

Access to Education and Adopted Identity of the Rohingya Amid Government Restrictions in Bangladesh

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Abstract : The consistent persecution, ethnic cleansing, and genocide against the Rohingya in Burma resulted four major influxes of the Rohingya people to the neighboring country Bangladesh. After the latest influx of October 2016 and August 2017, the total number of Rohingya in Bangladesh stands somewhere between 900,000 to over one million, placing Bangladesh much ahead with the number of refugees compared to Dadaab and Kakuma in Kenya, Bidibidi in Uganda and Zaatari in Jordan. While Bangladesh received recognition and appreciation for receiving a huge number of the Rohingya, one of the fundamental human rights of the Rohingya – education – has never been fulfilled in Bangladesh. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief of the government of Bangladesh has been looking after the Rohingya and managing various programs for the Rohingya. On its website, the Ministry claims that it provides the basic supports/services to the Rohingya, including providing education. In practice, however, education for the Rohingya include only the provisions for registered Rohingya refugees – who are a very small number of populations among the entire Rohingya hosted in Bangladesh – and that is only up to grade 7 within the registered camps at Teknaf and Ukhia of Cox's Bazar district of the country. There is no answer of the question, 'What's next'? Although refugees in Canada, Sudan, Turkey and other countries have been allowed to go to mainstream schools, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are not allowed to do so legally. Due to the lack of proof of nationality of the Rohingya, the government of Bangladesh imposes restrictions on their access to Bangladeshi schools. However, despite their vulnerability and statelessness, many Rohingyas are desperate to pursue education outside the camps and find their own way not only within Cox's Bazar but also even in the capital city of the country. But they must hide their refugee identity to accomplish this. My research aims to explore how they manage to get admission amid government restrictions on their access to education in the mainstream institutions in Bangladesh. It will reveal how Rohingya people use adopted identity to get access to education in Bangladesh, and how they apply their own techniques to achieve their goals without having government approved identity. This research examined the strategies the Rohingya applied to manage documents related to their identity to ensure their admission to Bangladeshi education institutions – in schools, colleges, and universities. The research employed a qualitative approach. It used semi structured individual interviews and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with 20 male and female Rohingya refugees who are 18 years old and above, and have enrolled in Bangladeshi education institutions with adopted identity. Also I interviewed 5 local community members and policy makers to understand their perceptions and roles in this process. The findings of this research will allow the policy makers to rethink the outcomes of the restrictions on Rohingya's education in Bangladesh, the ramifications of the denial of Rohingya's access to education, and initiate policy dialogues on how to allow Rohingya refugees to pursue education in Bangladesh in legal way.

Keywords : Rohingya, Refugee, Bangladesh, Education

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