

**DANGEROUS JOURNEYS
THROUGH MYANMAR:
INSECURITIES AND IMMOBILITIES
FOR ROHINGYA AND MUSLIM WOMEN
IN POST-COUP MYANMAR**

BRIEFING PAPER

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ACRONYMS

AA – Arakan Army - an Ethnic Armed Organisation with territorial control over parts of Rakhine State.

ARSA – Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army – an armed organisation operating in the border areas of Myanmar and Bangladesh.

EAO – Ethnic Armed Organisation

GBV – Gender Based Violence

IDP – Internally Displaced Person

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organisation

MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

About the Institutes on Statelessness and Inclusion and this initiative.

The [Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion \(ISI\)](#) is the first and the only human rights NGO dedicated to working on statelessness at the global level. Its mission is to promote inclusive societies by realising and protecting the right to a nationality. The root causes of the deprivations and marginalisation endured by the Rohingya community over multiple decades, are based on racist, discriminatory and xenophobic ideologies, laws and policies. While Myanmar is the source of these deprivations, other countries have also failed to provide meaningful protection, status or rights to Rohingya, whether they fled to their country or were born there. In this context, a principled and sustained human rights framing of the challenges, which is rooted in the information, expertise and solutions put forward by Rohingya and Burmese researchers and activists, and which challenges and shapes responses to the crisis by states, UN agencies, humanitarian actors and others, is much needed. This initiative aims to provide such a framing, through the production of briefing papers and other interventions on different human rights challenges.

This is the fifth briefing paper to be produced under this initiative. The other papers, available to download on ISI's website relate to human rights and COVID-19; the impact of digital identity systems; citizenship in Myanmar; the protection of refugees in India; and access to citizenship in Myanmar.

NLD – National League for Democracy – a political party led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

NUG – National Unity Government – a parallel government consisting of democratically elected representatives and ethnic minorities leaders.

NVC – National Verification Cards

SAC – State Administration Council (the 'coup-group.')

ULA – United League of Arakan – the administrative wing of the Arakan Army

ULA-AA – See above. The parallel state in Rakhine consisting of the administrative and military bodies.

UN – United Nations



Many families know the journey to another country has huge risks, but they try it anyway. People think if they are lucky on their journey, their families in Rakhine will have support to survive. The risk of being arrested on the route and sentenced to two to five years in prison does not stop them. The risk of rape does not stop them. Even the risk of death does not stop families from making these decisions. It's the limitations and restrictions here in Rakhine that makes them take the risks

ROHINGYA WOMAN TEACHER IN RAKHINE

INTRODUCTION

Rohingya communities have been arbitrarily deprived of their nationality and persecuted in Myanmar, while also being denied adequate protection as refugees and stateless people in neighbouring countries. At the centre of their insecurities and vulnerabilities, is the denial of their legal status as citizens in Myanmar, and as refugees and stateless people elsewhere. For over 30 years, Rohingyas in Myanmar have been subject to oppressive registration and administrative systems, discriminatory policies and systems of impunity, which have imposed severe restrictions on movement, segregated Rohingyas in pockets of Rakhine State, and severely limited Rohingyas' access to livelihoods and income earning opportunities. This has created food insecurities and poverty, leaving Rohingya households vulnerable to external shocks, including conflict, disease, and political upheaval. Since Min Aung Hlaing's coup in Myanmar on 1 February 2021,¹ which installed the State Administration Council (SAC) regime, Rohingya communities have been further negatively impacted by increased militarisation, conflict, and power struggles between SAC and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) in the region. Greater restrictions of movement, checkpoints and administrative costs following the coup have created new layers of insecurities for Rohingya households, driving them into poverty and leaving them vulnerable to human rights abuses from parallel/quasi state bodies.

Intersectional forms of discrimination mean that Rohingya women and girls are particularly impacted in Rakhine State. Increased vulnerabilities for Rohingya women and girls compel them to leave their homes in Rakhine State to seek security and stability in countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, as well as in Bangladesh, India and beyond. Compounded by the precariousness of their situations at home, experiences of forced migration can quickly turn to violence, exploitation and extortion during the journey or at the destination stage. This paper is focused on the situation in Myanmar and explores the structural factors that drive Rohingya women and girls to take dangerous journeys in search of safety and security, as well as the different forms of abuse and exploitation they encounter en route in Myanmar.

This is ISI's first Rohingya briefing paper to focus on women and girls. It will be followed by papers that will also consider the situation for Rohingya women and girls in destination and transit countries. The paper draws on in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants in Rakhine state and elsewhere in Myanmar as well as in refugee situations in Bangladesh. Participants were selected as those that have both first-hand experience of the issues and an in-depth knowledge of how these issues impact Rohingyas at the community level. They include community leaders, teachers and those working on gender-based violence, paralegal support and other roles and positions within the community which provide them with an overview of the situation. The interviews are mostly with Rohingya and Kaman women,² but also include some men working in community support roles. The names, exact locations and identifying features of all interviewees have been withheld to protect their personal security. Further information, details of places and identifying factors have been removed where they were deemed sensitive or where claims could not be substantiated. The interviews are supplemented with information gathered from other pieces of qualitative research conducted by the authors on the situation in Rakhine State, Myanmar, as well as desk-based research.

This paper does not provide an extensive overview of the situation, rather it is intended to provide a snapshot of some of the issues faced by Rohingya and other displaced Muslim communities in Rakhine and their own framings and understandings of the situation. Whilst efforts have been made to cross-check information against other published and unpublished research, it is not possible to verify information relating to individual cases due to access issues in the current conflict context in Myanmar. For ethical reasons, no testimonies were taken from survivors of sexual violence or trafficking for this research, many of whom continue to suffer from the trauma of their experiences and, in Myanmar, are mostly unable to access adequate psychosocial support.

This paper is divided into four parts. Firstly, the **background** provides information on the historic context that has given rise to the insecurities and immobilities experienced

by Rohingyas and other Muslims deprived of citizenship in Rakhine State, Myanmar. Secondly, the **situation in post-coup Myanmar** explains the impact of the increased militarisation and power-struggles between the SAC or the military regime, and the Arakan Army (AA), an EAO that has assumed administrative and military control over much of Rakhine State. Thirdly, the **gendered drivers of forced migration** provide an overview of the increasing insecurities and immobilities for Rohingya and displaced Muslim women and girls in Rakhine state. It considers factors such as household poverty due to movement restriction and restrictions on access to humanitarian aid; barriers to accessing education and work; risks of sexual violence; and decision-making within the household. Fourthly, the **dangerous journeys** section outlines the experiences of women travelling through Myanmar, including experiences of arrest and detention, extortion, sexual violence and risk to life.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Arbitrary Deprivation of Nationality

Rohingya are an ethnic community belonging to Rakhine State Myanmar, whose histories in Rakhine, now within the borders of Myanmar, by far pre-date modern nation-states and borders. The arbitrary deprivation of their nationality by Myanmar, which was initiated under military rule, is a key element in the decades-long persecution and genocide of Rohingya. Human Rights research conducted over decades, indicates that Myanmar's imposed statelessness on the Rohingya, and serious related restrictions on a range of fundamental human rights including freedom of movement, right to work, access to education, right to marry and have children, has been part of a wider strategy aimed at "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part" (Article 11 of the Genocide Convention).³

Myanmar's 1982 ethno-centric and exclusionary Citizenship Law, together with the arbitrary implementation of citizenship rules, provided a domestic framework that sanctioned discrimination, persecution and expulsion. The clear exclusion of Rohingya from access to citizenship by right - as opposed to a highly discretionary and arbitrary naturalisation procedure - was a deliberate next step towards the ratcheting up of abuses against the group. Denial of citizenship - and importantly, the group claim to citizenship by right - reinforced state narratives that Rohingya were foreigners - 'illegal immigrants' - unworthy of state protection.⁴ This in turn, reinforced narratives which undermined the identity of the Rohingya as a group belonging to the

Overall, the paper contends that the absence of rule of law and pervasive insecurities in Rakhine State combine with increased restrictions of movement whereby Rohingyas and others without citizenship documents, must turn to brokers to facilitate increasingly perilous journeys across their own country in search of security and a decent life. These factors create vulnerabilities to abuse and exploitation and frame the women and girls' experiences of gender-based violence. It is important to recognise that whilst experiences of violence and exploitation en route are pervasive, these routes also provide the only way out of a devastating situation for Rohingyas in Rakhine. Attempts to shut down the routes without first alleviating the restrictions and insecurities resulting from the actions of state and pseudo-state actors, could exacerbate an already volatile situation.

region. Since the coup of 2021, the United League of Arakan (ULA) and its military wing, the Arakan Army, (ULA-AA) has taken over many of the functions and structures of the state in Rohingya areas of Rakhine State.⁵ All Interviewees for this research reported concerns that recognition of their ethnic identity, land rights and future citizenship in their ancestral homes in Rakhine State remain in a perilous situation under both the SAC and the ULA-AA.

1.2. Forced Expulsions and Dangerous Journeys

Since the advent of military rule in Myanmar in 1962, Rohingya communities in Rakhine state have been subject to multiple waves of state-led violence and mass expulsions to Bangladesh. The most recent of these waves occurred in 2012 under the military/civilian government of Thein Sein, and 2016-17 under the de facto leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) party.

In 2012, a campaign of state-led violence drove at least 130,000 Rohingya and Muslims from their homes in Rakhine. Armed "civilians" from Rakhine state were also implicated in the violence.⁶ To this day, most Rohingya and Muslims remain detained in internment camps in Rakhine state and are subjected to restrictions of movement and other rights.⁷ Between 2012 and 2015, an estimated 170,000 Rohingya boarded boats from Rakhine and Bangladesh and made perilous journeys across the sea to Southeast Asia.⁸ Tens of thousands also made their way across the overland routes to join other

Rohingyas in India.⁹

In 2017, military “clearance operations” quickly turned into a campaign of brutal violence, driving more than three quarters of a million Rohingyas from their homes in Rakhine State into Bangladesh. The scale and nature of the abuses, violence, destruction and killings by the military during this period is now widely characterised as ‘genocidal’.¹⁰ Since that time, conditions conducive to safe, sustainable and voluntary returns to Myanmar have not been established and the vast majority of Rohingyas remain in Bangladesh, unable to return to their homelands. Pervasive insecurities, movement restrictions, restrictions on access to education and training, and a lack of livelihood and income earning opportunities in the camps of Bangladesh compound the long-term problems for Rohingyas, who are unable to secure decent and dignified futures for themselves or their family members.¹¹ In these situations, many Rohingyas take financial and other risks to send family members further afield to seek better futures for themselves as well as to support family members in the camps of Bangladesh and in Rakhine State through finding work and sending remittances.¹²

There are now over a million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas throughout Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Middle East, as well as further afield.¹³ As a stateless group, with no access to travel documents, they are compelled to use

irregular means to travel, relying on networks of brokers to pass through internal checkpoints and international borders. Without work permits or residence permits, they are also confined to working in the informal and unregulated sectors of the economy, often experiencing precarious and unsafe working conditions as well as escalating household debts.¹⁴ This leaves them vulnerable to danger during the journey, in transit countries, and on arrival. Over the past decade, many incidents have been documented of extortion of family members, deaths en route, torture and arbitrary detention, sexual violence, forced labour, debt bondage and other forms of exploitation.¹⁵

Whilst all Rohingya are subject to various risks and forms of exploitation, migration experiences are often gendered. Rohingya women and girls can face a particular set of insecurities and immobilities due to intersectional forms of discrimination that play out at the national, community and household levels. Women and girls often encounter greater barriers to accessing education, training and income earning opportunities in Rakhine, and reduced decision-making power within the household. Further, since many Rohingya men have been forced to flee Rakhine State, Rohingya women are often sent abroad for marriage to Rohingya men.¹⁶ The prevalence of insecurities and risks associated with gender-based violence, sexual violence and sexual exploitation in Rakhine also become drivers of migration outside Myanmar where families seek safety and financial security for women and girls within the household.

2. THE POST-COUP SITUATION FOR ROHINGYA IN RAKHINE – INCREASING INSECURITIES AND RESTRICTIONS

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Currently, there’s power competition between SAC forces and the AA. Rohingyas are caught in the middle of those tensions. They have to listen to both armed actors...Rohingyas are facing pressure and threats from the military who warned them to inform them of AA movement in their areas, but AA also puts pressure on Rohingyas to cooperate with them.”

ROHINGYA COMMUNITY LEADER

Following the military coup in Myanmar on 1 February 2021,¹⁷ there have been increasing struggles between SAC and ULA-AA over control of the territory and the administrative, judicial and taxation systems in Rakhine State. To further compound the power struggles playing out in Rakhine State, the parallel government, called National Unity Government (NUG),¹⁸ is also contesting

control of the central state under a federal democratic charter, with its own armed forces, revenue structures, ministries and international representatives.¹⁹ Whilst SAC seeks to maintain control over the central state including Rakhine State, ULA-AA seeks self-determination for Rakhine.²⁰ ULA-AA leader General Twan Mrat Naing has stated that he is taking a ‘wait and see’ approach as to whether they will seek to join the NUG’s federal union or seek independence. An ‘informal cease-fire’ is in place between the ULA-AA and SAC in Rakhine. As political analyst, Kyaw Lynn, explained, For Rohingyas

AA soldiers are participating in fighting against the Tatmadaw with EAO allies in other parts of the country; and, at the same time, ULA leaders have refrained from participating in the NUG, formed by NLD MPs-elect and other anti-SAC actors to challenge the legitimacy of the SAC.²¹

communities, this has created increased conflict and restrictions. Additionally, in some rural areas Rohingyas are having to navigate two parallel bureaucratic systems, pay double taxation, and face the risk of arrest and detention from different parallel security forces. This has created a double layer of vulnerability to human rights abuses. For example, one Rohingya woman said,

We are concerned about both the junta (SAC) and AA. AA members can arrest Rohingya and beat them without any reason or accuse them with fake cases. We cannot report those illegal and abusive activities to the junta or police. They do not take any actions.

This parallel system together with the informal ceasefire has compounded a situation in which Rohingyas feel compelled to comply with (dual) taxation systems, but at the same time they have no representation regarding their grievances, and no viable avenues for redress. Further, their citizenship rights and land rights remain under threat from two different sources.

2.1. SAC: Renewed Restrictions and Administrative Erasure in Post-Coup Rakhine

Since the enactment of the 1982 Citizenship Law in Myanmar, the vast majority of Rohingyas have been arbitrarily denied citizenship documents and access to citizenship. From the 1990s onwards, Rohingyas in North Rakhine State have faced severe movement restrictions, and a whole range of discriminatory policies targeting them as non-citizens.²² Since the 2021 coup, the power struggles between the military and the ULA-AA, as well as attempts to prevent the movement of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), an armed Rohingya group, meant that increased security measures and checkpoints were put in place by the SAC regime. As a result, Rohingyas have been facing even more restrictions of movement between townships.²³ In November 2021, SAC issued an order stating that “Bengalis”, meaning Rohingya, travelling outside their townships are “a threat to local security and rule of law” and can be arrested if they don’t have a permit.²⁴ Rohingyas must bribe the immigration authorities to obtain a permit – the costs of which have sky-rocketed. As a result, Rohingyas and other Muslims in Rakhine state have been struggling to access livelihood opportunities, financial services and local markets.²⁵

Further, Rohingyas who want to apply for ID cards - a requirement for applying for travel permission, are unable to do so in the current post-coup situation. In August 2021, the SAC immigration department launched a mobile scheme called Pann Kinn to increase access to citizenship cards and other registration

documents across the country. In Rakhine this was extended to those without documentation in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Kyauktaw townships. With many schools and government offices shut across the country due to the impact of the coup and the civil disobedience movement in Myanmar, the usual ways to obtain identity and registration documents became less accessible. Pann Kinn was largely considered to be a move to ensure people are documented ahead of future elections. Rohingyas as an unrecognised minority no longer have voting rights, so this reasoning did not apply to them.²⁶ The Pann Kinn scheme was only opened to people who belong to an ethnic group recognised by the State. According to the resident from Buthidaung and Sittwe townships, Rohingya and other Muslim communities are barred from applying for identity and registration documents under this scheme.

In multiple settings across Myanmar, women and girls who need to apply for identity documents tend to have more limited access than their male counterparts. The high costs, travel and burdensome bureaucratic process involved in security identity documents means that after households have weighed up the cost-benefits of obtaining identity cards for a limited number of family members, they often decide on prioritising male members with more income earning opportunities outside of the home.²⁷ Interviewees also noted that Rohingya women are less likely to have identity documents than men. There are multiple reasons for this. Many have not had access to education and literacy rates amongst Rohingya women are very low. As such, they are unable to fill in applications on their own. Further, a lack of access to Burmese or Rakhine language education, can present insurmountable barriers to navigating burdensome bureaucratic processes such as visits to police stations or immigration offices. This situation is compounded by cultural norms that limit women’s access to the public sphere.²⁸ In the context where rape has been utilised as tool of ethnic persecution and genocide,²⁹ concerns about the risks women and girls may face outside their neighbourhoods, further limit women’s mobility. As such, administrative procedures that require individual identity cards as a pre-requisite for travel, further impact women’s mobility within Rakhine State. This can mean that in order to travel through checkpoints, women and girls must increasingly rely on male members of the household, and on brokers, leaving households more vulnerable to the escalating costs of bribery and other associated risks should they need to travel beyond the neighbourhood.

Without citizenship cards, most Rohingyas are reliant on household registration documents or ‘family lists’ to prove their permanent residency. Regular checks are made by immigration and other officials. Family members are cancelled from the list if they are absent during these

house-to-house checks, and as a result become ‘illegal immigrants’. Since the 1990s being struck off or being unable to register on the family list has become a major driver of forced migration. All new-born Rohingya children must be added to the family lists, otherwise they become ‘blacklisted’, meaning that they have no right to live in Rakhine or access services. This also opens them up to arrest and persecution as they get older. Since the coup, many Rohingya in Rakhine State have been facing increased challenges in registering their new-born children on the family lists with the immigration office. Many are concerned that their children will be blacklisted or be unable to prove their right to live in Myanmar. In some villages, particularly mixed Rakhine/Rohingya villages, ULA-AA has gained control and does not allow SAC authorities access to check the population data or conduct registration. Rohingya living in those areas are increasingly worried that they will be permanently removed from the population records. This would effectively cancel their residency and undermine any future citizenship claims and may become a major driver of forced migration.

2.2. The ULA-AA Parallel State: Double Trouble?

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Both men and women face the same situation and worry that either junta troops or AA members will arrest them. They can be accused of things like being a military informer, being affiliated with AA or ARSA. After the coup the SAC police started arresting women if their husbands could not be located. In Buthidaung, police arrested women as they could not locate their husbands. ”

ROHINGYA YOUTH, SITTWE

Whilst SAC troops have been occupied with armed resistance from multiple fronts across Myanmar, ULA-AA has quietly made substantial gains in consolidating their control over the judicial, administrative and taxation system and are effectively functioning in many areas as a parallel state with full control over many rural areas and partial control in urban areas.³⁰ They have established a justice system separate from the one overseen by SAC. Courts have been set up from the village-tract level up to district level, prosecuting people in accordance with laws drafted by the ULA-AA. Since the coup, communities in Rakhine have widely turned to the ULA-AA judicial system for a variety of issues from land disputes to rape cases.³¹ Whilst an alternative to excessive delays, corruption and discrimination in the SAC judicial system is well-needed, some Rohingya expressed concern that

ULA-AA’s rules and administrative procedures are not transparent and the punishments are unclear. As a Rohingya woman from Sittwe Township said:

If someone has complained to ULA-AA, their authorities come to our town, and they take those considered guilty to unknown locations. The family does not know where they are taken and sometimes ULA-AA punishes those ‘offenders’ – for example by beating them.

The ULA-AA have also established parallel local administration structures. ULA-AA, like SAC, appoint Rohingya village tract administrators and committees in Rohingya villages. Their duties include maintaining records of who has paid ULA-AA taxes and updating records on house repairs, renovation, land sales or changes of land use. Villagers must apply for permission for such things to the ULA-AA authorities in areas under their control. In some areas, Rohingyas reportedly must apply to both authorities - ULA-AA and SAC - creating a double layer of bureaucracy to navigate.

Every household is expected to pay tax or ‘contributions’ either in money or rice. This is often in addition to taxes they pay to SAC, creating a financial crisis within many households. Villagers are sometimes caught in the middle, warned on the one side by SAC military not to cooperate in paying taxes to the ULA-AA, and feeling coerced into paying from the ULA-AA side.³² As one Rohingya woman said,

We do not need any other government actors as we are already living under the pressure of the Rakhine State Administrative Council, military forces and security police. But now there are other armed groups who try to influence the state.

ULA-AA have not challenged the movement restrictions or the discriminatory citizenship scheme that severely impact Rohingya lives in Rakhine State. This means many Rohingyas are paying double taxes, while they are kept in poverty by apartheid structures.³³ Rohingya participants in this research expressed frustration that they contribute to ULA-AA’s revenue, but do not receive protection or representation regarding their grievances with SAC in return. One Rohingya said,

They do not provide any basic services and they do not speak out or against how the military is oppressing us. For example, they do not help us to reduce the movement restrictions and they ignore our struggles.

Essentially Rohingya are being treated as non-citizens by both SAC and ULA-AA. Their aspirations to participate equally as citizens and determine their own futures are not met by either side. ULA-AA’s Major General

Twan Mrat Naing stated in media interviews that AA acknowledges citizenship rights and basic human rights for Rohingya.³⁴ But many Rohingyas have expressed concern that this may be empty rhetoric designed to address international concerns about their intentions for Rohingya populations. In the same interview, he noted that the Rakhine community do not accept the identity of Rohingya and find the term 'Rohingya' offensive. Rohingyas have always been clear, as survivors of group persecution, that citizenship restitution in Myanmar must include acceptance and recognition of their ethnic identity as a group belonging to Rakhine State.

This extra layer of administrative burdens and associated costs, together with the re-assertion of movement restrictions that limit income earning opportunities, make the situation for Rohingya household increasingly precarious. In addition, many feel deeply concerned about their long-term safety and security in their homelands. These insecurities and immobilities drive outward-migration. As one woman living in Bhasan Char camp in Bangladesh explained:

In our village, Rohingya feel insecure, and they told us not to return. They told me they even prepared to leave the Rakhine state at any time. Rohingya are facing movement restrictions and threats because of ULA-AA or from the military.

An additional established function of a State is to control freedom of movement in and out of their territories.³⁵ Many participants in this research explained that whilst some of the routes out of Rakhine State and Myanmar are still controlled by SAC, most of the routes particularly those across land through other parts of Myanmar are now controlled by ULA-AA. Some reported that brokers needed to pay both AA and SAC officials to get out of Myanmar. Interview participants reported that AA has been cooperative in facilitating outward travel.

The control of territory and population of Rakhine by ULA-AA as an unrecognised state body has further implications regarding the right of return for Rohingyas. Organised repatriation for almost one million Rohingyas in refugee camps in Bangladesh is contingent on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Bangladesh and Myanmar.³⁶ Whilst the agreement is based on arrangement between the SAC regime and the Government of Bangladesh, it remains impossible for them to implement the repatriations without the involvement of ULA-AA. Further it is currently impossible to ensure a situation of safety and security conducive to voluntary and sustainable repatriations.

3. THE GENDERED DRIVERS OF FORCED MIGRATION

Journeys out of Rakhine and Bangladesh towards Southeast Asia have proved dangerous over the years. After the 2012 violence, many Rohingya and others took to the seas in boats to make the journey. Many lives were lost at sea as boats ran out of fuel, food and fresh water.³⁷ Pushbacks from Thailand, and sometimes Malaysia and Indonesia, left people adrift without being allowed to disembark.³⁸ Whilst before 2012, the vast majority of Rohingyas making the journey were men and boys, since then, an increasing number of women and girls have also made the journey.³⁹ As the seas were increasingly monitored, routes over land across Myanmar were also used. These came with their own risks. Interviewees explained that these journeys were made despite many families being fully aware of the risks of arrest, sexual violence and extortion, as well as risks to health and life. Structural factors in Rakhine state continued to drive women and girls to make dangerous journeys. This section highlights some of the key factors that have driven migration for women and girls since the 2021 coup. It will show how Rohingya and other Muslim women and girls, embark on dangerous journey abroad in hope of

work, marriage and family reunion, despite knowing the risks involved. The factors that impact household and individual decisions to make these unsafe journeys in post-coup Rakhine include:

Household poverty and food insecurities due to conflict and power struggles between SAC and AA as well restrictions on movement and humanitarian aid delivery, and the rising costs of living.

- Lack of access for women to education and decent work.
- Lack of safety and security for women in Rakhine combined with a lack of recourse to support services and legal remedies for cases of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Lack of legal status and safe or regular migration options for Rohingya and other Muslim women, and
- Lack of status and decision-making powers within the household.

3.1. The ULA-AA Parallel State: Double Trouble?



People are facing challenges to access livelihoods and problems with movement restrictions...I do not receive any humanitarian assistance as we are not Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). But we all are facing the same challenges and difficulties like IDPs. ”

**ROHINGYA WOMAN,
BUTHIDAUNG TOWNSHIP**

Movement restrictions impacting livelihoods, restricted access for aid agencies to IDP and other areas, and the increased economic burden of taxation and bureaucratic costs, are amongst the factors which have negatively impacted Rohingya household income and food security in post-coup Rakhine State. Interviewees in different areas of Rakhine reported food shortages. In many international contexts, women often suffer disproportionately from food shortages within households, often forgoing meals in order to feed working members of the household and children. This is also true within Rohingya communities. In poor households, people skip meals with increasing frequency. Interviewees from Thet Kae Pyin IDP camp, Sittwe Township, reported that mothers or elderly women are most likely to forgo food within the household.

Additionally due to a lack of decent housing, and the restrictions and costs associated with extending and renovating housing, many Rohingya households are overcrowded and include extended families. Women expressed concern about the lack of privacy and resultant insecurities. As one woman in Sin Thet Maw camp explained,

Women feel they are unsafe due to the current situation - and we have to live with eight households in one building and there is no privacy for women.

Women also reported that poverty and food shortages can produce additional pressures on households, which in turn increases the likelihood of domestic violence and reduces the status of women and girls within the home. For example, one gender-based violence (GBV) coordinator said,

Because of household poverty, many face domestic violence as their husbands become very aggressive. Further, the informal safety nets for victims of domestic violence and exit strategies become more limited in times of scarcity. For example, another interviewee explained,

Women are afraid to speak out about their experiences and most do not want to share their experiences with

others or seek help. Sometimes the parents of those facing domestic violence by their husbands, advise their daughters not to separate or leave the family home. They are concerned that separation will leave them as grandparents with responsibility for more mouths to feed. It might fall to them to provide food and support for their grandchildren – something they simply cannot afford.

Food shortages and the impact of other poverty related factors can feed into household-level decisions for women and girls to migrate. Women and girls often have little access to income-earning opportunities, and households sometimes try to reduce the number of household members requiring food. In such circumstances single women and girls who do not contribute significantly to the household income, are sometimes being construed as a burden. This, therefore, creates incentives to arrange earlier marriages for girls, or to send women and girls overseas in the hope of them contributing to household incomes through remittances, or assisting siblings to make the journey at a later stage.

3.1.1. Restrictions on Livelihoods

Before the coup, some of the earlier restrictions on travel within Rakhine State for Rohingyas had been moderately eased. Rohingya men and women could travel through checkpoints between townships in Rakhine State by showing ‘receipt cards’ which are not forms of identification in themselves, but show that the holder used to have a Temporary Registration Card. They could also use recommendation letters from village administrators. This enabled household members – mostly men - to access a limited range of livelihood options, for example trading goods in local markets, fishing and agriculture.

After the coup, new rules were implemented, and security checkpoints no longer accepted such documents. Instead, at the time of writing, everyone needed to apply for travel permits (known as ‘Form 4s’), which were valid for 14 days. To apply for the travel permit, the applicant must show an ID card and a recommendation letter from the village administrators at the immigration office to proceed with the application for the travel permit. These extra layers of bureaucracy add to the costs as different officials must be bribed. Interviewees and other Rohingyas have reported skyrocketing costs for travel permissions⁴⁰ which, when combined with the rising costs of commodities, can have a devastating impact on household finances. Women and girls can be disproportionately impacted by these financial pressures.

Further restrictions to financial and other services since

the coup have impacted household finances. Most Rohingya and Muslim families in Rakhine State rely on remittances from family members abroad. The banking sector has been interrupted by post-coup situation in Myanmar as well as COVID-19 related lockdowns. This has made receiving remittances more difficult. As one interviewee explained:

Most families in Rakhine rely on remittances. But now banking restrictions and barriers to service access make life more difficult. More poor families, including women, are resorting to risky work in the black market because of the increasing livelihood challenges.

Another interviewee explained,

In urban areas we can see many Rohingya women are begging, and the rate of those women is increasing as they do not have food and cannot find a job due to the current situation.

Other interviewees from Sittwe and Buthidaung townships, also noted the increase in Rohingya ‘street children’ and women begging on the streets due to household poverty. According to interviewees, these women and ‘street children’ are understood to be vulnerable to exploitation and are sometimes targeted by criminal gangs controlling drug and sex work industries. The kinds of work available close to home for women struggling with financial pressures and food security, are often unfree or exploitative forms of work, sometimes in the criminalised economy where they are also at risk of arrest.

3.1.2. Restrictions on Humanitarian Support

“

The Rohingya community is facing extreme challenges because of the delay and insufficient humanitarian support in Rakhine. Many Rohingya rely on humanitarian aid and now many people are facing challenges to access food. Even in urban areas in Buthidaung, many homeless and poor families do not get any assistance.”

ROHINGYA WOMAN FROM BUTHIDAUNG

An estimated 600,000 Rohingya remain in Rakhine State. Of these, 126,000 are effectively confined to camps or camp-like settings that were established in 2012.⁴¹ Without freedom of movement to access decent work and livelihoods, camp residents are dependent on food rations and services provided by aid agencies. Further, with limited access to livelihoods and services, many Rohingyas in towns and villages throughout Rakhine are also dependent on humanitarian aid.

In June 2021, the Rakhine State division of SAC stated that due to a third wave of COVID-19, humanitarian agencies were restricted to engaging in four types of operations: health care, food assistance, supplying COVID equipment and water and sanitation services.⁴² According to Human Rights Watch, aid agencies have been facing additional bureaucratic restrictions and access limitations in Rakhine state, which have negatively impacted the delivery of services.⁴³ Agencies must apply for access permission, and individual staff members must apply for travel authorisation.⁴⁴

The lack of aid has been compounded by rapid inflation due to the conflict situation. Humanitarian agencies in Rakhine State provide IDPs with very limited cash assistance, 15,000 Myanmar Kyat (around 8.45 US dollars) per person per month. It is not sufficient for households to buy nutritious foods. According to a Rohingya IDP from Thet Kae Pyin IDP camp, Sittwe Township, in 2022, this increased to 16,000 Myanmar Kyat (around 8.97 US dollars). However, it still does not cover the increasing commodity prices. These factors increase food insecurity among Rohingya IDPs, especially impacting women and girls and contributing to compelling reasons to migrate.

3.2. Barriers to Education and Work

Rohingya girls have very limited access to schooling and women have low levels of literacy and Burmese language skills.⁴⁵ There are a range of reasons for this. Schools and other educational establishments have been open and shut intermittently since the violence of 2012, affecting both boys’ and girls’ access to education. Rohingyas and those without citizenship documents are no longer recruited into paid teaching roles. Rohingya and Muslim girls are more likely to either drop out of school early or never be enrolled in school due to the insecurities associated with discrimination in the classrooms, safety concerns for girls getting to and from school, the costs associated with transport and schooling, and cultural norms which often prevent adolescent girls from accessing school. Further, a lack of access to the job market for women disincentivises education for girls.

A lack of education hinders the ability of women and girls’ to access decent work outside the household. Without Burmese or Rakhine language skills or literacy, there are key challenges in accessing healthcare. In government hospitals and private clinics women need translators to communicate with doctors or nurses. Women report that translators often mistranslate terms relating to health and domestic violence and GBV. It also creates barriers to accessing civil registration

and administrative procedures including securing permission to travel, recommendation letters, and ID cards. Most women have to rely on their male family members and/or brokers. This also means women often have to spend more money for these bureaucratic processes including paying translators to communicate with government officials. These factors can combine to mean that women often must place their trust in brokers to facilitate travel through irregular means. In some cases, the relationships between them and the brokers can become violent or exploitative.

A lack of schooling and lack of access to income earning opportunities for women and girls can contribute to a diminished status within households and reduce their decision-making powers. In turn this means they do not always have control over their own migration, work or marriage decisions. It can also contribute to the occurrence of early marriage. As one Kaman interviewee noted,

Access to education is limited and most girls cannot afford to continue their education (primary level). So early age marriages are high among our community.

The lack of access to education and work for women and girls in Rakhine, then, combined with broader insecurities and immobilities within the community, impacts their status within the household, and can contribute to unsafe work and migration outcomes.

3.3. Rape and Sexual violence

Wide-spread experiences of sexual and gender-based violence in Rakhine, and perceived risks of rape and sexual violence, can contribute to house-hold level decisions for girls to enter into early marriage and/or to travel abroad. As expressed by interviewees, marriage with Rohingya men at home or abroad is often perceived as a way to keep Rohingya and other Rakhine Muslim women and girls safe from sexual exploitation. Further, experiences of sexual violence not only have severe physical and psychological consequences for women and girls, there can also be implications for household financial security. It can be harder for families to arrange marriages for women and girls who are known to be victims of sexual violence. These factors can contribute to household level decisions relating to early marriage.

Throughout Myanmar rape has been used by security forces as a weapon of war and persecution of minority groups.⁴⁶ In Rakhine State, in 2016 and 2017, rape was deployed as a military strategy against Rohingya groups and has been documented as a genocidal act.⁴⁷

Further community level GBV workers interviewed for this research, reported that rates of sexual violence within communities is also high, although reporting rates are low. The extent of sexual violence has always been obscured by associated stigma, a lack of access to support services, and the lack of recourse to legal remedies.

Online sexual exploitation is also reportedly on the increase. Interviewees for this research explained that online dating was common and some Rohingya women have experienced exploitation, extortion or been threatened by men overseas, who they have met online. For example, one woman interviewed in Buthidaung explained that her neighbour had committed suicide after explicit images of her were shared online and a series of threats were made by a man in Malaysia purporting to be her 'boyfriend'. She was then blamed by members of the community.

All these factors feed into community perceptions that Rohingya women should either remain protected inside the familial or marital home with limited access to the public sphere or would be safer with family or a marital partner in a different country.

3.4. Decision-Making Within the Household

Respondents for this research reported that women travel outside the country for three key reasons: family reunion; work and marriage. They also explained that decisions relating to travel for women and girls were generally made by the father, eldest brother or older males within the household. They stated that mothers also contribute to household decision-making processes but in some cases their decision-making powers were limited. For example:

Normally fathers decide, sometimes mothers do not agree to allow their daughter to travel aboard but they do not have power to oppose the fathers.

In some cases, women and girls reportedly had little decision-making power themselves. In other cases, women themselves made the decision to travel. For example, Rohingya women from Baw Du Pha IDP camp in Sittwe said,

Some girls do not want to go but their family forced them to marry Rohingyas who live outside of the country. Some women feel that there is no future in Rakhine, and they want to take the risk to escape from the open prison.

Some interviewees explained other factors relating to population imbalances and dowry that contributed to

household level decisions about women and girls going abroad to marry. Many families could not afford dowries and looked to overseas marriage as a negative coping strategy.⁴⁸ Gendered patterns of forced migration since the 1990s have meant that there is a gender imbalance in the population, with many Rohingya men and boys having left the country. This has driven up the dowry costs on the bride's side of the family for marriages in Rakhine. Meanwhile Rohingya men abroad are prepared to pay the costs of the journey for their fiancées, and do not ask for dowry from the bride's family. The risk is often perceived as worthwhile, since the woman may also be able to secure work to send remittances or support their siblings to join them later. One participant explained it as follows:

The ratio of women is higher than men in Rakhine. Women face difficulties to find their life partners and families have to pay a man's family money they cannot afford if they want their daughters in Rakhine. The lack of job opportunities and no regular income create pressures. Poverty means there's a lot of domestic violence or men divorce women...So some Rohingya women and girls do not want to marry with Rohingya who live in Rakhine.

4. DANGEROUS JOURNEYS IN MYANMAR: DETENTION, EXTORTION AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

This section will show that due to internal restrictions on movement and increasing insecurities in Rakhine and Myanmar, Rohingya and other displaced Muslims from Rakhine increasingly turn to a network of brokers to travel across Myanmar towards Southeast Asia in search of safety and security. During these journeys in which their movement is criminalised, they are vulnerable to:

- Arrest and detention, often without access to legal assistance and with insufficient finances to secure release.
- Extortion from brokers.
- Food and water shortages, ill-health, injury and death, and
- Violence and rape by security forces and brokers.

Systems of impunity and an absence of psychosocial support structures within the community compound the vulnerability of Rohingya and other Muslim women to these forms of abuse.

Rohingyas and others from Rakhine State who are not recognised as citizens of Myanmar are usually not permitted to travel outside the state. The 'Form 4' travel permits generally only allow them to travel between townships in Rakhine State. Travel through Myanmar

Whilst some reported women and their families being lulled into a false sense of security relating to the journeys, most interviewees explained that although the risks of arrest, rape, death or extortion en route were high, the structural driving factors outlined above were more compelling in household decision making. For example:

When fathers and elder brothers decide a girl in the household will travel to Thailand or Malaysia, most of them know that the journey is risky, but they decided to do that anyway because the situation at home is not good either.

One interviewee explained that some of the families that are aware of the prevalence of sexual violence, and, knowing that the risks are high, take measures to protect against pregnancies as a result of rape, but do not prevent girls from travelling.

In Sittwe some parents and women know about those experiences (of rape) and they take contraceptive injections before they go to Malaysia to stop getting pregnant.

en route to Southeast Asia or elsewhere therefore requires using networks of brokers to facilitate movement. This section focuses on the risks and insecurities that Rohingya women and girls encounter in Myanmar as a result of these criminalised internal movements through the country. These risks women and girls face are from two main types of perpetrator – firstly the risk of arrest, detention and abuse from the 'state' or SAC security forces, and secondly from the networks of non-state agents and brokers.

Both land and sea routes are used to reach Malaysia and other parts of Southeast Asia. Often journeys include long walks through forested areas. Interviewees, including those with links to brokers or smugglers, noted that SAC and ULA-AA as state-like authorities control movement through and out of Rakhine State and as such receive payments in order to facilitate travel. With competition and tension between the two bodies - including relating to revenue - the routes are reportedly vulnerable to exposure from informants. Respondents stated that many Rohingya travellers have been arrested while they are travelling within the state, which they believe relates to this.

The fee to travel from Rakhine State to Malaysia is around 5,000,000 to 6,500,000 Myanmar Kyat (2,850 to 3,700 US dollars) and the payment methods are varied. In some cases, travellers are required to pay up-front in full, in other situations they make a partial payment upfront and the rest at the half-way point or at the final destination. Sometimes, the costs of travel can spiral with demands made to families by agents for more money at the half-way point or before the destination stage. Children living in IDP camps in Rakhine are sometimes targeted by the traffickers who promise to find them work in Malaysia, Thailand or elsewhere. Whilst they are still en route in Myanmar, money is extorted from their families. One respondent from the IDP areas of Rakhine State explained:

I know of many trafficking cases. Brokers shared misinformation to children aged around 13, 14 and 15 years old. Children do not want to live in camp and the brokers ask them to come with them. They did not need to pay money to brokers. At the half-way point, the brokers asked them to call their family to transfer money. Then they started threatening the family until they transfer money.

Brokers often state that the journey will take a few weeks, but for some it can take months. In other situations, travellers never reach their destination. They may be arrested, abandoned, or die en route. Others are abused or exploited en route. In cases where women and girls travelling for marriage become pregnant as a result of rape en route, they are sometimes rejected for marriage on arrival at their destination.

4.1. Arrest and Detention in Myanmar

Prior to the coup, under the NLD government, Rohingyas travelling through Myanmar were intercepted and arrested. However, if intercepted outside of Rakhine State, they were often released and immediately transported back to their homes in Rakhine. Rohingya refugees travelling through Myanmar from the camps in Bangladesh towards Southeast Asia were often sent to Rakhine, issued with National Verification Cards (NVC) (a form of IDs for non-nationals) and allowed to stay with relatives.

Since the coup, this situation has changed. Many Rohingyas have been arrested by the police for travelling without permission either between the townships of Rakhine State or on their way to Yangon, Irrawaddy or Myawaddy divisions. They are not returned to their homes in Rakhine State but are instead sentenced to three to five years for immigration violations. Some children have also been detained with their parents. Unaccompanied children under 16 have also been

sentenced and some have been sent to youth detention facilities, including Hnget Awe San Youth Detention Centre in the Yangon region. They have not been screened as potential victims of trafficking and have no access to support services. As one community worker explained:

Rohingya have been sentenced to several years and children have been sent to youth detention camps. Actually, they should release them as they are underage. Some United Nations (UN) agencies have tried to help those children to get released, but the police do not allow UN agencies to help children who may be victims of human trafficking.

Most Rohingyas and Muslims from Rakhine State have been arrested in Rakhine, Yangon, Irrawaddy, Myawaddy and Hpa-An. Rohingya travelling via the sea routes from Bangladesh have also been arrested by the Myanmar navy near the Bangladesh border or within Rakhine state. The true number of Rohingya women, and girls arrested is obscured due to under-reporting and the limitations of systematic data collection in the current conflict situation in Myanmar. Women's Peace Network documented the arrest of at least 856 Rohingyas in Rakhine state since the coup. This included 464 women. The actual number according to respondents is closer to a thousand women and girls. Arakan Civic Cooperation Network estimates around 3,000 Rohingya women, girls and young people have been arrested and charged by the police. When Rohingyas are detained, high prices must be paid in order to obtain their release. The cost is approximately around 1,000,000 Myanmar Kyat (around 563 US dollars) but can be more than that. Many families cannot afford the release fee. In such situations, there is very little legal assistance and financial support available to them. One community worker who provides some limited assistance in such cases explained that they do not have the capacity to meet all the needs of detained women and children. He said,

Since the coup more than 3,000 Rohingya women, girls, young people and children have been arrested and charged by the military. Currently we are helping Rohingya women who have been arrested in Hpa-An and Irrawaddy – but we can't help all. We paid 10 lakh to the police to release each girl.

He went on to explain that the girls released were aged between 13 and 18 years old and that they recounted how some members of the group had been abandoned on the journey.

According to them, they had to make arduous journeys on foot through the forest. This was too much for some women – some were left behind as they could not walk any further. They also said they were kept in houses along the way guarded by men in military uniform.

The lack of support services available to women and children both in detention and on return to their homes, together with the lack of procedures to identify and protect them as victims of trafficking, can result in both dire financial consequences for their families and the potential for girls to be sent again on these dangerous journeys. One respondent gave the following example:

“A few months ago, there was a 22-year-old woman from Buthidaung- her family sent her to Malaysia, and she was arrested during her travels within the township. They had to pay 10 Lakh Myanmar Kyat (563 US dollars) to the police and the police released her. She was crying and asking the community to host her in Buthidaung temporarily as she did not want to go to Malaysia. The community leaders in Buthidaung town advised her father not to send her to Malaysia and look for a marriage in Rakhine. The father agreed. Two months later the family sent her to Malaysia again. We heard that her father decided to send her as they had already received money from the husband for her travel and had made promises to him. She was arrested again in Yangon last month.”

4.2. Death and Health issues

Rohingya who attempt to travel Malaysia do not always receive accurate information about the conditions, safety and security and the duration of the journey. Men, women and children are at high risk of food and water shortages, exhaustion and health issues en route. Additionally, there are reports of violence by some agents en route. Interviewees for this study reported incidents of untreated illness en route that prevented them from completing the journey – most commonly malaria and diarrhoea. There were other reports of both men and women being beaten or sustaining serious injuries during the journey.

A few months ago, 30 Rohingya women from Sittwe and 20 from different parts of Rakhine attempted to travel to Malaysia. First, the brokers told them it would take only three days to reach Malaysia. We didn't hear any updates for two months. They went from Thandwe to Yangon and some of them died during their journey due to lack of food and water. One of my cousins who was 23 years old was also with them - he died during the journey. The brokers only informed us one month later. They said he died due to diarrhoea. Some Rohingya women told us afterwards that the brokers did not provide food during the 10 days that they passed the mountains of Rakhine and some died due to starvation. The brokers left some women in the forest as some women couldn't walk anymore.

Families of travellers in Rakhine State also reported that the broker networks failed to communicate effectively with them, sometimes not receiving information for

several months at a time. One resident from Buthidaung township shared her experience that they did not receive any information from smugglers for two to three months about their family members, including in cases of death:

In November, one of my neighbours, who was 35 years old, died during the journey, in the forest. We got the information about her death two months later when we followed up with brokers. The brokers refused to talk with us, and they did not inform us of anything. We had to try many times. Later the brokers told us that she died because of a fall in the mountains. But when we managed to ask survivors who were on the journey with her, they told us she had been raped and beaten by the Rakhine brokers. They said she got brain injuries and died in the forest near Thandwe township. Her 11 years old daughter was found by the locals in the forest in Thandwe. Later the police sent her back to Buthidaung - but we could not ask her anything as she started crying when we asked about her mother.

4.3. Rape and Sexual Violence on the Journey

Although it is not possible to ascertain what percentage of women and girls experience rape and sexual violence en route, amongst the community the perceived risk is extremely high with respondents stating that they believed “most” or “almost all” women and girls were raped. There are reports of serious injuries sustained as a result of sexual assaults. In some cases, if women and girls are unable to continue their journey as a result of their injuries, they are left behind in the forest or elsewhere. For example:

Many women shared their experiences that the brokers raped them and if they resisted the brokers beat them. Some women died because they had been beaten badly and they could not walk in the forest and the brokers left them. In Sittwe some parents and women know about those experiences, and they take contraceptive injections before they go to Malaysia.

There are reports of women and girls being raped by brokers or, following arrest, by soldiers or police. For example,

Three months ago, ten women and girls from our village were released from Sittwe prison. They were sentenced to two months for travelling without permission. When they were released some of them were pregnant. Some said they were raped during the journey by the brokers and police. When they were arrested, the police did not send them directly to jail. Instead, they were held in the forest for three to four days and were repeatedly raped by police.

Many women and girls do not disclose their experiences due to stigma, a lack of support services and a lack of justice mechanisms in Rakhine. Unmarried women

and girls are also concerned about the impact on their futures. As a woman explained,

Women and girls do not speak out about their experiences as they are concerned that Rohingya men will refuse to marry them in the future.

4.4. Impunity and a Lack of Recourse to Legal Remedies

Multiple factors combine to establish systems of impunity and prevent women from accessing support after their experiences of trauma and sexual violence. Rohingyas in Rakhine state, with their diminished legal and social status, have, for decades, received extremely weak legal protections from state authorities. This has led to an ongoing system of impunity including with regard to offences committed by the security forces and/or government employees.⁴⁹ Corruption, discrimination and arbitrariness are prevalent throughout Myanmar's judicial and administrative system.⁵⁰ Prosecutions of perpetrators and protections for victims of trafficking and sexual violence have further been interrupted in Rohingya areas by the conflicts and competition between the parallel state structures of SAC and ULA-AA since the coup. One worker in a community support organisation stated,

“There are no good mechanisms to address the problems of sexual and gender-based violence in Rakhine for Rohingya women and girls. Police do not pay attention - even in rape cases people have to pay hefty bribes to get the investigation started. After the coup, nobody wanted to go to the police and government institution as ULA-AA influence over the justice system was growing in Rakhine. Before we could access some limited support from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) but now most GBV services have been stopped due to SAC restrictions on agencies”

Further, for offenses including sexual and gender-based violence that occur within the community or home, communities across Rakhine and Myanmar have long turned to their own local-level judicial, arbitration and mediation systems. With social support structures weak in some areas, particularly rural areas, Rohingya women also encounter many barriers at the local level to accessing counselling and support, as well as exiting abusive situations. As one woman explained,

In Buthidaung, we do not have a Rohingya organisation or group who are helping those GBV cases, but in Rakhine community, they have their own support systems and legal assistance to those who suffer domestic violence and sexual abuses.

5. CONCLUSION

The pressure and impact for Rohingyas and displaced Muslims of living under parallel state structures in Rakhine, both of which effectively treat them as non-citizens, has increased immobilities, insecurities and financial hardships. Intersectional forms of discrimination mean that Rohingya women and girls are particularly impacted in Rakhine State. Increased vulnerabilities for Rohingya women and girls compel them to leave their homes in Rakhine State to seek security and stability elsewhere in countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and elsewhere. Compounded by the precariousness of their situations at home, experiences of forced migration can quickly turn to violence, exploitation and extortion during the journey or at the destination stage.

It is vital that safe routes out of the country are available to genocide survivors. Whilst routes out of the country are a vital lifeline for some, for others they have become fraught with violence, abuse and risk to life. The deprivation of citizenship and movement restrictions drives a system in which brokers and parallel states gain revenue from facilitating the movement of people. Further, there is a strong link between the deprivation

of Rohingyas citizenship in Myanmar and the denial of the right of return. Since the 1990s, those that leave the country are struck from the household registers, effectively erasing their permanent residence. Thus, a move out of the country, in most cases, is permanent. As one Rohingya interviewee explained:

They do not want Rohingya in Rakhine and they cannot drive us out. So, many people feel that is why they (state and pseudo state officials) are helping those human smugglers if the Rohingya want to go outside.

Many are concerned that the facilitation of travel out of the country assists broader strategies to remove Rohingya from Rakhine State, and at the same time generates revenue for state-like structures.

The experiences of Rohingya women and girls captured in this report shows that almost five years on from the atrocities of 2017, and over a year since the coup of 2021, the cost of living in Rakhine state is only matched by the price of trying to flee. In both contexts, women and girls are impacted in particular, disproportionate and gendered ways.

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