



Overseas Processing Entity- Bangkok: A Comparative Summary of Rohingya Resettlement from Bangladesh and Malaysia

The Rohingya are an ethnic, linguistic and religious minority from Arakan State in Burma. They are predominantly concentrated in the three townships of northern Arakan State adjacent to Bangladesh. They are ethnically related to the Chittagonian Bengali people living across the border in Bangladesh and practice Sunni Islam. Claiming the Rohingya are in fact Bengali, successive Burma governments have refused to recognize them as citizens. The 1982 Citizenship Law of Burma stripped the Rohingya of their nationality, making them stateless. Severe repression in the early 1990's led to the flight of approximately one half million Rohingya from Burma into Bangladesh and 14,000 into Malaysia. Approximately 236,000 were repatriated from Bangladesh to Burma but have since returned due to ongoing persecution in Burma.

Daily Life

Camp Realities in Bangladesh

- 28,000 UNHCR-registered Rohingya live in two camps at the southernmost tip of Bangladesh
- More than half of camp population was born in camp
- UNHCR reports that 53% of camp population is at risk of personal safety, including SGBV, other threats and violence, detention and abduction for trafficking
- UNHCR reports exploitation of refugees by their own leaders

Urban Realities in Malaysia

- 20,000 UNHCR-registered Rohingya live in Malaysia without the protection of a camp
- Subject to same vulnerabilities as other refugees from Burma, including arrest, detention, deportation, trafficking and a lack of access to education and health care.
- UNHCR reports exploitation of refugees by their own leaders

US Resettlement Implications and lessons learned from Australia*

- Worried about family members and friends left behind, send remittances and call frequently*
- Population requires more intensive case management to learn life skills but they are eager to learn*
- Need special help learning about contacting emergency services, public transportation, modern home appliances, planning and budgeting, seeking and finding community services, English literacy and numeracy*
- Extremely grateful and receptive, resilient, hopeful and industrious*



Language *(Rohingya language is similar to Chittagonian, which is closely related to Bengali)*

Camp Realities in Bangladesh

- 14 % speak Bengali
- 3% speak English, of those 90% are men
- 2% speak Burmese, mostly elderly

Urban Realities in Malaysia

- Less than 20% speak Burmese
- Many speak Malay

US Resettlement Implications and lessons learned from Australia*

- Rohingya or Chittagonian language resources will be needed

Religion

Camp Realities in Bangladesh

- Camp population is 100% Muslim
- Informal worship in camp organized by refugees themselves

Urban Realities in Malaysia

- Often rely on local mosques to provide support in times of financial crisis

US Resettlement Implications and lessons learned from Australia*

- Want to be able to pray in mosques
- Mosques offer comfort in familiar rituals and ceremonies and provide context for adjustment as Muslims to new husband/wife role expectations, care and discipline of children, dress and cultural norms*

Women/Girls

Camp Realities in Bangladesh

- Religiously conservative, wear burkhas
- Mostly illiterate
- Polygamy practiced by 10% of camp population
- UNHCR reports that sexual and gender-based violence is a major yet underreported protection concern
- UNHCR reports that some practice early marriage at 13 or 14, when puberty is reached
- Girls stop going to school at puberty for security reasons
- Women do not work or do shopping in camp for security reasons

Urban Realities in Malaysia

Women typically do not work outside the home, some street selling and domestic work close to home



US Resettlement Implications and lessons learned from Australia*

- Most cannot sign their name
- Single mothers may not want to live apart from each other
- Single mothers have most challenges – very fearful, difficulty with solo parenting and discipline, living on a limited budget, managing the household, leaving younger children in the care of older siblings*
- A needle, thread and fabric might help them feel at home

Families

Camp Realities in Bangladesh

- Average family destined for resettlement has four children
- 20% of households are headed by single women
- Family sizes fall along educational lines, more schooling, fewer children
- Camp schools only reach grade 5
- Children run throughout camp without supervision
- Many young children do not wear clothing from the waist down and urinate on the ground
- UNHCR reports that many children are forced to work at an early age (same activities as adults)
- UNHCR reports that domestic violence is common

Urban Realities in Malaysia

- UNHCR estimates that only slightly over 20% of the registered population of school-aged children is obtaining any form of education, in community-run or religious schools.
- Boys often work as unskilled laborers to help support the family

US Resettlement Implications and lessons learned from Australia*

- Will need comprehensive information and coaching on child safety and parenting
- Many children will be attending school for the first time
- Diapers and child toileting practices will be new to most
- Require education on domestic violence laws and protections

Employment

Camp Realities in Bangladesh

- No formal employment available or allowed
- Some men find day labor outside camp farming, fishing, tailoring
- Two percent of men and women participate in camp programs in soap-making, pedicab repair, cell-phone repair, mushroom growing, sewing

Urban Realities in Malaysia

- Men and teenage boys perform unskilled labor such as grass cutting, scrap metal and garbage collection, fishing, and restaurant work
- Women typically stay in the home, some perform domestic work or sell items on the street

US Resettlement Implications and lessons learned from Australia*

- Men may have some employment history
- Women will be fearful of leaving home alone

Housing

Camp Realities in Bangladesh

- Due to lack of security, afraid to open windows, live in dark, stifling spaces
- Unhygienic food preparation and storage
- No familiarity with western bathrooms or kitchens; cook with compressed rice husks on dirt floors
- Betelnut spitting very common
- Camp diet: rice, lentils, fish, chicken, goat, duck, salt, sugar, spices, palm oil. Insufficient due to sharing with unregistered refugees

Urban Realities in Malaysia

- Large families live together under one roof, often 10 to 15 in a two-bedroom dwelling
- Houses are very basic, containing little except some cooking implements and perhaps a few mattresses.
- Diet is insufficient due to lack of financial resources.

US Resettlement Implications

and lessons learned from Australia*

- In Australia, suburban living made Rohingya feel profoundly sad and isolated at first*
- Household cleanliness a persistent problem in Australia*
- Need to learn hygiene to reduce infections
- Only Halal foods are consumed
- Like food very spicy



Health & Well-Being

Camp Realities in Bangladesh

- Anemia
- Malnutrition
- Tropical infections
- Vision impairment
- Mental health – anxiety and trauma

Urban Realities in Malaysia

- Lack of access to health care which is considered an unaffordable luxury
- Women give birth at home
- Preference in treating conditions such as diabetes and hypertension with traditional remedies

US Resettlement Implications and lessons learned from Australia*

- Need to learn how to buy and prepare fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods
- Little or no familiarity with western medicine
- Anxious and traumatized due to past experiences

* Progress of Rohingya Settlement in Brisbane Report to Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Government of Australia by Multicultural Development Association, October 2009.

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

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