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Editorial: Rohingya refugees: humanitarian responses and implications

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Rohingya refugees: humanitarian responses and implications

Introduction

As we write this editorial, the Rohingya crisis has entered its 7th year with no solution in sight. Trapped in the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Rohingya refugees face an uncertain future. In addition, ongoing political unrest in Bangladesh threatens to destabilize further the precarious situation of over a million Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar. The volatile security and political situation in both Bangladesh and Myanmar is prone to rapidly evolving, which may lead to major geopolitical consequences that profoundly affect the Rohingyas, particularly in terms of repatriation efforts and the evolving roles of major regional actors such as India and China, as well as global powers such as the United States of America (USA). What began in 2017 as a major humanitarian emergency has evolved into a protracted refugee crisis, with stateless Rohingyas facing dire living conditions in the cramped refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. The prospect of repatriation is also bleak as Myanmar does not recognize the Rohingyas as its citizens and has been mired in a civil war since the military coup in 2021. The dynamics in Rakhine State have also become increasingly complicated, with the rebellion of the Arakan Army, an ethnic armed group asserting greater autonomy for the Rakhine Buddhist majority, now controlling much of the state's central and northern regions.

Amidst these developments, the predicament of the Rohingyas has gradually faded from global attention ([Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023](#)). This shift in focus of the international humanitarian actors has led to a sharp drop in humanitarian assistance for the Rohingyas. For instance, in 2023, WFP reduced essential food support by 30%, harshly impacting the already precarious living conditions in the refugee camps ([European Commission, 2024](#)). The sharp decline in funding has aggravated the susceptibility of those living in the camps, particularly of young women forced into early marriage, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and dependency ([Guglielmi et al., 2021](#)). The reduction of funding has also disrupted social cohesion in the refugee-hosting areas of Cox's Bazar, where the locals, already struggling with poverty, face increased competition for common property resources and competition in the labor market ([Khaled, 2021](#)). The persistent insecurity,

political gridlock, and economic woes have also triggered a transnational crisis, with desperate Rohingyas taking death-defying sea journeys in search of refuge in neighboring countries (Ansar and Khaled, 2023).

Addressing this humanitarian crisis requires a comprehensive response from the international community, host countries, and humanitarian organizations. Humanitarian actors must tailor their assistance to the refugee-hosting areas' unique characteristics, considering demographic features, resource distribution, and access to services and employment opportunities (Ansar and Khaled, 2021). A nuanced, conflict-sensitive approach is indispensable to navigate the socio-economic dynamics of host areas, mitigate tensions, reduce vulnerability, and strengthen social cohesion.

Contributions to the Research Topic

The contributions to this Research Topic underscore the multi-layered challenges of the Rohingya crisis. The articles focus on complex dynamics between refugees and host communities and shortcomings in current approaches. They address important issues, such as statelessness, social cohesion, and displacement of the Rohingya population. Additionally, they emphasize the need for durable solutions, including resettlement in third countries and local integration, alongside the importance of addressing more systemic issues like discrimination and the denial of citizenship in Myanmar.

In the first article, Siddiqi examines the deteriorating social cohesion between the Rohingyas and hosts in Cox's Bazar. He underscores the role of legislative barriers and declining community sympathy as obstacles to social cohesion efforts. Siddiqi's analysis provides a crucial foundation for understanding the complexities of refugee-host relations, a theme echoed in all refugee crises.

Expanding on these challenges, Mithun emphasizes the urgent need for durable solutions beyond humanitarian support. While acknowledging the Bangladeshi government's myopic focus on repatriation, Mithun advocates for a more comprehensive approach that includes resettlement and integration as viable options. This perspective highlights the limitations of short-term measures and the necessity of long-term strategy.

Kaveri and Rajan delve deeper into the major causes of the crisis by framing it as a product of statelessness. They argue that the Rohingya's lack of citizenship renders them vulnerable to systemic discrimination, violence, and displacement. This perspective helps comprehend the crisis's broader context and develop effective responses.

Building upon the theme of statelessness, Bhattacharjee analyses the root causes of the Rohingya crisis by examining Myanmar's discriminatory policies. She highlights the denial of citizenship and incitement of state-sponsored ethnic violence as critical drivers of the mass displacement and human rights

violations of the Rohingyas. Bhattacharjee argues that a solution to the Rohingya crisis needs a multilateral approach involving the United Nations (UN), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The approach needs to prioritize the safe and dignified repatriation and reintegration of Rohingyas while also addressing the underlying causes of the crisis.

Future research on the Rohingya crisis in Cox's Bazar should explore the complex borderland dynamics and regional political developments, examining their impact on refugees' lived experiences and integration. They should take into account the security and political situation in both Bangladesh and Myanmar and the manifested impact of the Rohingya crisis. It is essential to investigate the Rohingya's vulnerabilities, for example, related to gender, age, and disability, to inform tailored interventions. Research into the interplay between international organizations, solidarity movements, grassroots organizations, and host-refugee communities can offer promising insights. Additionally, assessing refugee camps as alternative living spaces is crucial for understanding their impact on the Rohingya's wellbeing. In a nutshell, this Research Topic aims to inspire further research, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding and effective responses to this crisis.

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