

The Long-Term Aspirations of Rohingya Refugees' Families in Malaysia

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Abstract

The Rohingya refugees have often viewed Malaysia as open, although Malaysia is a non-signatory of the 1951 Refugees Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Hence, the number of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia had increased to more than 180000 in 2021. A fundamental problem with managing refugees in Malaysia is that there is no real policy in place and thus no real idea of how many, who, and where they are. Every year, less than one percent of the refugees have been successfully sent to a third country worldwide. The current situation has prevented the refugee resettlement matter in Malaysia from being resolved quickly; instead, it takes years and even decades for a small outcome, often without any apparent end. One of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is that the resettlement releases to third countries worldwide decreased sharply in 2020 due to international travelling had to be stopped. Every year, less than 5 percent of the world's refugees will receive a place in a third country (UNHCR Malaysia, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to understand Rohingya refugees' long-term aspirations to prepare them for the future. The right policy is needed to prepare the refugees to resettle in a third country or eventually return to Myanmar. Therefore, this paper explores the Rohingya refugees' future aspirations and resettlement plans based on qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. This research carried out in-depth qualitative interviews with 10 Rohingya refugees currently living in Malaysia and six Rohingya refugees who have already resettled in a third country and used to stay in Malaysia as their transit country. This research discovered nine livelihood aspirations, three community aspirations, and two-family aspirations shared by the respondents. This study also found that almost all respondents aspire to resettle in a third country in the long run, but the delay in getting resettlement leaves them no choice, but to remain in Malaysia. Hence, this paper concludes that policymakers need to construct settlement programmes



to help Rohingya refugees and asylums while they are still in Malaysia and prepare them to settle in the third country eventually.

Keywords: Rohingya refugees; aspirations; resettlement; durable solutions

1.0 Introduction

The failure to end the conflicts and endless wars in countries such as Myanmar, Pakistan, Yemen, and Syria has contributed to an incredible number of refugees seeking protection in Malaysia, as well as in other countries (Bernama, 2018). Being a non-signatory country to the 1951 Refugee Convention or Protocol 1967 means that Malaysia does not have legal obligation towards refugees (UNHCR Global Report, 2006). However, Malaysia cannot refuse to admit a person seeking protection as all states are bound to follow the principle of non-refoulement as per customary International Law. This is because the principle of non-refoulement prohibits the return of a refugee to a territory where his or her life or freedom is threatened, which means that a refugee seeking protection must not be prevented from entering a country as this would amount to refoulement (UNHCR,2011). Thus, Malaysia has no choice other than to accommodate the refugees and it has done fairly well over the last decade with them. Due to this, Malaysia has often been viewed by the refugees as being open and accepting until the country is facing refugee entry problems.

Every year, the number of refugees hosted in Malaysia is gradually increasing. The number of refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR in Malaysia has increased from the previous years and many more remain unregistered. The actual number of the refugees in Malaysia is said to be higher, possibly anywhere between 150,000 to 400,000 (Daniel & Jeffrey, 2020). In Malaysia, a majority of those who are registered with UNHCR come from Myanmar (157,040) and most are of the Rohingya ethnicity (104,330) (UNHCR, 2022). This ethnic group is said to have fled their homeland and become illegal immigrants in Malaysia since the Myanmar government's massacre campaign against Rohingya Muslims and unacceptance of the Rohingya ethnic as members of their social community. The number of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia had increased to more than 180000 as of end May 2022, but only less than one percent of the refugees has been successfully sent to a third country worldwide, yearly. This situation has prevented the refugee resettlement matter in Malaysia



from being resolved quickly; instead, it takes years and even decades for a small outcome, often without any apparent end.

Although Malaysia has no legal right to accommodate and help these refugees, we need to attend to them as they are already here. Having no real policy on refugees has led Malaysia to face a fundamental problem in managing them in Malaysia. Without the policy handling the refugees, there is no real idea of how many, who, and where the refugees are. Despite the restriction and no legality to enter the labour market, it has been found that the Rohingya refugees are working in various economic sectors in Malaysia (Ghazali & Tan, 2021). As the country is facing refugee entry problems, proper management is subsequently necessary so that it will not be burdensome at present nor in the future. Therefore, it is essential to understand Rohingya refugees' long-term aspirations to prepare them for the future. The right policy is needed to prepare the refugees to resettle in a third country or eventually return to Myanmar. Thus, this study aimed to explore the Rohingya refugees' future aspirations and resettlement plan.

2.0 Literature Review

Ray (2003) stated that aspiration refers to social foundation; it is a multi-dimensional facet and depends on one's position in the socio-economic hierarchy. Accordingly, Heelsum (2017) described it as the future perspective in which people would like to have a 'satisfactory life', which may differ for individuals or groups. Furthermore, Barbelet and Wake (2017) revealed that refugee aspirations are different individually, can be very subjective, and may change over time. Therefore, refugees may have short-term and long-term aspirations alike. Meanwhile, Dalton et al. (2015) have highlighted that aspiration is normally associated with a reference point wherein it normally establishes one's goals or future desires. According to Carling and Collins (2018), a few researchers have suggested that the term 'aspiration' itself can be accounted as 'desire,' 'wishes', and preferences. Hebbani et al. (2016) defined employment aspiration as the difference between one's current job and future desired ideal job. Similarly, Willott and Stevenson (2013) found that employed refugees, equipped with employment aspirations and working in low-paid and low-skilled jobs, are concurrently looking for opportunities to retrain or gain other employment. Rottmann and Kaya (2020) stated that ones' immigration decision on aspiration is determined by their experience in a transit country. This includes their emotions, feeling of acceptance,



feeling of being home, and safety in the host country. Dijk (2022) found that the aspirations of refugees in terms of their careers were different while they were in a third country than what they fought for while in the country of origin.

Next, the study by Atwell et al. (2009) indicated that most refugees have high employment aspirations for themselves and their children. They are also highly dedicated to improving their future life and livelihood. Meanwhile, Guo (2014) expressed that certain refugee parents base the socio-demographic factor in promoting interest among their children about further education and future employment. Here, the parents will normally monitor their children and guide them in choosing a successful career. Moreover, the outcomes by Hebbani et al. (2016) showed that men are more likely to have employment aspirations. Accordingly, Belloni (2016) found that some refugees deem it satisfactory to emigrate and work where the salaries are sufficiently high to improve their life.

Based on the findings by Bellamy et al. (2017), refugee aspiration differs according to the amount of capital inherently possessed by these individuals. Therefore, those sought by refugees with the least capital are distinguishable compared to their peers having somewhat greater capital and stability in lives and are financially comfortable with the more decent living conditions. In particular, Heelsum (2017) indicated that Syrian refugees in Netherland are highly aspired to work in the country and become fully-integrated members of the local community. However, they end up being not allowed to work and have to live in isolation at the refugee shelters. Meanwhile, the survey by Erdogan (2017) on Syrian households' migration aspirations in Turkey found that the refugees view the country as their permanent nation and do not want to resettle to a third country (as cited in Rottmann & Kaya, 2020). Similarly, Kaya (2017) underlined that the original goal of these refugees moving to Istanbul is to gain a job, while the interviewed ones also surprisingly considered the option to resettle in Europe as the third country. In addition, the study emphasised that around 20 percent of the interviewed refugees refused to return to their home country under any circumstances. Dange (2022) found that the future aspiration of the young refugees in Denmark is focused on the hope of getting an education and employment, becoming socially inclusive, improving language skills, and achieving safety and stability. They have planned and actively tried to pursue and achieve the aspirations they stated.



In line with the above, Duvell (2018) identified the reasons behind refugees' decision to stay in Turkey. Initially, the refugees aspired to move to Europe, but lacked the resources to do. Furthermore, they preferred living in a Muslim country like Turkey, liked having friends or relatives facilitating their lives in the new country, as well as feeling more anxious about any impending uncertainty to be faced in European countries in the future (as cited in Rottmann & Kaya, 2020). Besides, Kvittingen et al. (2018) revealed that Syrian refugees in Jordan only see the country as a temporary destination before they return to their motherland when their security issues are settled. However, the conditions in Syria have worsened and the precarious legal status in Jordan, resulting in most of them planning to migrate and resettle in Europe. Failure to resettle or delay in the family-reunification procedure, however, has rendered many of the refugees stranded in Jordan. Mingot (2022) found that despite wanting to stay and build their lives in the Netherlands, the Sudanese migrants nevertheless decided to move to the UK when there were obstacles that limited them to fulfilling their aspirations, particularly education, employment, and marriage. Rahman et al. (2021), in their study, found that the near future Rohingya refugees will not return to Myanmar and it is expected that Bangladesh will be the only home to the Rohingya refugees. Thus, they recommend to the government to do its best to manage the refugee camps so that they can be occupied more easily. In addition, adequate assistance from donors is also welcomed to reduce the burden on the country.

In summary, the refugees aspire to obtain a durable solution that will enable them to have a good and dynamic future. Therefore, the conditions of their home, host, and third country accordingly would affect the decision taken by them to either opt for voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement. This research explored the different kinds of future aspirations that the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia have to satisfy and permanently resolve their refugee problems focusing on three broad aspiration themes: livelihood aspirations, community aspirations, and family aspirations.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 The Study

In order to gain thematic analysis, the semi-structured interview questions were used to collect the data from primary sources. Thematic



analysis was done to achieve the qualitative objectives for this study. This study explored the Rohingya refugees' future economic aspiration and resettlement plan.

This research used thematic analysis to analyse the interview responses from the perspectives of familiarising with the data, searching for the themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and producing the report. Cross analysis was done to identify the similarities or contrasts of the future aspirations of the refugees who are still in Malaysia and those who already resettled in a third country.

3.2 Methods

This study adopted a qualitative method, based on semi-structured interviews. The researcher found the respondents through some personal contact with a few Rohingya refugees. Convenience and snowball sampling were used to reach more respondents. Other than that, the researcher recognised and self-identified the potential respondents via Facebook page and active Rohingya refugees who are living in Klang Valley and have resettled at a third country. The researcher then contacted the admin of the page via messenger chat or WhatsApp the person to ask for permission to conduct the survey. As the researcher himself conducted the interviews, it was very important to make sure the participants can speak and read English as the questionnaire was written in English. Several criteria had been set up when looking for the potential respondents to be interviewed. One of the criteria is being able to understand and speak the English language. Pre-assessment was done to filter the respondents to make sure they fully understand the questions. Moreover, the interview questions were sent to the respondents prior to the interview session. The respondents could ask the interviewers directly in the area of confusion. Online sessions were conducted on Google Meet for the in depth semi-structured interviews. A copy of the interview questions was given to the participants for their referral prior to the interview session. Each interview session lasted approximately around 50 minutes to 90 minutes, depending on the respondents' ability to communicate (speak in English), internet connection, technical issues and other factors like weather. No major technical issue happened during the online interviews except with one. It was raining heavily when the session was about to start. The session was delayed for 15 minutes and ran smoothly after that.



3.3 Participants

The data used in this research were obtained from interviews with two groups of respondents, (1) 10 local Rohingya refugees who are still in Malaysia, and (2) six Rohingya refugees who already resettled in a third country.

Group 1 respondents were selected based on the following criteria; (1) Hold Rohingya refugee status in Malaysia, (2) Rohingya refugees that have been staying in Malaysia for at least one year, (3) Rohingya refugees who are in the working-age population; $18 \geq 50$ years old, and (4) Able to understand and speak English language. As for Group 2 in this study, the targeted respondents followed the criteria below; (1) Rohingya refugees who already resettled in a third country, (2) Used to stay in Malaysia as their transit country, (3) Rohingya refugees who are in the working-age population; $18 \geq 50$ years old, and (4) Able to understand and speak English language.

The potential respondents were self-identified by the researcher through informal platform. Thus, it did not involve any authority. Besides, the participation in this research was entirely voluntary. The refugees might refuse to take part in the study or they might withdraw themselves at any time without penalty.

Prior to the interview, the researcher contacted the respondents informally to obtain their approval to participate in this study. An appointment was set to conduct the interview. The aim of the study, data collection methods, data management, and the right to withdraw from the study were informed to the respondents before asking for their consents.

The first group of the respondents were the Rohingya refugees who are currently living in Malaysia, to be exact, living in the Klang Valley area. All of the respondents were males. Their age ranged from 18 years to 43 years old. Five of them are single and the rest are married and one divorced. Their duration of living in Malaysia ranged from 6 to 11 years.

The second group of the respondents were the Rohingya refugees who were already resettled in a third country and used to stay in Malaysia as their transit country. Majority of the refugees are currently staying in the United States and one of them is in Australia. The respondents consisted of four males and two females. Their age ranged from 22 years to 42 years old. One of them is single, the rest



are married, and one is divorced. Their duration of living in Malaysia before resettlement in a third country ranged from 3 to 28 years.

3.4 Data Handling and Analysis

The findings for this research were mainly obtained from the analysis of the interview transcripts. Each of the interviews was transcribed by the interviewer verbatim. All the transcribed interviews were coded in Atlas.ti software for qualitative method data. This study used thematic analysis to analysed the interview responses from the perspectives of familiarising with the data, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Cross analysis was done to identify the similarities or contrasts of the future aspirations for those refugees who are still in Malaysia and those who have already resettled in a third country.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

Thematic analysis of the data suggested three major future aspiration themes which consist of livelihood aspirations, community aspirations, and family aspirations.

4.1 Livelihood Aspirations

When the refugees first came to Malaysia, most of them aspired to survive and minimise the hardship that they had faced since leaving their home country. The main purpose for them living in Malaysia was to protect and support themselves and their family who were either together with them in Malaysia, in their home country, or in other countries. The third respondent of the Rohingya refugees who has already resettled, (RR3) for example, was not planning to live in Malaysia, but to go to another country. Majority of them wanted to continue surviving and advocate for their family. It has been the ultimate life goal for the fifth respondent of the Rohingya refugee who has already resettled (RR5) to go back and live in their home country.

Among the livelihood aspirations found among Rohingya refugees who are staying in Malaysia are educational pursuit, to obtain citizenship, to survive, job acquisition, business opportunities, self-development, social security, expanding social network, and resource acquisition (Figure 1).



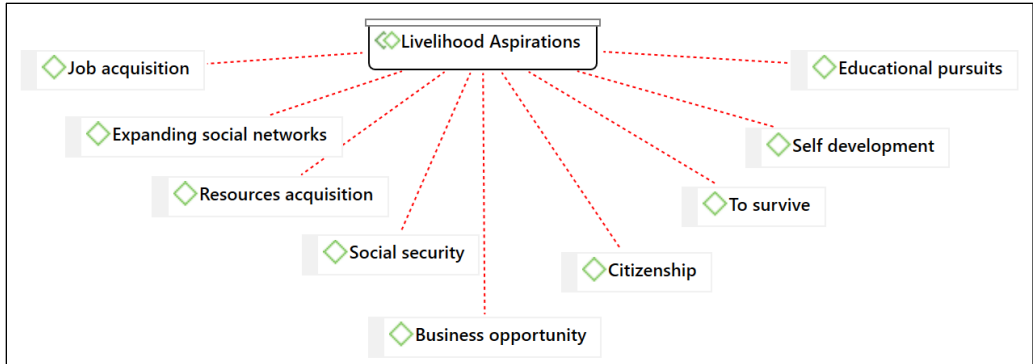


Figure 1 : Livelihood Aspiration Network

4.1.1 Educational Pursuits

Majority of the Rohingya refugees do not have any formal education background. Many of them manage to complete primary school, some are able to attend secondary school, but not able to complete it. Not many of them are able to pursue their education to the tertiary level. This study found that most of the Rohingya refugees who are still staying in Malaysia aspire to pursue their education to the higher level. The second respondent, who is living in Malaysia (LR2), said that he had imagined that he would be able to study once he came to Malaysia. However, since there was no support, he was not able to study and continues to work. Nonetheless, he is still hoping to pursue his studies. Obtaining education in Malaysia however is not easy for the Rohingya refugees as they cannot get it legally in Malaysia. Back in their origin country, they were not allowed to study. Due to legality issues, they have no chance to improve themselves through education. Nevertheless, the Rohingya refugees still aspire to pursue education in Malaysia legally one day. If this is not possible to do in Malaysia, they are hoping to go to a third country to pursue education. The second (RR2) and fourth (RR4) respondents of the Rohingya refugees who have already resettled shared the same aspiration when they were in Malaysia. They still hold on to it even though they already resettled in a third country. They still have the aspiration to pursue their education.

“My aspiration is to study in Malaysia for legal. This is my plan. So, we cannot study legally in Malaysia, so, my plan is to go to the third country or any other.”
(The eighth respondent who is living in Malaysia (LR8))

4.1.2 Citizenship

Another livelihood aspiration for the Rohingya refugees is to obtain citizenship status. Citizenship is a relationship between an individual and a particular country in which the individual owes allegiance and is entitled to protection from that country. In addition, citizenship also provides freedom that comes with responsibilities where citizens have certain rights, obligations, and responsibilities (Tikkanen, n.a). Their dream is to be a citizen of a country. They do not want to be considered as refugees for the rest of their life.

“...if I really abide the rule and law and regulation of that country, so after five years I will get a citizenship of that country according to the resettlement uh law and regulation.”

(LR4)

Just like the other refugees who are still in the transit countries, those who have already resettled in a third country also aspire to get citizenship. Some of the refugees already have their green card which allows them to live and work in the third country on a permanent basis. They are hoping to get the citizenship status as soon as possible so that they can exercise their rights as a citizen of the country, no longer known as a refugee.

4.1.3 To Survive

To survive is another livelihood aspiration for the refugees. It means that they want to continue to live or exist, especially in spite of danger or hardship. The refugees had to leave their home country due to safety issue due to the genocide that happens in their home country. Some of them have been sold to the human traffickers from one country to another country. Some of them have been living in refugee camps for years. Some of them have been struggling as refugees since they were born. Thus, to survive and be alive have been their aspirations. Hussain et al. (2020), in their study, found that the struggles of the Rohingya refugees and their communal resistance are developed around the social hope of survival and respect.

“I safe my life from genocide. How they gonna send me to another again the war.. I mean war- or genocide. Yeah, obviously if Malaysia is forcing us to go, I have



to find another solution to go another country. Because refugee doesn't have any hope. I mean uh refugee have to cut dream, right? Refugees are also human. I as a Rohingyas I have hope also to stay here for save a life I mean to find safe life in Malaysia. Even though this one its host country also.”
(The third respondent who is living in Malaysia (LR3))

The first respondent of the Rohingya refugees who have already resettled, (RR1), also still aspires to survive, to get the security of life where their life is protected under the law which allow them the freedom of movement, to have freedom of speaking, and etcetera. They no longer want to live in fear, in hiding, and fear from being arrested by the immigration or police officers because of no documentation or citizenship, without any wrongdoing.

4.1.4 Job Acquisition

Acquiring a job has also been one of refugees' aspirations. This aspiration may be related to where they are headed to in their career or professional life, such as to have a better job, wanting a promotion or a salary increase, or career goals, such as how they plan to maintain their work-life balance. Most of the refugees are hoping to have a better future life and do a better job. For example, some of the refugees want to be a leader to lead their community where they are staying now. Some of them want to become doctors or want their children to become doctors so that they can be a great help to their community and in their own life. This is because for them, those who are in their community, it is a very rare opportunity for them to be able to do that.

“I always hope and wish and dream is my mission is to become a doctor. I want to become a doctor.”
(LR6)

Even though RR4 has already resettled in the US, she still has an aspiration to get a good job too so that she can earn good money for herself and family.

4.1.5 Business Opportunities

Another aspiration of the Rohingya refugees is to have business opportunities. This aspiration refers to the opportunities of entering a



new job sector legally or start their own business or idea by selling products on the market. Some of them may already have their own business activities and may want more opportunities to expand their business. For example, working as a part-timer in a grocery shop has prompted the seventh respondent, who is living in Malaysia (LR7), to open his own business when he has money one day. He is hoping that he can earn money to continue his study and help others.

“I want to be; I try to uhh if I have money I try to be- I want to do business then if I got some I want to study more, then if I have money I will also try to help others. These my big dreams. These all.”

(LR7)

RR3 also shares the same aspiration. He aspires to own a business and believes that if he continues to gain more experience in his current job, he will be able to set up his own company one day. Meanwhile, RR1 is hoping that he is able to expand his business centre further.

4.1.6 Self-Development

Self-development is also one of the aspirations for the Rohingya refugees. This aspiration refers to taking steps to improve or develop themselves such as by learning new skills or overcoming their weaknesses so that they are able to support themselves. Some of the refugees are hoping that they can do more than what they have done before. Since Malaysia is not one of the refugees' convention signatory countries, thus the refugees do not receive much facilities to support their life in Malaysia. Thus, they have to develop themselves in order to get a better future. The same aspiration is being carried by those who have already resettled. They are interested in attending more training or programmes that can improve and develop themselves like computer training, leadership, and public speaking.

“How I gonna say I would like I gonna stay here long time. So, my dream is to go to another country to build up myself and then to build up I mean my son.”

(LR3)



4.1.7 Social Security

Other than this, obtaining social security is also one of the aspirations of the Rohingya refugees. Social security refers to the protection that a society provides to individuals and households to ensure access to health care and guarantee income security, particularly in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity, or loss of a breadwinner (International Labour Organization, 2001). Having a job to support themselves and the family is very crucial to the Rohingya refugees even though they have to work illegally. However, some of the families are struggling to survive right now because they have lost their jobs and do not have a proper job. Some of them have been kicked out of their house since they are unable to pay their rent. Some of the families also do not have enough money to provide necessities for the babies. Thus, the refugees are hoping to get social security, perhaps in terms of monetary assistance, survivor benefits, disability benefit, and retirement benefits.

“So first of all yes I’m going to get a uhh going to get a settle life. So the second thing, you’re like, if I really abide the rule and law and regulation of that country, so after five years I will get a citizenship of that country according to the resettlement uh law and regulation. So what I know. Then third I’ll have opportunities to be educated. End of the last one is social security.”

(LR4)

According to RR1, now in the US, his family and him have already had security of life. He has a house of his own, food security, job security, and nothing much to complain about. Same goes for the others. All they ask is perhaps one day they can have financial freedom.

4.1.8 Resources Acquisition

The Rohingya refugees also aspire to have resources acquired for their future. This is referring to obtaining the needs or resources for their livelihood, and obtaining the right resources for their education or career and other resources or facilities available to manage their life. One of the barriers for the refugees to achieve their dreams is not getting facilities to achieve them. This applied when they were still in their home country, when they were in the refugee camps in another



country, as well as when they are in Malaysia currently, including the resettlement facilities. Thus, the refugees are hoping to acquire the resources perhaps if they are able to resettle in a third a country. Differ with those who have already resettled, there are a lot of assistance and resources available for them to explore. It is just that some of them have some limitations like language barrier which restricts them from fully enjoying the assistance or support available for them. Other than that, their status in that country, either as refugee, permanent residence, or citizen of the country, will determine their rights.

“If I want to study also, I can study there. I mean in different sector. In different sector maybe I can study. So, this is you know the one uhhh I expect more I mean more facility from another country like resettlement country.”

(LR3)

4.1.9 Expanding Social Networks

Last but not least, the Rohingya refugees aspire to expand their network. This refers to having more connections and good relationships with people, having more friends or peers which might help them for social purposes, business purposes, improve their livelihood activities, or their career. LR4 mentioned that in order for him to achieve his dreams, it is very important for him to get support from his seniors, other than pursuing his education at the higher level. LR10, on the other hand, likes and would like to communicate with more new people who are educated and experienced that can advise, encourage, and help him get more knowledge to be practiced.

“I like to communicate with new people and the people who are knowledgeable and I also like to listen to these kind of people who will be advising me, who will be talking to me for things which would be better for me for the future.”

(LR10)

Most of the refugees who are already resettled aspire to contribute back to the communities. The communities that they mean refer to the Rohingya community in the third country, the local community that they are living in, and all refugees who are still in the



transit country. Thus, they are hoping to develop more networks either locally or internationally to help those who are in need.

4.2 Community Aspirations

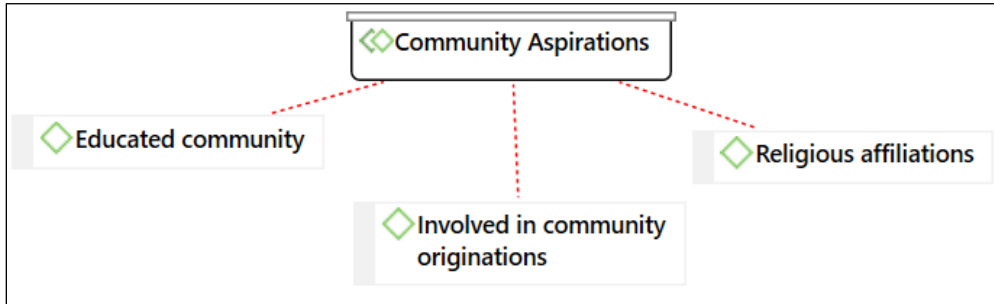


Figure 2 : Community Aspiration Network

4.2.1 . Educated Community

There are three community aspirations found in this study (Figure 2). One of the big aspirations is to have an educated Rohingya community. This is referring to developing a community that promotes education and learning through formal or informal methods which can help to develop the community and improve their quality of life. They believe that an educated Rohingya community is not only good for them, but also to help them understand the law and regulation while they are still staying in Malaysia. At the same time, being educated will be able to help them to earn some income, especially women who do not have income sources because most of them cannot read. They do not know how to survive and do anything other than taking care of their family. They also believe that being an educated Rohingya community will allow them to develop themselves and at the same time be able to help them improve their behaviour and have a better life in the future. Those who have already resettled are also hoping for the same thing, i.e., to give education to the community. They are hoping to provide not only academic education, but also religious education so that they and their next generation can practice Islam in the resettlement countries.

“We always make educated people, those who don’t know the rules of this country, we always tell them to follow the government rule. Especially during- during COVID-19 period, this period we always tell them to follow the rules, SOP, yeah... especially most of our

people don't know how to read because we didn't establish in Myanmar."

(LR6)

4.2.2 Involved in Community Originations

The second community aspiration is to be involved in the community of the origin. This is referring to the involvement with the community which is meaningful and consistent participation in activities that support and improve social well-being. The Rohingya refugees believe that they are here in Malaysia trying to survive, but they noticed that many of them are suffering. They aspire to have a community that stays together and united. At the same time, they aspire to be involved in the community so that they can lead the community, show the community the good things so that they will always come together and do the right things. This can help them to have a positive image for the Rohingya community and a better future. Some of the refugees who have already resettled are hoping to speak on behalf of the Rohingya refugees so that their voice can be heard and more Rohingya refugees who are in transit countries can be resettled to a third country. They also hope to contribute more to the society and the community, helping them, not necessarily Rohingya refugees only, but all the needy that need help all around the world. Besides, they also want to build a strong, resilient, supportive community in the resettlement countries.

"To build a community we always have to come together and do the right thing for the people in the community people, and tell them good things, what we have to do, what we have go through and we have to create positive information for the people in the community."

(LR6)

4.2.3 Religious Affiliations

Another aspiration is to have religious affiliations in the community. Religious affiliation refers to religious or spiritual beliefs and practices to which a person adheres or a religious group to which a person belongs (Australian bureau of Statistics, 2016). Hundred percent of the Rohingya refugees in this study are Muslims. They have Islam as their religion. Despite having a normal day like others, the Rohingya refugees aspire to have a community where they can spend



their time to practice Islam. They want to focus more on religious obligations like teaching and reading the Quran and Hadith. Wherever they go, they can always sit and listen to Islamic lectures so that they can start being a community that focuses on religious practice. Same with those who have already resettled, some of them aspire to create a Muslim Rohingya community over there, just like other communities that can learn more about Islam together. They aspire to have a community where they can present their culture and religion.

“We start to focus more on the religious one because we this this is obligated because we spent a lot of time on teaching how to read Quran, and then understand uhh understand the Hadis something like that. So, people there are- the community there start more on religious one.”

(The ninth respondent who is living in Malaysia (LR9))

4.3 Family Aspirations

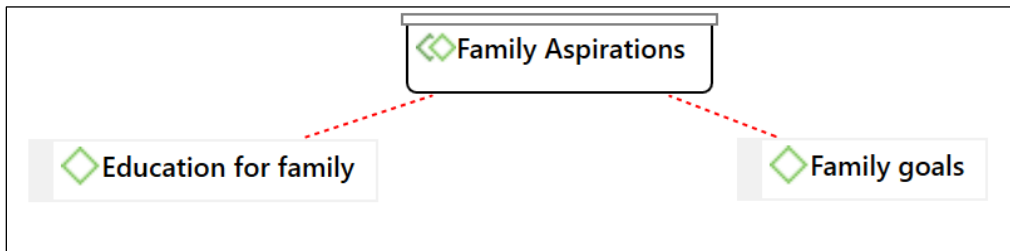


Figure 3 : Family Aspiration Network

4.3.1 Education for Family

Just like for themselves and the community, the Rohingya refugees also aspire to give education to their family members. This refers to providing education by equipping and empowering their family members to develop knowledge and skills that can enhance their well-being and strengthen their interpersonal relationships. Those who have already resettled also have the same aspiration to provide education for their kids. LR2 is currently working so hard to earn money to support his family. His brothers are not able to work, thus he sends money to them who are living in other countries for their studies so that they will have a better life in the future. LR3, on the other hand, focuses not only on his children, but also his wife. He is hoping to educate his family not

only by sending them to schools or colleges, but also to educate their family about Malaysia.

“I mean my future plan for my children uh for my children and wife is to build up I mean to educate my wife like uh just now I mentioned I have to educate him how about Malaysia. Malaysia system like, how Malaysia do, how the behavior, how they protect environment like that and then my son I have to educate on the same way.”

(LR3)

4.3.2 Family Goals

Most of the Rohingya refugees have family goals. This refers to how they want to live their family life often by staying together, reuniting with the whole family who has been separated, supporting each of their family members, and sharing life's joys and sorrows. Fleeing from their home country to save themselves has caused them to be separated from their loved ones. The family members are either still left behind in the country of origin, get separated during the journey, be the victims of human trafficking, or have gone to other neighbouring countries. Some of the refugees are hoping to reunite with their family who are currently staying in Bangladesh. The fifth respondent who is living in Malaysia (LR5), for example, is in Malaysia alone without any family members. His whole family is staying in Myanmar, so he hopes that one day they will be able to reunite because the situation in Myanmar is still not improving. Some of the refugees are hoping that they can go to another country that can accept refugees for resettlement so that they can have freedom, reunite with their family, and live together with their family members happily.

“I want to go to the country that that accepts refugees so that we can, at least we have freedom, we can go reunite with our family in Bangladesh. So, this is my target.”

(LR1)

Even though some of them have already resettled in a third country, not all of them are living together with their whole family. There are still some refugees who got separated or living separately from their family. RR3, for example, wants to reunite with his family members who



are still in the Bangladesh refugee camps and bring them to the resettlement country to live with them. Some of them intend to advocate for their family and their parents. Some of them aspire to send their parents to perform Hajj, i.e., the fifth of the fundamental Muslim practices, in the near future.

4.4 Settlement Aspirations

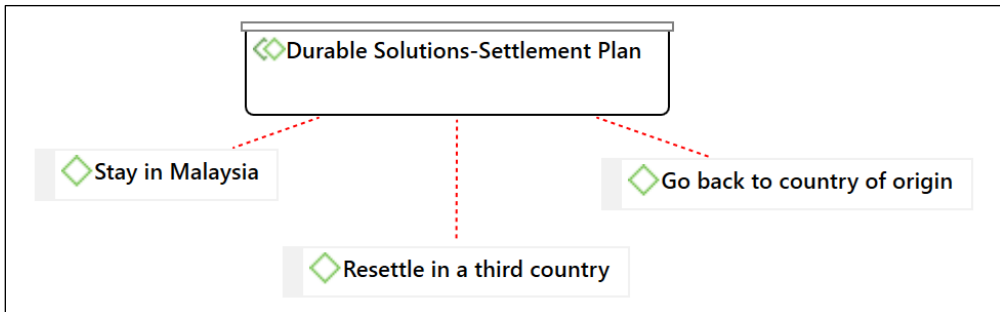


Figure 4 : Durable Solutions-Settlement Plan Network

4.4.1 Local Integration-Stay in Malaysia

This study found that some of the Rohingya refugees will settle down in Malaysia if they get the opportunity to study here. LR7, for example, would like to stay in Malaysia if he got the chance to do that. LR9, on the other hand, said he needs to stay in Malaysia for a very long time if he cannot resettle in another country. LR6 said that he likes Malaysia more than other countries. However, he did not decide to stay in Malaysia because he does not have any identification card or passport. He only depends on UNHCR card to stay in Malaysia. Even holding a UNHCR card does help him to stay in Malaysia, but he cannot do many things, including having a driving license and they are even exposed to retention when they go out from their house to work or for daily purposes. LR4, however, stated that he did not decide to stay in Malaysia because Malaysia is a non-signatory country to the refugee convention 1953. Same goes for LR8. He said that as a non-signatory country to the refugee convention, Malaysia would not accept them to stay in this country. Thus, they cannot decide to stay here. LR5, who has already spent his life in Malaysia for about 10 years, said that he did not see any future potential here in Malaysia. Thus, he finds it difficult to continue staying in Malaysia.

“I like Malaysia more than any other countries. The only thing is I don’t want to stay here because of I don’t have any- actually UNHCR card is legal document but only legal is only for UNHCR. If we go outside, we cannot use it to buy a- to make license or anything. So we don’t any- like no passport no- we don’t have IC that’s why..”

(LR5)

4.4.2 Resettlement to a Third Country

Majority of the respondents chose to resettle in a third country for their durable solution. Among the countries that the refugees prefer to resettle are Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom. LR1 believed that he can go to the other country for resettlement based on the 1950 Refugee Convention. Even though he feels safe to be in Malaysia, he still chooses to be in the country that accepts the refugees from Malaysia. LR9 said he is looking for resettlement in a third country as they cannot expect the Malaysian government to recognise refugees. LR3 said that it has been his dream to resettle in a third country as Rohingya refugees are not allowed to stay in Malaysia for a long period and he has fled from Myanmar for about seventeen years already. Same goes for LR4. Since the situation in Myanmar still does not allow them to go back to the country of origin, he opted to go to any third country that accepts him for resettlement. LR2 said that he wants to go to the United States just to be with his father. According to LR10, if there is a chance, perhaps he can go to a third country in two years after he gets his resettlement letter. However, if he is not able to resettle in a third country, he will continue to stay in Malaysia and not go to any other country as smugglers again since he has already faced many unviable things during his journey to Malaysia.

“So, we also thinking maybe we also get the chance to resettle. Because uhh, because uh here we cannot expect the Malaysian government can recognize the refugee. Yeah and so that’s why we are looking for a resettlement.”

(LR9)



4.4.3 Voluntary Repatriation- Going back to Country of Origin

To go back to their home country has become one of the dreams for the Rohingya refugees. LR7 said that if he could, he wishes to go back to his country of origin to meet his grandparents and everybody else. LR6 also hoped that if UNHCR or any other international community is able to help them to get their rights, then they will go back to their home country. Since violence, genocide, killing, and raping are still happening to their ethnicity, they will never go back to their home country as they are in fear and there is no safety for them if they go back. The political crisis and unstable country situation also restrict them from voluntary repatriation. If they still go back to their country in this current situation, there will be high chances that they will be killed. They will only return to their country if it is safe for them to be there. This will only happen when the Myanmar government accepts them, gives them nationality, and recognizes their ethnicity. However, they cannot expect that the political situation in Myanmar will improve in the near future as the problem is getting bigger and still happening. Going back to their home country means they will die as things will be complicated. Thus, most of the refugees are looking for a resettlement in a third country.

“I’m hoping that if UNHCR or any other international community give us chance to go back to our country, if they give back our rights, and we will go back to our country... I want to tell you that in my country there’s still violence and genocide, killing people, burning house and killing, raping, all these are still ongoing in Myanmar. So, I’m so fear of this thing that’s why we don’t want to go back it’s no safety for my life.”

(LR6)

Generally, there are three durable solutions for the refugees in which UNHCR can help. These include local integration, resettlement to a third country, or voluntary repatriation. Based on the analysis of this study, it was found that the majority of the Rohingya refugees aspire for a resettlement in a third country. However, Malaysia could only send 8,312 Rohingya refugees to third countries from 2003 to 2021 (Bernama, 2021). The receiving countries included the United States, Australia, Canada, and Japan, where the United States has received the most refugees. Meanwhile, Rohingya refugees who have



been in Malaysia have no choice but to remain here until they receive a call for resettlement. For them, the option to return to their country of origin is not possible unless they are granted citizenship status and all the crises that occurred have been resolved. Nevertheless, it can be seen that the resolution of the crisis will not be possible in the near future. Therefore, voluntary repatriation is unlikely to be opted by the Rohingya refugees because they are too scared to return to their home country as it is still hostile and not safe for them (Petersen & Rahman, 2019).

5.0 Conclusion

This research discovered nine livelihood aspirations, three community aspirations, and two-family aspirations shared among the respondents. Livelihood aspirations include job acquisition, expanding social networks, resource acquisition, social security, business opportunity, citizenship, survival, self-development, and educational pursuit; family aspiration includes education for family and family goals while community aspiration includes educated community, involvement in community originations, and religious affiliation.

The aspirations identified during this study somehow indicated that the Rohingya refugees' aspirations are based on their life experience in the home and transit countries which later influenced their settlement aspirations. As the refugees will be staying in Malaysia for quite some time, it is very important to develop more settlement programmes involving refugees and asylum seekers which later may give some input on how the government can come up with strategies on how to manage the uncontrollable inflow of the refugees into Malaysia. Exploring the aspirations of the Rohingya refugees can help the transit countries such as Malaysia to see how the dreams of Rohingya refugees direct their life journey and give meaning to continuing their daily struggles in transit countries. Moreover, it can provide insights into how the refugees plan their future in realising their future aspirations as in to either remain in Malaysia or choose to resettle in a third country. The findings from this study also allow the transit countries to come out with the mechanism or strategies in helping the refugees to achieve their goals while preparing them for the durable solutions.

In identifying future research needs, it is very important to consider the limitations of this research. One of the limitations of the present study is that most of the information gathered was from men.



This is due to the fact that the men are the leaders and breadwinners of the family. However, due to this, the result obtained may not be applicable to the Rohingya women in the community. Moreover, due to COVID-19 and the standard procedure that has to be followed to prevent the spread of the epidemics, online interviews were done to communicate with the respondents. While online interviews do help to reach a number of participants easily, including the one who are living overseas, arising connectivity problems make it difficult to hear what the respondents are saying clearly. Besides, in order to conduct the interview, the respondents must have access to a computer or at least a hand phone with an internet connection. Any technical problems that arise wreak havoc in the interview process.

As for future research direction, it is hoped that the researcher can include more Rohingya youth and women as the respondents in order to study their future aspirations and plans in developing their human capital and preparing themselves to achieve all their aspirations.

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