

Understanding the current and potential contribution of Rohingya refugees to the Malaysian economy

March 2023



PRRI PARTNERS:



Funded by the European Union

Submitted to:
Danish Refugee Council

Designed by:
www.arasd.com

Cover Photo Credit:
DRC/2023/Ahmad Yusni



Acknowledgements

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Special thanks to the Rohingya refugee community in Malaysia, without whose support and valuable inputs, this research would not have been possible.

Protecting Rohingya Refugees in Asia

The ‘Protecting Rohingya Refugees in Asia’ (PRRiA) project brings together the Danish Refugee Council, the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform, the Mixed Migration Centre, the Geutanyoë Foundation, HOST International Malaysia, and Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia to enhance regional protection responses in support of Rohingya refugees.

Through support from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the project aims to identify and address the protection risks and needs of Rohingya refugees in Southeast Asia with a particular focus on Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. It combines evidence-based research with programmatic and advocacy expertise to allow project partners, through their comparative advantages, to explore and advocate through new paths to support Rohingya refugees and the communities hosting them.

For more information on PRRiA, please visit:
<https://drc.ngo/our-work/resources/protecting-rohingya-refugees-in-asia/>.

About MMC

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global organisation engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs hosted in Danish Refugee Council (DRC) regional offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Geneva and Brussels. The MMC is a leading source of independent and high-quality data, research, analysis, and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC’s overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move. The MMC is part of, and governed by, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC’s work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC. For more information on MMC visit: www.mixedmigration.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As of November 2022, Malaysia hosted 182,990 refugees and asylum seekers, 106,120 of whom were Rohingya. However, Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol and does not have a legislative framework for refugee protection. Notwithstanding barriers to legal employment, a UNHCR study found that 60% of refugee adults in Malaysia were employed. The large informal employment sector in Malaysia, which constituted 23% of total employment in 2021, provides livelihood options for refugees. However, informal employment makes refugees susceptible to high risks of exploitation, including verbal and physical abuse by employers, partial or non-payment of wages, and lack of protection in high-risk work environments.

Through collaboration between Rohingya-led community-based organisations (CBOs), the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) and partners of the Protecting Rohingya Refugees in Asia (PRRIA) project, participatory research was conducted to gain a better understanding of Rohingya refugees' existing livelihood strategies and challenges in Malaysia. The research focuses on employment profiles and the challenges Rohingya refugees face in accessing livelihoods and decent work, as well as their potential to contribute to the Malaysian economy, should their legal status and access to the labour market be formalised.

The study presents evidence collected by the Rohingya community to inform policymaking on issues related to Rohingya refugees' work rights in Malaysia.

Key Findings

Skills

1. Knowledge of Malay language was most regularly reported (22%) as a useful skill in the job market, followed by construction skills (21%) and grass cutting skills (13%).
2. The top five skills respondents reported interest in learning for better income-generation were: electricity and wiring (16%), sewing (14%), English language (12%), air-conditioner servicing (11%), and business or accounting (9%).

Livelihoods

3. Male respondents reported benefitting from relatively better livelihoods in Malaysia as their unemployment rate dropped from 30% prior to coming to Malaysia to 2% in Malaysia; the unemployment rate for female respondents decreased slightly from 26% to 20%.
4. In Malaysia, the most common economic sectors respondents were working in were services (47%), construction (23%), and self-employment (10%). Before coming to Malaysia, most who were working had been engaged in agriculture and fishing (23%), self-employment (11%), and services (7%).

Access to information

5. 39% of respondents approached family or friends and 31% went to community organisations for information about job availability and job vacancies in Malaysia. Other popular avenues were going door-to-door (31%) and approaching local Malaysians (29%).

Risk and challenges

6. 87% of the 158 respondents who had worked during the last five years in Malaysia reported experiencing protection incidents at their workplace. The most common exploitation experienced at the hand of employers, and relate to pay.
7. Arrest or detention (66%), bribery or extortion (61%), and confiscation of UNHCR card (40%) or other IDs were the three most common protection incidents perpetrated by the authorities.

Assistance

8. Although a majority of the respondents were employed, many continue to live in precarity. 95% indicated the need for livelihood assistance, especially financial assistance, but most (87%) reported not receiving any in the last 12 months in Malaysia.

Key Policy Recommendations

For humanitarian and aid organisations:

- i. Formulate livelihoods programming that actively mainstreams gender, builds on the community's strengths, integrates community needs, and promotes sustainability and resilience.
- ii. Facilitate access to information about livelihood opportunities and protection assistance.
- iii. Advocate for the legal rights to work.

For policymakers in Malaysia:

- i. Formalise refugees' rights to work through engagement with refugee community, private sectors, Malaysian citizens, civil society organisations and international organisations.
- ii. Promote labour protection and fair compensation for informal employment.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report is the outcome of participatory research conducted through collaboration between Rohingya-led community-based organisations (CBOs) and partners of the Protecting Rohingya Refugees in Asia project. This study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of Rohingya refugees' existing livelihood strategies and challenges in Malaysia. The research focuses on relevant employment profiles and challenges Rohingya refugees face, as well as their potential to contribute to the Malaysian economy to an even greater extent should their legal status and access to the labour market be formalised. The study presents evidence collected by the Rohingya community to inform policymaking in issues related to Rohingya refugees' work rights in Malaysia. The findings in this report will be used to inform advocacy activities undertaken by the CBOs.

As of November 2022, Malaysia hosted 182,990 refugees and asylum seekers, 106,120 of whom were Rohingya.¹ However, Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol and does not have a legislative framework for refugee protection. Refugees and asylum seekers do not have legal status in Malaysia nor clear access to international protection and are deemed 'illegal' migrants under the Malaysian Immigration Act 1959/1963. Despite this, the presence of refugees and asylum seekers is, to some extent, tolerated by the Malaysian government on "humanitarian grounds".² In the absence of a legislative mechanism on refugee issues, the government has devolved the responsibility of refugee protection and registration to UNHCR.³ UNHCR-issued documentation affords refugees minimal protection, but they still face risks of arrest and detention, given the ambiguity of regulations surrounding refugee issues.⁴

The Malaysian government views Malaysia as a transit country for refugees and asylum seekers, who will eventually be repatriated or resettled to third countries.⁵ Local integration of the Rohingya population is therefore impossible, in the absence of legal pathways to permanent residence or citizenship for refugees or asylum seekers. Persecution of minority populations and ongoing conflict in Myanmar makes repatriation unrealistic, particularly for Rohingya refugees who have been facing decades of systemic discrimination and targeted violence. At the same time, resettlement options are scarce, as less than one percent of the population is resettled every year.⁶ Rohingya refugees in Malaysia are trapped without viable prospects for durable solutions in the foreseeable future – they are not able to move onward or back.

While non-state actors play an important role in providing support and services to the refugee population, this support is inadequate to fulfil the needs of long-standing refugee populations. In addition, the operation of aid organisations is limited by the restrictive environment especially for international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Malaysia.⁷ A 2011 study by the International Rescue Committee revealed that only 7% out of 1,000 refugee households in Kuala Lumpur had received humanitarian support.⁸ Despite the passage of time since this study, there is little evidence of improvement in terms of refugees' access to humanitarian support, as humanitarian assistance to refugees in Malaysia remains limited and sporadic.⁹ Studies also show that in response to the lack of formal support from the government and aid organisations, refugees have adopted an approach of self-reliance and mobilised themselves into community-based organisations that offer support and assistance within the community.¹⁰

Notwithstanding the barriers to legal employment, a 2016 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) baseline socio-economic survey found that 60% of refugee adults were employed.¹¹ The significant size of informal employment in Malaysia, which constituted 23% of total employment in 2021 provides an alternative to livelihoods for refugees.¹² Most employed refugees, if not all, engaged in informal work.¹³ However, informal employment makes refugees susceptible to high risks of exploitation including verbal and physical abuse by employers, partial or non-payment of wages, and lack of protection in high-risk work environments.¹⁴

1 This could be an underestimation as the statistics only includes those who are registered with UNHCR. See UNHCR (2022) [Figures at a Glance in Malaysia](#).

2 Abd Jalil, A. (2021) [The Paradox of Malaysia's 'Humanitarian Grounds'](#). Oxford Law Blog.

3 UNHCR. (2023) [UNHCR - Malaysia](#).

4 While refugees with UNHCR-issued documentation are recognised and exempted from arrests under Immigration Act, there are also instances of arrest and detention of refugees holding UNHCR documents. See Lego, J. (2012) [Protecting and Assisting Refugees in Malaysia: The Role of the UNHCR, Informal Mechanisms, and the 'Humanitarian Exception'](#)

5 Alhadjri, A. (2020) [Minister: Rohingya refugees to be deported or resettled](#). Malaysiakini.

6 UNHCR. (2022) [Resettlement](#).

7 Wake, C. & Cheung, T. (2016). [Livelihood strategies of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia 'We want to live in dignity'](#).

8 IRC (2012) [In search of survival and sanctuary in the city](#).

9 Sheikh, S. (2019) [Cash or Kind? The Debate Over Humanitarian Assistance Continues in Malaysia](#). The Diplomat.

10 McConnachie, "Securitization and Community-Based Protection Among Chin Refugees in Kuala Lumpur"; Nah, "The Ambiguous Authority of a 'Surrogate State': UNHCR's Negotiation of Asylum in the Complexities of Migration in Southeast Asia."

11 UNHCR (2019) [Decentralized Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihoods Programme in Malaysia \(2015-2018\)](#).

12 According to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022) [Statistics on informal sector and informal employment, 2021](#), out of 15.06 million total employment in 2021, 3.5 million people were employed informally.

13 While refugees do not have legal work rights in Malaysia, a small minority do get employed formally through contractual arrangement particularly with NGOs or IOs and are entitled to social protection and certain employment benefits.

14 Nungsari, M. & Flanders, S. (2018) [A Comprehensive Study of Rohingya Construction Workers in Peninsular Malaysia and Recommendations for a Future Work Pilot Program](#). Asia School of Business; IRC (2012) [In search of survival and sanctuary in the city](#)

Studies related to refugee employment or refugee contributions to the Malaysian economy broadly focus on the ‘refugee population’, or on a particular economic sector.¹⁵ However, the employment profiles and challenges vary by refugee community, as noted by UNHCR:

‘employment and self-employment rates differed drastically between ethnic groups and across gender. Across adult registered refugees, 60 percent are employed. Yet, only half (52 percent) of Rohingya refugees were employed, but self-employment for Rohingya at 11 percent was the highest as compared to the other ethnic groups.’¹⁶

Similar observations are presented in an Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network report:

‘refugee communities in Malaysia are heterogenous – individuals possess a variety of characteristics, skills, education levels, and abilities.’¹⁷

Against this background, this research seeks to shed light on the economic profile of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, focusing on the following research objective and research questions.

Research objective

To better understand and articulate current and potential contributions by Rohingya refugees to the Malaysian economy.

Research questions

1. What are the income-generating activities of working-age Rohingya women and men (types of employment, economic sectors, work experience) in Malaysia, and what were these prior to coming to Malaysia?
2. What skill sets do Rohingya refugees have (or need) that can potentially contribute to greater income-generation?
3. What are the channels through which Rohingya refugees access information related to income-generating activities, and how reliable are these sources of information?
4. Do Rohingya refugees receive livelihood support or assistance? If so, how does this support interplay with overall income-generating activities?

15 IRC (2012) *In search of survival and sanctuary in the city*; Todd, L., Amirullah, A. & Wan, Y. S. (2019) *Economic Impact of Granting Refugees in Malaysia the Right to Work*. IDEAS; Nungsari, M., Flanders, S. & Chuah, HY (2020) *Poverty and precarious employment: the case of Rohingya refugee construction workers in Peninsular Malaysia*. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications; APRRN (2020) *Towards Refugees’ Right to Work An Analysis of Employment Trends for Refugees in Thailand and Malaysia*.

16 UNHCR (2019) *Decentralized Evaluation of UNHCR’s Livelihoods Programme in Malaysia (2015-2018)*, p.p. 43.

17 APRRN (2020) *Towards Refugees’ Right to Work An Analysis of Employment Trends for Refugees in Thailand and Malaysia*, p.p. 16-18.



2.0 METHODS

Research methods

The research was conducted using a participatory methodology utilising qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) and the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP) conducted a four-day capacity building workshop on research and advocacy in Kuala Lumpur in July 2022 (See [Annex 1](#) for the training agenda) with two Rohingya-led CBOs. 17 participants attended. Following the workshop, the participants engaged in the research as co-inquirers who shaped and informed the research topic, objectives, research tool design, data collection, and analysis, facilitated by the MMC team. The workshop participants also played a role in conducting surveys and semi-structured interviews with the research participants. Finally, MMC led the research report writing, based on inputs from the co-inquirers/enumerators and their findings.

The research draws on both primary and secondary data. Secondary data was collected through a desk review of documents from multiple sources including news media, academic literature, and governmental/organisational reports, while primary data was collected through quantitative surveys with 200 Rohingya refugees in Peninsular Malaysia. The survey questionnaire (See [Annex 2](#)) covers five key areas: profile, past livelihoods, current livelihoods, access to employment, and risks and challenges. This was complemented with a total of eight semi-structured interviews (Interview guide attached in [Annex 3](#)), which comprised two interviewees in each of the employment status category below:

- i. Full-time job with regular income
- ii. Casual/occasional work
- iii. Business owner/self-employed
- iv. Unemployed

Sampling

Surveys were conducted with Rohingya refugees¹⁸ aged between 18 and 64 years old. Purposive sampling was applied to account for the intersection of gender, age, occupation, educational status, and geographical location. The research team first reached out to potential participants within their social network and then utilised snowball sampling through referrals made by the set of initial participants.¹⁹ As the sample was selected using non-random criteria, it is important to note that it may not be fully representative of the Rohingya population.

Data collection and analysis

The survey was conducted through in-person interviews whenever possible, however, in circumstances where in-person surveying was not possible,²⁰ enumerators conducted the survey remotely through phone or WhatsApp calls - 41.5% of the surveys were conducted virtually. Data analysis focused on descriptive statistics which provide insights on general patterns and trends in the data. The team also conducted data comparisons between different variables such as gender and age groups. Thematic analysis was conducted using the qualitative data collected from semi structured interviews, which provided more in-depth information on the livelihoods of Rohingya refugees.

18 The term 'refugee' is used broadly in this research to include both refugees and people seeking asylum and does not limit to those who are registered with UNHCR.

19 Atkinson, R & Flint, J. (2001). [Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies](#).

20 Due to issues such as long travel distance or challenges in scheduling the interviews.



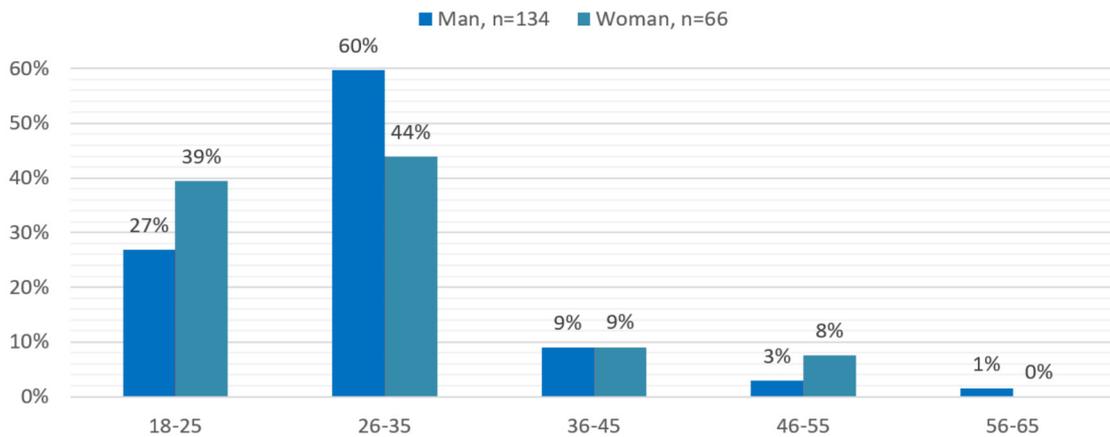
Photo Credit: DRC/2023/Ahmad Yusni



3.0 RESPONDENT PROFILE

The survey respondents comprised of 134 men and 66 women, with an average age of 29.3 years. Most belonged to the age groups of 18-25 and 26-35. Respondents were living in 10 states and two federal territories in Malaysia, with 71% located in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. The respondents had arrived in Malaysia between 1987 and 2022, and had been in Malaysia for 9.5 years on average. Six respondents were born in Malaysia and in the 18-33 age range.

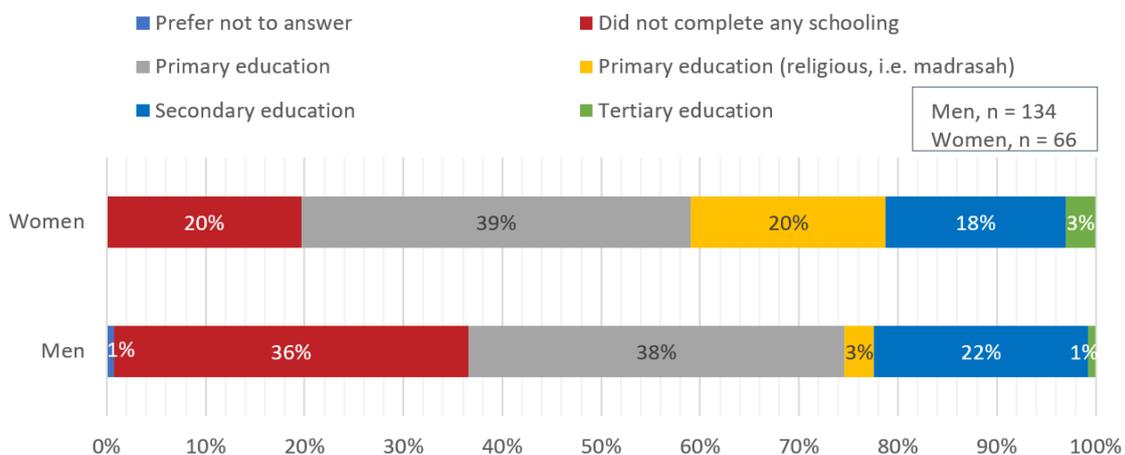
Figure 1: Age group distribution by gender



In terms of migration status, the majority of respondents (83%) were refugees holding a UNHCR card,²¹ 12% were unregistered refugees without any legal documentation, and 5% were refugees currently in the process of refugee status determination.

More than a quarter of the respondents (31%) had not completed any schooling, while 48% had completed primary school. Less than a quarter (21%) had completed secondary school, while only 2% of the respondents had completed tertiary education. Respondents' education attainment level was observed to be low, tied to the systemic denial of rights to formal education in Myanmar as well as restrictions to public education in the countries of asylum such as Bangladesh and Malaysia. Education attainment levels also varied by sex. Women are more educated than men as shown below – a lower proportion of female respondents (20%) did not complete any schooling in comparison to male respondents (36%); and there were a slightly higher number of university graduates among women (3%) as compared to men (1%). This data is different than gender disparities found among Rohingya refugee populations in other studies,²² and the relatively high level of women's education in this sample is worth noting when considering the results.

Figure 2: Education attainment level by gender



21 Refugees in Malaysia will be issued a [UNHCR card](#) upon receiving positive refugee status determination decision. However, it is important to note that while the bearer of the card is recognised as persons under UNHCR protection, it does not grant them any legal status in Malaysia.

22 MMC (2021) [Profiles and Drivers of Rohingya moving to Malaysia](#); Inter-Sector Coordination Group (2017) [Gender Profile No. 1 For Rohingya Refugee Crisis Response, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh](#); Banerjee, S. (2021) [Children Left Behind: Challenges in Providing Education to the Rohingya Children in Bangladesh](#). Observer Research Foundation.

4.0 FINDINGS

Skills

Among respondents who were employed, knowledge of Malay language was most regularly reported (22%) as a useful skill in the job market, followed by construction skills (21%) and grass cutting skills (13%). A respondent working as a general helper at a retail shop selling frozen meat reported the following about the importance of Malay language proficiency:

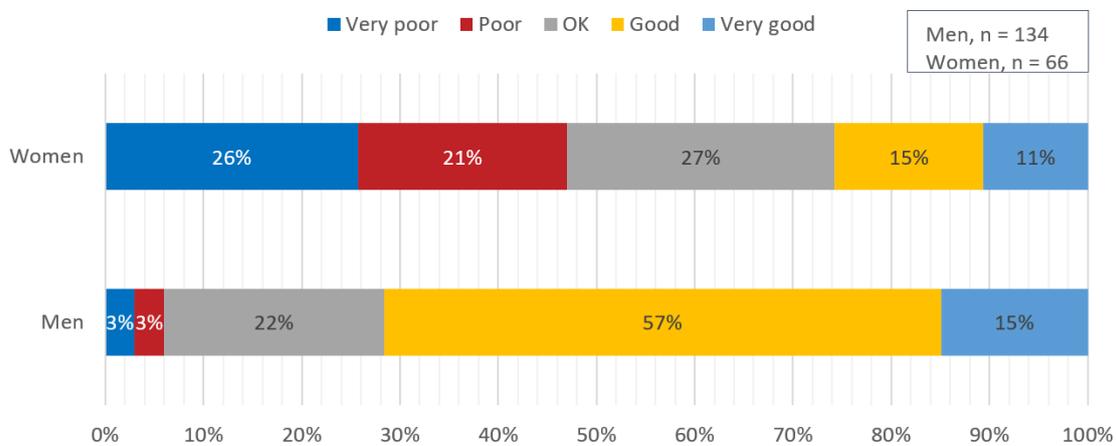
“There is no need [for other] skills [in my current job other than] Malay language because most of the shop customers speak Malay.” - Male participant, 24, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant

The skill profiles are gendered – among 27 female respondents who were employed, the top three most reported useful skills are Malay language (26%), cooking (26%), and cleaning (19%); while 131 male respondents who were employed reported construction skills (25%), Malay language (21%), and grass cutting skills (15%) as the most useful skills in their current roles.

The top five skills respondents reported interest in learning for better income-generation were: electricity and wiring (16%), sewing (14%), English language (12%), air-conditioner servicing (11%), and business or accounting (9%). These also varied by gender. Among female respondents, 28 were interested in learning sewing, followed by English language (n=17), Malay language (n=11), baking (n=10), and cooking (n=7). On the other hand, the top five skills male respondents reported interest in learning were electricity and wiring (24%), air-conditioner servicing (16%), English language (14%), accounting or business (10%), and auto mechanics (7%).

While a majority of respondents (81%) were able to speak Malay (self-declared language proficiency ranged from ‘OK’ to ‘very good’), a significant gender gap is apparent. Almost half of the female respondents (47%) could not speak Malay, a number almost eight times higher than male respondents (6% could not speak Malay).

Figure 3: Malay language proficiency by gender

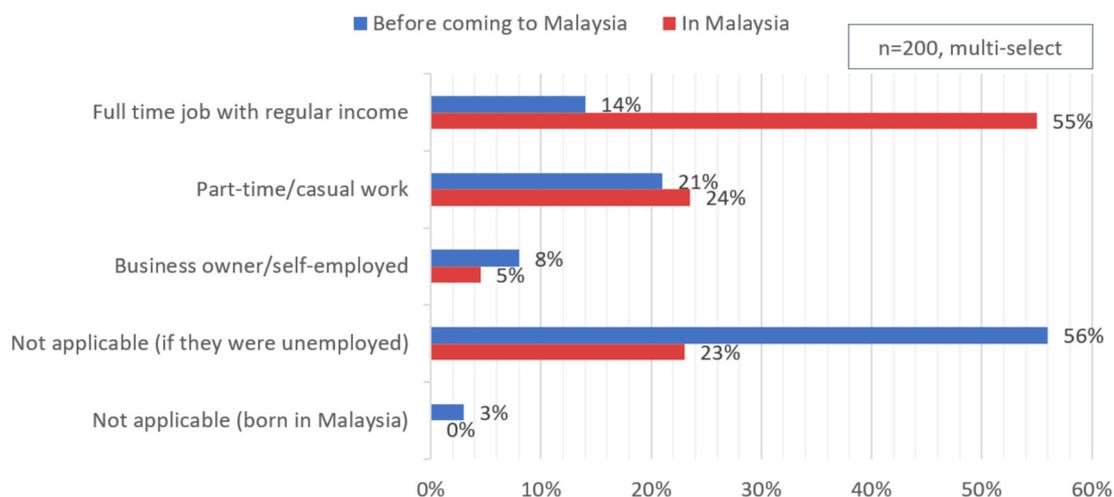


Livelihoods

Respondents’ livelihood profiles changed significantly after arriving in Malaysia. The figures below compare livelihood experiences of respondents before coming to Malaysia with those once in Malaysia. The respondents’ unemployment rate before coming to Malaysia (56%) was more than double the rate in Malaysia (21%). The number of respondents engaged in full-time jobs also increased significantly from 14% to 55%.



Figure 4: Type of job before and after coming to Malaysia



As reported by one of the enumerators,

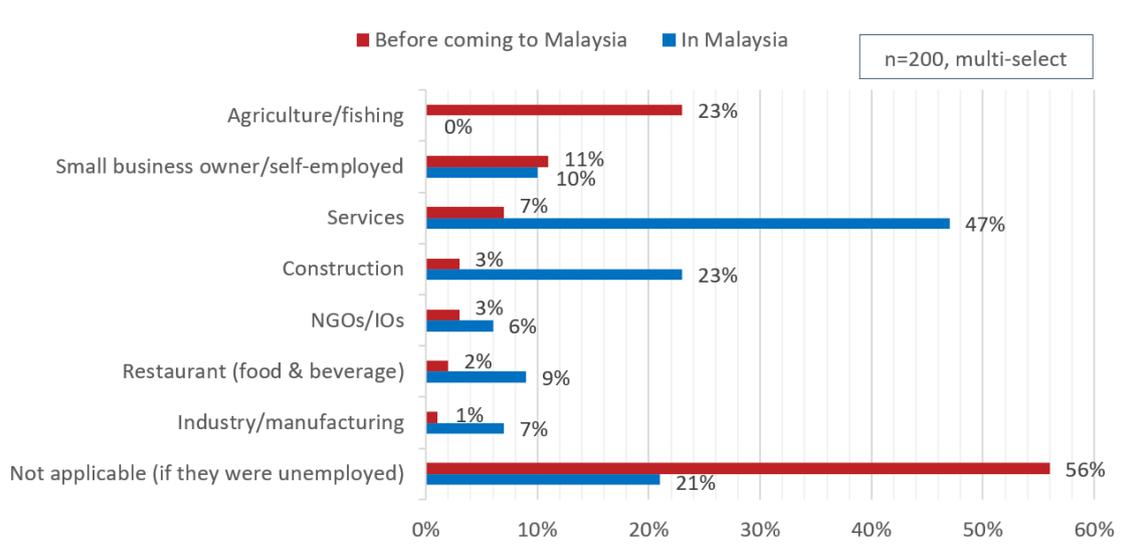
“Back home [in Myanmar], we have land [for farming], we have our own house, we don’t need to work. Now in Malaysia, we have to pay for rent, food, etc. So, we must work. It is the only way to survive here.” – Female participant, 33, Kuala Lumpur, co-inquirer/enumerator

The reported unemployment rate was high prior to coming to Malaysia (56%) because respondents primarily engaged in subsistence activities including farming and fishing rather than earning income through employment. As land ownership in Myanmar is common, it allowed respondents to build their own property and farm. Many required minimal expenses in day-to-day life and were nearly completely self-sufficient. As reported by one of the interviewees:

“[We have] less expenses as vegetables are grown in the back yard. Only sometimes [we] have to buy fish... My father built[a] house for us and it’s long lasting.” – Male participant, 37, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant

Approximately 23% of respondents worked in the agricultural sector prior to coming to Malaysia, however, this number shrank to zero once in Malaysia. Respondent engagement in the service sector rose by nearly a factor of seven in Malaysia, from 7% prior to coming to Malaysia to 47% in Malaysia. Common jobs reported in the service sector include grass cutting, cleaning, and car washing. This is followed by the construction sector, in which about one quarter of respondents (23%) engaged in after coming to Malaysia, as compared to only 3% before coming to Malaysia. Some respondents were self-employed (10%) as scrap metal or recyclable collectors, tailors, and market vendors.

Figure 5: Employment by sector



Despite having lower education attainment levels relative to female respondents (see Figure 2), male respondents reported benefitting from relatively better livelihoods in Malaysia. The unemployment rate for male respondents prior to coming to Malaysia was 30%, while the unemployment rate among male respondents after coming to Malaysia was 2%. On the other hand, the unemployment rate for female respondents prior to coming to Malaysia was 26% and after coming to Malaysia it was 20%.

Only 27 out of 66 female respondents were engaged in income generation activities in Malaysia: 17 had a full-time job, eight worked in part time roles, and five were self-employed.²³ The key sectors female respondents worked in are services (n=11), NGOs or international organisations (n=8), industry/manufacturing (n=5), and food and beverage (n=5).²⁴

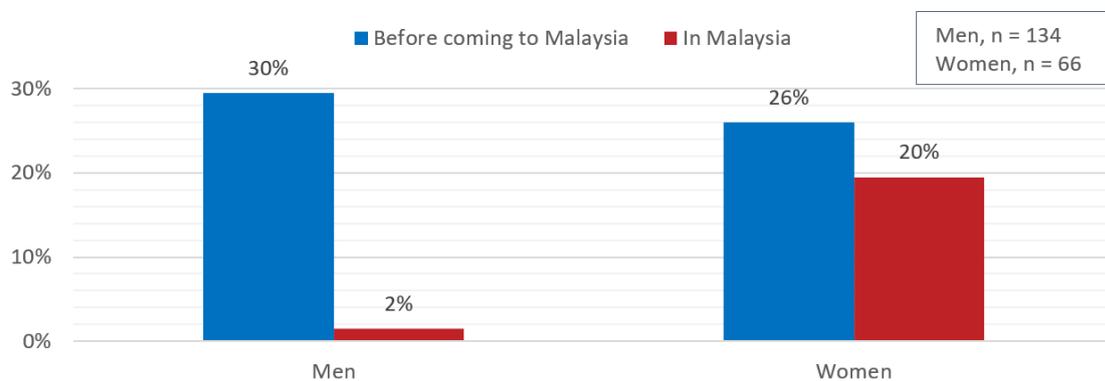
One of the key barriers to employment for female respondents was gender norms within the community, as reported by a female interviewee:

“I had never worked outside. Due to religion, my parents and my husband didn’t allow me to work.” – Female participant, 44, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant

Another female respondent, who is a single mother, cited challenges in accessing childcare as a barrier to work:

“[I]t is very hard for me to work here with three small kids, without [a] husband and to earn money to support myself and my children.” – Female participant, 28, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant

Figure 6: Unemployment rate by gender



²³ The total number exceeds 27 as some female respondents were both self-employed and worked part-time.

²⁴ Similarly, some respondents worked in multiple roles in different industries.



Access to information

As hiring undocumented persons is prohibited by law in Malaysia, job opportunities advertised on mainstream platforms are restricted to people with documentations. Rohingya refugees therefore cannot seek employment through these mainstream channels due to lack of access to government-issued identity documents and work permits. As a result, social networks play a critical role in providing information about income generating opportunities, especially for informal roles that are available to refugees. 39% of respondents approached family or friends and 31% went to community organisations for information about job availability and job vacancies in Malaysia (note that respondents could choose more than one answer to this question). For instance, information about job vacancies in construction sector is not usually circulated publicly and often shared through word-of-mouth among friends who are already working at the same construction sites.

“I was working as a construction worker. This kind of job [is] usually found through friend’s referral.” - Male participant, 37, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant

This suggests that community members who are not well connected within the community may face more challenges than others in accessing job opportunities.

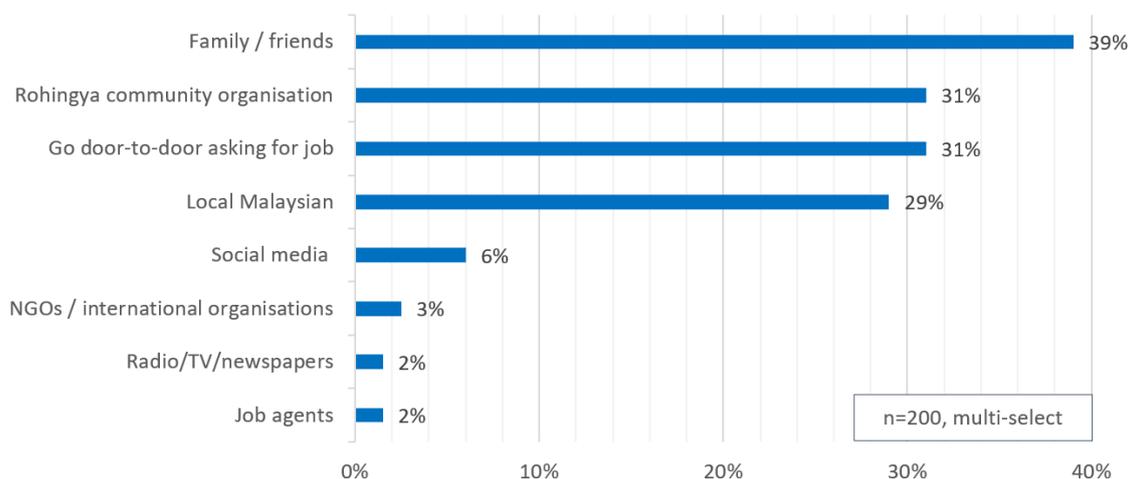
“It was very hard [to look for a job], because of language barriers and no connection with the community.” - Female participant, 30, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant

Other popular avenues for seeking information about jobs were through going door-to-door (31%) and approaching local Malaysians (29%). A female respondent who had been a tailor in a Bangladesh refugee camp found livelihood opportunities by approaching tailoring businesses in her neighbourhood:

“[The] place [where I live] has some garment shops. Once, I reached out to the shop [owner] and asked [if there is any] job opportunity. The shop owner [checked my work sample] and later paid me [for my work].” - Female participant, 38, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant

While social media was only used by 6% of the respondents in accessing information about jobs, one co-inquirer cited a Facebook page as an effective job platform for them, explaining that job openings for refugees were advertised on the page with adequate information on salary packages. Employers who posted these job openings on the page are also informed about the risk of employing refugees and are open to employing the refugees. However, though the platform was widely utilised in the past, the number of job postings on the page has decreased significantly and has been inactive since 2020. Moreover, accessibility to social media is not possible for individuals who are illiterate or non-tech savvy.

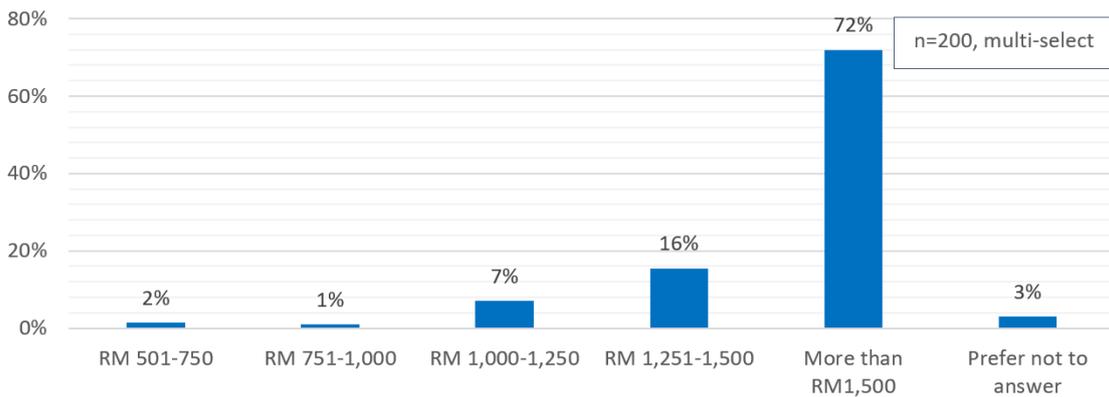
Figure 7: Sources of information about jobs



Though a portion of respondents had access to livelihoods in Malaysia, income levels often proved insufficient to cover living expenses. The majority of respondents (72%) spent more than RM1,500 (USD 344)²⁵ per month. Less than half of the respondents (41%) reported that they made enough to meet their basic needs, while 36% of respondents did not have enough to meet their basic needs and were forced to borrow money and depend on friends or family.

25 Based on the [exchange rate](#) of RM4.36/USD as of Feb 13.

Figure 8: Monthly expenses in Malaysia



Risks and challenges

While Rohingya refugees were able to secure informal employment, they face heightened risks and challenges at work due to the lack of legal recognition and protection. The multifaceted sets of protection incidents experienced at their workplace could be divided into incidents perpetrated by employers and those by authorities.

Employers

87% of the 158 respondents who had worked during the last five years in Malaysia reported experiencing protection incidents at their workplace. The most common exploitation experienced at the hand of employers relates to pay. 63% of respondents reported that they were paid less than Malaysians or other migrant workers in similar roles, and 48% experienced wage payment issues such as late payment and/or withholding of wages. Almost half of the respondents (41%) also mentioned a lack of social protections including insurance and paid sick leave.



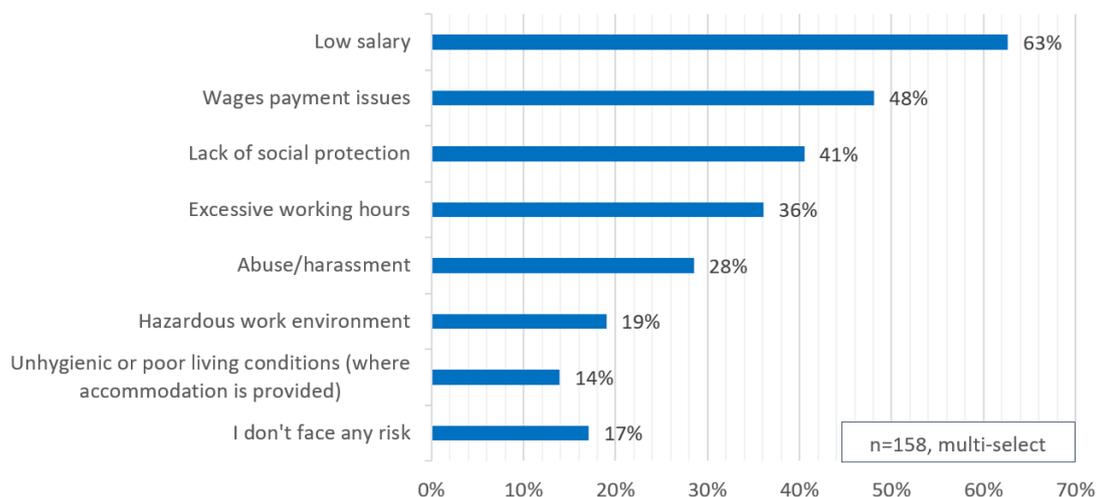
“... we’re insecure at work and not treated like human[s]. The employer give[s] low wages as we’re illegal immigrants according to them. So many times, they didn’t provide salary on time.” – Male participant, 37, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant



“My boss is a Malaysian and treat[s me] not equally like the others and [pays me] low wages... As a part time employee, I cannot claim for sick leave or day[s] off.” – Female participant, 38, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant

Female respondents reported experiencing fewer protection incidents. More than half of the female respondents reported not experiencing any protection incident perpetrated by either employers (52%) or authorities (56%) at their workplace - five times higher than the male respondents who reportedly did not face any risk perpetrated by employers (10%) and authorities (11%). The types of incidents experienced by the respondents also varied by gender. For female respondents, the most common protection incidents perpetrated by employers were low pay (22%), abuse or harassment (15%), and wage payment issues (11%). For male respondents, the most common protection incidents perpetrated by the employers were low pay (71%), wage payment issues (56%), and lack of social protection (47%).

Figure 9: Types of exploitation experienced at the hand of employers





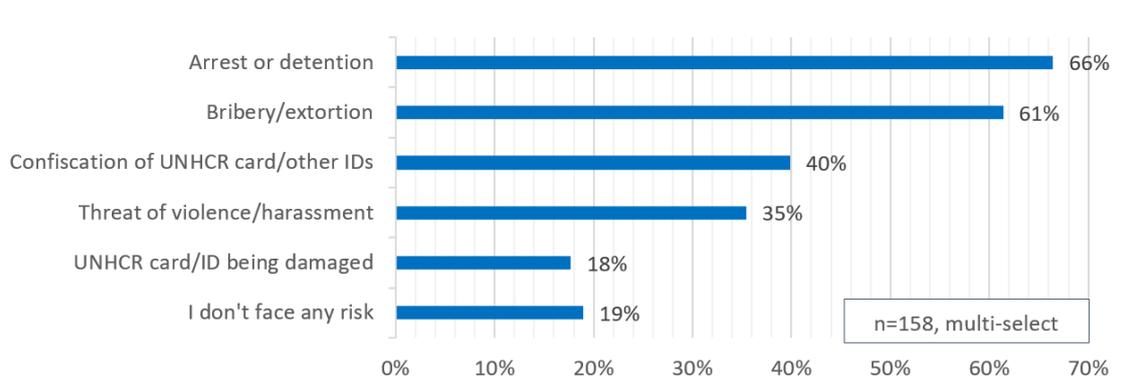
Authorities

In terms of protection incidents perpetrated by authorities at the workplace, both male and female respondents most often reported arrest or detention, bribery or extortion, and confiscation of UNHCR card or other IDs.

“[The workplace] was not a safe place at all due to fear of arrest. Whenever I have to go out with [a] lorry to deliver goods outside sometimes [I get] caught by authorities [and] had to pay [a] fine.” – Male participant, 26, Selangor, semi-structured interview participant

“... police asked for money even though I had [a] UNHCR Card without [committing any] offence but they accused me [saying that] I’m not allowed to work in Malaysia. They confiscated [my] wallet and took all [my] money from the wallet.” – Male participant, 37, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant

Figure 10: Types of protection incidents experienced at workplace (perpetrated by authorities)



Assistance

While UNHCR documents do not entitle refugees and asylum seekers to any legal rights in Malaysia, they do facilitate access to some assistance, resources, and a semblance of protection. For instance, UNHCR documented refugees and asylum seekers are able to access public healthcare services at a 50% discount off the foreigner’s rate.²⁶ Notwithstanding, healthcare remains unaffordable for many, as shared by one interviewee who is a UNHCR cardholder.

“I’m so frustrated with healthcare as I’m not getting proper treatment from the government hospital. Last time I got treatment it was so expensive, and I have another appointment this month. I’m planning not to go to the hospital as I have insufficient money.” – Male participant, 37, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant²⁷

Although a majority of the respondents were employed, many continue living in precarity. 95% indicated the need for livelihood assistance, especially financial assistance, but most (87%) reported not receiving any in the last 12 months in Malaysia. In instances where they experienced a protection incident at work, 58% were not able to get assistance - lack of legal rights in Malaysia hinders their access to protection and assistance.

“If [I] got raided by immigration [at my workplace, I would] have to run away or otherwise [I would] have to stay in prison for 14 days and more.” Male participant, 24, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview participant

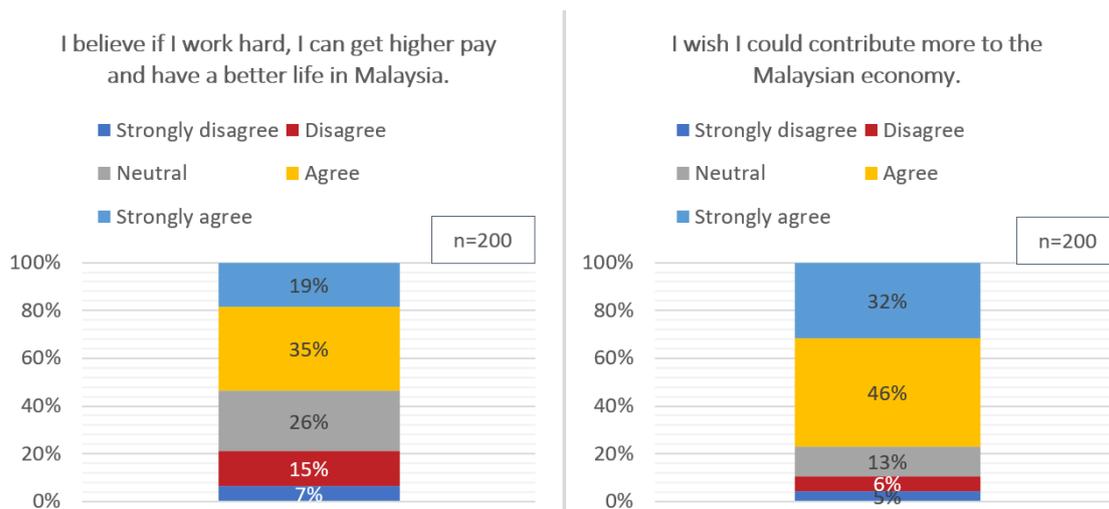
Perception about prospects in Malaysia

Respondents were optimistic about livelihood opportunities in Malaysia. Over three quarters of respondents (78%) agreed with the statement: ‘I wish I could contribute more to the Malaysian economy’. More than half (54%) believed that their hard work would eventually result in better pay and a better life in Malaysia.

26 UNHCR Malaysia. (2023) [Health Services - Refugee Malaysia](#).

27 All quotes from semi-structured interview participants cited in the report have been edited to clarify meanings and to correct grammatical or spelling error.

Figure 11: Perception about prospect in Malaysia



Potential contribution to the Malaysian economy

The Malaysian economy has been heavily reliant on migrant workers, who constituted about 20% of total workforce in 2019.²⁸ Following the post-pandemic economic recovery phase, the country has witnessed a significant rise in demand for migrant labour across different economic sectors, which has led to a supply gap of between 800,000 and one million workers.²⁹ The construction sector, for instance, has been affected by the critical labour shortages of 400,000 workers since 2022.³⁰

Notwithstanding the lack of work rights, Rohingya refugees have been earning their livelihoods through informal employment – often their only means of survival as urban refugees in Malaysia. Rohingya constitute a part of the workforce that helps address the labour shortage in labour-intensive industries that are key drivers of the Malaysian economy. Furthermore, the Rohingya community’s day-to-day expenditure in Malaysia contributes to the economy. Legalising refugees’ right to work could contribute to addressing the labour shortages in the economy. However, this is not yet the case and the lack of legal recognition has hindered Rohingya from substantively contributing to the Malaysian economy, and exposed them to exploitation and abuse. Rohingya refugees, while being employed, face constant fear of arrest and detention by the authorities and risk of exploitation by the employers:

“In Malaysia, we are not recognised as legal migrants. [We have] no legal rights to work in any sector. [We face] fear of arrest anytime and anywhere. If the Malaysian government allows refugees to work legally and start a business, it will benefit the Malaysian economy.” – Female participant, 38, Kuala Lumpur, semi-structured interview respondent

Some respondents also shared that they have the necessary skills but are not able to utilise them due to legal barriers:

“I have observed all the service(s) in a carwash, I can lead my own carwash [business] if I am allowed [by law].” – Male participant, 21, Kuala Lumpur, survey respondent

“If I want to work or open a business like a restaurant in Malaysia, I need legal documentation. Skills I have already, but I need legality.” – Male participant, 52, Kuala Lumpur, survey respondent

28 ILO / UN Country Team Malaysia. (2019) [Policy Brief: Labour Migration in Malaysia](#).

29 Tee, K. (2023) [Report: Malaysia still short of one million foreign workers post-pandemic, says association](#). Malay Mail.

30 Ignatius, C (2022) [Labour shortage, weaker ringgit among challenges faced by construction industry this year](#)



5.0 CONCLUSION

In contrast to the political rhetoric that refugees are a burden to public resources,³¹ this study finds that the majority of Rohingya refugee respondents are self-reliant, with minimal dependence on the state. They also contribute to the Malaysian economy through informal employment and their expenditure. However, Rohingya refugees are often subject to exploitation in the workplace due to the lack of legal recognition. Many, while being employed, continue to face financial insecurity and live in the margins of society due to the precarious nature of informal jobs. While granting Rohingya refugees the right to work in Malaysia does not address the wider issue of refugee protection, it could empower refugees to participate fully in the economy and contribute more to the economy, and eventually create mutual benefits to both the host country and refugee community.

The following **recommendations** have been formulated based on the key findings:

For humanitarian and aid organisations:

- i. Formulate livelihoods programming that actively mainstreams gender, builds on the community strengths, integrates community needs, and promotes sustainability and resilience.
 - a. The employment level among female respondents is relatively lower than male respondents despite their higher education attainment level. Organisations should adopt gender-sensitive livelihood programming that ensure equal access to opportunities for both men and women.
 - b. The low levels of Malay language proficiency among female respondents as compared to male respondents indicates that Malay language training targeted at women would be helpful to support Rohingya refugee women in their day-to-day life and livelihoods in Malaysia.
 - c. In terms of additional skills, respondents are interested in acquiring new knowledge and skills for better income-generation opportunities. The top five reported skills desired female respondents were sewing, English language, Malay language, baking, and cooking. The top five skills male respondents reported interest in learning were electricity and wiring, air-conditioner servicing, English language, accounting or business, and auto mechanics.
- ii. Facilitate access to information about livelihood opportunities and protection assistance.
 - a. Family or friends play a critical role in providing information about income generating opportunities in Malaysia. Organisations should leverage the pre-established social network within Rohingya community to enhance access to information about livelihoods opportunities.
 - b. A key social media platform which was widely utilised in the past to seek job opportunities has been inactive since 2020. This potentially affects the ability of respondents to seek work in Malaysia, particularly through informal channels. A similar platform that advertises livelihood opportunities for refugees could be helpful in increasing access to livelihoods among Rohingya community.
 - c. Though a portion of respondents had access to livelihoods in Malaysia, the income often proved to be insufficient to cover all the living expenses. In instances when they faced a risk at work, more than half of respondents were not able to get assistance.
- iii. Advocate for the legal rights to work.
 - a. Livelihood challenges reported among Rohingya refugees stem from the lack of work rights. Advocating for the formal work rights among refugees should remain the fundamental of livelihood programming.

For policymakers in Malaysia:

- i. Formalise refugees' rights to work through engagement with refugee community, private sectors, Malaysian citizens, civil society organisations and international organisations.
 - a. Rohingya refugees reported having the necessary skills to engage in income generating activities in Malaysia but are unable to do so as they lack legal documentation.
 - b. While services and construction sectors are not economic sectors Rohingya refugees traditionally engaged prior to coming to Malaysia, many refugees are already working informally in these industries and could continue to contribute to fulfilling the extensive labour demand in these labour-intensive industries should their legal status and access to the labour market be formalised.
 - c. The government should adopt a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to formalising refugees' work rights through formation of a multi-ministry task force that includes Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Human Resources and Ministry of Economy as well as civil society organisations and refugee-led community-based organisations.
- ii. Promote labour protection and fair compensation for informal employment.
 - a. Rohingya refugees are exposed to a number of protection risks at their workplace. The most common exploitation experienced at the hand of employers, were related to pay. In terms of protection incidents perpetrated by the authorities, the top three reported were related to the lack of legal recognition.
 - b. While refugees are treated as "illegal migrants" under Immigration Act 1959/63, all local and foreign workers in Malaysia, regardless of their legal status are protected under Employment Act 1955, as affirmed in multiple court decisions that involved undocumented migrant workers.³² The labour department should uphold their mandate of protecting the rights of labour including of refugees.

31 Bernama (2019). [Help bear the costs of managing refugees, Muhyiddin urges developed nations](#)

32 FMT Reporters. (2022). [Court of Appeal Affirms Undocumented Can Seek Redress from Labour Court](#); Zul Rafique & Partners. (2022) [The Voices of the Exploited: Undocumented Migrant Workers' Right to File a Claim in Labour Court](#).



Photo Credit: DRC/2023/Ahmad Yusni



ANNEX 1 – Training agenda

Strengthening Research and Advocacy Capacity for Rohingya Refugee Community-Based Organisations in Malaysia

Day 1: Saturday, 16 July 2022		
Time Slot	Session Description	Note/Facilitator
9:00 – 10:30	Opening Session <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome remarks Introduction & icebreaking Briefing on training outline and expected outcome 	ADSP, MMC, DRC
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee Break	
11:00– 12:30	Introduction to research	MMC
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch & Prayer Break	
14:00 – 15:30	Research process (part 1) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Research question Research methods 	MMC
15:30 – 15:45	Coffee Break	
15:45 – 17:00	Research process (part 2) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Data collection Data analysis Dissemination 	MMC [Group activities included]
Day 2: Sunday, 17 July 2022		
9:00 – 9:30	Review of Day 1	Group activities included
9:30 – 10:30	Research design (part 1) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Research window Problem tree analysis (theory and examples) 	Link to advocacy
10:30 – 10:45	Coffee Break	
10:45 – 12:30	Research design (part 2) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss research window for Rohingya-led community-based organizations in Malaysia Develop a problem tree and formulate a research question 	Break into groups MMC
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch & Prayer Break	
14:00 – 15:00	Evidence-based research -Introduction to 4Mi and MMC's publications	MMC
15:00 – 16:00	Ethics in community-based research	MMC
16:00 – 16:15	Coffee Break	
16:15 – 16:45	Dissemination of research findings	MMC
16:45 – 17:00	Review of research component	MMC

Day 3: Monday, 18 July 2022		
9:00 – 10:30	Introduction to Advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is Advocacy? - Principles and guidelines - Advocacy cycle & steps - Examples of good and bad advocacy - How advocacy differs between different organizations (Amnesty vs DRC vs UN) - Community driven advocacy 	ADSP
10:30 – 10:45	Coffee Break	
10:45 – 12:30	Designing Advocacy Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Defining advocacy goal - Key elements of advocacy plans - Theory of Change/Problem tree in the context of advocacy - Group activity 	DRC
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch & Prayer Break	
14:00 – 15:00	Stakeholder Mapping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying key stakeholders - Power mapping grid (interest-influence matrix) - Group activity 	DRC
15:00 – 15:15	Coffee Break	
15:15 – 16:30	Advocacy with the Government	Geutanyoë Foundation
16:30 – 16:45	Summary of Day 3	ADSP

Day 4: Tuesday, 19 July 2022		
9:00 – 10:30	Advocacy with international organisations	International Organization for Migration (IOM) UNHCR
10:30 – 10:45	Coffee Break	
10:45 – 11:45	Advocacy with ASEAN and international bodies	Geutanyoë Foundation
11:45 – 12:30	Engaging the media & social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to work in partnership with media? - How to feed information to the media? What interests them? - How to develop a story and advocacy 	ADSP
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch & Prayer Break	
14:00 – 15:15	Group Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing advocacy message - Drafting a declaration/press note/policy brief 	ADSP
15:15 – 15:30	Presentation of Group Work	ADSP
15:30 – 15:45	Coffee Break	
15:45 – 16:30	Post-training Assessment Test <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research component (MMC) - Advocacy component (ADSP) 	ADSP & MMC
16:30 – 17:00	Closing Session <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Closing Remarks 2. Feedback collection (participants will be given link to a google form to collect their feedback) 3. Certificate ceremony 	ADSP, MMC, DRC



ANNEX 2 – Survey questionnaire

PART 1: Demography

1	Participant Name (first/nick name)	
2	Contact number	
3	Age	
4	Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Woman <input type="checkbox"/> Man <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
5	Year of arrival in Malaysia	
6	What is your migration status?	<input type="checkbox"/> Irregular/no legal document (not registered with UNHCR or expired visa) <input type="checkbox"/> Asylum seeker (registered with UNHCR, waiting for interview) <input type="checkbox"/> Refugee (with UNHCR card) <input type="checkbox"/> Student visa <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
7	Which state are you living in now?	<input type="checkbox"/> Kuala Lumpur <input type="checkbox"/> Melaka <input type="checkbox"/> Terengganu <input type="checkbox"/> Putrajaya <input type="checkbox"/> Kedah <input type="checkbox"/> Pahang <input type="checkbox"/> Selangor <input type="checkbox"/> Johor <input type="checkbox"/> Kelantan <input type="checkbox"/> Pulau Pinang <input type="checkbox"/> Perak <input type="checkbox"/> Perlis <input type="checkbox"/> Negeri Sembilan
8	Are you living in rural or urban area?	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban <input type="checkbox"/> Rural <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
9	Marital status	<input type="checkbox"/> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input type="checkbox"/> Engaged <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced <input type="checkbox"/> Separated <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
10	Do you have child(ren)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, how many? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer
11	Total number of dependents (in Malaysia and other countries e.g. Bangladesh or Myanmar)	
12	Highest level of education completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not complete any schooling <input type="checkbox"/> Primary school <input type="checkbox"/> Primary school (religious, i.e. madrasah) <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary school <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational training <input type="checkbox"/> University (Degree, Masters, PhD., etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

13. Language proficiency (mark one '/' for each language)

	Very poor	Poor	OK	Good	Very good
Rohingya					
Burmese					
Bengali					
Urdu/Hindi					
English					
Malay					

PART 2: Past Livelihoods (during the last 5 years before coming to Malaysia)

14	Did you have any income during the last 5 years before coming to Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
14a	If no, why so? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> I was taking care of the home/children <input type="checkbox"/> I was a student <input type="checkbox"/> I could not find any job <input type="checkbox"/> I was unfit to work (due to health issues/ disabilities) <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if answered 'Yes' in Q14) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
15	What kind of income-generating activities were you involved in during the last 5 years before coming to Malaysia? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Full time job with regular income <input type="checkbox"/> Part time/Casual work <input type="checkbox"/> Business owner/self-employed <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if they didn't work) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
16	In what sector? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Services (cleaning / carwash / grass cutting / waste collector / street sweeper / gardening) <input type="checkbox"/> Restaurant (waiter / waitress / chef) <input type="checkbox"/> Small business owner (market vendor / shop / catering / services) <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture / fishing <input type="checkbox"/> Construction <input type="checkbox"/> Industry / manufacturing <input type="checkbox"/> NGOs/International Organisations (interpreter/volunteer/teacher/community worker) <input type="checkbox"/> Professional services (Finance / IT / Law) <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if they didn't work) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
17	Please state your job(s) during the last 5 years before coming to Malaysia.	
18	How many hours did you usually work per day before coming to Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 8 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 8 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 9-10 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 11-12 hours <input type="checkbox"/> More than 12 hours <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if they didn't work) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
19	How many days did you usually work per week before coming to Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> Irregular (based on job availability) <input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 days <input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 days <input type="checkbox"/> Everyday <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if they didn't work) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
20	How much money did you make in an average month before coming to Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> RM 1-500 <input type="checkbox"/> RM 501-1,000 <input type="checkbox"/> RM 1,001-1,500 <input type="checkbox"/> RM 1,501-2,000 <input type="checkbox"/> More than RM 2,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if they didn't work) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
21	Was your previous income enough to meet your basic needs before coming to Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> More than enough <input type="checkbox"/> Just enough <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if no income) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____





22 How often did you save money **in a month** before coming to Malaysia? Never
 Seldom
 Sometimes
 Always
 Prefer not to answer
 Not applicable (if no income)
 Other: _____

PART 3: Current livelihoods in Malaysia

23	Did you have any income from work during the last 5 years in Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
23a	If no, why so? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> I was taking care of the home/children <input type="checkbox"/> I was a student <input type="checkbox"/> I could not find any job <input type="checkbox"/> I have health issues <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if answered 'Yes' in Q23) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
24	What kind of income-generating activities are you involved in during the last 5 years in Malaysia? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Full time job with regular income <input type="checkbox"/> Casual/occasional work <input type="checkbox"/> Business owner/self-employed <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if they don't work) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
25	In what sector? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Services (cleaning / carwash / grass cutting / waste collector / street sweeper / gardening) <input type="checkbox"/> Restaurant (waiter / waitress / chef) <input type="checkbox"/> Small business owner (recyclable or scrap metal collection / market vendor / shop / catering / services) <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture / fishing <input type="checkbox"/> Construction <input type="checkbox"/> Industry / manufacturing (factory work) <input type="checkbox"/> NGOs/International Organisations (interpreter/volunteer/teacher/community worker) <input type="checkbox"/> Professional services (Finance / IT / Law) <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if they don't work) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
26	Please state all your job(s) during the last 5 years in Malaysia.	
27	How many hours do you usually work per day in Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 8 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 8 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 9-10 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 11-12 hours <input type="checkbox"/> More than 12 hours <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if they don't work) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
28	How many days did you usually work per week in Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> Irregular (based on job availability) <input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 days <input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 days <input type="checkbox"/> Everyday <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if they don't work) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____



29	What is your average daily income in Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> RM 1-25 <input type="checkbox"/> RM 26-50 <input type="checkbox"/> RM 51-75 <input type="checkbox"/> RM 76-100 <input type="checkbox"/> RM 101-150 <input type="checkbox"/> More than RM 150 <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if no income) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
30	What is your average monthly income in Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> RM 1-500 <input type="checkbox"/> RM 501-1,000 <input type="checkbox"/> RM 1,001-1,500 <input type="checkbox"/> RM 1,501-2,000 <input type="checkbox"/> More than RM 2,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if no income) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
31	Is your income enough to meet your basic needs in Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> More than enough <input type="checkbox"/> Just enough <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if no income) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
32	What are other sources of income do you have to support your basic needs? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Support from friends and family (money / in-kind assistance) <input type="checkbox"/> Assistance from NGOs/UNHCR (money / in-kind assistance) <input type="checkbox"/> Savings <input type="checkbox"/> Selling other assets <input type="checkbox"/> Borrowing money <input type="checkbox"/> Seek extra/part-time jobs (take up more than 1 jobs) <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
33	How often do you save money in a month in Malaysia?	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (if no income) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
34	Do you currently have any debt for any of the following? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Food <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare <input type="checkbox"/> Rental <input type="checkbox"/> Education <input type="checkbox"/> Clothes / shoes / blankets <input type="checkbox"/> Communication (phone/laptop/computer/internet) <input type="checkbox"/> Journey to Malaysia (for self / family) <input type="checkbox"/> No debt <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
35	Type of accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/> Apartment / house (non-sharing) <input type="checkbox"/> Apartment / house / room (sharing with others) <input type="checkbox"/> Makeshift shelter (squatter, shack, non-permanent habitation) <input type="checkbox"/> Worker dormitory at farm / construction site <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary shelter home (hosted by NGOs / friends / family) <input type="checkbox"/> No shelter <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
36	Do the school-aged (above 5 years old) children in your household go to school?	<input type="checkbox"/> None go to school <input type="checkbox"/> Some go to school <input type="checkbox"/> All go to school <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable. No school-aged children in household





37 If not school-aged children all go to school, why is it so? Financial issues (can't pay for education)
 No available school nearby/no transportation
 Only boy(s) goes to school, girl(s) stays home
 Children are medically unfit to attend school (disabilities or health issues)
 (select all that apply) Prefer not to answer
 Not applicable (has no children)
 Not applicable (if all children attend school)
 Other

38 In the last 12 months in Malaysia, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? Yes
 No
 Prefer not to answer

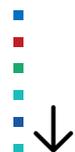
39. Estimated monthly expenses breakdown. State the estimated amount.

	Estimated Amount (state '0' if none)	Prefer not to answer
Rental		
Utilities (water, electricity, gas)		
Communication (phone bill/internet)		
Food		
Transport		
Education		
Healthcare		
Clothing		
Baby-related expenses (diapers, formula milk)		
Leisure/vacation		
Send overseas to family/friends (state how regular if not monthly)		

40 Monthly TOTAL expenses Less than RM500
 RM 501-750
 RM 751-1,000
 (calculate based on Q39) RM 1,000-1,250
 RM 1,251-1,500
 More than RM1,500
 Prefer not to answer

PART 4: Access to employment

41 How do you usually access information about job? Family / friends
 Radio/TV/newspapers
 Rohingya community organisation
 Job agents
 (select all that apply) Social media (Facebook, Instagram)
 NGOs / international organisations (e.g. UNHCR/IOM)
 Local Malaysian
 Go door-to-door looking
 Put on advertisement (flyer/brochure) for freelance work like plumber, aircond servicing
 Prefer not to answer
 Other: _____



42	Have you received livelihoods assistance in the last 12 months? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Financial assistance (for emergency needs) <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational skills training <input type="checkbox"/> Language training <input type="checkbox"/> Community projects (e.g. handicraft making, sewing) <input type="checkbox"/> Business grant (for starting small/online businesses) <input type="checkbox"/> Job referral <input type="checkbox"/> Legal assistance and information on labour protection <input type="checkbox"/> Access to financial institution (opening bank account) <input type="checkbox"/> None. I did not receive any livelihood assistance. <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
43	Who did you receive the assistance from? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> NGOs / international organisations (e.g. UNHCR/IOM) <input type="checkbox"/> Community based organisations <input type="checkbox"/> Family / friends <input type="checkbox"/> Local Malaysians <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (did not receive any livelihood assistance) <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
44	What additional livelihoods assistance do you need the most? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Financial assistance (for emergency needs) <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational skills training <input type="checkbox"/> Language training <input type="checkbox"/> Community projects (e.g. handicraft making, sewing) <input type="checkbox"/> Business grant (for starting small/online businesses) <input type="checkbox"/> Job referral <input type="checkbox"/> Legal assistance and information on labour protection <input type="checkbox"/> Access to financial institution (opening bank account) <input type="checkbox"/> None. I don't need any additional assistance <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

45. To what extent do you agree with the following statement. Please mark '/':

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Prefer not to answer
The information about job I received helps me in getting employed						
The information about job I received is inaccurate.						
The livelihood assistance I received help me in generating income.						
I need more livelihood assistance to sustain my life.						

46. What skills do you have that have been useful for you in your current job(s)?

47. What additional skills do you want to learn that would contribute to better income-generation?



PART 5: Barriers & Work-related risk factors (in Malaysia)

48	What are the barriers to getting employed in Malaysia? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Language and cultural barriers <input type="checkbox"/> Low education level <input type="checkbox"/> No access to bank account <input type="checkbox"/> Gender norms in the community (Rohingya women do not work) <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of relevant skill sets for employment <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of information about job opportunities <input type="checkbox"/> No work permit/visa <input type="checkbox"/> Discrimination by the employers (prefer to hire locals or other non-Rohingya workers) <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
49	What are the main risks perpetrated by the employers/ job agents that you had experienced at workplace? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Wages payment issues (late payment, withholding of wages, deducted wage) <input type="checkbox"/> Low salary (as compared to locals or other migrants) <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive working hours (forced overtime, being denied breaks) <input type="checkbox"/> Hazardous work environment (non-compliant to safety regulation) <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of social protection (health insurance/employee benefits) <input type="checkbox"/> Abuse/harassment (physical/verbal/psychological) <input type="checkbox"/> Unhygienic or poor living conditions (where accommodation is provided) <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> I don't face any risk <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
50	What are the main risks perpetrated by authorities that you had experienced at workplace? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Arrest or detention by authorities <input type="checkbox"/> Bribery/extortion by authorities <input type="checkbox"/> Confiscation of UNHCR card/other IDs by authorities <input type="checkbox"/> UNHCR card/ID being damaged by authorities <input type="checkbox"/> Threat of violence/harassment by authorities <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> I don't face any risk <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
51	Are you able to receive assistance when you faced risks at work? If yes, from whom? (select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, from my employers <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, from my co-workers <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, from NGOs or international organisations <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, from friends or family <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, from authorities <input type="checkbox"/> No, I am not able to get help from others but have to depend on myself <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

52. To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Please mark '✓'.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Prefer not to answer
I have a better livelihood in Malaysia as compared to before.						
I have adequate wages for a decent life in Malaysia.						
I enjoy my job(s) in Malaysia.						
I believe if I work hard, I can get higher pay and have a better life in Malaysia.						
I wish I could contribute more to Malaysian economy.						
I want to return to my country of origin in the future.						

CLOSING

The final question is open for you to tell us about your migration experience in your own words. We may quote your response in our publications. Please remember that all the information you have given us, including this response, is anonymous, and you have the right not to reply.

53. What is the one thing you would like to tell people about your livelihood experience in Malaysia?

Many thanks for your participation in our project! Do you have anything to add or any comment about this survey?

ANNEX 3 – Semi-structured interview guide

PART 1: Background

1	Participant Name (first/nick name)	
2	Contact number	
3	Age	
4	Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
5	Year of arrival in Malaysia	
6	What is your migration status?	<input type="checkbox"/> Irregular/no legal document (not registered with UNHCR or expired visa) <input type="checkbox"/> Asylum seeker (registered with UNHCR, waiting for interview) <input type="checkbox"/> Refugee (with UNHCR card) <input type="checkbox"/> Student visa <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
7	Which state are you living in now?	
8	Marital status	<input type="checkbox"/> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input type="checkbox"/> Engaged <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced <input type="checkbox"/> Separated <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
9	Highest level of education completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not complete any schooling <input type="checkbox"/> Primary school <input type="checkbox"/> Primary school (religious, i.e. madrasah) <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary school <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational training <input type="checkbox"/> University (Degree, Masters, PhD., etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

10. Language proficiency (one 'x' for each language)

	Very poor	Poor	OK	Good	Very good
Rohingya					
Burmese					
Bengali					
Urdu/Hindi					
English					
Malay					

11. Can you share with me about your family?

- how many family members do you have in Malaysia? outside Malaysia? who are they?
- how many of them are dependent on you?
- do you live together? where?
- do you have children? do they go to school?



PART 2: Past livelihoods: This section is about your livelihoods before you came to Malaysia.

12. *Employment Status:* What did you do for a living before coming to Malaysia? (list all)
 - which sector?
 - where was that?
 - can you describe your normal working day?
 - If unemployed,
 - how long were you unemployed?
 - what were the reasons for your unemployment?
 - did you try to look for job? how was the experience?
 - what did you do to get a job?
 - how did you sustain your life without any income from work?
 - did you receive any assistance? from whom? what kind of assistance?
 - was it enough?
13. *Nature of Employment/Business:* Can you describe your work/business/services before coming to Malaysia?
 - what skills did you need for that role?
 - how did you get those skills?
 - how many years of experience did you have in that work/business/services?
14. *Employment/Business Conditions:* Did you like the job/business/services? Why?
 - how were the working hours/seasons?
 - did you work full time/part time?
 - Were you treated fairly at work?
 - Did you face any challenge/risk at work?
15. *Finance:* How was your financial situation before coming to Malaysia?
 - how regular do you get your income? daily? monthly?
 - how much was your monthly/daily income?
 - how much were your average monthly/daily expenses?
 - was the income enough to cover your needs?
 - did you have other sources of income besides work?
 - were you able to save money?
16. *Basic Needs:* Did you have access to basic needs like food, clothes, shelter, education, healthcare with your income?
 - if not, how did you cope with your daily life?

PART 3: Current livelihoods: This section is about your livelihood in Malaysia

17. *Employment Status in Malaysia:* What do you do for a living in Malaysia? (list all in the past 12 months)
 - which sector?
 - where is that?
 - can you describe your normal working day?
 - If unemployed,
 - how long have you been unemployed?
 - what were the reasons for your unemployment?
 - did you try to look for job? how was the experience?
 - what did you do to get a job?
 - how do you sustain your life without any work?
 - do you receive any assistance? from whom?
 - is it enough for your daily expenses?
18. *Nature of Employment/Business in Malaysia:* can you describe your work/business/services in Malaysia?
 - what skills do you need for that role?
 - how do you get those skills?
 - how many years of experience did you have in that work/business/services?
19. *Employment/Business Conditions in Malaysia:* Do you like that job/business/services? why?
 - how are the working hours?
 - do you work full time/part time?
20. *Finance in Malaysia:* How is your financial situation in Malaysia?
 - how regular do you get your income? daily? monthly?
 - how much is your daily/monthly income?
 - how much are your average monthly/daily expenses?
 - did you have other sources of income besides from work?
 - is the income enough to cover your needs?
 - are you able to save money?
21. *Basic Needs in Malaysia:* do you have access to basic needs like food, clothes, shelter, education, healthcare with your income?
 - if not, how did you cope with your life in Malaysia?

PART 4: Access to employment in Malaysia

22. *Access to Information:* How did you get your current job?
- did you receive any help? if yes, from whom?
 - how do you usually access information about job opportunities? from whom?
 - is the information helpful?
 - If you are self-employed or running a business,
 - how did you get into your current role?
 - did you receive any help? if yes, from whom?
 - how do you usually access information about employment/business opportunities? from whom?
 - is the information helpful? how so?
23. *Livelihood Assistance:* Have you received livelihoods assistance in the last 1 year?
- if yes, what were they? who provided the assistance? were they sufficient? in what way does it contribute to your livelihood?
 - if no, what assistance did you wish to receive?
24. *Skill Sets:* What skills do you have? how do you learn the skills? from where?
- How do these skills help you in getting employed? why so?
 - If you are self-employed/have a business,
 - what skills do you need to start a business in Malaysia?
 - how do you learn the skills? from where?
 - do you think those skills helped you in your business/self-employment? why so?
25. Do you think you have a better livelihood in Malaysia as compared to your country of departure/origin? Why so?
- do you enjoy your life/work in Malaysia? why so?

PART 5: Barriers & Work-related risk factors in Malaysia

26. *Barriers to Employment:* What are the key challenges/risks you face when you look for a job/run a business?
- what are the most important factors that help you in getting a job/business?
(*prompt:* friends/money/legal right/UNHCR card/skills/other social connections/location)
 - what should be done so that more Rohingya can get employed or start a business in Malaysia? (*prompt:* NGOs/government/UN/Community)
27. *Risks at Workplace:* Do you feel safe at work? Why so?
- do you face any threats to your safety or security? can you provide an example?
 - what are the challenges you face at work?
28. *Perpetrators: Employers/Job Agents*
- who are your employers (boss)?
 - do they treat you well at your workplace?
 - do you face any challenge at work? if yes, can you share more about it?
 - is your workplace safe? do you have to wear protection gears like helmet?
 - do you get paid on time?
 - do you get the same pay as other co-workers?
 - do they provide you accommodation? describe how is it like living there.
 - what happens if you fall sick? do you get a day off? do you get to go to clinic?
29. *Perpetrators: Authorities*
- have you ever experienced harassment from authorities at your workplace or when you travel to work?
 - if yes, what kind of harassment? what do they do? who are they? when did this happen?
30. *Perpetrators: Co-Workers*
- who are your co-workers? where are they from?
 - how is your interaction with your co-workers?
 - is it positive/negative? any example?
 - do you face any discrimination?
31. *Assistance:* If you faced the risks at workplace above, have you been able to receive help?
- If yes, from whom? what kind of assistance? how did you seek help?
 - If no, what kind of assistance do you wish to get?

CLOSING

32. What is the one thing you would like to tell people about your livelihood experience in Malaysia?

Many thanks for your participation in our project! Do you have anything to add or any comment about this interview?

Protecting Rohingya Refugees in Asia

– towards a coordinated regional approach

Protecting Rohingya Refugees in Asia (PRRIA) is a two-year ECHO-funded initiative launched in 2021 to address protection risks and needs of Rohingya refugees in Southeast Asia. The joint project of the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Geutanyoe Foundation Malaysia, HOST International Malaysia, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Indonesia, and Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) combines evidence-based research, programmatic and advocacy expertise to inform integrated regional protection responses in support of Rohingya refugees as the world's largest stateless population. PRRIA targets 54 local, 20 international, and 27 regional organisations with a particular focus on Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

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Funded by
the European Union