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FACT SHEET **YALE MACMILLAN CENTER**
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Socioeconomic Characteristics of Rohingya Refugees from Myanmar Living in Bangladesh

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Background

Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh has received multiple waves of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar since the 1970s, but late 2017 saw the largest and fastest refugee influx in Bangladesh's history. Between August 2017 and December 2018, 745,000 Rohingya refugees fled Myanmar into Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, following an outbreak of violence in Rakhine State.¹ As of December 31, 2019, Teknaf and Ukhia sub-districts host an estimated 554,704 stateless Rohingya refugees, almost all of whom live in densely populated camps (UNHCR 2019).

Researchers from Yale University,² the World Bank, and the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) initiative started the Cox's Bazar Panel Survey (CBPS) in order to provide accurate data to humanitarian and government stakeholders involved in the response to the influx of refugees. The survey is an in-depth household survey covering 5,620 households³ living in both refugee camps and host communities. This quantitative data collection is complemented with qualitative interviews with adolescents and their caregivers.

In line with the 2018 Global Compact for Refugees commitment to promote economic opportunities, decent work, and skills training for both host community members and refugees, this brief presents a set of stylized facts on the socioeconomic status of Rohingya refugees in 2019 and in the year preceding the latest outbreak of violence.

The aim is to better understand the ways in which the challenges faced by Rohingya refugees while they were living in Myanmar are likely to affect their ability—and the ability of future generations of Rohingya—to attain a better living standard in their host communities, with a view to informing policy and programming.

Drawing from a survey on retrospective employment and labor income from the first round of panel data in 2019, we compare three groups: the population of Myanmar, Rohingya people who crossed the border into Bangladesh in 2017, and those who left Myanmar prior to 2017 and are currently living in Cox's Bazar.⁴

Key Facts

- Refugees, especially women, have low educational attainment both in absolute terms, and relative to the average in Myanmar.
- Still, pre-displacement labor force participation rates were high among refugee men and comparable to those of men across Myanmar, as reported in the 2017 Myanmar Labor Force Survey.
- Among refugee women, however, pre-displacement employment rates were low, both in absolute terms and relative to average female employment rate in Myanmar.
- Refugee men were predominantly self-employed, and the self-employed earned about twice as much as wage workers.
- Those who were employed in Myanmar prior to forcible displacement are much more likely to be employed in Bangladesh currently. Their current employment consists primarily in volunteering.
- Despite the credible reports that assets were commonly confiscated or destroyed in Myanmar, Rohingya refugees displaced from Myanmar after July 2017 owned more assets than Rohingya who left Myanmar prior to 2017.
- Rohingya refugees in camps had on average an age dependency⁵ ratio of 1.26 compared to 0.89 in host community households, reflecting the greater pressure on working age refugees to find jobs and provide for the basic necessities for their household.

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