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The lives they lead: Exploring the capabilities of Bangladeshi and Rohingya adolescents in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

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Overview

Since August 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingya crossed the border into Bangladesh, joining another half million that made similar journeys in previous years to escape decades of systematic discrimination and human rights violations in Myanmar (Human Rights Council, 2018; IOG, 2017). The nearly three-quarters of a million refugees who arrived in the autumn of 2017 – over half of whom were children under the age of 18 – have predominantly settled into 32 camps located in two flood-prone sub-districts of Cox's Bazar, which is situated in Chittagong Division along Bangladesh's border with Myanmar (IOG et al., 2019; UNHCR, 2018). These two sub-districts (Ukhia and Teknaf) now have populations that are 70% and 20% refugees respectively (ACAPS, 2018).

Rohingya refugees are confined to camps, prohibited not only from attending local schools but from using government curriculum, are not allowed to work or build permanent houses and have limited access to the internet (HRW, 2018). The Joint Response Plan (JRP) of the UN and government of Bangladesh (IOG et al., 2018) notes that with no access to their own livelihoods, 'the refugee population remains 100% reliant on food assistance' (p. 30).

While large-scale national surveys such as the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) provide some evidence about Bangladesh's adolescents living in host communities, there is little known about adolescent Rohingya refugees because the Rohingyas have been stateless – and uncared for – in Myanmar for decades due to systematic discrimination and marginalisation. To date, there have only been a few small-scale assessments, including one aimed at child marriage and sexual and reproductive health (Anis et al., 2018) and one aimed at adolescent girls more broadly (Pan and GPS, 2018).

This brief draws on mixed-methods data collected in 2019 as part of the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme – a unique longitudinal mixed-methods research and impact evaluation study that is focusing on

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research and impact evaluation study that is focusing on what works to support the development of adolescents' capabilities during the second decade of life (10–19 years) (GAGE consortium, 2019 forthcoming). In Cox's Bazar, GAGE partnered with researchers from Yale University and the World Bank to implement 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.

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