

Briefing Paper

Impact of Climate Change on the Migration and Displacement Dynamics of Rohingya Refugees

May 2024

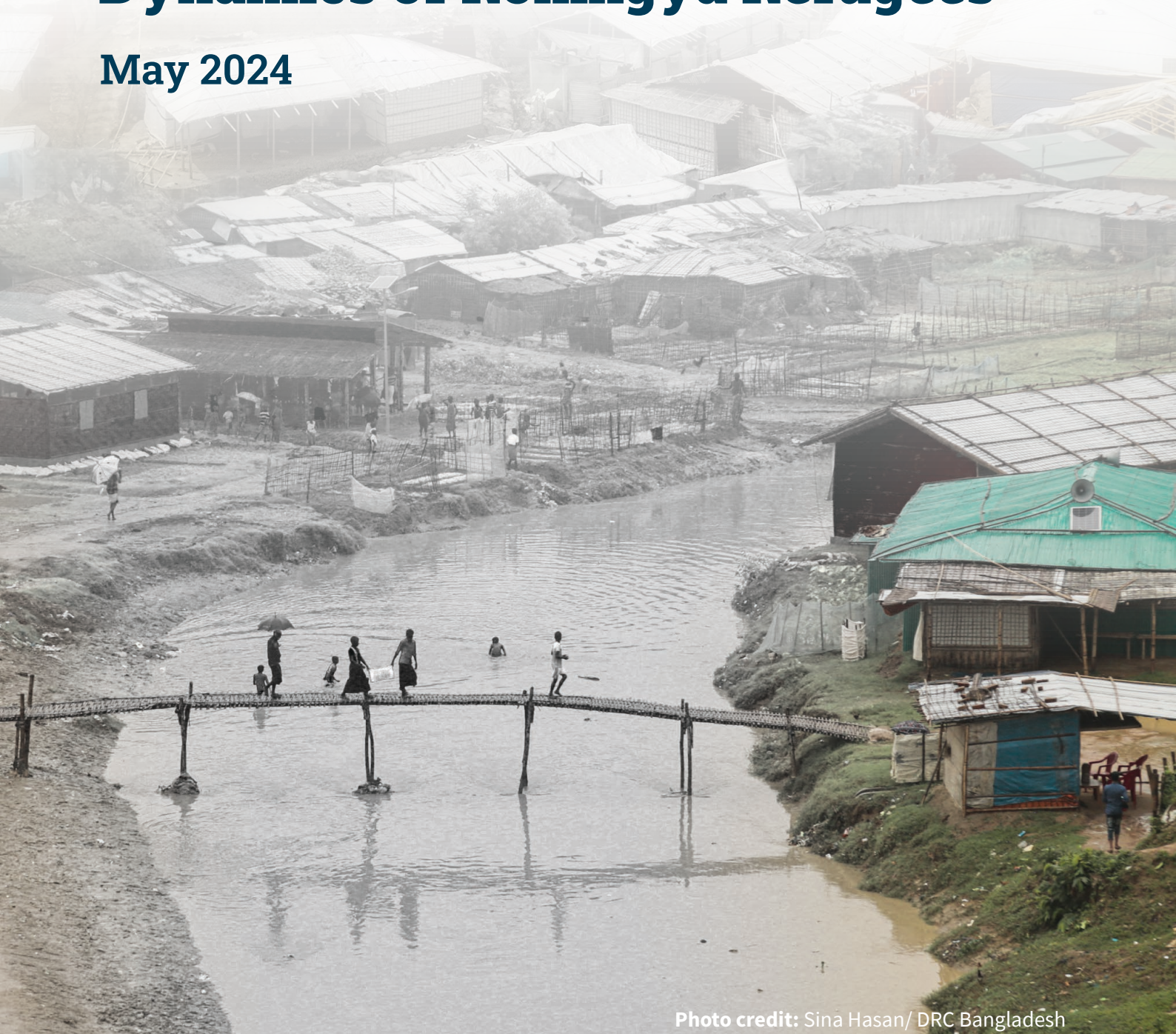


Photo credit: Sina Hasan/ DRC Bangladesh

Protecting Refugees in Asia

– towards a coordinated regional approach



Funded by
the European Union

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The “**Protecting Refugees in Asia**” (PRiA) project is a joint project of Adventist Development & Relief Agency (ADRA), the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), HOST International Malaysia, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Indonesia, and the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), made possible through the generous support of the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO).

This research report was commissioned by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) under the PRiA project and prepared by Jessica Marsh, Human Rights Consulting, with valuable support from Field Research Lead, Mohammad Aziz, as well as a team of Rohingya volunteer researchers. The report was produced with the overall supervision and support of Hui Yin Chuah, Research Officer at Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), and Paul Vernon, Regional Advocacy Specialist, Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rohingya refugees have been forcibly displaced from Myanmar across the Asia region, with close to one million Rohingya in Bangladesh.¹ This research aims to examine the complex ways in which climate change specifically affects (im)mobility for the Rohingya, and to what extent environmental factors interact with other social, economic, and political factors in driving (im)mobility, increasing protection risks, and impacting prospects for achieving durable solutions.

The research took place between December 2023 and February 2024. The research methodology comprised a mixed methods approach incorporating a literature review, 4Mi survey data among 4,064 Rohingya in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand; 200 household surveys in Cox’s Bazar, and 36 semi-structured key informant interviews with representatives of Rohingya-led grassroots organisations in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand; as well as key stakeholders at the global, regional and national levels engaged in humanitarian policy and programming, disaster preparedness and response, climate change, and refugee protection.

There is growing recognition that climate change is a factor driving displacement – primarily within borders, but also across international borders (usually within the same region).² Climate change is seen as a “**threat multiplier**,” exacerbating existing inequalities and risks - for example, through destroying shelter or increasing food insecurity.³ Groups such as the Rohingya who have been displaced by conflict are more likely to be **secondarily displaced** by disasters. This is because refugees often settle in hazard-prone areas, with temporary shelters, and usually have limited resources and local networks.⁴

Although economic and socio-political factors are often viewed as the primary drivers of migration it is important to not neglect “underlying structural forces” which may be important yet not perceived by individuals.⁵ This research centres on the subjective perceptions of Rohingya of the environmental impacts that they are facing, and aims to assess how these impacts are interacting with other aspects of their lives, including social, economic and political factors, and how these intersections may be influencing mobility.

¹ UNHCR Operational Data Portal (accessed 20 February 2024) [Refugee Response in Bangladesh](#)

² UNHCR (1 October 2020) [Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters](#);

UNHCR (15 November 2023) [Climate change and displacement: the myths and the facts](#)

³ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (5 October 2022) [Climate change is a threat multiplier for women and girls: UN expert](#); World Health Organisation (12 October 2023) [Climate Change: Key facts](#); Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, [Climate Mobility Hub](#)

⁴ Calabria, E. et al (2022) [Anticipatory Action in Refugee and IDP Camps: Challenges, Opportunities, and Considerations, Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre: Mixed Migration Centre](#) (2022) [Climate change, environmental stressors, and mixed migration](#)

⁵ This point was raised in the landmark 2011 Foresight Report, which recognises five key interdependent drivers of migration: economic, social, political, demographic and environmental. See: The Government Office for Science, London (2011) [Foresight: Migration and Global Environmental Change, Final Project Report](#) p46

RECOMMENDATIONS

Crosscutting Recommendations

- Upscale ‘nexus’ and ‘resilience’ approaches to reduce vulnerability of refugees and their host communities to the effects of climate change as a threat multiplier.
- Fully include refugees and other forcibly displaced populations into national and local climate change and disaster management frameworks and response mechanisms.
- More strongly integrate and address climate mobility in regional climate mechanisms and disaster frameworks.
- Make multi-year climate financing for adaptation and resilience programmes and initiatives accessible to displaced populations such as the Rohingya who are at risk of climate-induced loss and damage.
- Scale up and expand access to safe migration pathways through increased resettlement and complementary pathways as part of an expanded package of solutions for Rohingya refugees, including through supporting innovative linkages between portable green skills building and expanded access to labour complementary pathways.
- Integrate climate change considerations into assessments of future voluntary, safe, dignified and durable return options for refugees.

For Host Countries

- *For the Government of Bangladesh*
 - Ensure that non-nationals at risk of climate-related onward movement are included into the National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management and the National Action Plan (2022-2042) under the ‘prevention’ and ‘protection’ thematic areas.
 - Further scale up movement between Bhasan Char and mainland camps and ensure freedom of movement for Rohingya around the island, and within Cox’s Bazar.
 - Support efforts to improve safety, disaster preparedness and reduce exposure to environmental hazards for refugees in Bhasan Char.
 - Support the inclusion of Rohingya in disaster risk reduction strategies, early warning systems, and neighbourhood-based disaster preparedness initiatives.
 - Support efforts to build Rohingya-led disaster preparedness and response capacity and support the adequate provision of accessible cyclone shelters to Rohingya.
 - Allow for more climate-resilient and sustainable shelters to be built using more durable and weather resistant construction materials.
- *For the Governments of other Host Countries in the region*
 - Adopt ‘nexus’ and ‘resilience’ approaches to reduce the vulnerability of Rohingya and their host communities to the impacts of climate change and better prepare Rohingya to access complementary pathways and durable solutions in the future.
 - Ensure that refugees and other forcibly displaced populations are included into the design and implementation of national climate action policies and plans.

For Humanitarian Actors

- Work towards strengthening existing disaster preparedness initiatives by supporting proactive planning for emergency evacuations, provision for cyclone shelters in safe areas, and improved early warning systems.
- Continue to highlight the financial, protection, and environmental benefits of climate-resilient and sustainable shelter solutions.
- Support efforts to build the capacity of refugee-led organisations and provide them with material and technical support to act as first responders in a climate emergency.
- Build the capacity of Rohingya refugee-led organisations to access loss and damage financing.
- Empower and support Rohingya to take on leadership and decision-making responsibilities in

climate action and anticipatory action initiatives.

- Integrate considerations of the impact of environmental factors on protection risks in protection programming.
- Support and implement ‘nexus’ interventions that strengthen refugee and host community resilience and mitigate loss and damage from climate impacts.
- Integrate gender-responsive and intersectional considerations, and conflict-sensitive approaches into all ‘nexus’ and ‘resilience’ programming.
- Explore opportunities to support portable ‘green’ skills-building and livelihoods activities that engage Rohingya and their host communities in environmental conservation, climate mitigation activities, and infrastructure development activities.

For Donors

- Follow up and support the implementation of pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum to strengthen climate resilience and adaptation measures in Bangladesh, including investing in climate-resilient infrastructure, water and sanitation systems, and climate resilient-livelihoods.
- Support initiatives to strengthen local capacities, systems, and structures to increase refugees and their host communities’ ability to withstand climate shocks.
- Scale up multi-year financing for adaptation and strengthening resilience for displaced populations who are at risk of climate-related loss and damage, such as the Rohingya in Bangladesh.
- Ensure that already-displaced populations are considered as primary recipients of loss and damage funding through mechanisms such as the Santiago network and the ASEAN Climate Finance Strategy.
- Work to integrate climate financing with existing humanitarian, disaster risk reduction, and development funding streams.
- Support climate resilience and adaptation initiatives in Rakhine State in Myanmar to enhance preparedness for safe, dignified and durable returns.
- Increase funding for anticipatory action for displaced populations such as the Rohingya, with targeted investment in developing forecasting mechanisms, and risk and vulnerability mapping.
- Explore innovative ways of linking portable green skills-building with expanded access to ‘green’ education and labour complementary pathways.

For Regional Actors

- *For Governments in South and Southeast Asia*
 - Develop regional cooperation mechanisms to respond to climate-related displacement, which should include free movement agreements and support for mobility as an effective form of climate adaptation.
 - Work towards establishing bilateral frameworks which would offer protection pathways, entry and stay, and temporary humanitarian protection to migrants in vulnerable situations and at particular risk of climate induced displacement.
- *For the Platform on Disaster Displacement*
 - Explore opportunities to engage and collaborate with the government of Bangladesh and ASEAN to develop regional and multilateral instruments to provide protection for those at risk of cross-border disaster displacement.
- *For the Asia Pacific Disaster Displacement Working Group*
 - Work towards developing more harmonised and protection-driven regional disaster frameworks, ensuring adequate attention is paid to climate-related cross-border disaster displacement in the context of both slow and rapid-onset climate events.
- *For the Second ASEAN Migration Outlook*
 - Provide recommendations for how ASEAN can integrate migrants at particular risk of climate impacts (such as Rohingya across the region) into climate mobility and labour mobility policies at the national and regional levels and outline a roadmap towards developing a comprehensive regional approach to climate mobility.
- *For the ASEAN Centre for Climate Change*
 - Conduct transboundary climate risk assessments in the area of human mobility and invest in developing regional forecasting mechanisms to support anticipatory action.

- *For the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management*
 - Ensure inclusion of all vulnerable groups including refugees as part of the implementation of the ASEAN Framework on Anticipatory Action in Disaster Management.
- *For the ASEAN Working Group on Climate Change (AWGCC) and the ASEAN Senior Officials on Environment (ASOEN)*
 - Facilitate mutual learning and collaboration around the issue of climate mobility through regular intergovernmental dialogues.

KEY FINDINGS

Current onward migration from Bangladesh - Irregular migration to other parts of the region has been occurring from Cox's Bazar refugee camps in increasing numbers. 49% of household survey respondents confirmed that someone in their household had migrated or attempted to migrate outside of Cox's Bazar. While insecurity, conflicts, and deprivation of rights remain primary reasons for migration, environmental hazards such as cyclones, floods, landslides, and extreme weather also contribute, albeit to a lesser extent. Notably, 4Mi survey respondents departing from Bangladesh were eight times more likely to cite natural disasters and environmental factors as drivers compared to those leaving from Myanmar. This indicates the significant influence of environmental conditions on Rohingya migration, particularly evident in Bangladesh.

Climate or environmental factors are not currently a primary driver of onward movement of Rohingya from Bangladesh, however it was acknowledged that climate change is likely an indirect driver and may contribute increasingly to movement in the region in the future.

Internal displacement, relocation and evacuations - While the connection between environmental factors and cross-border migration appears weak based on the survey findings, the research shows a significant evidence of climate or environmental hazards driving internal displacement, predominantly temporary in nature, within the camps in Bangladesh. Rohingya in the camps reported pre-emptive and reactive mobility in response to hazards including floods, landslides and cyclones. Survey respondents indicated a need for more proactive planned evacuations, as well as support for relocation of shelters from hazard-prone areas.

Climate impacts en route - Climate change exacerbates the already hazardous journey undertaken by Rohingya to Southeast Asia via maritime routes. The increasing frequency and unpredictability of extreme weather significantly affect their journey. Key informants among the Rohingya community perceive climate change as already negatively impacting their migration, citing instances of loss of life and boats sinking due to cyclones and extreme weather en route. In 2023, 13% of Rohingya embarking on sea journeys were reported to have perished or gone missing, marking the highest recorded death rate to date.⁶ Humanitarian responders acknowledge that while climate change may make weather and ocean conditions less predictable and possibly more dangerous, current efforts on irregular movement in the region do not adequately address how climate change impacts onward movement or related risks.



We know Asia is the most disaster-prone region in the world. Even if Rohingya are not primarily motivated by climate change to get onto boats, there are connections.

- Regional humanitarian actor



⁶ UNHCR (2024) [UNHCR: Urgent action needed to address dramatic rise in Rohingya deaths at sea](#)

Involuntary Immobility - Of the respondents who said that nobody in their household had migrated or attempted to migrate, 44% of them indicated this was because they were unable to do so, not because they did not want to. Displaced Rohingya are effectively contained, with very limited freedom of movement both in internal displacement camps in Myanmar,⁷ and in refugee camps in Bangladesh.⁸ Additionally, the lack of rights to livelihood opportunities deprives them further of the means needed to leave, which poses serious protection challenges, particularly in the case of sudden onset disasters like cyclones.

This forced or involuntary immobility takes on a new dimension in the context of climate change and natural disasters, where an inability to move can significantly decrease the ability to withstand, and even survive environmental hazards, particularly in the context of rapid onset disasters.

If we need to leave the camp in an emergency, we feel fear in our hearts, as we might be stopped at a checkpoint, face mistreatment, or encounter attempts to extort bribes.

- 24-year-old Rohingya man

Relocation to - and effective containment on - Bhasan Char

Since May 2020, Bangladesh has relocated over 30,000 Rohingya refugees from Cox's Bazar to Bhasan Char, a remote island in the Bay of Bengal prone to tidal surges, monsoons, cyclones and flooding.⁹ Despite authorities' claims of safer and more secure shelter,¹⁰ concerns persist regarding the island's remoteness (three to five hours by boat from the mainland), lack of emergency preparedness, access to healthcare and humanitarian support, and basic habitability.¹¹ Humanitarian actors expressed strong doubts about whether the island could be safely evacuated in the event of a disaster.

Rohingya key informants referred to cases where people agreed to move to Bhasan Char because they were coerced, or because they had no other options. Examples included households in Cox's Bazar whose shelters were damaged, or were facing constant risk of landslides and flooding, who were not permitted to move to another location within the camp, who therefore ultimately signed up for relocation to Bhasan Char. Upon relocation, some reported that they continue to face environmental challenges. Attempts to leave Bhasan Char to return to the mainland have resulted in arrest, detention, abuse, and extortion by Bangladeshi authorities.

The biggest issue is a lack of mobility. We have been lucky that many cyclones have missed Bhasan Char. The concern is how you would move people off the island if needed.

- Regional humanitarian actor

Future mobility - Violence and conflict within the community in Cox's Bazar was overwhelmingly nominated (by 64% of respondents) as a primary reason for possible future migration. However, upon further probing, 53% of respondents indicated that if environmental factors in Bangladesh (such as cyclones and flooding) worsen this would be likely to contribute to future decisions to migrate. This suggests a complex interplay between climate and environmental factors and other drivers, often not readily acknowledged due to their

⁷ Danish Refugee Council and Stockholm Environment Institute (2022) [Exploring the Environment-Conflict-Migration Nexus in Asia, Asia Climate Framework - Research Report](#) p2

⁸ Youth Congress Rohingya (2023) [This persecution is the worst there is: Restrictions on Rohingya freedom of movement in Bangladesh](#)

⁹ Nguyen, Hanh and Lewis, Themba (8 February 2022), [Bhasan Char and Refugee 'Warehousing'](#), The Diplomat

¹⁰ Neef et al (2023) [The Conflict, Climate Change, and Displacement Nexus Revisited: The Protracted Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh](#), Journal of Peacebuilding & Development

¹¹ Human Rights Watch (7 June 2011) ["An Island Jail in the Middle of the Sea"](#)

indirect influence. Additionally, survey findings indicate that environmental factors also play a substantial role in decisions regarding return to Myanmar, raising the possibility of ‘**climate-induced forced return**’, a little understood or studied phenomenon. This phenomenon poses novel questions about the voluntariness of return and international obligations to protect already-displaced populations facing climate change risks.

Climate change as a “threat multiplier” - Although the majority of surveyed Rohingya did not identify climate change or environmental hazards as a primary driver of current migration, on further examination, it is clear that **environmental factors that may be linked to climate change interact with, and sometimes act as a “threat multiplier” in relation to other drivers of movement including better access to shelter, health, sanitation, food and water security, and livelihoods**. The impacts of climate change can also amplify intersectional protection risks in relation to age, gender and disability.

Interactions between environmental factors and pre-existing vulnerabilities

Shelter, sanitation, health, food and water security

In the last monsoon, a landslide happened near my shelter, and my shelter was partially damaged.... I requested them to build concrete walls on the hill slope to prevent further landslides, but they built it with bamboo. I also requested them to help rebuild my shelter, but they didn't. They only gave me a shelter kit, and I had to build my shelter by myself.

**- 39-year-old Rohingya man,
Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh**

In recent years, the weather seasons have been extreme over the camp. During the hot weather, our people have to suffer from unbearable heat inside shelters made of plastic.

**- Rohingya community leader,
man, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh**

When it's cold, we sell some of our food rations so that we can buy some blankets and warm clothes.

**- 48-year-old Rohingya woman,
Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh**

In Cox's Bazar, 'shelter' intersects in a multi-directional way with climate change, both contributing to environmental degradation following the rapid expansion of refugee settlements, while at the same time, increasing human vulnerability to climate impacts. Respondents identified that the nature of shelters and infrastructure in the camps was significantly impeding their ability to withstand climate and environmental impacts.

Shelters made from tarpaulin and bamboo offer inadequate protection against extreme weather, and compound threats to Rohingya refugees' lives. Over the past seven years, Rohingya refugees have been compelled to repeatedly repair or rebuild shelters due to environmental hazards, exacerbating budget strains and environmental pressures. Advocacy for weather-resistant materials has seen limited success. On Bhasan Char, while shelters are more durable, corrugated iron roofing leads to overheating.

The research also highlights connections between climate impacts, and health and sanitation, including health issues from extreme heat; the spread of disease in congested camps due to adverse weather; and environmental and health risks from flooding, landslides, water shortages and ineffective drainage systems.

Climate impacts extend to food and water security, with delays in food assistance due to cyclones and climate-related damage to crops leading to supply shortages and increased prices among Rohingya communities. Soil salinification on Bhasan Char threatens agricultural productivity and foreshadows future water security crises. As these challenges intensify in the face of climate change, migration may increasingly be seen as a solution.

Livelihoods

Some daily labour workers can't go to work due to extreme hot weather... due to heavy precipitation, floods occur which hinders farmers from cultivating the land... many of us can't afford proper warm clothes, and people who need to go to daily labour work in the early morning suffer from the extreme cold.

- Rohingya youth leader, man, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

A significant number of respondents citing the lack of livelihood opportunities as a primary driver for leaving Bangladesh. With restrictions on accessing formal livelihoods, nearly all respondents rely on external support such as humanitarian aid and remittances while residing in Cox's Bazar. However, this support often proves inadequate.

The challenge of accessing adequate livelihoods is exacerbated by environmental factors, particularly affecting daily wage workers. Conversely, the lack of livelihoods also undermines respondents' resilience and ability to cope with climate impacts, illustrating the complex and interconnected relationship between environmental factors and the broader livelihood challenges faced by Rohingya refugees.

Protection, gender and inclusion

Whenever we feel extremely warm we go out of our shelter to get natural fresh air but our women and girls don't have that opportunity. The women and girls have to suffer a lot inside the small and hot shelter.

- 28-year-old Rohingya man, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Household surveys and key informant interviews identified clear gendered impacts of climate change, demonstrating how climate change can amplify intersectional risks. Due to cultural and security considerations, Rohingya women are largely confined to their shelters within the camps.¹² They therefore face disproportionate impacts of extreme heat, and available coping mechanisms are limited.

Rohingya women and girls face heightened exposure to gender based violence during and after disaster events.¹³ Temporary and small shelters, and inadequate sanitation facilities, create privacy issues and can increase gender-based impacts and protection risks.¹⁴ For example, when shelters are destroyed by cyclones, families are rendered homeless, and women and girls do not have a private space to change sanitary pads, which can have follow-on effects on girls' attendance at education centres.

I am suffering lots of problems with livelihoods as I don't have anyone to make any income. As a widowed woman I have to face many challenges. I don't see a good solution to solve it. I don't have enough warm clothes for me and for my son.

- 41-year-old Rohingya woman, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Women-headed households, widowed, single or unaccompanied women face even greater protection challenges, as they may have less ability to access livelihood opportunities, may have sole caring responsibilities, and may be at heightened risk of exploitation and gender-based violence.

¹² Oxfam, [Breaking barriers for Rohingya refugee women](#)

¹³ Danish Refugee Council and Stockholm Environment Institute (2022) [Exploring the Environment-Conflict-Migration Nexus in Asia, Asia Climate Framework - Research Report](#); Protection Sector (Quarter 4 2023) [Joint Protection Monitoring Report](#)

¹⁴ Norwegian Refugee Council (2023) [5 things you should know about shelters for refugees in Bangladesh](#)

BUILDING CLIMATE-RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE RESPONSES

The future for Rohingya refugees seems bleak, painted even darker by the brushstrokes of climate change and the conditions in Arakan State and in Bangladesh. Whether they dream of returning to Myanmar, building a new life in Bangladesh, or finding a safe haven elsewhere, the odds are stacked against them... The international community must find a sustainable solution for Rohingya refugees.

- Rohingya youth leader, man, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Global frameworks: In addressing the potential implications of climate change on migration and displacement in South and Southeast Asia, it is crucial to draw upon existing global instruments and guidance - including the *Nansen Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change (the Protection Agenda)*, the *Global Compact for Migration (GCM)*, and the *Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)*; as well as existing models and approaches in other parts of the world such as the *Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility*, Article 16 of the *Protocol on Free Movement of Persons in the IGAD Region*, Article 1(2) of the *OAU Convention*; and Article III(3) of the *Cartagena Declaration*.

Regional and national frameworks: Key regional bodies relevant to countries of Rohingya displacement in Asia include the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). However, neither has established regional refugee law or refugee protection framework, nor do they have specific mechanisms for addressing climate-induced mobility. Nonetheless, some existing state policies could potentially offer protective pathways, entry and stay, and temporary regular status for migrants in vulnerable situations, such as displaced populations in the context of both conflicts and disasters.¹⁵ While all South and Southeast Asian countries have developed institutional frameworks for addressing climate change, mobility and durable solutions for climate-induced displacement are generally inadequately integrated, if addressed at all, and there is a need to scale up proactive and forward-looking responses to the human mobility dimensions of climate change.¹⁶

Despite challenges in establishing a new protection framework for climate-related cross-border displacement, there are several potential avenues for developing more coordinated regional responses to internal and cross-border climate mobility. Engagement with existing platforms such as the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) and the Asia Pacific Disaster Displacement Working Group (AP DDWG) offers opportunities for developing regional protection instruments concerning internal and cross-border climate mobility. Bilateral frameworks between governments in the region can also play a crucial complementary role in providing migrants at risk of climate induced displacement with protection pathways, entry and stay, and temporary humanitarian protection.

Safe third country pathways: As part of a comprehensive approach to climate change, measures to ensure adaptation and resilience *in situ* must be complemented by efforts to support options to move in a safe and dignified manner. Without accessible pathways for safe migration, irregular maritime movement from Bangladesh is likely to continue to escalate, in spite of increasingly perilous risks posed by cyclones and

¹⁵ UN OHCHR (2022) [Pathways to Migrant Protection: A mapping of national practice for admission and stay on human rights and humanitarian grounds in Asia and the Pacific](#)

¹⁶ While not a focus of this report, it is noted that Pakistan's 2023 National Adaptation Plan contains several references to displacement and refugees in the context of climate change, as well as the climate-conflict-migration nexus. See: Government of Pakistan (2023) [National Adaptation Plan](#)

extreme weather during such journeys.

In addition to taking immediate action to ensure protection for Rohingya at sea, the international community should work with the government of Bangladesh to expand access to third country pathways for the Rohingya. Given the ongoing instability and violence in Myanmar, and the dwindling humanitarian funding for the Cox's Bazar camp, third country pathways can play an important role as part of an expanded package of solutions for Rohingya refugees. In addition to resettlement, offers of complementary pathways, including through higher education opportunities, labour mobility, family reunification and private or community sponsorship, should also be scaled up.¹⁷

Nexus/resilience approaches: A collective emphasis on climate-resilient development is essential for both refugee and host communities to withstand the impacts of climate change. Recognising the intricate linkages between socioeconomic factors and environmental vulnerabilities, longer-term strategies are imperative to enable both refugee and host communities build resilience to respond to the compounding effects of climate change. This entails fostering new partnerships and adopting innovative approaches to address the intersecting challenges of climate change and displacement. Strategies focussing on resilience, social protection and economic inclusion, 'building forward better,' anticipatory action, and localisation of resources and responses, will be key to mitigating climate-related protection risks in displacement settings.

Climate finance: In the face of chronic humanitarian funding shortfalls, diversifying funding sources, including engagement with non-traditional donors such as international financial institutions and the private sector, and mobilising climate funding for specific climate-related interventions with displaced populations - such as disaster risk reduction, anticipatory action, water and sanitation, environmental regeneration, and sustainable energy, is crucial. The operationalisation of the 'loss and damage' fund under the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) for Loss and Damage and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)¹⁸ presents a new mechanism through which to finance resilience-building in Rohingya displacement settings. As climate impacts proliferate, climate action should be mobilised to promote refugee community resilience, self-reliance and preparedness in order to address the needs of displaced climate-affected populations throughout the displacement cycle.

Disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response: The international community and donors have a crucial role in providing strategic support to States hosting Rohingya in the context of disasters and adverse effects of climate change. Advocacy efforts should prioritise the integration of vulnerable populations, including non-citizens, into national and regional disaster management frameworks. Utilising politically neutral language such as 'people present in the territory' can help facilitate this inclusion. As locally led disaster risk reduction (DRR), preparedness and response gain momentum within displacement settings, which may include nature-based solutions, early warning systems, anticipatory action, evacuations, planned relocation, and initiatives aimed at 'building back better',¹⁹ acknowledging the agency of Rohingya communities as frontline responders to climate impacts is paramount.

Localisation and refugee leadership: Interventions should leverage the existing capacities and resilience of Rohingya communities, placing them at the forefront of developing and implementing solutions to climate-related challenges in host countries and on the move. By prioritising meaningful refugee participation and leadership, localised approaches are more likely to be effective in context and less prone to maladaptation.²⁰ Rohingya are already involved as key actors in climate action and humanitarian initiatives in Bangladesh and the wider region. Rohingya diaspora have also been active in funding grassroots initiatives and engaging in advocacy. Rohingya key informants were commonly involved in and leading protection, resilience and adaptation work, information campaigns, as well as emergency preparedness, response and recovery efforts. However, Rohingya key informants reported that their roles are often informal, not respected or adequately recognised, and not fairly compensated (if at all). Bangladesh's MCPP incorporates

¹⁷ See, for example, UNHCR (2023) [2nd batch of Rohingya scholars arrive in Philippines for Complementary Pathways programme](#).

¹⁸ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2023) [Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts, Proposal by the President, Draft decision-/CP.28, FCCC/CP/2023/L.5](#)

¹⁹ See, for example, UNDRR's December 2023 [Workshop on preventing, managing and finding solutions to disaster and climate-induced displacement](#), which focussed on internal displacement in the Asia-Pacific region:

²⁰ Danish Refugee Council and Stockholm Environment Institute (2022) [Exploring the Environment-Conflict-Migration Nexus in Asia, Asia Climate Framework - Research Report](#) p3

the concept of ‘locally led adaptation hubs to enhance local empowerment and resilience with loss and damage finance.’ The humanitarian sector should take the lead in building the capacity of Rohingya RLOs to engage with this policy framework, and advocate for refugee-inclusive national approaches that would allow for direct engagement by Rohingya RLOs.

“

If we get the chance to work and provide services to our own people, we will be able to do that because we can understand one another better than anyone else. The humanitarians should collaborate with us regarding services and responses to our people. It would be better if Rohingya-led organisations are provided with funding to provide emergency responses, education and awareness to our people.

- Rohingya human rights advocate, woman, Delhi, India

”

Protecting Refugees in Asia

– towards a coordinated regional approach

Protecting Refugees in Asia (PRIA) is a three-year ECHO-funded initiative launched in 2021 to address protection risks and needs of refugees in Southeast Asia. Phase II (2023-24) of the joint project of the Adventist Development & Relief Agency (ADRA), Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), HOST International Malaysia, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Indonesia, and the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), combines evidence-based research, programmatic and advocacy expertise to inform integrated regional protection responses in support of refugees. PRIA targets 65 local, 20 international, and 27 regional organisations with a particular focus on Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and India.

