

DESPERATE JOURNEYS: ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN SEARCH OF PROTECTION



Over 1 million Rohingya refugees, a stateless Muslim minority from Myanmar, have fled conflict and persecution in Myanmar in successive waves of displacement. The largest exodus took place in August 2017, when more than 742,000 individuals fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh. The region now hosts 1.1 million Rohingya refugees with limited opportunities to develop self-reliance. With dwindling humanitarian assistance, many risk their lives, undertaking desperate journeys¹ in search of safety and solutions. For additional information and statistics, please visit the [Myanmar Situation Data Portal](#).

KEY FIGURES | 01 January 2022 – 30 June 2024



by land

11,700 Rohingya refugees
attempted the land journey



by sea

9,300 Rohingya refugees attempted
the sea journey on **109** boats



21,000 Rohingya refugees attempted the land or sea journey

¹ For the purposes of this document, the simplified term “movement” refers to Rohingya fleeing by land and/or sea directly from Myanmar and/or travelling in an onward movement from a country where they sought refuge and international protection. ‘Attempted’ movements include intercepted/stopped movements as well as those reaching their intended destinations. The information in this report is compiled and triangulated from various sources, including governments, partners, UNHCR operations, media reports and interviews with refugees. All data is provisional and subject to change.

Photo: A Rohingya girl poses while holding a book at a temporary shelter in Kulam village, Aceh, 3 May 2024. ©UNHCR/Jemma Galvin

DEVELOPMENTS IN 2024

- A total of 2,000 Rohingya refugees attempted land and sea movements in 2024 out of which 1,300 embarked on perilous sea journeys and 104 were reported deceased or missing from maritime movements.
- In addition to sea movements, **around 700 Rohingya refugees are known to have undertaken land movements in the first six months of 2024**, with the vast majority reporting detention by authorities or other protection risks along the land routes.² Given the lack of access and information on the often-clandestine land movements, the actual figures are likely to be higher.
- With 4,300 Rohingya refugees departing on perilous maritime movements and 416 reported deceased or missing, 2023 saw the highest number of attempted sea journeys and was the deadliest year on record since the 2015 Andaman Sea Crisis. **Comparing the first six months of 2023 with the same period in 2024, the data suggests that the worrisome trend observed for 2023 will continue at the same high levels in 2024**, as an estimated 1,300 people have so far embarked on sea movements in the first half of 2024 compared to 1,400 people during the same period in 2023.
- At least three **known tragic accidents at sea have occurred, resulting in 51 confirmed deaths and 53 people missing** between January and June 2024. Inconsistent with the principle of non-refoulment and the laws of the sea, survivors have reported practices of push backs and delayed disembarkations that resulted in deaths. In addition, widespread physical abuse, including gender-based violence, was reported by the survivors.
- While Malaysia and Indonesia continue to be the main intended destinations for the maritime movements in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal, during the first six months of 2024, reports from UNHCR partners and media coverage indicate that people fleeing Myanmar are increasingly using boats to cross the Naf River in search of protection in Bangladesh, with a significant number of people reportedly denied access to territory.
- Nearly 2,700 Rohingya refugees are currently detained in countries along the route outside of Myanmar** on immigration charges, often indefinitely and without due process of the law. Out of these, 82 have serious medical conditions, 199 are children, of whom 90 are unaccompanied or separated children. A significant number of these Rohingya refugee detainees have been incarcerated for prolonged periods that span several years. Within Myanmar, over 400 Rohingya were newly detained between January and June 2024, resulting in at least **3,100 Rohingya in detention**. With restricted access by UNHCR and partners to detention centres, the actual figure may be higher.

**ROHINGYA REFUGEES
ATTEMPTING JOURNEYS | 2024**



2,000 by land and sea

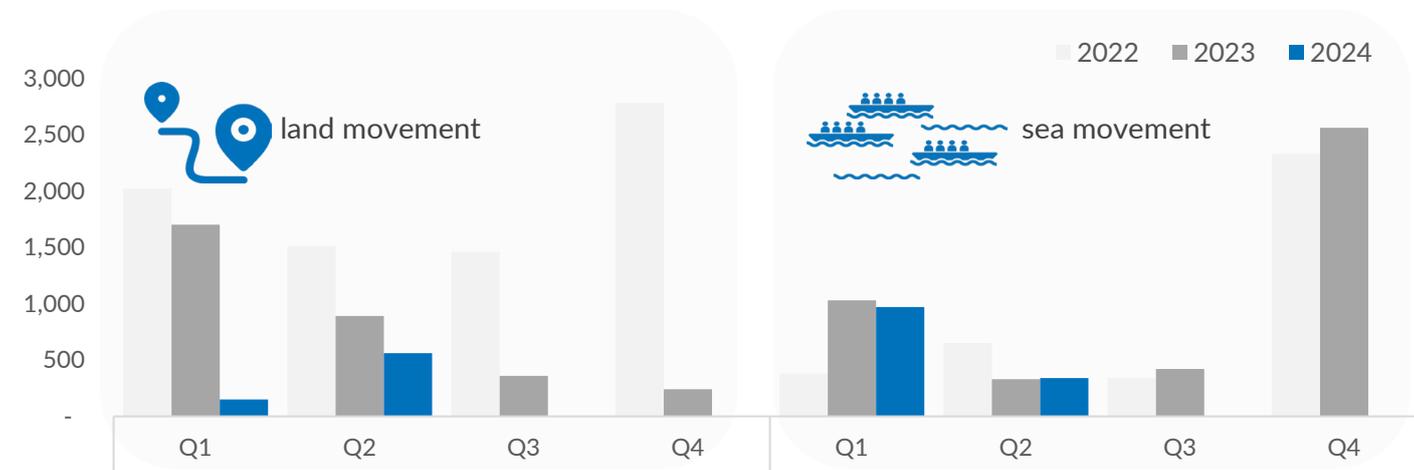


700 by land



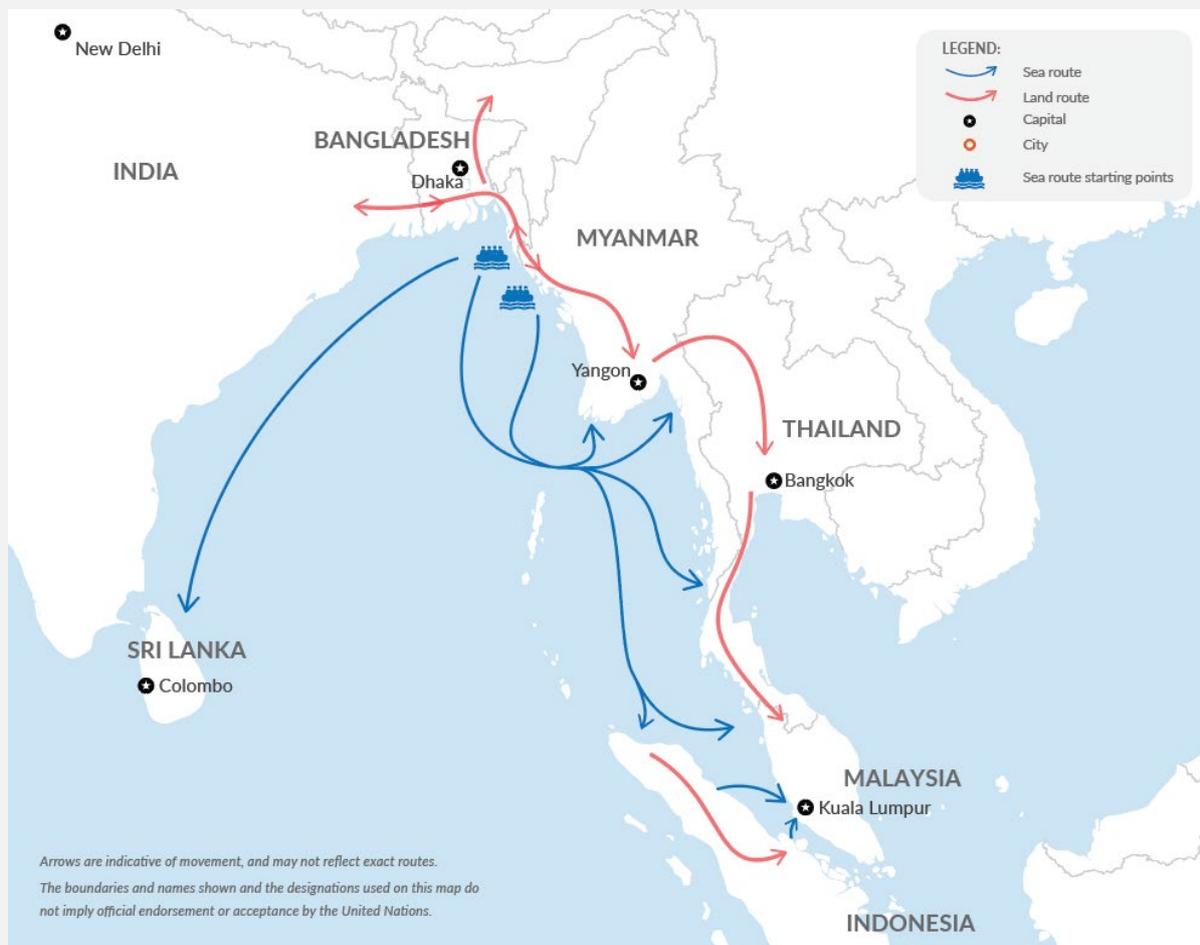
1,300 by sea in 28 boats

Land and sea movements – quarterly trends



² Source: UNHCR

Land and sea journey routes taken in 2022-2024



Land and sea movements are often combined in multiple sub-routes, covering various countries, to reach the intended destination. While efforts are made to capture all land and sea movements, it is recognized that many journeys are not known due to their clandestine nature.

MYANMAR IN FOCUS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS



634,000
Estimated Rohingya
in Rakhine state



1,200
Irregular land and sea
movements in 2024
(Rakhine and Bangladesh)



32%
of 2024 departures
were children



417
Arrests in Myanmar
in 2024 for irregular
movements

Heightened levels of armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights abuses and displacement continue to be central features of the current situation in Myanmar. Since February 2021, over 3 million people have been displaced, including over 1.6 million people since October 2023, with many forced to attempt to seek safety in neighboring countries.

The number of individuals from Myanmar seeking international protection is significantly underreported, due to limitations in accessing registration coupled with irregular or regularized stay arrangements that are used in the absence of fully functional asylum systems in many countries within the region.

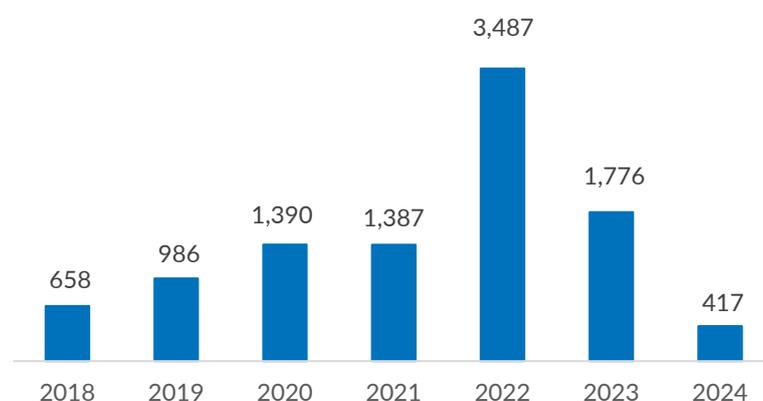
The estimated 634,000 stateless Rohingya in Rakhine State continue to face discrimination, marginalization and human rights violations. Following the cessation of the informal ceasefire in November 2023, the situation in Rakhine State has rapidly deteriorated in the first half of 2024 with intensified armed conflict as well as reports of human rights abuses, including forced recruitment of Rohingyas. The worrisome development has already led to an increasing number of Rohingyas attempting to seek refuge abroad. The escalation of violence in Rakhine State may diminish prospects for safe, dignified and voluntary returns in the near future.

Discrimination and lack of citizenship are root causes for irregular movements of Rohingya in Myanmar as well as for the onward movements outside the country. Systematic marginalization effectively hinders access to health, education, livelihoods, recourse to legal protection, and housing, land and property rights.

Movement Trends

- For the first half of 2024, more than 1,200 Rohingya attempted to depart Myanmar³ while 183 Rohingyas departed from Bangladesh with the intention to transit through Myanmar. Overall, the number of Rohingya from Rakhine State who attempted movements to third countries increased from January – June 2024 when compared to the same period in 2023.

Rohingya attempting irregular movement arrested within Myanmar



- The intensified conflict since November 2023 have affected existing smuggling and trafficking dynamics, notably fewer persons reportedly passed through Arakan Army (AA) controlled areas while sea routes from Rakhine State towards the Ayeyarwady and the Tanintharyi regions are more frequently used.
- From January – June 2024, a total of 417 persons were arrested. Out of these, 15 persons were sentenced for violating “Myanmar Immigration (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1947” and 400 persons for violating “The Residents of Myanmar Registration Act, 1949”. 25 per cent (106 individuals) were children.
- While Malaysia and Indonesia continue to be the main intended destinations for the maritime movements in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal, a significant increase in maritime movements towards Bangladesh have been observed in the first six months of the year.

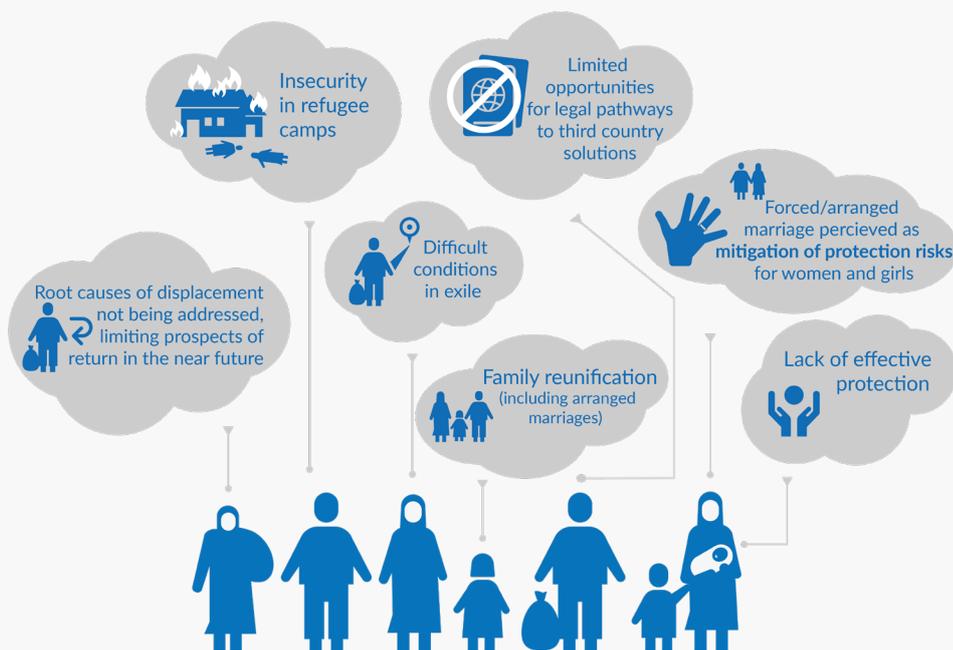
REASONS FOR EMBARKING ON DANGEROUS JOURNEYS

Rohingya refugees are the world’s largest stateless population, with the lack of citizenship being a key challenge in accessing basic rights and protection. The majority of Rohingya refugees have indicated they wish to return home to Myanmar once conditions for a voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return are met, including addressing the root causes of their displacement. Pending return, Rohingya refugees hope to contribute to their host communities, despite ongoing limitations on accessing resilience activities, including education, skills development and livelihoods, which often leave them vulnerable to despair and exploitation, and compel them to embark on dangerous journeys. The overall deteriorating situation in Myanmar, not least the intensified conflict in Rakhine state, coupled with insecurity and hardships in exile remains key factors forcing Rohingya refugees to seek effective protection in other countries within the region.

³ With limited access to affected areas, the number of attempted movements are conservative estimates. The actual number may be higher. UNHCR and partners continue to triangulate and update figures as they are made available, including on the public maritime dashboard.

Other factors compelling Rohingya stateless refugees to travel by land and sea

UNHCR assessments and consultations with Rohingya refugees indicate high awareness of the risks related to movements by land and sea with the intention of reaching other countries in the region. With regards to sea movements, a substantial number (82 per cent in 2024), of such attempts are unsuccessful, with disembarkations taking place in Myanmar or Bangladesh, leaving refugees in an even more vulnerable situation. However, despite the risks, many take the desperate decision to leave in search of protection.

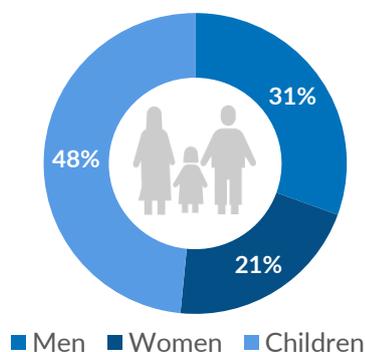


PROFILES – AGE AND GENDER DYNAMICS

Prior to 2015, the majority of those undertaking maritime movements were men. However, the gender balance has shifted in recent years as the number of Rohingya refugee women and children on sea routes has steadily increased since mid-2015, with peaks in 2020 – 2021 when two-thirds of those embarking on sea journeys were women and children. Although this trend shifted slightly in 2022, when 53% of those embarking on sea journeys were women and children, in 2023 and 2024, the proportion has again increased. **In 2024, 72% of those attempting sea journeys were women (29%) and children (44%).**

Analysis of gender dynamics within **land movements from 1 Jan 2022 to 30 June 2024 reveals similar trends where 74 per cent were women and children** (18 per cent and 56 per cent respectively) while 26 per cent were adult male travelers.

Gender & age breakdown for land and sea movements | January 2022 - June 2024



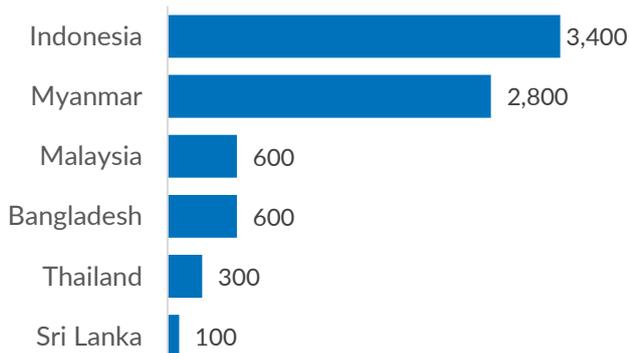
Among Rohingya stateless refugees attempting land and sea movements, specific profiles face protection risks and challenges:



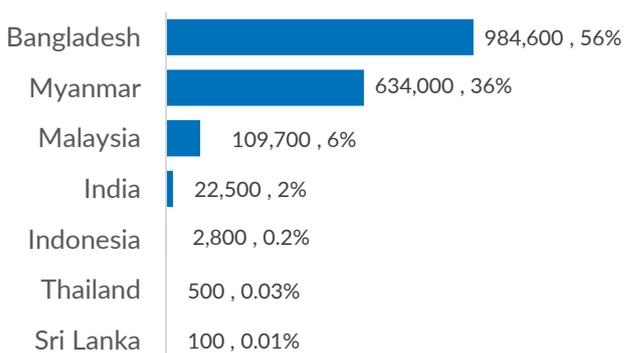
RESPONSIBILITY-SHARING

Responsibility sharing could be more evenly distributed in a collective effort to save lives along the sea and land routes. This could be achieved through a regional response that encompasses search and rescue, safe disembarkations, protection-sensitive and victim-centered approaches, strengthened efforts to combat trafficking, coupled with local and third country solutions.

Known Rohingya stateless refugees arriving by sea - Disembarkations per country⁴ | January 2022 - April 2024



Rohingya stateless refugees registered with UNHCR & Forcibly Displaced and Stateless in Myanmar⁵ | June 2024



ACCESS TO ASYLUM

UNHCR continues to advocate for access to asylum for refugees and to strengthen protection-sensitive entry systems along sea and land routes.⁶ Refugees, including those moving onwards, should in principle be allowed to access territory and must be protected against *refoulement* (return to a country where their life or freedom would be at risk) in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention and international customary law. The principle of *non-refoulement* applies to all individuals in need of international protection, regardless of whether a country is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention.



⁴ 'Disembarkations' include dead and missing persons and entails situations where a boat was intercepted in transit by authorities and the passengers arrested. These situations are the majority of disembarkations in Myanmar and also applies to Bangladesh.

⁵ Including IDPs and in-situ stateless.

⁶ [Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Myanmar](#)

Photo caption: A UNHCR staff talks with refugees at a temporary shelter in Kulam village, Aceh, 3 May 2024. ©UNHCR/ Jemma Galvin

KEY PROTECTION ISSUES

Rohingya refugees face significant protection risks before, during and after arriving at their destination. Examples of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech targeting Rohingya refugees continue to be identified in countries along the route. The impact of this on access to the territory and to asylum, physical protection, self-reliance, and social cohesion, is felt by Rohingya communities in the region.

 Gender Based Violence (harassment, rape, exploitation, violence and enslavement)		Forced marriages 
 Detention without due process and indefinite detention		Bonded labor 
 Deprivation of food/water		Trafficking 
 Theft, fraud, and extortion		Medical issues 

ARREST & DETENTION	TRAFFICKING & SMUGGLING	WOMEN & GIRLS ON THE MOVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 2,700 Rohingya refugees are currently known to be held in detention outside Myanmar. Rohingya refugees are frequently held in prolonged or indefinite detention, with limited access to due process. In Myanmar, laws preventing freedom of movement are strictly enforced, leading to 417 Rohingyas who attempted journeys in 2024 being detained. In Myanmar, from January – June 2024, UNHCR supported 326 detainees (including 106 children) with food, medicines, legal aid and non-food items. While in detention, Rohingya refugee men and boys as well as women and girls face GBV risks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The interagency Anti-Trafficking Working Group (ATWG) in Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh) identified, referred, and assisted 134 victims of trafficking from January to June 2024. The ATWG figures should not be interpreted as showing the extent or prevalence of human trafficking in the camps. Human trafficking networks frequently operate across borders and are connected to broader transnational criminal syndicates. Threats to physical integrity, include abuse, torture and death and are often perpetrated by traffickers or smugglers. Rohingya refugees are often denied the use of telephones or other means of communication by smugglers and traffickers and may get separated from their family along the journey. Initially, and unaware of the risks, individuals may willingly undertake a journey that later turns into a situation of trafficking. Trafficking for the purpose of child marriage and forced labour of Rohingya refugees continues to be of particular concern and reported from several countries in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GBV (harassment, rape, exploitation, violence, and enslavement) are common risks faced by women and girls. Rohingya refugee women and girls are particularly at risk to be kidnapped and sold into marriage or sexual or domestic servitude.
DURING TRAVEL	THEFT, FRAUD & EXTORTION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unseaworthy vessels can lead to shipwreck and death or severe distress situations at sea with a lack of essential supplies, such as food and water. Cases of malnutrition have been identified as well as skin diseases and communicable diseases caught during the journey. For both travel modes, refugees are faced with sickness and medical emergencies, and are unable to access medical assistance without risking detention. Travelling in dire conditions can lead to refugees being separated from their family members during the journey, thus increasing the risk of re-trafficking. As evidenced in survivors' statements, practices of push backs and delayed disembarkations have led to deaths at sea. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smugglers often take money without rendering the promised service or request a higher fee than initially agreed, threatening to stop the travel or harm refugees or their family members unless they pay more money. Smugglers and traffickers are also known to take the belongings of the Rohingya refugees, including phones or personal documents. Smugglers and traffickers are known to make false promises, such as of marriage or employment. 	

UNHCR is grateful for the following donors, who have contributed to our Myanmar situation response as well as those that contribute to UNHCR programmes with globally unearmarked funds and broadly earmarked funds for the Asia-Pacific region: [Australia](#) | [Belgium](#) | [Canada](#) | [Denmark](#) | [European Union](#) | [France](#) | [Germany](#) | [Ireland](#) | [Japan](#) | [Jersey](#) | [Kuwait](#) | [Luxembourg](#) | [Netherlands](#) | [New Zealand](#) | [Norway](#) | [People's Republic of China](#) | [Philippines](#) | [Republic of Korea](#) | [Saudi Arabia](#) | [Slovenia](#) | [Sweden](#) | [Switzerland](#) | [United Kingdom](#) | [United States of America](#) | [Private donors Australia](#) | [Private donors Canada](#) | [Private donors France](#) | [Private donors Germany](#) | [Private donors MENA](#) | [Private donors Netherlands](#) | [Private others](#) | [CERF](#) | [UN Development Programme](#) | [UN Joint Programme](#) | [UN Pooled Funds](#) | [UN Population Fund](#) | [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#) | [Qatar Charity](#) | [The Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives](#) | [Fast retailing Co., Ltd. \(UNIQLO\)](#) | [UPS Corporate](#)