

# LANGUAGE GUIDANCE FOR RAKHINE STATE

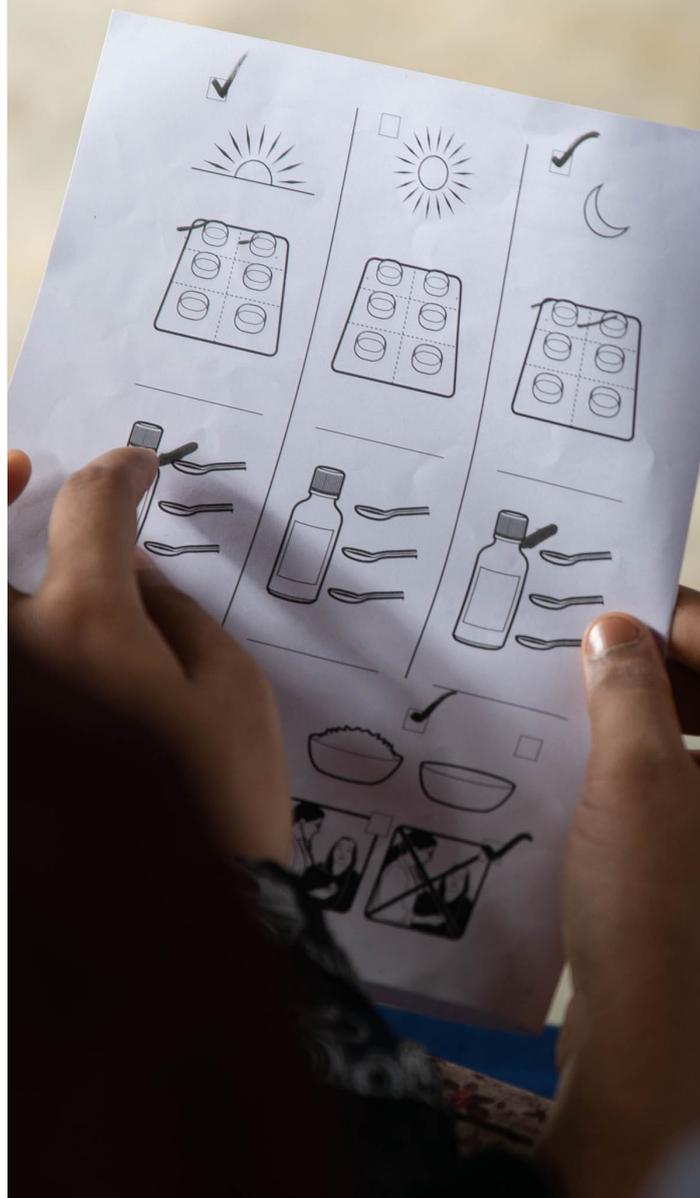


## HEALTH

These Rohingya language guidelines provide cultural background and linguistic context for humanitarian program managers, field workers, and interpreters who work in health programs. They accompany the TWB Glossary for Myanmar, which contains more than 200 health- and education-related terms. It is available in four languages online and offline via mobile app in written and audio format.

<https://glossaries.translatorswb.org/myanmar/>

We compiled and verified these terms through interviews and focus group discussions, complemented by desk research.



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The Rohingya people's understanding of health combines ancient Indian traditions like Ayurveda, religious concepts like the Islamic *jinn*s and *nazar*, Myanmar culture, and Western medicine. These culturally rich beliefs of how and why people get sick are valuable to understand when designing health interventions for the community. The language used by the Rohingya community when describing medical conditions reflects these various influences.

In central Rakhine, most communication to and from the Rohingya community flows through Rakhine-speaking interpreters and field staff. As such, it is important for program staff to be familiar with Rakhine and Rohingya terms. As the official language, and thus the one used by the health ministry, Myanmar influences both Rohingya and Rakhine. Newly acquired terms are often in Myanmar, and wholly adapted into the latter two languages. For example, the word for nutrition in both Rohingya and Rakhine is *ahara*, which was borrowed from Myanmar. Similarly, both Rakhine and Rohingya borrow the Myanmar word for vaccine, *kaa-kway-see*, albeit with a slight difference in pronunciation. These guidelines focus on medical concepts in Rohingya, to take into account low literacy rates and limited secondary language knowledge among Rohingya women and older people.

## WHICH LANGUAGE IS THAT IN?

The Rohingya language is constantly evolving due to influence from humanitarians, social media, and of course, internal societal dynamics. Rohingya speakers are increasingly adopting English and Myanmar words for new concepts that they learn about in the camps. For example, Rohingya often say *luna gari* or *embulens* for ambulance. *Luna* means "patient" in Myanmar, and *gari* means "car" in Rohingya. Another example is that Rohingya speakers borrow from English to say *kinni* meaning "kidney."

Though these words show the influence of foreign languages in Rohingya, the terms may not be used by everyone in the community. Those with better access to education and humanitarian services may adapt to these terms. However, most people, especially women and older people, understand Rohingya terms best.





# SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTH

Spirituality and medical practices are interlinked in the Rohingya community. They therefore use a mix of health treatments, including medical doctors and traditional healers.

The concept of *jinns* is part of Islamic folklore. They are spirits that can be either good or evil. Rohingya believe that these spirits can affect people's health and mental states. In Rohingya, paralysis is translated as *batashe maiije*, which literally means "hit by winds." Many female reproductive conditions are also explained by *jinns*. Women who have heavy periods, or who have recently given birth, are encouraged to carry something made of iron (like a nail) or fire (with candles or lamps) when they leave the house to protect them from bad *jinns*. To discourage these *jinns*, the Rohingya community often seeks the guidance of imams and shamans, and treatment often includes holy water, exorcism, prayers, and herbal remedies.

These spiritual practices and terms are usually difficult for Rakhine-speaking interpreters and nurses to understand due to the cultural differences between the two communities. Though the Rakhine community also have spiritual elements in their medical practices (generally Buddhist), they are not parallel to the Rohingya concepts, which are Islamic in nature. Arabic and Urdu words, like *jinn* and *nozor* ("evil eye"), do not readily translate into Rakhine.

## HEALTH, AGE, AND TIME

Childhood is a time of free play for all girls and boys, though certain milestones and rites of passage are marked during childhood to start segregating the genders.

The Rohingya do not have an established term for "adolescence" or "adolescent." They use *horim balok* for "prepubescent girls" and *fata hoish'sha* for "prepubescent boys." The word *juwan*, which literally means "youth" or "young," is used for both sexes after they show physical signs of puberty. There are more descriptive words for girls after puberty that reflect their lives in a segregated society. For example, *gor goille* means "one that enters the house", and *mathar hor diye* means "one who covers her hair."

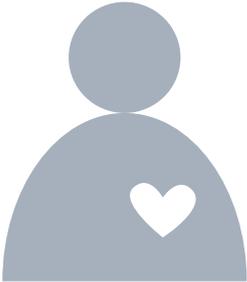
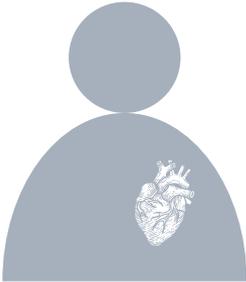
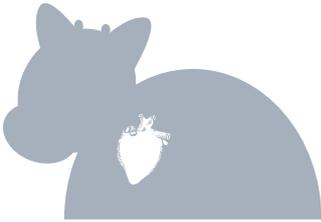
Similarly, the Rohingya do not have a distinct word for "adult." They often say *beda* or *bedi*, meaning "man" or "woman." They refer to someone approximately between the ages of 30 and 50 as *adboisha*, which means "half a lifetime." Anyone that looks older and has good social standing in the community is known as a *murobbi*, loosely translated as "elder."

# Understanding basic anatomy

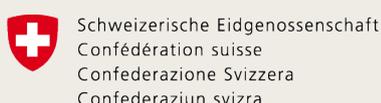
Low health literacy in the community is particularly evident when talking about anatomy. You may have heard someone in a health center saying *aaar hoilla dufdufar*, while moving their palm up and down their chest. An obvious assumption would be that they are complaining of chest pain. However, when translated literally, the phrase means “my liver is palpitating.” The idea that a person’s liver is near his or her chest is a common misunderstanding in the Rohingya community.

The multiple words that Rohingya people associate with the concept of “heart” further illustrate anatomical misconceptions in the community. An “emotional heart” is *dil* (borrowed from Urdu), and is used to describe emotional states. They also use the word *mon*, which means “mind.” The physical organ in a person’s chest is called *hoilla* (which remember, literally means “liver”). However, when describing an animal heart – let’s say, that of a cow after a ritual sacrifice – they use *amgurda*, which means “mango-kidney” because the shape of a heart resembles a mango.



		
Dil	Hoilla	Amgurda

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