



Global and Regional Migration Frameworks: A Case Study on the Rohingya Displacement

Moinuddin Zahangir¹, Pooja Rani Pramanik¹, Imran Hossain^{1*}, Fahim Ahmed Emon²

¹Department of Political Science, Varendra University, Rajshahi- 6204, Bangladesh

²Department of Political Science, Dhaka International University, Bangladesh

*Corresponding Author Email: imran.pol@vu.edu.bd

Received: 20 October, 2025. Accepted: 27 December, 2025. Published: 28 December, 2025

ABSTRACT

Research Problem: Forced migration has become one of the most critical humanitarian challenges of the 21st century. The Rohingya refugee crisis highlights fundamental weaknesses in existing global and regional governance systems, particularly in addressing systemic persecution, statelessness, and large-scale displacement. The crisis also exposes the unequal responsibility borne by host countries such as Bangladesh and the inadequacy of international and regional responses.

Research Purposes: This study aims to critically examine the structural causes of the Rohingya crisis, assess the effectiveness of international and regional refugee protection frameworks, and identify governance gaps in managing forced migration. It seeks to evaluate how current systems fail both refugees and host states, and to explore lessons for improving global migration governance.

Research Methods: The research employs a qualitative policy analysis approach. It is based on a comprehensive review of legal instruments, policy frameworks, and relevant scholarly literature related to refugee protection, forced migration, and international governance mechanisms.

Results and Discussion: The analysis reveals persistent systemic persecution and statelessness of the Rohingya people, alongside a disproportionate burden placed on Bangladesh as the primary host country. Major refugee protection frameworks, including the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the Global Compact on Refugees, are found to lack binding burden-sharing obligations and effective enforcement mechanisms. Regional organizations such as ASEAN and SAARC demonstrate limited capacity and coordination in responding to the crisis, resulting in fragmented and insufficient protection.

Research Implications and Contributions: The study underscores the urgent need for a global migration governance framework that is equitable, sustainable, enforceable, and rights-based, while providing fair support to host countries. By using the Rohingya crisis as a case study, this research contributes to broader debates on forced migration and offers policy-relevant insights for reimagining international and regional responses in an increasingly interconnected and crisis-prone world.

Keywords: International framework, Rohingya, forced migration, refugee governance, host country, ASEAN, SAARC

INTRODUCTION

Migration has always been the signification of human history and the basis of social and civilization development for centuries (Park, 1928). Whether motivated by conquest, exploration, economic hopes, or crisis, the migration of peoples has seared its deep imprint on the history of humanity (McNeill, 1984).

Forced migration, however, is among the most urgent global challenges of the 21st century (Castles, 2006). Forced migration, on the other hand, is a response to persecution, conflict and violence, which push individuals and communities to leave their homes in life-threatening conditions, rather than

a voluntary migration in search of opportunities (Wood, 1984). Of these crises, a New York Times editorial suggested that few other modern migration crises are as complex and urgent as the ongoing crisis facing the Rohingya refugee population (UNHCR, 2018).

The Rohingya people, a mainly Muslim minority group originating from the country of Myanmar, have suffered systemic persecution and discrimination and have been in a state of statelessness for decades (Ahsan Ullah, 2016). According to Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, Rohingyas lost citizenship and became outlaws (Leider, 2018) without civil rights, including restrictions on travel, marriage, education (Daw and Djalal, 2018) and access to health services. The crisis peaked in August 2017 when Myanmar's military launched a brutal crackdown on Rohingya communities, prompting the UN to call it a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" (UN General Assembly, 2017). This violent persecution drove, in weeks, more than 700,000 Rohingya to cross into neighbouring Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2018).

Bangladesh, a country struggling with socioeconomic and environmental problems, opened its borders and extended massive humanitarian support to this population facing a serious humanitarian crisis (Islam, 2018). Today, there are over one million rejected (803,000, UNHR), and many of them are in the Cox's Bazar district on the border with Myanmar, which has formed the largest refugee settlement in the world (Ahmed, 2019). Although Bangladesh's efforts have been lauded around the world, the size and scope of the crisis have revealed serious weaknesses in the current international system to address mass migration.

The Rohingya crisis will not be the last of forced displacement management but one of many across the globe, where forced migration has become a quest of the century. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) currently reports that over 35 million refugees reside around the world, a number that is expected to increase with the continuation of protracted conflicts and the growing impacts of climate change (UNHCR, 2022). International legal frameworks, like the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), represent essential groundwork for managing refugee crises. However, these frameworks have limitations, especially when it comes to current patterns of migration shaped by non-traditional drivers such as environmental degradation, regional instability and political turmoil (Hathaway, 2005; Betts, 2013).

The two examples of the Rohingya crisis reflect the promise and the limits of these international regimes. On the one hand, Bangladesh's response highlights the importance of regional cooperation and international assistance to meet immediate humanitarian needs. However, the crisis reveals serious shortcomings, such as a lack of enforcement mechanisms, inadequate burden-sharing, and a lack of politically sustainable, long-term solutions (Tan, 2017). Without real reform, these problems are unlikely to go away, making responses to future migration crises all the more difficult.

At the heart of it is the question of accountability and responsibility-sharing. Host states retain control due to the crisis nature of the agreements (e.g. GCR), and thus they are reluctant to cooperate in contexts where these states are in opposition with host states. However, the Rohingya crisis is an example of the consequences of this approach, which has been disproportionately burdening Bangladesh with significant socio-economic and environmental impacts. The Site overflow of refugees has compromised the infrastructure of certain natural resources (e.g., water, wood) systems (which are often common property) in the region, causing large-scale pressure on public resource systems and generating considerable tensions with local communities (Ahmed, 2019). The current attempts are also more important, although the protracted nature of this crisis is raising serious doubts about the sustainability of any current practice, as none are looking to the future, and no repatriation plan is available (Islam, 2018).

This article analyses the international frameworks on large-scale migration and their relevance to the Rohingya crisis. Despite the novelty of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention when it was adopted, it is now considered insufficient to tackle migration challenges outside Europe (Hathaway, 2005). The same goes for its GCR, which was adopted in 2018 and was a more progressive step towards burden-sharing but failed to be legally binding and brought only voluntary contributions (Betts, 2013).

This article also assesses the role of regional mechanisms, like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). More recently, these organizations have been criticized for their lack of unified strategies. ASEAN's non-interference principle often makes collective action difficult, while SAARC has also been unable to coordinate an

efficient regional effort (Tan, 2017). As a result, Bangladesh and other host countries have been mostly on their own in dealing with the crisis, and international assistance has provided little relief.

The goal of this article is not only to critique these frameworks but also to distill lessons learned from the experience of the Rohingya crisis that could be used to inform future responses to forced migration. Additionally, the article suggests that current frameworks be amended to have enforceable commitments, improved regional collaboration, and the development of a global emergency fund for migration disasters (Islam, 2018).

This paper follows a qualitative research design, utilizing the secondary data analysis strategy to investigate the governance of large-scale forced migration through the lens of the Rohingya displacement context. The research derives its insights from a wide range of literature that includes peer-reviewed academic journals, institutional reports, legal documents, and work done by international organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to critically analyse the global and regional migration frameworks and what is applicable and appropriate for the Rohingya crisis.

We opted for a case study methodology, as it allows for a rich, contextual understanding of complex socio-political phenomena. The Rohingya crisis, with its complex drivers and wide-ranging global implications, provides a useful lens through which to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of existing migration governance mechanisms. A multi-faceted approach that combines legal, humanitarian, environmental, and socio-political aspects.

Owing to the fact that this study is purely based on secondary sources, it contains certain limitations, especially in terms of the lack of primary field data and the limitations this creates for generalizability. Nevertheless, the triangulation of data from various and credible sources has been engaged and ensured analytical stringency and validity. This methodological approach allows us to pinpoint main themes, issues and policy gaps in contemporary migration governance architectures and refers to stateless populations and burdens to host countries.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Rohingya crisis is among the most heartbreaking examples of both ethnic persecution and forced displacement in modern times. To gain full awareness of the crisis, we must unpack the historical, social and political context that has led to the development of the Rohingya people, the difficulties experienced by Bangladesh as a host nation, as well as the wider consequences for global migration governance.

The Rohingya are a mostly Muslim ethnic minority group native to the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Historical records show that they have been in the region since the early medieval period, and some historians speculate that Arab traders led to the introduction of Islam in the region by as early as the 8th century (Leider, 2018). Over centuries, the Rohingya formed a unique cultural and linguistic identity, separating them from other ethnic groups in Myanmar.

While the Rohingya people have been part of the landscape for many centuries, they have always been marginalized and ostracised. Burmese governments have treated successive waves of Muslims as migrants from Bengal, as if they are some sort of outsiders with no right to citizenship. This denial of identity was codified in Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, which excluded the Rohingya from a list of 135 officially recognized ethnic groups. Consequently, the Rohingya were rendered stateless people, unconferred with basic human rights, and eventually, oppressed by systematic discrimination. Under the 1982 law, they had their freedom to marry, movement, education, job and health facility restricted without clearance from the government (Haque, 2020a).

The Rohingya were particularly vulnerable to persecution because of their stateless status. As waves of violence have been deployed against the Rohingya community over the decades, state authorities have invariably justified these assaults in terms of security threats, real or imagined. One of the most well-known was Operation Dragon King in 1978, a military campaign that purported to crack down on illegal immigrants. The operation resulted in mass violence, driving more than 200,000 Rohingya people to flee to Bangladesh (Ahmed, 2019).

Further waves of violence followed in 1991-92, 2012, and 2016, all of which were characterized by large-scale displacements and serious human rights violations. But the crisis escalated to unprecedented proportions in August 2017 after a series of attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation

Army (ARSA) on Myanmar police outposts. In response, Myanmar's military unleashed a brutal crackdown marked by mass killings, sexual violence, and the destruction of entire villages. Within weeks, more than 700,000 Rohingya sought refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh, thereby joining the large pre-existing refugee population in the country (UN General Assembly, 2017).

These actions have been labeled as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing," according to the United Nations and international human rights organizations, with calls for investigations into possible genocide (UNHCR, 2018). While the violence has drawn widespread condemnation, Myanmar's authorities have largely blamed it on counterinsurgency operations.

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated and poorest countries in the world, but the authorities showed incredible humanitarianism in opening the borders to the fleeing Rohingya. The coastal district of Cox's Bazar in southeastern Bangladesh became the heart of the crisis. The district is now home to the world's largest refugee settlement, which houses more than one million Rohingya refugees. Though Bangladesh's response has received international praise, it has also put tremendous strain on the country's resources and infrastructure.

The ecological consequences of the crisis are especially striking. Huge swathes of forest in Cox's Bazar were cleared to make way for refugee settlements, resulting in deforestation, biodiversity loss and soil erosion. These environmental impacts have long-term ramifications not only for the refugees but for host communities that depend on the natural resources of the area (Islam et al., 2018).

Another significant challenge is the socio-economic pressure on local communities. The sudden influx of refugees, however, has overwhelmed public services, including health care, education and sanitation systems. Local people often see the new arrivals as competition for limited resources, resulting in tensions and even resentment in some cases. The need to maintain this fine balance highlights the importance of meeting both refugee and host community needs through sustainable solutions (Haque, 2020a).

The Rohingya crisis is part of a global phenomenon of conflict, climate crisis, and political instability resulting in forced displacement. As of the end of 2022, there are more than 35 million refugees globally, a figure that is expected to increase with prolonged hostilities and the escalating effects of climate change (UNHCR, 2022). Around 85% of all refugees across the world are found in low- and middle-income countries. The UNHCR accounts for the vast majority of refugees, and only a handful of countries are experiencing the benefits of refugee statistics, but this reflects the lack of an international framework that is right for refugees and ensures equitable responsibility-sharing.

Forced migration is also often intertwined with non-traditional drivers of migration, like climate change and environmental degradation. For instance, sea-level rise and extreme weather events are projected to displace millions of people in the coming decades, especially in susceptible regions such as South Asia. The Rohingya crisis acts as an example of how ethnic persecution, political insecurity, and environmental factors combine to create forced migration dynamics (Betts, 2013).

The scale and urgency of the Rohingya crisis should mean that international and regional mechanisms for protection and security provide effective functions. The central international refugee law framework, namely the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, was built for a largely European post-World War II displacement context. Consequently, they are frequently called into question for their Eurocentric perspective and narrow reach in understanding contemporary crises in areas such as South Asia (Hathaway, 2005).

There is also the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), adopted in 2018, which takes a broader approach to welcoming refugees to promote international burden-sharing and support to host countries. However, the GCR is a soft or a non-binding agreement that depends on voluntary contributions, so it does not prove instrumental in the handling of protracted crises like the case of the Rohingya (Betts, 2013). There are also other types of groups like ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), etc., that have constantly remained criticized due to a lack of unity of approach towards a particular task. ASEAN's long-shared principle of non-interference has prevented it from collective action, and SAARC has not been able to coordinate a unified response (Tan, 2017).

The dimension of longevity of the Rohingya crisis highlights the immediate necessity for sustainable and long-term solutions. Although the provision of humanitarian aid is critical, this must be supplemented with approaches to curb the drivers of displacement and facilitate the integration of

refugees into host communities.” Examples include improving international burden-sharing, regional cooperation in addressing refugee movement, and accountability for human rights violations.

Migration does not just affect traditional, non-traditional and human security; migration governance must also take into account other considerations such as environmental sustainability and public health. Ecological restoration efforts such as reforestation programs in Cox’s Bazar could help relieve the environmental impact of refugee settlements and generate livelihood opportunities for both refugees and residents (Islam et al., 2018). Investments in healthcare and education infrastructure can also improve the welfare of host communities as well as refugees, helping with social cohesion and resilience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

International Species Existing

The architecture of global governance for forced migration comprises a range of international legal frameworks, agreements and conventions. These frameworks offer vital frameworks to protect refugees and respond to situations of displaced populations. Yet, their application to newer forms of crises, such as the Rohingya refugee crisis, illustrates important gaps and challenges. Critically on forced migration: This section explores the central international frameworks such as the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and associated mechanisms, and their strengths and weaknesses.

The 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its Protocols

The cornerstone of international refugee law is the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. It defines a refugee and states the rights of refugees and the responsibilities of states to protect them. The Convention was created in the wake of World War II to respond to the displacement of millions of people, particularly across Europe. Although initially Eurocentric, the scope of the 1967 Protocol broadened the applicability to displacement situations beyond the continent (Hathaway, 2005).

The Refugee Convention contained new principles, such as the principle of non-refoulement, which forbids states from returning refugees to territories in which their lives or freedom would be in danger. It also enshrined the right to seek asylum, access public services and not be discriminated against (UNHCR, 2011). For the past seven decades, these principles have underpinned the international response to displacement crises around the world.

While the Convention has several strengths, it also suffers from significant limitations in the context of contemporary migration crisis. First, it has nothing to say about internally displaced persons (IDPs), who are still within the borders of their home countries. Second, it does not include those forced from their homes by non-traditional triggers, including climate change, environmental degradation and socio-economic instability. Third, the Convention has no enforcement mechanisms and relies on states’ goodwill to fulfill their obligations (Betts, 2013). This limitation is also evident in the case of Rohingya crisis. Myanmar, from which the people have fled, is not a signatory to the Convention, and the responsibility to protect the Rohingya has fallen disproportionately on adjacent Bangladesh.

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)

The GCR adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018, was a major milestone in the effort to address the shortcomings of the 1951 Convention. The GCR seeks, through international solidarity and burden-sharing, to provide a more equitable and sustainable approach to refugee protection. It is based around four key objectives: (1) easing pressures on host countries; (2) enhancing refugee self-reliance; (3) expanding third-country solutions (including resettlement); and (4) supporting conditions in countries of origin for return (UNHCR, 2018).

A significant move concretely taken under the GCR umbrella was the Global Refugee Forum, a platform through which states, organizations and other actors make pledges and contributions to support one or other refugee-related efforts. The Compact further calls on countries to incorporate refugees into national development plans and work together with international financial institutions, the private sector, and civil society (UNHCR, 2020).

The GCR is a non-binding undertaking, however, which undermines its potential effectiveness. Its reliance on voluntary contributions and lack of enforcement mechanisms mean that commitments are often poorly implemented. Moreover, despite acknowledging the need to address the root sources of displacement, the GCR offers little direction on practical implementations (Betts, 2013). With regard to the Rohingya crisis, the GCR has allowed international assistance to reach Bangladesh, though it has not provided significant relief to the country's disproportionate burden.

Other salient international mechanisms: Several other international mechanisms address forced migration, but their relevance to the Rohingya crisis varies, including; As an instance, the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, which was adopted by the Organization of African Unity (currently the African Union), categorized more broadly who might be a refugee with the inclusion of persons who had left due to "events seriously disturbing public order" (Hathaway, 2005). This wider definition applies specifically to crises in Africa, but its applicability elsewhere is limited.

The 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees

The 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, a non-binding agreement in Latin America issued in January 2021, finds that generalized violence, foreign aggression, and large-scale violations of human rights can cause displacement. Although these regional instruments can offer valuable lessons, their relevance to the Rohingya disaster is constrained by geographic and contextual differences.

Existing international instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), provide more general human rights protections to which refugees can claim rights. But these tools were not purpose-built to meet the specific challenges associated with forced migration and often lack the detail necessary to implement effectively (Hathaway, 2005).

EVALUATION

Implementation on Rohingya Crisis

The Rohingya crisis has highlighted significant deficiencies in the current international architecture. Although the 1951 Convention and its Protocol are important instruments affording protection to refugees, their limitations are clear given the contemporary dynamics of displacement. Myanmar's refusal to sign the Convention has been a barrier to accountability, and the lack of enforcement mechanisms means that Bangladesh has borne an inordinate burden. Despite its focus on burden-sharing, the GCR has not resulted in as much international support as the level of the crisis requires.

The absence of a dedicated legal framework for IDPs many of whom remain displaced within Myanmar has also posed challenges. In addition, the inadequate state of ethnic persecution and statelessness that birthed the crisis begs for a more encompassing framework for migration governance.

As a high-profile case of forced migration outside the global north, the Rohingya crisis has emerged as a litmus test for the effectiveness of international frameworks. But while international instruments, like the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, and recent frameworks like the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) aim to bring structure and support to the needs of moving populations, the Rohingya crisis has shown how poorly those instruments are implemented. This section assesses how well these frameworks have been operationalized or not in response to the crisis, paying particular attention to the host-state framework regarding Bangladesh, the challenges that have arisen, and criticisms of international burden-sharing and accountability mechanisms.

Background & Implementation challenges in Bangladesh

The Rohingya crisis has placed Bangladesh at the forefront of the humanitarian emergency. Though not a member of the 1951 Refugee Convention or 1967 Protocol, Bangladesh has been a phenomenal host by welcoming over a million Rohingya refugees. Working with international organizations, the government has provided life-saving services primarily food, shelter and medical care largely in the sprawling refugee camps in Cox's Bazar (UNHCR, 2018).

But the scale of the crisis has laid bare challenges to the functioning of international frameworks.

Central to the problem: insufficient financial and technical support from the global community. While the GCR focuses on burden-sharing, real solutions are available to Bangladesh, but they remain limited compared to the severity of the crisis. For example, only 31 per cent of the required US\$ 1.07 billion had been met as of the end of 2021 (IOM, 2021), as set out in the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis. This lack of funding has stretched local resources and threatened the provision of essential services.

Moreover, the absence of enforcement mechanisms inherent in international frameworks has placed Bangladesh at a disadvantage. Although the GCR promotes shared responsibility among states, it is non-binding, so size of contributions is voluntary and often haphazard. Lack of legally binding obligations undercuts the principles of collective solidarity and responsibility that the Compact seeks to promote (Betts, 2013). As a result, rich countries have largely left Bangladesh to cope with the crisis on its own, with many reluctant to admit refugees or offer significant funding.

Failures in Addressing Statelessness and Repatriation

The Rohingya crisis highlights the failure of international frameworks to adequately address statelessness, a driver of forced displacement. Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law made Rohingya stateless, omitting them from the list of recognized ethnic groups, and thereby taking away their rights and protections. Nonetheless, the global response has been largely ineffective in holding Myanmar accountable for such atrocities, which have been condemned by the international community (Haque, 2020).

Repatriation, one of the primary goals of international refugee regimes, has also encountered major challenges. While Bangladesh and Myanmar signed bilateral agreements for the return of Rohingya population from Bangladesh, there has been little progress. The Dominican Republic, for example, has denied Haitians and their descendants, born on the island citizenship. Gaps in accountability mechanisms are further illustrated by the continued inability of the United Nations and international actors to impose conditions for safe and voluntary repatriation (UNHCR, 2020).

Environmental and Socio-Economic Impacts

International frameworks applied to the Rohingya crisis also do not adequately factor in environmental and socio-economic impacts to host countries. The influx of refugees in Bangladesh is large and has even caused serious environmental degradation. The clearing of large tracts of vegetation in Cox's Bazar for building refugee camps has led to soil erosion, loss of biodiversity and susceptibility to natural disasters (Islam et al., 2018). The result of these environmental impacts has not only harmed refugees themselves but also affected the livelihoods of local communities that depend on natural resources for their survival.

From a socio-economic standpoint, the crisis has put tremendous strain on local infrastructure and public services. Healthcare facilities, already pushed to the limit, have not been able to respond to the needs of both refugees and host communities. Refugee children do not easily integrate into the education system and question the challenges they face; many of those do not have the same opportunity to attend school (Ahmed, 2019). These examples of the impact on the host population in terms of resource strain and social cohesion highlight the complex social challenges faced in such circumstances.

Critique of International Burden-Sharing

One of the most notable criticisms of international systems related to the issue of the Rohingya crisis is the shortcomings of burden-sharing mechanisms. The GCR and similar frameworks focus on the necessity of international solidarity, but the voluntary nature of contributions has led to a patchwork of responsibility-sharing. Rich countries, especially in the global North, have largely resisted accepting large numbers of Rohingya refugees, citing political and security concerns. This responsibility has instead been shouldered disproportionately by the low-income country of Bangladesh, which lacks resources (Betts, 2013).

This disparity raises larger questions about the adequacy of existing systems to meet the needs of those on the move and their host countries. In the absence of binding commitments or enforceable mechanisms, the principles of responsibility-sharing remain aspirational, not operational. The Rohingya

situation exposes the urgent need for reform so that international frameworks genuinely benefit countries such as Bangladesh the epicenter of the forced migration crisis.

Migration lessons from the Rohingya crisis

Firstly, it highlights the lack of adequate frameworks addressing the specific concerns of stateless groups.

Second, it underscores the need for migration policies to incorporate non-traditional factors, such as environmental sustainability and public health.

Finally, the crisis reveals people or other stuck motivations about non-binding agreements, reminiscent of the 2016 GCR, and the need for legally enforceable frameworks to ensure responsible and equitable sharing of responsibility.

Assessment of the Role of the Regional Mechanisms

Global frameworks understand the crisis of forced migration; regional mechanisms enable adaptation to local challenges. In the specific context of the Rohingya crisis, regional organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have come under fire for their respective roles or lack thereof in the ongoing crisis. This segment investigates the role of the aforementioned regional Mechanisms, their pitfalls, and possible paths for reform.

ASEAN's Role

As the leading regional organization in Southeast Asia, ASEAN is uniquely qualified to work on solving the Rohingya crisis. Myanmar is an ASEAN member state, and the crisis directly affects the region's security and stability. ASEAN's response to the Rohingya crisis is however hamstrung by its cardinal principle of a non-interference policy in the internal affairs of member states. This principle, enshrined in the ASEAN Charter, accentuates respect for sovereignty and has typically impeded collective action on controversial matters, such as human rights violations (Tan, 2017).

ASEAN's tepid response to the Rohingya crisis has come under fire. Though the organization has issued statements raising concern and urging humanitarian assistance, it has avoided addressing the underlying causes of the crisis, including Myanmar's systemic persecution of the Rohingya. Moreover, ASEAN's consensus-based approach to decision-making has led to weak and piecemeal responses due to member states' differing perspectives on how to mitigate the crisis (Haque, 2020b).

Nevertheless, ASEAN has the opportunity to take a more active role. For instance, it can activate its structures, such as the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Centre (AHA Centre), to lead the coordination for regional assistance and support to Rohingya refugees. ASEAN could also facilitate dialogue between Myanmar and Bangladesh to see how durable solutions, including repatriation as well as accountability measures, can be achieved. But realising this potential would also require overcoming institutional inertia and galvanising political will within the member states (Tan, 2017).

South Asian Regional Organization (SAARC)'s Role

As the SAARC too, stands implicated in the Rohingya crisis because of Bangladesh's crucial role as a host country. But SAARC response as such has also been limited and needs to be understood within broader structural and political issues of the organization. SAARC, unlike it, does not have a humanitarian mechanism specifically for addressing either migration or refugee crises. Geopolitical tensions, especially between India and Pakistan that have often overshadowed broader regional agendas further reduce its ability to play a coordinating role in the region (Ahmed, 2019).

The absence of SAARC engagement in the Rohingya crisis highlights the need for institutional reform. It could do this by, for instance, developing a regional migration governance framework to respond to displacement and to foster burden-sharing between members. The newly formed SAARC regional mechanisms can partner international organizations to prepare the terms of technological and financial assistance to Bangladesh as it faces undue burden (Haque, 2020b).

This reinforces the need to strengthen regional cooperation in South Asia considering the limited role of SAARC in finding a solution to the Rohingya crisis. Geopolitical tensions present challenges, yet the shared consequences of forced migration, Environmental degradation and socio-economic pressures, to name a few, make a clear case for collective responsibility and collective action.

The restrictionist policies of the Myanmar government were seemingly validated by ASEAN's response, while the dysfunction within SAARC reveals the difficulty of finding consensus on regional migration governance. Each organization unfortunately missed the opportunity to partner, and to utilize their strengths to tackle the crisis. For instance, the experience of ASEAN in coordinating disaster relief and humanitarian assistance could be harnessed to support SAARC's mandate of improving socio-economic development and alleviating poverty. Between the two organizations, joint ventures could deliver total answers, focusing on more than just humanitarian necessities but also reminding people of the purpose behind international humanitarian efforts in the primary place.

And regional cooperation can help minimize the spillover effects of the crisis trafficking, security threats and environmental degradation. Increased cooperation between ASEAN and SAARC may also facilitate data sharing for greater accountability and burden-sharing between member states in response to the impacts of forced migration (Tan, 2017).

CHALLENGES AND GAPS

The Rohingya crisis has highlighted deep deficiencies and challenges in the governance of forced migration and has laid bare the shortcomings of international and regional mechanisms. These obstacles include not only the structural constraints of the frameworks in operation but also the socio-political considerations of host nations and a lack of long-term vision for displaced groups. This chapter integrates many lenses and studies, pinpointing concerns of the crisis that need our focus.

Weakness of Enforcement Mechanisms in Global Frameworks

The lack of enforcement mechanisms in international migration frameworks has long been a critique. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol which, for all their trailblazing nature at the time, are predicated on the goodwill and voluntary compliance of signing states. This dependence has been shown to be ineffective when states choose national concerns over collective accountability. For example, as a major player in the Rohingya crisis, Myanmar is not a party to the Refugee Convention, and thus one of the significant actors remains outside the possibility of its legal frameworks (Hathaway, 2005).

While the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) did embrace the need for burden-sharing and articulated this in terms of international cooperation, it did not include binding commitments that would strengthen accountability mechanisms around equitable contributions. The GCR's non-binding nature has been identified by scholars as a factor in limiting its usefulness in addressing protracted situations like that of the Rohingya. According to betts (2013), the GCR does a good job in terms of driving the global community towards cooperation but greater dependence on voluntary contributions means the GCR continues to face significant funding gaps, as during 2021 less than half of the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis was funded (IOM, 2021).

The Host Country Perspective

Bangladesh, though a non-signatory to Refugee Convention, have been to some extent a good human resources in providing refuge to more than a million refugees. But this generosity has had a steep price. The socio-economic pressure on public services, health-care infrastructure and communities in Cox's Bazar has been enormous. This has challenged hospital systems, diminished the opportunity for local children to go to school, and stressed water and sanitation facilities, compromising public health for both refugees and host (Ahmed, 2019).

Environmental degradation is another serious problem. Deforestation has been massive in Cox's Bazar to set up refugee camps and is causing loss of biodiversity and increased vulnerability to climate change-related disasters, like cyclones and landslides. According to Warren et al. (2018), reflects the environmentality of this crisis and the necessity of its integration into the migration governance and sustainable resource management debate.

Regional Initiatives

Responses by regional organizations, such as ASEAN and SAARC, have been weak, hindered by structural problems and geopolitical rivalries. ASEAN's principle of non-interference has stalled collective action, while SAARC has been hobbled by intra-regional frictions, particularly between India

and Pakistan. Indeed, their efforts have not only been weak, but has also been increasingly criticized. Bandial Bombing poses a threat to maintain the classic separation between humanitarianism and politics (Tan, 2017).

Within South Asia, scholars contend that SAARC's inability to design a regional migration governance framework has rendered Bangladesh heavily burdened. This contrasts with Ahmed (2019), who argues that ASEAN could be in a better position to take a more proactive role. But with ASEAN's disjointed responses and its unwillingness to criticize Myanmar's policies of persecution, its effectiveness has been limited.

Accountability and International Burden-Sharing

The critical challenge of equitable burden-sharing by the international community is perhaps one of the most contentious issues in the Rohingya crisis. Rich countries, especially in the global North, have mostly sought to "close the gate", receiving a handful of Rohingya refugees and failing to deliver resources to host countries such as Bangladesh. This degree of disparity raises concerns regarding the efficacy and fairness of international structures built to respond to forced migration (Betts, 2013).

Case in point

The European Union has poured resources into managing migration flows from the Middle East and Africa but has given relatively little to the Rohingya crisis. In a similar vein, United States and other major powers provided on-off support helping out largely in terms of humanitarian assistance but not addressing the determinants of displacement or ensuring prolonged solutions (UNHCR, 2020).

Barriers to Repatriation and Durable Solutions The potential for safe and voluntary repatriation for Rohingya refugees is frustratingly distant. Myanmar's denial of citizenship rights or safety guarantees has become an impediment to repatriation. Bilateral accords between Bangladesh and Myanmar have not, according to Haque (2020a), instilled confidence in refugees, many of whom fear of further persecution if they return.

The lack of long-term planning for internally displaced persons, alongside repatriation challenges, has left refugees with outsized uncertainty about their fates. Without formal education and livelihood opportunities, not only are they doomed to a life of continued poverty, but it leaves their children without the promise of diversity and fortifies cycles of dependency, making the path toward self-reliance and integration appear unreachable. While the challenges of managing HSP are not unique to any one population, scholars argue that HSP are often neglected in both international frameworks and since HSP are often viewed as an issue of immediate humanitarian assistance rather than as an opportunity for sustainable development (Islam et al., 2018)

The Non-Traditional Drivers

The Rohingya crisis highlights the interrelationship of forced displacement with non-traditional drivers, such as environmental degradation and climate change. Cox's Bazar trees were cut down, and the region, prone to cyclones and monsoons, made it increasingly difficult for refugees and host communities to recover from disasters. Environmental push and pull factors have been emphasized by researchers such as Ahmed (2019), who suggest that these highlight the importance of forming policies on migration and climate resilience, something that is often absent from existing frameworks.

CONCLUSION

The displacement of the Rohingya highlights the importance of shoring up both global and regional frameworks for dealing with forced migration. While instruments such as the 1951 UN Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 1951) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) lay the foundations for addressing different aspects of the crisis, they also expose the limited nature and scope of international governance in this area, including difficulties in enforceability, challenges regarding equity in burden-sharing and sustainability of solutions to the crisis over the long term. As a result of the lack of binding commitments and accountability mechanisms, countries at the frontline have assumed the most significant share of refugee people burden, with limited capacity and being non-signatories. Statelessness is at the heart of the crisis. A key

factor behind the displacement and ongoing marginalization of the Rohingya¹⁷⁹ people is Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law and if there is no international agreement on how to solve statelessness and provide legal protections for vulnerable groups, such crises will continue to occur and become increasingly serious. On a regional basis, ASEAN and SAARC both failed to galvanize coherent responses. Compliance with non-interference in ASEAN and institutional inertia in SAARC have hindered active regional engagement, underscoring the critical deficit in coordination of migration governance in South and South-East Asia. The case study of the Rohingya suggests that humanitarian responses need to be accompanied by systemic reforms. These include integrating environmental and public health concerns into migration policy, enhancing refugee self-reliance through access to education and livelihoods, and establishing enforceable frameworks for burden-sharing among the international community. Moreover, regional cooperation is critical for long-term resilience, not just in response to crises but to help address root causes such as persecution and political instability. In an increasingly interconnected, crisis-prone world, forced migration needs to be recognized as a shared global responsibility. The Rohingya crisis is not only a regional issue but a test of the moral and operational strength of global and regional governance architectures, a litmus test for governance. The international community cannot afford to leave other crises to continue so tragically, without the radical reforms needed to end such a trajectory.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

-

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahsan Ullah, A. K. M. (2016). Rohingya crisis in Myanmar: Seeking justice for the “stateless”. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 32(3), 285-301.
- Alchatib, S. R. (2021). The Political and Economic Impacts of Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Challenges and Opportunities of Humanitarian Intervention in Post-Conflict Space. *Insignia: Journal of International Relations*, 88-101.
- Betts, A. (2013). *Survival migration: Failed governance and the crisis of displacement*. Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801468964>
- Bhattacharjee, M. (2024). Statelessness of an ethnic minority: the case of Rohingya. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 6, 1144493.
- Castles, S. (2006). Global perspectives on forced migration. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 15(1), 7-28.
- Crisp, J. (2003). No solutions in sight: the problem of protracted refugee situations in Africa. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 22(4), 114-150.
- Ferris, E., & Donato, K. (2019). *Refugees, migration, and global governance*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351172806>
- Hathaway, J. C. (2005). *The rights of refugees under international law*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511614859>
- Howlader, M. R., Nesa, J., & Islam, M. (2025). The Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh: challenges and prospects. *Discover Global Society*, 3(1), 103.
- International Organization for Migration. (2021). *Joint response plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis*. IOM.
- Kuhlman, T. (1991). The economic integration of refugees in developing countries: a research model. *Journal of refugee studies*, 4(1), 1-20.
- Kumar, R. (2011). *SAARC: Changing realities, opportunities and challenges*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Leider, J. P. (2018). *Rohingya: The history of a Muslim minority in Myanmar*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.115>
- Mank, B. C., & Jackson Jr, J. W. J. (2012). Climate change and displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 34(1), 267-285.

- Masood, S. M. U., & Uddin, M. S. (2020). International response to humanitarian crisis: A study of Rohingya Issue. *Being Immigrant in the World: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities*, 1, 143-164.
- McNeill, W. H. (1984). Human migration in historical perspective. *Population and development Review*, 1-18.
- Noor, M. A. (2025). The Genesis of Rohingya Statelessness and Justice Pathways for Rohingya Refugees.
- Park, R. E. (1928). Human migration and the marginal man. *American journal of Sociology*, 33(6), 881-893.
- Rajan, S. I., & Kumar, A. (2023). Migration, development within the SAARC framework: Towards a migration governance model of the future. *Migration in South Asia*, 215-226.
- Richardson, B. J. (2010). *Climate Change and Displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 2010, edited by J. McAdam.
- Shukri, S. (2021). The Rohingya refugee crisis in Southeast Asia: ASEAN's role and way forward. *Journal of International Studies*, 17, 239-263.
- UNHCR. (2011). *Handbook and guidelines on procedures and criteria for determining refugee status*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- UNHCR. (2018). *Global compact on refugees: Objectives and key principles*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- UNHCR. (2018). Rohingya emergency: Immediate needs and international response. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- UNHCR. (2020). *The global refugee forum: Outcomes and achievements*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- UNHCR. (2020). The Rohingya refugee crisis: Global perspectives. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- UNHCR. (2022). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2022*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- United Nations General Assembly. (2017). *Report on the situation of human rights in Myanmar* (A/RES/72/248). United Nations.
- Wood, W. B. (1994). Forced migration: Local conflicts and international dilemmas. *Annals of the Association of American geographers*, 84(4), 607-634.
- Yuan, C., & Lee, B. T. F. (2023). ASEAN in the Conflict Management of the Rohingya Crisis. *Journal of Autonomy and Security Studies*, 7(1), 39-60.