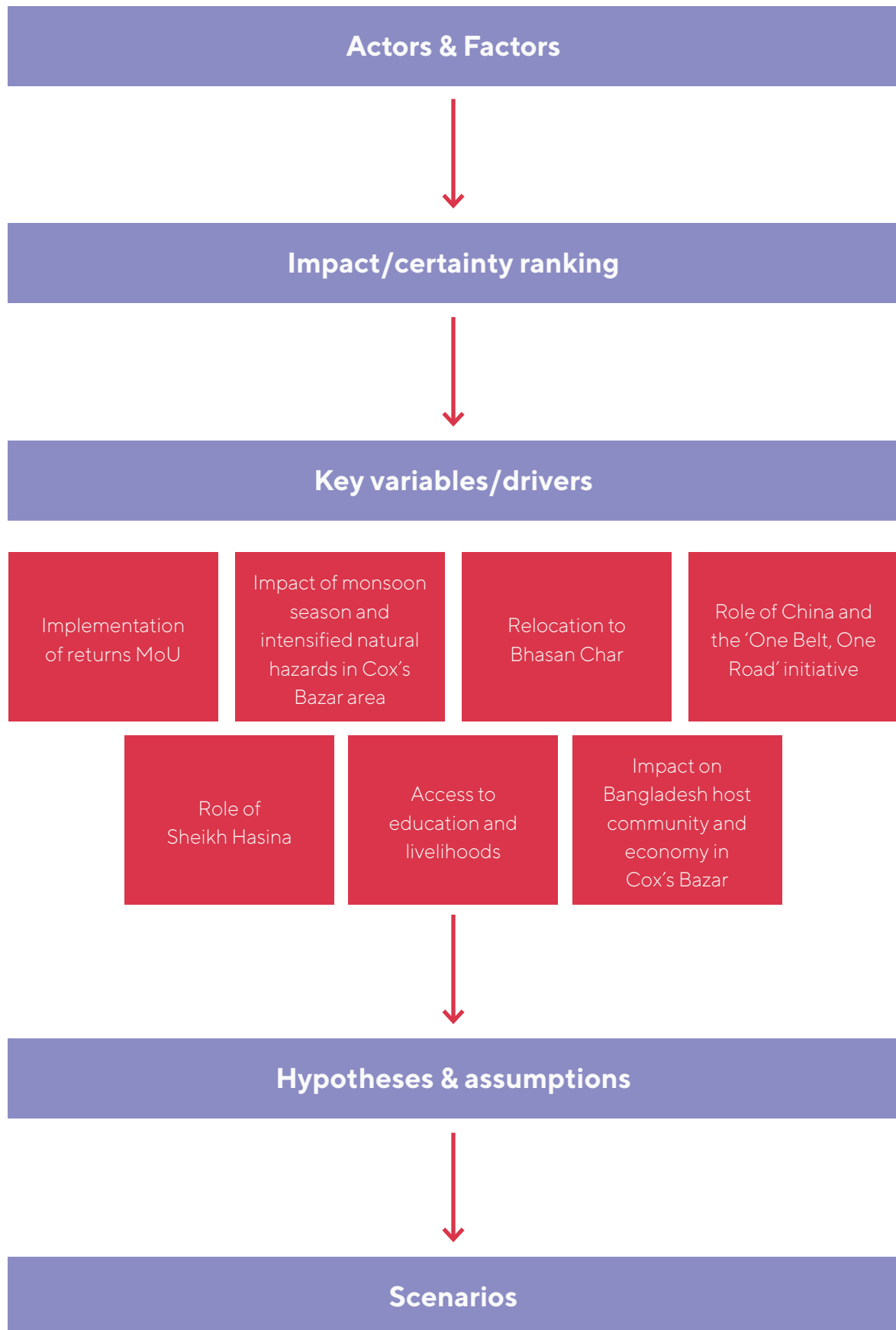
Methodology

The scenarios were developed collaboratively with the staff of the Bangladesh office of international NGO, all of whom have been working either directly on the Rohingya response or in a supporting role. Input was also sought from regional and global colleagues across operational and advocacy roles within the INGO. The process was facilitated through an in-person workshop and remote consultation by analysts from the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, based in Melbourne.

Scenario-building is a field that originated from intelligence organisations and the private sector. The methodology proposed here is based on best practice in the humanitarian sector as recommended by organisations such as ACAPS, INSO and the IARAN. While there is more than one way to build a scenario, the focus here is on 'exploratory scenarios', which allow for a more systematic analysis of the different drivers in context. This type of methodology works best in volatile, complex environments.

In order to create the scenarios, the first step was to identify the key contextual variables (be they actors or factors) framing the critical question, meaning having some direct influence over how the situation could evolve by 2022. These were mapped across political, legal, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental dimensions and at a national, regional and international level. The 97 variables identified were then ranked in a double-axis matrix according to their respective degree of impact on the issue under consideration on one hand, and the level of certainty with which their trajectory could be predicted in the outlook on the other (the impactful and highly predictable variables form the assumptions).

An additional step allowed for isolating the most influential variables among those that were ranked highly impactful but more uncertain, by assessing the extent to which each of them exerted influence over the others. For those most influential variables, a number of hypotheses (or possible outcomes for each variable over the timeframe) were developed – see Attachment entitled "Key driver analysis and hypotheses". The scenarios were developed by linking a hypothesis for each variable, focusing on some of the most contentious or potentially impactful developments and then following a logical path on potential flow-on effects and consequences. The scenarios where then validated by both Rohingya response staff and other colleagues with an interest in the response and the wider context.

OVERVIEW OF THE SCENARIO-BUILDING PROCESS

Actors & Factors

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Impact/certainty ranking

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Key variables/drivers

Implementation of returns MoU	Impact of monsoon season and intensified natural hazards in Cox's Bazar area	Relocation to Bhasan Char	Role of China and the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative
	Role of Sheikh Hasina	Access to education and livelihoods	Impact on Bangladesh host community and economy in Cox's Bazar

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Hypotheses & assumptions

↓

Scenarios

CONTEXT

Following a military crackdown by the Myanmar military in August 2017 in Rakhine State, over 700,000 Rohingya from Myanmar crossed the border seeking safety into Bangladesh. There are now over 1 million Rohingya in Bangladesh, mostly living in large camps in the area of Cox's Bazar. An UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission, under the auspices of the United Nations Human Rights Council, found that the actions by the Myanmar military and other security forces warranted investigations of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.[1]

Prior to the August 2017 displacement, there have been several other large influxes of Rohingya into Bangladesh from Myanmar. In recent decades (in 1978 and again in 1991–1992), approximately 250,000 Rohingya entered Bangladesh. Over 80,000 Rohingya entered Bangladesh in 2016. The 1978 and 1991–1992 displacements were followed by large-scale repatriation exercises, though whether this repatriation was voluntary has been seriously questioned.[2] The Rohingya living in Bangladesh from these previous influxes were mostly living in two registered camps, and while their registration status provided some formal status, freedom of movement and access to livelihoods and social services were significantly limited.

The government of Bangladesh opened its border to the August 2017 influx, and has permitted the Rohingya to remain in Bangladesh. However, the status of the Rohingya in Bangladesh as "forcibly displaced Rohingya nationals" or FDMN (as opposed to asylum seekers or refugees) is reflective of the reticence of the Bangladeshi government to acknowledge a right to asylum. The prolonged presence of the Rohingya in Bangladesh has been a highly political issue, particularly in the lead-up to the 2018 federal elections in Bangladesh. In a speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2019, Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that the international community must "understand the untenability" of the current situation and couched it as a regional threat, "increasing congestion and environmental degradation … challenging health and security".[3]

Environmental damage is among the most significant effects of the last influx. According to the Cox's Bazar Forest Department, the influx has destroyed about 4818 acres of forest reserves worth US$55 million. Meanwhile, every day, around 750 tonnes of timber, vegetation and roots are collected as cooking fuel.

Many species of wildlife are also coming under threat.[4] The camps have been constructed on previously forested land, and the topography is steep and muddy in many areas. The area was already vulnerable to Bangladesh's monsoon season, which occurs from April to October each year, and deforestation has only exacerbated the risk.

The Bangladeshi host community in and around the area of Cox's Bazar were among the first responders to the initial influx of Rohingya and similar ethnic and religious ties engendered initial support. However, the scale of the Rohingya displacement has had a significant impact on the surrounding host community, including a 50% rise in the prices of daily essentials, a decrease in the wages for daily labour, and large-scale destruction of forested and agricultural land that provided resources and income for the local population.[5] World Bank and Asia Development Bank funding has made some provision for services to host communities;[6] however, Cox's Bazar was a resource-poor area prior to the most recent influx, and as resources become even more scarce and additional pressure mounts, tensions continue to build between the Rohingya population and local host community. Even prior to the 2017 influx, the Cox's Bazar district was considered a high-risk area for human trafficking, facilitated by its geographical location bordering India and Myanmar and its close proximity to Nepal and Thailand. The current circumstances have generated even more favourable conditions for such criminal networks to operate.

The government of Bangladesh has made a significant investment (reported to be around $US280 million) in building facilities on Bhasan Char, an island in the Bay of Bengal, to receive up to 100,000 Rohingya.[7] However, the international community has voiced concern about the isolation of the island, its high vulnerability to natural hazards (floods etc.), and absence of a protection framework or guarantees as to freedom of movement.

As early as January 2018, the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar made agreements about the repatriation of Rohingya to Myanmar. While the government of Bangladesh has said that it would not progress repatriation unless it was safe to do so, there has still been a series of further agreements and dates

1   Report of the independent international fact-finding missions on Myanmar, 12 September 2018.
2   UNHCR, States of denial: A review of UNHCR's response to the protracted situation of stateless Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, December 2011.
3   UN News, 'Despite grappling with the Rohingya crisis, Bangladesh is a "development miracle"', 27 September 2019.

4   UNDP, Impacts of the Rohingya refugee influx on host communities, November 2018.
5   UNDP, Impact of the Rohingya refugee influx on host communities, November 2018.
6   World Bank , 'World Bank helps Bangladesh improve service delivery for Rohingya', 8 May 2019; Asia Development Bank, 'ADB $100 million grant approved as first phase of proposed $200 million package for displaced persons in Bangladesh camps", 6 July 2018.
7   Thomson Reuters, 'A remote home for the Rohingya', 31 December 2018.

set for repatriation to take place. This has so far not eventuated, though historical precedent for previous large-scale influxes has been set for returns, despite the absence of conductive conditions further fuelling the cyclical migratory nature of this longstanding crisis.

Recent large-scale protests by the Rohingya in the face of proposed repatriation, as well as security incidents purporting to involve members of the Rohingya community, were then followed by an increase in restrictions by the Bangladesh government, with cuts to access to telecommunications and fencing of the camps.[8]

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has to date played a limited role in bringing about a sustainable resolution to the crisis, given its consensus model of operation. However, China's significant economic interests in Bangladesh and Myanmar as part of its 'One Belt, One Road' initiative has led it to play a significant role as mediator after the most recent influx, attempting to champion the return of the Rohingya to Rakhine State and protecting Myanmar from more significant action by the United Nations.[9]

There has also been a lack of willingness by countries in the region, and globally, to offer alternative pathways to the Rohingya. Instead, countries such as India and Saudi Arabia have deported Rohingya despite the dire conditions in Myanmar and Bangladesh.[10] While Rohingya have previously settled in India with less restrictions than in Bangladesh,[11] a growing anti-Muslim sentiment is reflected by citizenship legislation that may render stateless up to 2 million people, many of whom are perceived as illegal Bengali immigrants.[12] Saudi Arabia deported Rohingya to Bangladesh, despite there being no evidence that Bangladesh was their country of origin.[13] With Bangladesh already under intense pressure hosting the Rohingya, further mass influxes of people into Bangladesh may see more political restrictions and pushes for hasty relocation or repatriation for the Rohingya.

Cases or investigations relating to actions against the Rohingya are ongoing in the International Criminal Court (for the crime against humanity of 'deportation'), in Argentina (based on the principle of 'universal jurisdiction'), and in the International Court of Justice (for breaches of the genocide convention). The ICJ proceedings are notable due to the court's ability to impose "provisional measures" – injunction-style orders to prevent further harm or the destruction of evidence while the main proceedings are ongoing. In its 23 January 2020 decision on provisional measures, the ICJ found that the Rohingya "remain extremely vulnerable"[14] and ordered that the Myanmar government shall take all measures in its power to prevent genocidal acts against the Rohingya, ensure that its military does not commit genocidal acts, and preserve evidence related to the main genocide proceedings. The court also ordered that Myanmar report to it on the measures taken to implement the order within four months, and then every six months.[15]

8   Human Rights Watch, 'Bangladesh: clampdown on Rohingya refugees', 7 September 2019.

9   International Crisis Group, 'Bangladesh–Myanmar: the danger of forced Rohingya repatriation' Crisis Group Asia Briefing no.153, 12 November 2018.

10   Zarir Hussein, 'India deports second Rohingya group to Myanmar, more expulsions likely', Thomson Reuters, 3 January 2019.

11   Ashley Starr Kinseth, 'India's Rohingya shame', Al Jazeera, 29 January 2019.

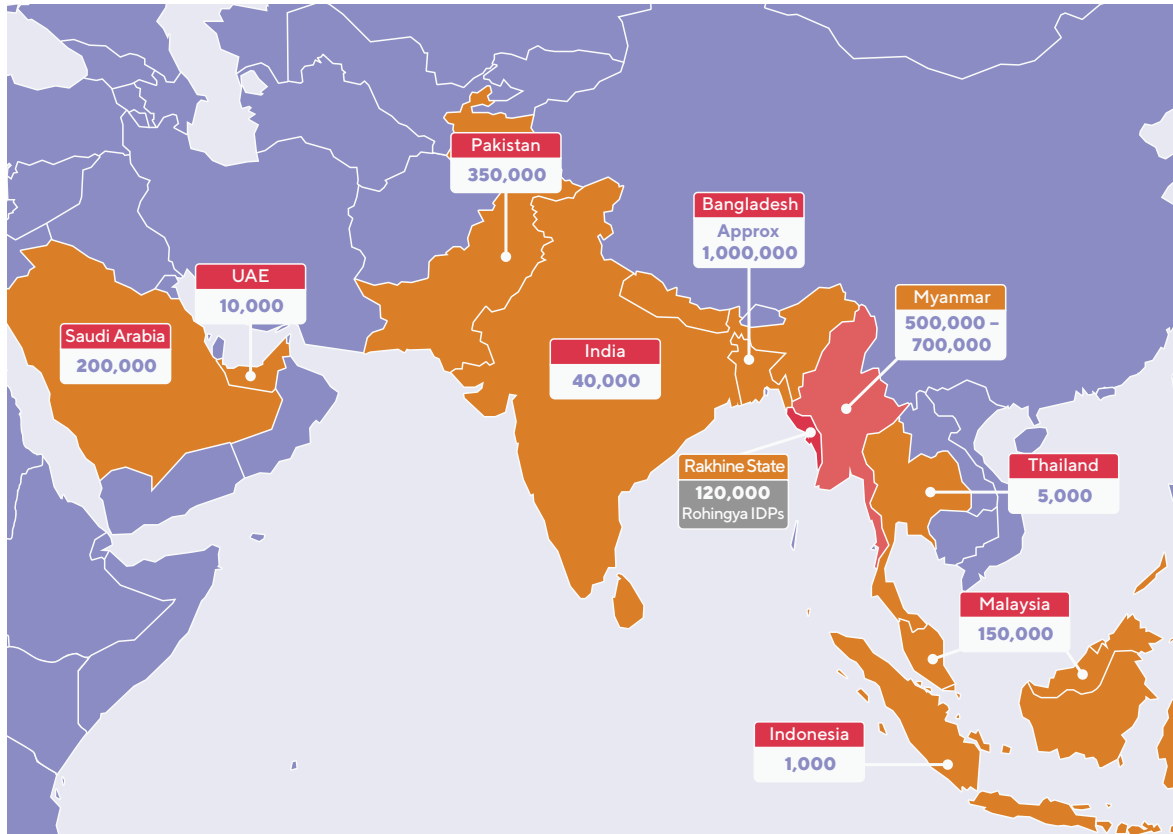12   BBC, 'Citizenship Amendment Bill: India's new "anti-Muslim" law explained', 11 December 2019.

13   Al Jazeera, 'Saudia Arabia deports dozens of Rohingya to Bangladesh: MEE', 8 January 2019.

14   International Court of Justice (23 January 2020), Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v Myanmar) – Order at [72]–[73].

15   International Court of Justice (23 January 2020), Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v Myanmar) – Order at [86].

FOLLOWING MYANMAR'S FLEEING ROHINGYA

Since the late 1970s, more than one million Rohingya have fled Myanmar

Rohingya crisis map. Source: Al Jazeera (2017). Retrieved from:
https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2017/09/rohingya-crisis-explained-maps-170910140906580.html

ASSUMPTIONS

We assume that the following factors (identified as having a high impact and high level of predictability) will remain stable up to 2022 as defining background features. These features apply consistently across all scenarios:

- **The role of Myanmar military:** The attitudes and actions from Myanmar military (Tatmadaw), from soldiers to high-ranking officials, remain unchanged and characterised by a widely shared profound disrespect for Rohingya's rights and integrity. A constitutionally entrenched civil/military government guarantees a quarter of parliamentary seats to the armed forces; sees continued significant influence over matters of national security; and can effectively veto any meaningful change which would reduce their power. The Military retains significant power of the country's political and economic life, and impunity regarding operations conducted in Rakhine State remains the norm.

- **Myanmar government's attitude toward the Rohingya:** With the Union government dominated by the National League for Democracy, and Rakhine State government dominated by the Arakan National Party, the government of Myanmar will continue to lack the willingness and capacity to significantly improve the situation for Rohingya in Rakhine State, remaining a critical obstacle to the realisation of Rohingya rights. While the government has made some public concessions as to the military's "disproportionate" response to the events leading up to the August 2017 influx into Bangladesh, it has largely supported the military and furthered the narrative that the Tatmadaw's operations in Rakhine State were, and continue to be, justifiable as a matter of national security.

- **Impact of international sanctions:** The weak/limited sanctions by the international community against top-ranking Tatmadaw, and military-owned enterprises, which continue to generate most of the Burmese military's operating revenue, will continue to have diminutive impact.

- **Decline in humanitarian funding:** Globally, with more humanitarian need than there is funding, the trend for crisis funding to decline as time passes, donors turning to other crises, and the protracted nature of the Rohingya crisis, the level of international humanitarian funding for the Rohingya will continue to decline (funding for the Joint Response Plan for the response has declined from 73% in 2017 to 69% in 2019),[16] and will reduce the capacity of the international community to adequately address the needs of the Rohingya population in Bangladesh.

- **Role of IOM and UNHCR:** The IOM and, to an extent, UNHCR (that is caveated by the reluctance of the government of Bangladesh to recognise the mandate of UNHCR) continue to play an influential role. In their position on the repatriation of the Rohingya, as well as their approach to influencing the government of Bangladesh, the IOM and UNHCR have high impact and demonstrate relative predictability.

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16   UN OCHA Financial Tracking Service, Bangladesh: 2019 Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis (January–December) (Other), as at 6 February 2020.

SCENARIOS

Scenario 1: Forced returns

Government-led small scale returns to Myanmar without favourable conditions for conducive return in place sparks fear among the Rohingya, a massive spike in trafficking, and escalation of violence in Rakhine State

Probability: low | Impact: high

Scenario

Little political movement has occurred to find a long-term solution to the displacement of the Rohingya. While some progress has been made in relation to access to education being more readily available for Rohingya children, challenges such as a lack of appropriately qualified teachers and a simple absence of physical space in the camps to build the necessary infrastructure mean that real change is yet to materialise. There is an increasing sense of hopelessness among the Rohingya, as conditions in the camp continue to be eroded by the flooding, rain and landslides of the monsoon season and livelihood opportunities remain restricted. Humanitarian funding diminishes each year, despite the constant need to maintain basic services and rebuild the temporary structures so prevalent in the camps.

The Bangladeshi host community is also growing increasingly frustrated about the protracted nature of the Rohingya refugee camps and the impact that it is having on the Cox's Bazar economy. The host community has an increasing sense that whatever investment exists targets the Rohingya and does not offer them any benefit, despite what they perceive as the significant detrimental impact on their living conditions and livelihoods. As a result, tensions flare between Rohingya and the local community and there is increasing pressure from the Bangladeshi public for a resolution to be reached.

China continues to facilitate discussions on repatriation and push for resolution. With mounting local political tensions and encouragement from China, Bangladesh cites positive improvements brought about in Myanmar by the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice as evidence of an improved situation in Rakhine State. However, human rights organisations argue that the underlying, core issues of the conflict have not been addressed and violence is likely to flare again. While there is no appetite to attempt large-scale repatriation, the government of Myanmar and Bangladesh agree that small-scale repatriations may build acceptance among the Rohingya and be the catalyst for many deciding to return, particularly when faced with no viable alternatives in Bangladesh.

UNHCR does not support the repatriations, as it does not agree that conditions for safe and fully informed repatriation have been met, and questions what process would be utilised as to who would be 'selected' for repatriation. The government of Bangladesh turns to the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA) to provide support in the absence of UNHCR's assistance; however, the AHA Centre lacks the experience and resources. Nevertheless, reports emerge that several hundred Rohingya were identified and removed from Bangladesh back to Myanmar. The Rohingya fear that this is just the start of what will be an eventual large-scale-return policy. Panic is rife in the camps, and many families feel they must take the opportunity while they can to move on to third countries. Human rights organisations report a massive spike in young women and girls using traffickers to reach countries including Malaysia and Indonesia in the hope of being married there, but violence and abuse is rife along the trafficking routes, and those who do arrive in third countries are highly vulnerable to exploitation. Young men and boys seek employment in the fishing industry, but many find themselves subject to slave-like conditions on Thai fishing boats.

Access in Rakhine State is still very limited, but the impact of even a small number of returnees sparks tensions in relation to land ownership and further violence ensues. Many fear they cannot stay in Rakhine State, but the border into Bangladesh is now closed.

Humanitarian implications
- Further destabilisation and escalation of inter-communal violence in Rakhine State, but with very limited options for flight.
- Ongoing need for 'response within a response' to the monsoon season, including continual damage to temporary structures, potential health crises and escalating protection concerns.
- Protection concerns in the camps increasingly compounded as education and livelihood activities are limited and people are increasingly forced to resort to negative coping strategies.
- Resort to trafficking and smuggling creates a very high risk for abuse and exploitation.

Operational considerations
- Increasing challenge of maintaining and prioritising funding when monsoon season response continually leads to a spike in need.
- How can education programming be adapted to an environment where there is now more political will, but a range of physical constraints to implementation?

- How will NGOs and regional players respond to involuntary returns? What approach will be taken from an advocacy perspective and in relation to communicating with communities?
- Inability to access information in Rakhine State.
- Challenges in coordinating responses in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Scenario 2: A regional approach

Registration in Bangladesh for a portion of the Rohingya community as part of regional arrangement which sees large-scale investment for longer-term development funding mechanisms from international financial institutions and relocation pathways to other countries in the region. Relocation to Bhasan Char increases protection and freedom of movement concerns.

Probability: low | Impact: high

Scenario

An escalation in irregular regional migration prompts reinvigorated attempts to create a more sustainable and certain regional approach.

Myanmar and Bangladeshi tensions, with both countries blaming the other for the failed repatriation attempts, continue to fuel a diplomatic stalemate. Spurred by China, the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar continue to make agreements and set dates for repatriation, but attempts gain no traction with the international community. The Rohingya continue to oppose returning to Myanmar, not convinced that conditions in Rakhine State have sufficiently shifted to enable safe and conducive return.

With repatriation seeming increasingly unlikely and pointing to the agreements made as part of Global Compact negotiations, Bangladesh indicates that it will grant a registered status to a portion of the Rohingya to remain in Bangladesh if other countries also provide resettlement pathways and if further large-scale development funding is made available to support refugee and host communities alike. Bangladesh commits to improved infrastructure for the Rohingya, though it intends this to be similar to the registered camp approach prior to the August 2017 influx. While not fully recognising the rights of the Rohingya, it at least offers some sense of certainty in the ability to remain in Bangladesh and an improvement in infrastructure.

In religious solidarity with the Rohingya, Malaysia and Indonesia agree to receive a portion of the displaced Rohingya population, though there is confusion and unrest among the Rohingya community as to how such resettlements will be managed and who will get to go where.

Intercommunal tensions decrease with the move to get both Rohingya and host community children additional resources, and pressure is eased on the Cox's Bazar economy with the injection of funding. Large-scale investment for longer-term development funding from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank encourages opportunities to work with more development actors. The government of Bangladesh continues to work with other donor states, such a Japan, to develop infrastructure to relieve the environmental and economic burden. However, despite the promised injection of funds, progress is slow. While additional education services are promised, the following issues remain: finding appropriately qualified teachers; an absence of physical space in the camps to build the necessary infrastructure; and the number of children in need of quality education and training.

Part of Bangladesh's plan for the Rohingya includes relocation to Bhasan Char. Bangladesh attempts to address international community concerns relating to protection and mobility in the initial relocation phase; however, given the remoteness of the island, the Rohingya are now highly isolated and the access and services promised by the government of Bangladesh do not sufficiently materialise, freedom of movement and mobility is constrained and space for NGOs to operate on Bhasan Char is restricted. These concerns are exacerbated in the face of an impending monsoon season, with refugees now on an island prone to flooding during this time with limited mobility and nowhere to go/evacuate to. There is no clear coordination on how organisations should operate, leaving numerous gaps in the response. There is also significantly increased expense to operating on Bhasan Char, given its remoteness, and donors are unwilling to continue to fund NGOs operating on the island.

Humanitarian impact
- Measured transition to development programming and design, with a core focus on integration with the host community to improve social cohesion and access to more sustainable services.
- Improved infrastructure within camps and host community decreases vulnerabilities, but situation still highly precarious due to spikes in need during monsoon and cyclone season.
- Relocation to Bhasan Char brings increased risks in relation to protection, freedom of movement and vulnerability to weather events.
- Challenges remain with rollout of education and skills training given physical and technical constraints.

Operational considerations
- Ensure balanced programming and engagement in host and refugee communities for access to basic services, including protection and education activities.

- How can educational programming be adapted to overcome challenges of physical constraints, and meet the needs of the most vulnerable?
- How will agencies respond to the challenges of Bhasan Char, including decisions on whether or not to provide services in such an environment?
- With a shift to longer-term programming, what does this mean for aid agencies strategy development and programming in thinking about the humanitarian-development nexus?

Scenario 3: Impasse

Continued desolation of camps, deterioration of the status quo, and a decline in funding spurs increase in people on the move (relocation; migration), attempts at repatriation, and increased negative coping strategies.

Probability: high | Impact: medium

Scenario

Political stalemate and inadequate funding of the response leads to a marked deterioration of the crisis status quo. This impasse sees no substantial move from Bangladesh to longer-term planning. The government of Bangladesh maintains its historical pattern of a 'no integration policy' to support the perception of non-permanency of the Rohingya staying in Bangladesh. While there is some progress in relation to access to education and vocational training for Rohingya refugees, extended also to local host communities, the challenges–including slow bureaucratic impediments and a range of physical implementation challenges–restrict effective provision of education services.

Bangladesh repeatedly maintains the international community has not done enough to pressure Myanmar to address security, rights and accountability issues to enable any large-scale return or establish a durable solution to the intractable situation. Further, Bangladesh's emphasis on near-term planning denies commitment of donor funding to reach maximum potential, and/or deters future commitment of funding.

Instead, the Bangladeshi government continues to tighten security, with little freedom of movement and restricting access to employment, and continues to manage the displacement crisis through a one-year plan. Their efforts to control crime and respond to domestic political pressure heightens tensions, increasing resentment and desperation among refugees leading to a dangerous downward spiral in the camps, exacerbating security challenges. With this short-term lens and increasingly heavy-handed responses to security challenges, the situation becomes more fraught, dangerous and desperate.

The perception from host communities as to how the economy is impacted may influence levels of community acceptance towards the Rohingya, contributing to deterioration in host community tensions and anti-Rohingya sentiment. While the government of Bangladesh moves to allow greater access to education and vocational training aimed at Rohingya refugee and host community children, in reality this takes time to filter through due to bureaucratic delays and a range of implementation barriers.

This marked deterioration in camps–and perceived, if not actual, imbalanced investment in host and refugee communities–incrementally exacerbates violence and insecurity for the Rohingya and anti-NGO sentiment and risks further alienating refugees, setting the stage for greater insecurity and conflict.

There is greater willingness from the Bangladesh government to invest in more balanced preparedness activities and construction of permanent structures, but this is still not enough. The majority of the refugee population live under precarious tarps in the face of large-scale weather events, including an intensified monsoon season given geographic exposure combined with the congested nature and fragility of the refugee camp infrastructure, the muddy and hilly terrain, and the lack of evacuation options.

In wanting to contain and mitigate deterioration in camps and increased violence, the Bangladesh government moves to an accelerated Bhasan Char relocation with unfavourable conditions–increasing protection and voluntary concerns. The relocation does not meet the UN standard protection framework or address their list of conditions, including a regular shipping service, freedom of movement or access to services, sustainability, livelihoods, etc. and Rohingya on the island experience limited mobility, no access to market and isolation. Restrictions on aid activities limit the effectiveness of the aid agencies that decide to operate on Bhasan Char.

Meanwhile, Myanmar and Bangladeshi tensions continue to fuel a diplomatic stalemate, with both countries blaming the other for the failed repatriation attempts; no traction is made for repatriation with favourable conditions, and the majority of Rohingya refugees continue to be faced with no viable alternatives. Status quo on returns largely remains, but with worsening insecurity and instability, there continues to be a trickle of Rohingya who elect to return without conducive conditions in place.

For Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, experiencing inflamed deterioration, an absence of prospects for returns with conducive conditions and longer-term planning, and fears they will at some point be forced back to Myanmar without conducive conditions as catalyst, leaves refugees susceptible to recruitment into criminal, militant or extremist networks and/or triggers an increase in resorting to negative coping strategies.

The intolerable situation convinces some refugees of the chance to build a new life elsewhere and sparks a sharp uptick in regional migration. The pathway to India is no longer viable given the anti-Muslim sentiment building there, and many attempt dangerous sea journeys across to Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia or other countries, leading to exploitation at the hands of smugglers or traffickers intensifying over time and prompting wider regional implications. This leads to a crisis that would echo the scale and implications of the Andaman sea refugee crisis of 2015.

Further, a compounding lack of access to services and livelihoods, an increasingly strained economy in Cox's Bazar—or worse, a recession—adds a significant push factor for economically motivated migration out of the area, for both the Rohingya population and host community.

Humanitarian impact

- Prospects, and optics, for balanced programming with both host and refugee community fail to mitigate increasing intercommunal tensions, and negative narrative and violent incidents increase toward the Rohingya, exacerbating the humanitarian situation.
- A cyclical lack of preparedness, imbalanced re-building in the camps (donor fatigue), as well as violence in the camps and the surrounding areas limits access for INGOs and there are further crackdowns on the operational environment on security grounds.
- Protection concerns surge inside the Cox's Bazar camps and neighbouring countries, refugees increasingly rely on negative coping strategies as there is no indication of their living situation improving, and this leads to an increased need for psychosocial support.
- Serious protection and rights concerns on Bhasan Char provide uncertainty around how aid agencies will respond and how they will be able to operate in compliance with humanitarian principles.
- Increase in trafficking/regional migration leads to an increased likelihood of an Andaman Sea crisis re-play, exposing gaps in regional frameworks. Significant spike in protection concerns as smugglers take advantage of increased demand.
- Despite the government of Bangladesh's commitment to extend education and skills training facilities to Rohingya refugee and host community children, the actual implementation is slow-moving and fraught with impediments that significantly impacts on the delivery of education activities.

Operational considerations

- The Bangladeshi government continues to enforce increasingly stringent security measures around the camps, further restricting INGO and UN access inside refugee camps.
- Donor fatigue worsens as the protracted refugee crisis continues at an impasse, constraining operational capability and lessening reach.

- For aid agencies operating on a geographically isolated Bhasan Char, access and a constrained humanitarian space in which to operate will be a challenge to providing aid, including the freedom of movement restrictions it would imply for residents.
- Harsh weather conditions on Bhasan Char during the monsoon season compounds operational challenges.
- Lack of robust normative or policy frameworks to support operational capacity to respond to and manage mass migration in the region, especially at a scale and urgency of migratory movements that exceeds previous crises experienced in the region.
- Growing anti-NGO sentiment leads to increased suspicion of, and potential violence toward, aid workers, in particular international aid workers.

Scenario 4: A second crisis

A large-scale weather event causes significant loss of life, prompts expedited relocation to Bhasan Char and sparks rise in trafficking and onward flight to third countries.

Probability: medium | Impact: high

Scenario

While the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar continue to make agreements and set dates for repatriation to take place, the Rohingya continue to be opposed to returning to Myanmar and are not convinced that conditions in Rakhine State have sufficiently shifted to enable safe return.

Plans for relocation to the island of Bhasan Char remain on the table, but no concrete moves have been made for the Rohingya to be relocated.

Myanmar purports to be complying with the provisional measures imposed by the International Court of Justice, but in practice this leads to little enhancement of living conditions for the Rohingya, nor does it remove the fear of subsequent escalations.

Not wishing to create any incentives for longer-term integration, the government of Bangladesh continues to restrict the provision of education services to non-formal activities and the ability for Rohingya to earn a living is very limited. Similarly, the building of more sustainable structures in the camps is heavily regulated and restricted, with bamboo and tarp still heavily utilised.

The heavy rains and high winds of the monsoon season cause significant damage to structures. Local and international aid agencies are stretched in the face of dwindling funding to provide the materials necessary to continually relocate and build.

A tropical cyclone is predicted to sweep through Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and India within days. In Cox's Bazar, a storm surge of 1.5 metres is predicted as well as devastating winds and rain. Over 1 million Bangladeshi citizens are predicted to be in severe danger, requiring evacuation. The Rohingya camps are also in the severe danger zone. Bangladesh authorities mobilise to evacuate Bangladeshi citizens, but time and resources permit only 200,000 people to be moved out of danger. The Rohingya community is aware of the alerts and are pressing for information, but there are no evacuation plans in place for them as evacuation facilities are already near capacity with Bangladeshi citizens. Aid agencies try to support with preparedness messaging for the Rohingya in the camps, but this seems woefully insufficient in the face of the level of danger.

The cyclone brings a storm surge of 1.5 metres, and dumps heavy rain across the region. Devastating winds cause widespread damage to infrastructure and landslides, flooding and tree falls claim an estimated 80 lives among Bangladeshi citizens, and over 2000 Rohingya are killed. The camps are decimated.

In the aftermath of the cyclone, the Bangladesh government moves forward quickly with plans to relocate those most at risk in the Rohingya camps to Bhasan Char. The international community voices its concerns about the isolation and absence of a protection framework, but the government questions whether the international community can continue to resist the relocation when the cyclone has made clear the risk of remaining, and countries in the region have failed in encouraging conditions conducive to return in Myanmar, nor have they offered alternative pathways for resettlement of the Rohingya to third locations. The first transfers of Rohingya from the mainland commence. Some Rohingya transferred say they are willing to go, while others say they don't want to leave the mainland but are worried they would be sent back to Myanmar if they resist.

Panic quickly spreads through the Rohingya community. Many now fear they are not safe in Myanmar, and nor are they safe in Bangladesh due to both the dangerous conditions in the camps and the risk of relocation to an isolated island. Trafficking routes that have been relatively dormant since crackdowns by regional governments in 2015 were reinvigorated at the start of the Rohingya displacement, but now are increasingly active and new routes are opening. Many more women and girls seek to reach countries including Malaysia and Indonesia – human rights agencies estimate at least 50% of those on the boats are women and girls and that this number is steadily rising. Reports are rife of sexual assault on these routes, lives lost on the treacherous journey, and exploitative conditions on arrival for those who have survived the journey.

Rumours abound that large numbers of Rohingya are planning on accessing smuggling routes to travel to other countries. At the peak of movement, media outlets report that a large unauthorised vessel has been intercepted in the Bay of Bengal, carrying potentially thousands of people, whose origin is currently unconfirmed.

While discussions ensued from the Andaman Sea crisis in 2015, which highlighted the lack of a policy frame to manage unsafe migration in the region, little tangible progress has been made in improving the protection environment. Governments in the region do not want to accept any responsibility for the vessel and the people aboard. Under the auspices of the regional initiatives of the Bali Process People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, an urgent meeting is called.

Humanitarian implications

- Ongoing need for 'response within a response' to the monsoon season, including continual damage to temporary structures, potential health crises and escalating protection concerns.
- Protection concerns in the camps increasingly compounded as education and livelihood activities are limited and people are increasingly forced to resort to negative coping strategies.
- Vulnerability to mass loss of life, injury and further trauma given impermanence of camp environment and the absence of effective evacuation plans.
- Resorting to trafficking and smuggling creates very high risk for abuse and exploitation, particularly for women and girls.
- Potential for large-scale onward movements of people in unsafe conditions and with no protective legal status.
- Risk of abuse and exploitation in receiving countries which have no, or limited, protection framework in place.

Operational considerations

- Increasing challenge of maintaining and prioritising funding when monsoon season response continually leads to a spike in need.
- Local and international agencies will need to determine a position on whether they will or won't provide assistance on Bhasan Char and, if so, under what circumstances.
- In the case of further large-scale movements of people within the region, how will regional governments respond?
- Increased pressure on limited resources of agencies supporting displaced people in receiving countries.
- Possible recalibration of the response as 'climate crisis', which presents opportunity to attract further funding and work more with local capacity/ actors.

GLOSSARY

Term	Definition	Key question
Assumption	A statement that one accepts as true without definitive proof	*Why is it important to us to consider this statement as true?*
Driver	A part of a system (can be an actor or factor) that transmits motion to its other parts, that is, influence them	*Is this actor/factor driving all of the system, or only its critical elements?*
Hypothesis	A supposition for something that is based on known facts but is yet to be proved or is yet to happen	*How will we verify which of our hypotheses will turn to be true?*
Predictability	The state of knowing what something will be like in the future or when something will happen	*What do I base my judgment on to determine whether a phenomenon is predictable or not?*
Time horizon	A fixed point in the future (date) in which scenarios project us	*How far ahead are we looking (2021, 2030, 2050)?*
Trend	A consistent pattern measured over a period of time, which allows for predicting the future based on past data	*How far back should we look to get an accurate picture of the future?*
Uncertainty	An element of a situation that is not known, or the feeling of not being sure of what will happen in the future	*Do we not know because there's no information, or because we haven't collected or analysed the existing evidence?*