

Protection at Sea in South-East Asia – 2021 in Review

 **770**


People have attempted the sea journey in 2021

 **741**

People have disembarked

 **29**

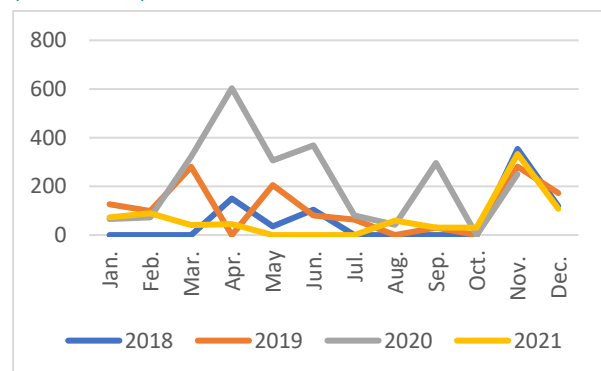
People are believed to have died or gone missing at sea in 2021

 nearly **80%**

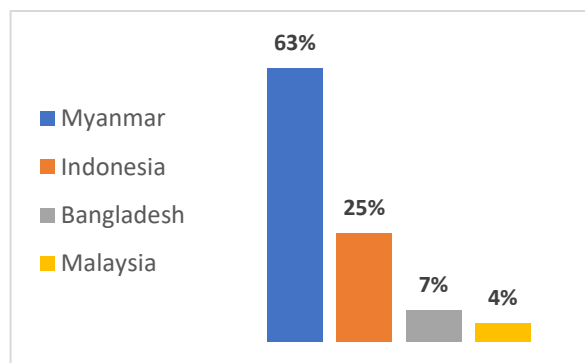
of rescued persons were women and children, up from 63% in 2020

Most people moving irregularly across the Andaman Sea are **Rohingya refugees**. Some are fleeing their home country of Myanmar, while others leave Bangladesh, where they are in exile. They seek protection, security, family reunification and livelihoods in other countries.

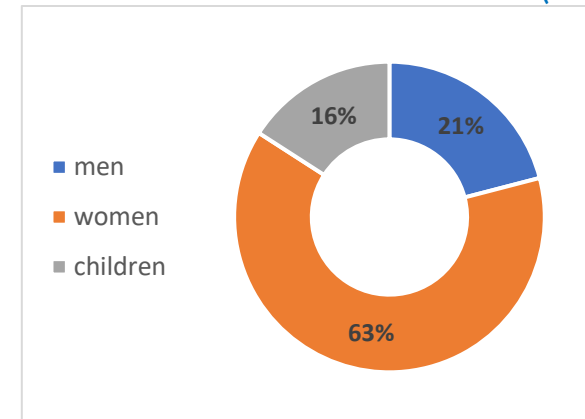
CONFIRMED SEA ARRIVALS BY MONTH (PERSONS) 2018 -2021



DISEMBARKMENT LOCATIONS (2021)



SURVIVORS' GENDER AGE BREAKDOWN (2021)



RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN 2021

On 30 December 2021, 105 Rohingya refugees were rescued and disembarked in Aceh, Indonesia. The refugees on board were overwhelmingly women and girls, which is consistent with overall trends. One 17-year old girl died during the three weeks the boat spent at sea in dangerous conditions. Survivors reported that smugglers physically abused them and then abandoned them adrift at sea. In addition, in June 2021, 81 Rohingya refugees disembarked in Aceh after a grueling four-month journey at sea.

TREATMENT OF PERSONS RESCUED AT SEA

On both occasions of disembarkation in Aceh, authorities and humanitarian actors immediately mobilized to address the medical and other needs of the rescued persons. Health screening for COVID-19, quarantine measures and vaccinations were implemented. In addition, UNHCR and protection partners deployed experts to identify survivors with specific needs and provide specialized services. Vulnerable people include potential victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated children, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

NEED FOR RESPONSIBILITY-SHARING

The local community in Aceh has maintained solidarity and compassion towards those in need, with Acehese fishermen continuing to rescue those in distress at sea. In 2021, Indonesia and Bangladesh disembarked the majority of vulnerable refugees in distress at sea (those that disembarked in Myanmar were intercepted by authorities as they attempted to leave.) This important humanitarian responsibility needs to be more evenly distributed among countries in the region to ensure protection responses are sustainable.

Key Developments: Maritime Movements of Rohingya Refugees in South-East Asia in 2021

Disembarkation as a life-saving act

Timely disembarkation of vessels in distress **prevents loss of life** in ensuring prompt assistance to address medical and other needs, sheltering rescued persons from unpredictable weather and sea conditions as well as preventing further harm by abusive smugglers.

COVID-19

Bangladesh and Indonesia have demonstrated that safe and orderly disembarkation can be implemented with **health screening and quarantine arrangements** for persons rescued at sea.

Interception measures

Rescued refugees have reported several instances of interception at sea by coastal states. Interception measures including pushback practices **deny access to life-saving assistance** for refugees in distress at sea and can directly or indirectly result in **refoulement or death**.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Conduct immediate search and rescue of Rohingya stranded at sea.
- 2) Ensure timely **disembarkation** in a place of safety.
- 3) Support **regional solidarity** with countries of disembarkation in their response to the needs of rescued persons and search for solutions.
- 4) Address the **root causes** of displacement in the country of origin.

