

Information gaps regarding repatriation

Find out more on page 1

Language: discussions on return and repatriation

Find out more on page 2

Special edition

# WHAT MATTERS?

Humanitarian Feedback Bulletin on Rohingya Response

Wednesday, August 21, 2019

# Repatriation

Source: Community feedback and questions passed on from information centres, listening groups and other community engagement and feedback channels across multiple agencies since 15 August 2019.

Following the recent confirmation from the government of Myanmar that some refugees are eligible to return, many Rohingya people have expressed concerns and questions about the issue. Feedback from the community also suggests that there are rumours and misunderstandings circulating about the topic and that there is the need to fill information gaps about repatriation.

## Key information gaps

The process of repatriation is not clear to many in the Rohingya community – there is a desire for more, and more detailed, information about the process through which people cleared to return will be informed and consulted. Some people report that they are confused by hearing different information from different sources. Beyond the current process, many people also report a desire for more information about the decisions that have already been made and feel that it is important for these information gaps to be filled. The list of people cleared to return is a key area where people want more information, including:

- Why only 3,450 people are eligible to return now and how they have been selected.
- Why people from camps 24, 26 and 27 have been cleared to return.
- Why the list has not been / cannot be published.

- Whether the original list sent to Myanmar was sent by the government of Bangladesh or by UNHCR; and whether this list is the same list as the one that was used in 2018.
- Whether the families who were cleared for return in November 2018 are also within the scope of the latest list.

Information gaps are being exacerbated because some field-level practitioners have been told not to discuss repatriation with the Rohingya community. According to some humanitarian staff, instructions have been issued by agency managers, sectors or donors that no proactive communication on the topic should take place and that all questions should be referred to CICs or UNHCR. This lack of communication, despite the existence of cleared and coordinated communication tools, is likely to be exacerbating information gaps and could encourage the circulation of rumours and misunderstanding.

## Rohingya people want assurance on nationality and property in Myanmar

Some Rohingya people say that they do not want to return until their status as Myanmar nationals has been assured by the Myanmar government and their property is returned to them. They want these issues to be resolved before any repatriation process starts. This is perhaps particularly relevant for people who were better off before leaving Myanmar – with land, businesses and other assets – since feedback suggests that there are some more wealthy families who would be prepared to return at this point.

Some people have heard that, after repatriation, they will be issued with an NBC card which will identify them as 'Bangladeshi'. They are afraid that, if this is the case, the Myanmar army might force them back to Bangladesh at some point in the future. A few people have also said that they want compensation for their lost property before they return.

## People are concerned about their safety if they return

Much of the feedback from the Rohingya community is about safety concerns in the event that they return to Myanmar. People say that they do not know who would take care of their security if they are 'sent back' to Myanmar and that, without proper security, they are worried that the Myanmar army could torture them. Some feedback suggests that lack of information about the safety of Rohingya people who are currently living in Myanmar is leading people to be unconvinced about their own safety, should they choose to return.

Some also mentioned that 'Mogs' (the Buddhist community living in Rakhine) don't want them to return. Some people have seen video clips of clashes between the Myanmar army and Rakhine Buddhists protesting against Rohingya people's return. Some mentioned their

fear that, since the military had killed so many Rohingya people in the past, it would be easy for them to repeat this if only a small number of Rohingya people return now.

### People are not sure where they will live in Myanmar

Several questions are regarding the place where repatriated people would live in Myanmar. Some mentioned their fear that they would be kept in camps with limited facilities. They have heard about a camp in Akyab where they say 117,000 Rohingya people are living with little food and poor access to health and WASH facilities. Many people feel that, if the choice is between camps in Bangladesh and camps in Myanmar, the Bangladeshi camps are better as they feel more secure here.

### Complexity around the decision to return

Some feedback suggests that the concept of 'voluntary return' is not well understood and needs clearer and better explanation. Even where there is understanding, feedback suggests that individuals' decisions may be influenced by powerful people within the Rohingya community who are against repatriation. Audio messages are circulating on social media requesting refugees to decline if they are offered the option to return. Some people also mentioned that their decision to return or not would be determined by a particular community leader who lives outside of the camps. Feedback suggests that some Rohingya organisations have held meetings with the community encouraging them not to return to Myanmar.

### Other issues arising

Some less frequent issues to emerge from recent feedback include:

- Some people have heard that only Hindu people will be repatriated.
- Some feedback recalls the previous repatriation exercise in November 2018 and expresses skepticism about whether any repatriation will happen at all, given that the previous attempt did not result in any people returning.
- Some believe that there is going to be an attempt to force them to return, and that the police and military are likely to be involved in that attempt. There are some concerns about the additional police and security presence that has been noticed in camps.
- Some feedback asked whether the Myanmar government delegation was going to come back and talk with Rohingya people and leaders. There is a feeling amongst some people that the Myanmar government had undertaken to do this before repatriation takes place.

## Language: discussions on return and repatriation

The recent repatriation announcement by the Government of Bangladesh and the Government of Myanmar will no doubt have increased conversations among refugees. People need clear and accurate information in relevant languages and formats to make decisions for themselves and their families. It is important that field workers engage the community in discussions about the issue, using terms the community understands well. This will reduce the chance of sensitive information being unintentionally misinterpreted.

### Address expectations early

At the beginning of any engagement with the community, field workers should clearly state the purpose of the discussion. It is equally important for them to explain what will happen with the information community members provide. For example, is this a discussion designed to provide information, or are you taking a formal registration for relocation? Be clear and manage expectations carefully before you proceed.

### Key terms

As many of the technical terms associated with repatriation do not exist in the Rohingya language, it's important to explain the concepts using clear terminology. For example, *nizor issa* or *kushi-kushi* for 'own choice' and *wafis* for 'return'.

There is no single word for 'repatriation' in the Rohingya language, and few speakers understand the Bangla word *protyabashon* which is also used by Chittagonian speakers. To describe a forced return they use *bolazuri Bormat fathai don*. To describe voluntary repatriation, Rohingya speakers use the phrase *nizor kushi-kushi Burmat wafis loizon*.

The English word 'voluntary' is often confused with 'volunteer'. The Rohingya community in Bangladesh has also absorbed the English term 'volunteer' into their language to refer specifically to Rohingya aid workers (they pronounce it '*bolontiyar*'). This word association may lead to confusion amongst the Rohingya community if 'voluntary' is used in conversations about return. Some may think only volunteers are returning to Myanmar.

Several other terms will also be useful for community discussions on this sensitive topic. The Rohingya community values the concept of honour and dignity (*izzot*). Many Chittagonian and most Rohingya speakers don't understand the Bangla word for 'information' (*tothyo*). They use *hobor* instead, which is also the word for 'news'. 'Fear' (*dor*) is an important term to know, as is 'rumour' (*urainna-hobor*). The words for 'consent' (*razi*) and 'privacy' (*gufoniya*) will also come in handy. And lastly, knowing such simple words as 'yes' (*oy'ze*), 'no' (*no'ze*), and 'don't know' (*no zani*) will be important for any discussion on repatriation.

### Talking about family

A discussion about return and relocation easily leads to a discussion about family here and back in Myanmar. The Rohingya community use a number of terms when speaking about family. For example, *foribar* refers to only the husband and wife, while *goror gush'shitia* refers to the household, or the family that lives within your house (nuclear family). The extended family (including aunts, uncles and grandparents) is *egana-gush'shi*. If you are talking about family who still live in Myanmar, you could use the term *felai-aish'shede goror manush* which translates as 'left-behind family'.

Key Rohingya terms that might be useful in discussions about repatriation:

| English term           | Rohingya equivalent                  |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Voluntary repatriation | <i>Nizor issaye Burmat wafes zon</i> |
| Forced repatriation    | <i>Bolazuri Burmat fathai don</i>    |
| Voluntary / agree      | <i>kushi-kushi</i>                   |
| Forced                 | <i>Bolazuri</i>                      |
| Return                 | <i>Wafes zon goi</i>                 |
| Consent                | <i>Razi</i>                          |
| Identity               | <i>Sinno / forisoj</i>               |
| Citizenship            | <i>Tairinsa / deshoitta</i>          |
| Ethnicity              | <i>Zaat / koum</i>                   |
| Dignity (honour)       | <i>Izzot</i>                         |
| Yes                    | <i>Oi ze</i>                         |
| No                     | <i>No'ze</i>                         |
| Don't know             | <i>No zani</i>                       |

| English term                          | Rohingya equivalent                              |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Maybe                                 | <i>Oit fare</i>                                  |
| Home                                  | <i>Nizor ghor-duwar</i>                          |
| House                                 | <i>Ghor</i>                                      |
| Village                               | <i>Gang</i>                                      |
| Shelter                               | <i>Saara / bashar ghor</i>                       |
| Possessions (personal items)          | <i>Mal shombotti</i>                             |
| Safe                                  | <i>Hefazot / soyi-salamot</i>                    |
| Unsafe                                | <i>Hefazot sara</i>                              |
| Lawyer                                | <i>Ukil</i>                                      |
| Compensation                          | <i>Gunari / hoti furon</i>                       |
| Freedom of movement (camps)           | <i>Kulamela gori solifiri faron kemfot</i>       |
| Freedom of movement (another country) | <i>Kulamela gori solifiri faron oinno deshot</i> |



BBC Media Action 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 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](mailto:info@cxbfeedback.org)