

Over the past two weeks, community feedback suggests that refugees are becoming increasingly concerned about the possibility of repatriation to Myanmar, with rumours circulating and a clear need for more information. Repatriation is currently one of the most discussed issues within the Rohingya community with lots of queries and apprehension. Many of the community's concerns relate to a lack of knowledge about how repatriation decisions are being made and what the process will be. Given these concerns, this special edition of *What Matters?* provides an immediate snapshot of the rumours and worries currently present within the Rohingya community, gathered from individual community members as well as through mahjis and other influential people.

Confusion about process and fear of implications: Rohingya people's views about repatriation



Source: Feedback collected between November 6 and November 11 by 14 Internews community correspondents using Kobo Collect application in camps 1E, 1W, 2E, 2W, 3, 4, 4 Extension, 7, and 21. In total, 116 interactions have been analysed to present the significant concerns and questions of the Rohingya community regarding repatriation. The Internews feedback is collected in Rohingya using English and Bangla script. The data has been contextualised through in-depth interviews with mahjis carried out by BBC Media Action in camps 1, 2, 8 and 14.

why people were fearful of the process, which is becoming a cause of tension in the community. People do not understand how names are added to the list and have been requesting mahjis not to include their names.

Prior to the most recent news reports about repatriation, refugees were already suspicious about filling in forms or providing personal information. People's anxiety has increased with the latest reports, with many people now refusing to fill in any forms at all and many mahjis helping other community members to avoid having their names listed in any documents.

“ We heard 8000 people will be repatriated first and that every block leader will collect five to ten households. Repatriated people will be kept in IDP camps in Myanmar. We don't know how they will live in those IDP camps as they think they are better here in Bangladesh.”

– Female, 49, camp 1W

“ The head mahji gave us a list of ten families who will be taken back to Myanmar. We heard that the list has come from the Bangladesh army.”

– Male, 28, camp 1E

Worries about the implications of return

Many in the community strongly believe that they will be killed by the Myanmar military if they are sent back to Myanmar. There are also strong concerns from the community that they may be tortured or forced to come back to Bangladesh, if they return to Myanmar. Others are concerned that they might not get the chance to escape to Bangladesh a second time if they are repatriated now and experience violence back in Myanmar.

“ We don't know, is it a forced repatriation? We are worrying if they kill and torture us again, we won't have the option to come back here in Bangladesh. Until and unless we get self-recognition as Rohingya, even if they kill us, we won't go.”

– Male, 70, camp 7

“ In the last 55 years, we came three times because our people can't tolerate the torture of the Burmese government anymore. How many times we will come and go? In the past, if we didn't want to go, they forced us.”

– Female, 55, camp 2W

Special Edition

WHAT MATTERS?

Humanitarian Feedback Bulletin
on Rohingya Response

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Process not clear

The process of repatriation is not clear to the community and lack of knowledge about this is a considerable issue. Some are worried that the process will not be voluntary.

Specifically, the lack of clarity over how the list of names is being developed, and no knowledge within the community about which names are on the list, was frequently mentioned by both the community in general and the mahjis as a major reason

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Community members have been requesting mahjis to raise concerns on their behalf, reinforcing the community leaders' stated position that a return to Myanmar is impossible until certain conditions are met and their security can be guaranteed. All the mahjis seem to be aware of these conditions – the recognition of the Rohingya as an ethnic group; security of life; international acknowledgement of the Rohingya community; human rights including the right to move freely around Myanmar (for education, economic activities, etc); and access for media and NGOs to Rakhine.

One mahji voiced the concerns of the community more starkly, saying that dying in Bangladesh would be less painful than dying in Myanmar, where the community feel they may be tortured or raped before being killed. He also voiced the community's belief that death in Bangladesh would at least allow for janazah (the Islamic funeral prayer) and dafan (burial).

“ If you want to, kill us, burn us and shoot us – but please do it in Bangladesh. Still, we won't go back to Myanmar. At least I'll get a janazah over here. This country's government is not as cruel as the Myanmar govt.”

– Mahji

Other issues of concern

The community have also raised other issues connected to the recent news about repatriation.

Role of humanitarian actors:

Many Rohingya people say that they have no idea who would take care of their security if they are sent back to Myanmar now. Feedback received mentioned that people might consider going back if the UN can make sure that they will not be killed or tortured and can monitor what happens to the community in the future.

“ Who will take care of us if we go there and the Burmese army torture us again? We will not be able to come back to Bangladesh anymore. Will UNHCR take responsibility for us?”

– Male, 28, camp 1W

“ If UN, UNHCR can make sure that they will keep an eye on us, only then will we go.”

– Male, 42, camp 1W

Justice and Rights:

It is clear from feedback that people are unlikely to volunteer to return unless they feel that justice has been served for the events that caused them to flee to Bangladesh. Some of the community members say that, without justice from the International Criminal Court, they would not go back even if that meant facing death in Bangladesh.

IDP camps in Rakhine:

Questions have also arisen regarding the place where repatriated people would live in Myanmar. Some Rohingya people think that the camps in Bangladesh are preferable to the IDP camps in Myanmar.

National Verification Card and Rohingya documents:

A lot of Rohingya people mentioned that they do not want the National Verification Card. Instead, they want either to be identified as a Rohingya or have another document which would identify them as a citizen of Myanmar. Without these, they do not want to go back.

“ We want to get justice from the ICC Court. We will not go unless we get justice.”

– Female, 55, camp 1W

“ On October 30, the Burmese and Bangladeshi governments made an agreement. They said that they would take all the refugees back to Burma, that they would give us National Verification Cards and keep us in an IDP camp for five months. Then, they will take us to our places.”

– Male, 43, camp 1E

“ We are worried that they will take us back and give us an NVC card. We will not take an NVC card; we want a card which calls us Rohingya.”

– Male, 55, camp 4

BBC Media Action, Internews, and Translators without Borders are working together to collect and collate feedback from communities affected by the Rohingya crisis. This summary aims to provide a snapshot of feedback received from Rohingya and host communities, to assist sectors to better plan and implement relief activities with communities' needs and preferences in mind.

The work is being delivered in partnership with IOM, the UN migration agency, and is funded by EU humanitarian aid and the UK Department for International Development.

If you have any comments, questions or suggestions regarding *What Matters?*, you are welcome to get in touch with the team by emailing info@cxbfeedback.org