



DESPERATE IRREGULAR JOURNEYS: ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN SEARCH OF PROTECTION

The Rohingya, a stateless Muslim minority from Myanmar, have fled conflict and persecution in Myanmar in multiple waves of displacement since the 1970s. The largest exodus took place in August 2017, when more than 742,000 people fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh. The region now hosts over 1.1 million Rohingya refugees with limited opportunities to develop basic self-reliance or find safety and protection. With continued instability in Myanmar and dwindling humanitarian assistance in host countries in the region, many Rohingya are forced to further 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 – 31 December 2024



15,800

Rohingya attempted to find safety and protection by **land** journeys



17,200

Rohingya attempted to find safety and protection by **sea/river** journeys on 238 boats



33,000

Rohingya refugees attempted to find safety and protection by **land or sea/river**

¹ For the purposes of this document, the simplified term “movement” or “journey” refers to Rohingya fleeing by land and/or sea/river directly from Myanmar and/or travelling onwards 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 themselves. All data is provisional and subject to change.

Photo: A boat carrying Rohingya refugees off the coast of South Aceh, Indonesia. After a perilous journey that claimed lives, 152 Rohingya refugees were evacuated on 24 October 2024 due to the humanitarian acts of the Indonesian authorities and the local community. ©UNHCR/ Amanda Jufrian

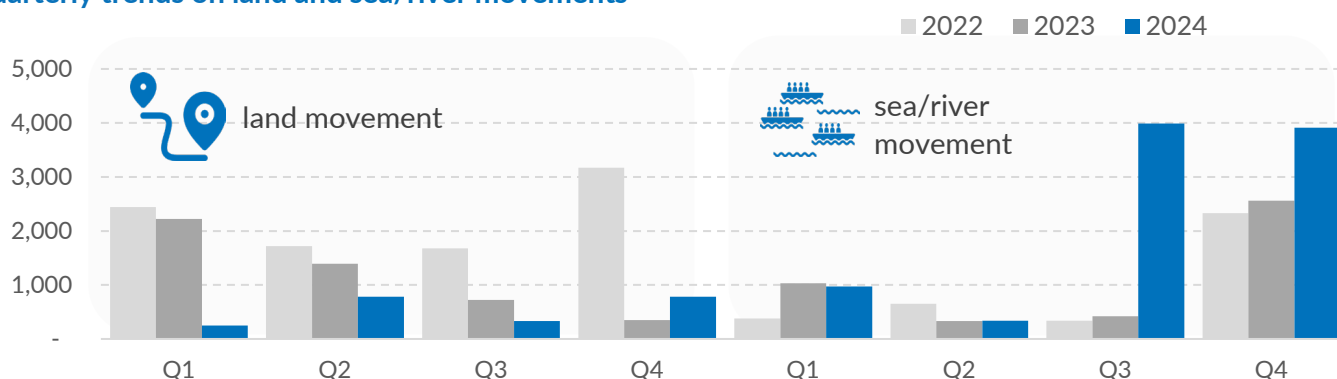
DEVELOPMENTS IN 2024

- In 2024, **11,300 Rohingya refugees attempted to find safety and protection by land and sea/river movements**, of which 9,200 embarked on perilous sea/river journeys and 657 were reported deceased or missing from maritime movements.
- In addition to sea/river movements, **around 2,100 Rohingya refugees are known to have undertaken land movements in 2024**, with the vast majority reporting detention by authorities or other protection risks along land routes.² Given the lack of access and information on the often clandestine land movements, the actual figures are likely to be higher.
- 2024 witnessed the highest number of attempted sea/river journeys and was the deadliest year on record since the 2015 Andaman Sea Crisis.**³ This worrisome trend of steadily increasing numbers is expected to continue for 2025, highlighting the need for urgent and comprehensive responses.
- Compared to 2023, there was a **112 per cent increase in the number of people attempting boat movements in 2024**, with the vast majority of movements observed between Myanmar and Bangladesh. However, the number of **persons arriving by boat in Indonesia from Myanmar or Bangladesh decreased by 66 per cent in 2024**.
- At least 15 tragic boat accidents occurred in 2024 which resulted in 657 people being reported as dead or missing.** At variance with the principle of non-refoulement and the law of the sea, survivors of maritime movements have reported incidents of push backs (in which authorities or community members forcibly returned boats back to the open sea) or provision of assistance and repairs to facilitate push-ons (in which authorities or community members support onward movement as part of a rescue without the possibility of disembarkation), and delayed disembarkations that resulted in deaths.
- In 2024, due to the ongoing conflict and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Rakhine State in Myanmar, **an increasing number of stateless Rohingya refugees continued to flee across the Naf River in search of safety and protection in Bangladesh.** Information obtained by UNHCR, partners and media coverage reported that a significant number of those reaching Bangladesh were denied access to territory and safety. **Of the 9,200 persons embarking on maritime movements in 2024, 87 per cent attempted to cross the Naf River.** However, towards the end of 2024, due to increased patrols and restrictions on the Naf River, the proportion of overland movements have reportedly increased.

ROHINGYA ATTEMPTS TO FIND SAFETY AND PROTECTION | 2024



Quarterly trends on land and sea/river movements



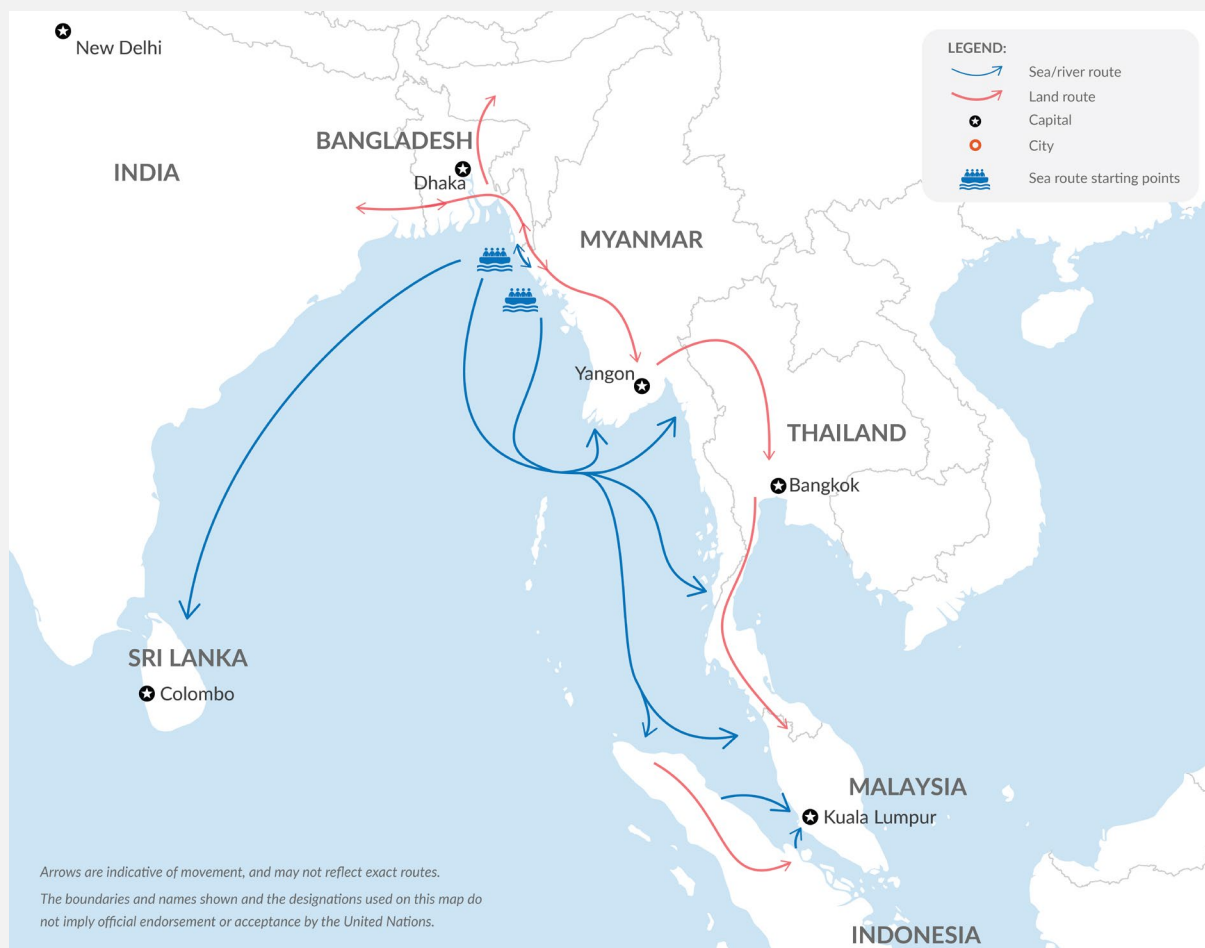
- Nearly 2,900 stateless Rohingya refugees are currently detained on immigration charges outside of Myanmar**, often indefinitely and without due process of the law – with some deaths being reported in detention without

² Source: UNHCR

³ Mixed Maritime Movements in South-East Asia in 2015

families being informed of the reasons of death, contrary to national regulations. Of those detained, 89 people have serious medical conditions and 176 are children, of whom 48 are unaccompanied or separated children. **Within Myanmar**, the Rohingya's right to exercise freedom of movement continues to be curtailed and unauthorized movements criminalized. UNHCR is aware of approximately 1,000 Rohingya who were newly detained in 2024 and at least **4,917 Rohingya remain in detention** as at the end of 2024, approximately half of whom have already completed their prison sentence or have been pardoned. Due to restricted access for UNHCR and partners to detention centres, the actual figure may be higher.

Land and sea/river journey routes taken from 2022 to 2024



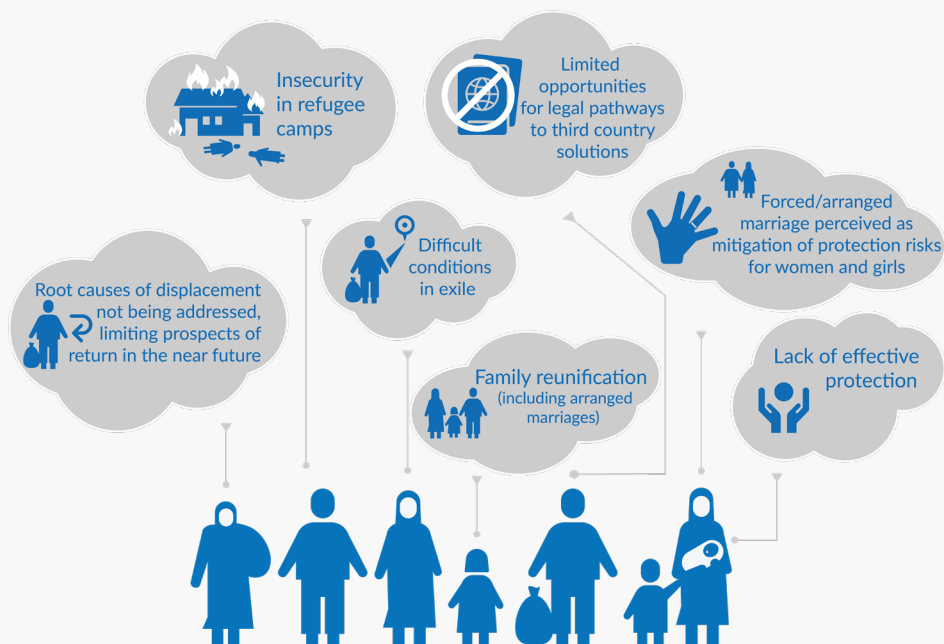
Land and sea/river movements are often combined in multiple sub-routes, covering various countries, to reach the intended destination. While efforts are made to identify all land and sea/river movements, it is recognized that many journeys are not known due to their clandestine nature.

REASONS FOR EMBARKING ON IRREGULAR DANGEROUS JOURNEYS

The Rohingya ethnic group is the world's largest stateless population, with their lack of citizenship posing a significant barrier to accessing basic rights and protection. Most 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. While awaiting return, Rohingya refugees hope to contribute to their host communities. However, limited access to resilience activities such as education, employment, skills development and livelihoods opportunities often leave them vulnerable to despair and exploitation, driving some to embark on irregular dangerous journeys. The deteriorating situation in Myanmar, particularly the intensified conflict in Rakhine State, along with insecurity and hardships in exile, remain key factors forcing Rohingya to seek safety, protection and a dignified life in other countries within the region.

UNHCR assessments and consultations with stateless Rohingya refugees indicate a high awareness of the risks related to movements by land and sea with the intention of finding safety and protection in other countries in the region. Regarding sea/river movements, a substantial number (87 % in 2024) of boat movements were unsuccessful, with disembarkations / interceptions occurring in Myanmar or Bangladesh, leaving stateless Rohingya refugees in an even more vulnerable situation. Despite the risks, many take the desperate decision to leave in search of protection.

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

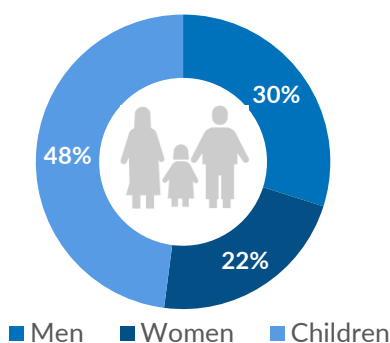


PROFILES – AGE AND GENDER DYNAMICS

Prior to 2015, most people undertaking maritime movements were men. However, the gender balance has gradually shifted in recent years, with the number of Rohingya refugee women and children on sea/river routes steadily increasing since mid-2015. This trend peaked in 2020–2021 when two-thirds of those embarking on sea/river journeys were women and children. Although this trend shifted slightly in 2022 when 53 per cent of those embarking on sea/river journeys were women and children, the proportion increased again in 2023 and 2024. **In 2024, 72 per cent of those attempting sea/river journeys were women (33%) and children (39%).** While this represents a 6 per cent increase compared to 2023, it should be noted that data on age and gender composition is often limited for boats being intercepted on the Naf River and disembarked in either Myanmar or Bangladesh.

Analysis of gender dynamics in **land movements from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2024 reveals that 75 per cent were women and children** (19% and 56% respectively) while 25 per cent were adult males. In 2024, the majority (57%) of people moving by land were women and children. This is a decrease of 23% compared to 2023.

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



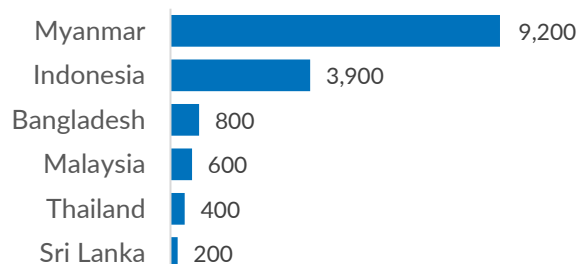
Among stateless Rohingya refugees attempting land and sea/river movements, specific profiles face protection risks and challenges:



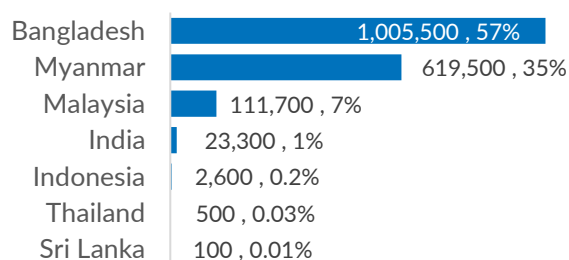
RESPONSIBILITY SHARING

Responsibility sharing could be more evenly distributed in a collective effort to save lives along the sea/river and land routes. This could be achieved through a regional response that encompasses search and rescue, safe disembarkations, protection-sensitive and victim-centred approaches and strengthened efforts to combat trafficking, along with local and third-country solutions. In 2024, a significant number of boat movements occurred across the Naf River, with Bangladesh receiving the majority of people fleeing Myanmar.⁴

Known Rohingya disembarkations per country⁵ | January 2022 - December 2024



Stateless Rohingya refugees registered with UNHCR & Forcibly Displaced and Stateless in Myanmar⁶ | December 2024



ACCESS TO ASYLUM

UNHCR continues to advocate for access to nationality for stateless persons, access to asylum for refugees, and strengthened protection-sensitive entry systems along sea/river and land routes.⁷ Refugees, including those moving onwards, should be allowed to access territory and must be protected against refoulement (i.e. return to a place where their life or freedom would be at risk) in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention, international human rights law, and customary international law. The principle of non-refoulement applies to people in need of international protection, regardless of whether a country is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention.



⁴ The Government of Bangladesh, with support from UNHCR and partners, is undertaking a verification exercise, which will capture the number of new arrivals to Bangladesh.

⁵ 'Disembarkations' include dead and missing persons and includes 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.

⁶ Including IDPs and in-situ stateless.

⁷ [Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Myanmar](#) (May 2024).

Photo caption: A Rohingya child is seen at a temporary shelter where he and 152 others found safety after being evacuated from a boat that landed in South Aceh, Indonesia in October 2024. ©UNHCR/Amanda Jufrian

KEY PROTECTION ISSUES

Rohingya refugees face significant protection risks before, during and after arriving at their destination. Incidents of online and offline hate speech, disinformation and misinformation 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.



ARREST & DETENTION	TRAFFICKING & SMUGGLING	DURING TRAVEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly 2,900 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 approximately 1,000 Rohingya who attempted journeys in 2024 being newly detained. • In Myanmar, UNHCR supported 407 detainees (including 122 children) with food, medicines, legal aid and non-food items from January to December 2024. • While in detention, Rohingya refugee women, girls, men and boys face gender-based violence risks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The interagency Anti-Trafficking Working Group (ATWG) in Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh) identified, referred, and assisted 316 victims of trafficking from January to December 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, unaware of the risks, people may willingly undertake a people smuggling journey that later becomes a trafficking situation. • Trafficking for the purpose of child marriage and forced labour of Rohingya refugees continues to be of particular concern with reports emerging from several countries in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unseaworthy vessels can lead to shipwreck and death or severe distress situations at sea from a lack of essential supplies such as food and water. Cases of malnutrition have been identified as well as skin diseases and communicable diseases contracted during the journey. • For both sea/river and land travel, Rohingya refugees face sickness and medical emergencies and are unable to access medical assistance without risking detention. • Travelling in dire conditions can lead to separation from their family members, increasing the risk of re-trafficking. • As evidenced in survivors' statements, practices of push backs and delayed disembarkations have led to deaths at sea.
THEFT, FRAUD & EXTORTION		WOMEN & GIRLS ON THE MOVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smugglers often take money without providing the promised service or demand a higher fee than initially agreed, threatening to stop the journey or harm refugees or their family members unless they pay more money. • Smugglers and traffickers are known to take the belongings of refugees, including phones or personal documents. • Smugglers and traffickers are known to make false promises, such as of marriage or employment. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-based violence (harassment, rape, exploitation, violence, and enslavement) are common risks faced by women and girls. • Rohingya refugee women and girls are particularly at risk of being kidnapped and sold into marriage or sexual or domestic servitude.

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 and the Pacific region in 2024:

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