



XCHANGE
RESEARCH ON MIGRATION

The Rohingya Survey

20¹⁷

During September-October 2017 we collected **1,360 testimonies** from Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh) - This is what we found.

“

The Rohingya are often referred to as 'one of the world's most persecuted minorities' by activists and the press.

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Context

Rohingya Muslims are the largest Muslim community in Myanmar¹. They form a distinct ethnic group, with their own language and culture.² However, the Rohingya are subject to severe discrimination from the Myanmar government, compounded by marginalization from the general population. The Rohingya are considered “illegal immigrants” from neighbouring Bangladesh despite being able to trace their roots back for centuries in the territory which now forms the State of Myanmar.³ As a result, the Rohingya have faced protracted displacement, discrimination, lack of access to education, and restrictions on freedom of movement.



Kutupalong, the biggest Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh.- © MOAS.eu - October, 2017

- 1 Report of OHCHR mission to Bangladesh: Interviews with Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016 , 3 February 2017 para 2 pg2 <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport3Feb2017.pdf>
- 2 Report of OHCHR mission to Bangladesh: Interviews with Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016 , 3 February 2017 para 3 pg2 <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport3Feb2017.pdf>
- 3 Xchange Foundation, Rohingya Survey 2016, <http://xchange.org/map/RohingyaSurvey.html>



Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law establishes three tiers of citizenship, the highest order of which is only attainable to members of 135 "national races" that are deemed "indigenous" under the law. Rohingyas do not appear on this list⁴. In order for Rohingyas to be eligible for the basic level of citizenship (naturalised), they are required to provide evidence of their ancestry in Rakhine State prior to 1948, as well as fluency in one of the national languages. The former, in particular, is an unattainable burden of proof for most⁵. As such, the vast majority are effectively stateless, yet citizenship has de facto little impact on rights or ability to access services. Rohingyas and Muslims of other ethnicities that have citizenship documents face many of the same restrictions, despite the fact that their rights are technically enshrined in law.

In the 2014 census - the first census conducted in Myanmar since 1983 - the government prohibited Rohingyas from identifying themselves by their chosen designation and required them to register as "Bengali", which most refused to do.⁶ The vast majority of Rohingyas were not counted by census enumerators and do not appear in the final census document. This most recent 'erasure' of the Rohingya compounds existing restrictions that have left most unable to access their rights to work, study, travel, marry, register births, and health services, a process that accelerated following 2012 communal violence in Rakhine State. In Northern Rakhine State (Northern Rakhine), Rohingya face being deleted from government 'residency list' if they are not present during annual "household inspections". The implications of this are that without proof of residence, Rohingya may not be able to acquire citizenship in the future; for those who fled Myanmar, complying with this regulation may prove insurmountably - and intentionally - difficult.⁷

The majority of Rohingya Muslims live in the northern areas of Rakhine State in northwestern Myanmar, with populations particularly concentrated in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung townships. Rakhine State is one of the most deprived states in Myanmar, with chronic poverty, poor infrastructure, limited access to basic services, few livelihood opportunities, as well as human security and human rights challenges.⁸

4 These are: Bamar (which constitute approximately two thirds of the population), Rakhine, Kachin, Kayah, Chin, Kayin, Mon, and Shan. They may be further broken down into 135 recognised "national ethnic groups" which does not include the Rohingya. See: Report of OHCHR mission to Bangladesh: Interviews with Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016 , 3 February 2017 para 19 pg 6 <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport3Feb2017.pdf>

5 In 1982, the government introduced regulations that denied citizenship to anyone who could not prove Burmese ancestry from before 1823. This disenfranchised many Muslims in Myanmar, even though they had lived in Myanmar for several generations. See: Burma Citizenship Law, 15 October 1982, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4f71b.html>

6 As a result, there is no publicly available data on the exact number of the Rohingya population in Myanmar. See: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar (A/HRC/32/18), <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/report-united-nations-high-commissioner-human-rights-situation-human-rights-rohingya>

7 Amnesty USA, Caged without a Roof: Apartheid in Myanmar Rakhine state (2017) <https://www.amnesty-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Caged-without-a-Roof-Apartheid-in-Myanmar-Rakhine-State.pdf>, pg 11

8 Report of OHCHR mission to Bangladesh: Interviews with Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016 , 3 February 2017 <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport3Feb2017.pdf> 5



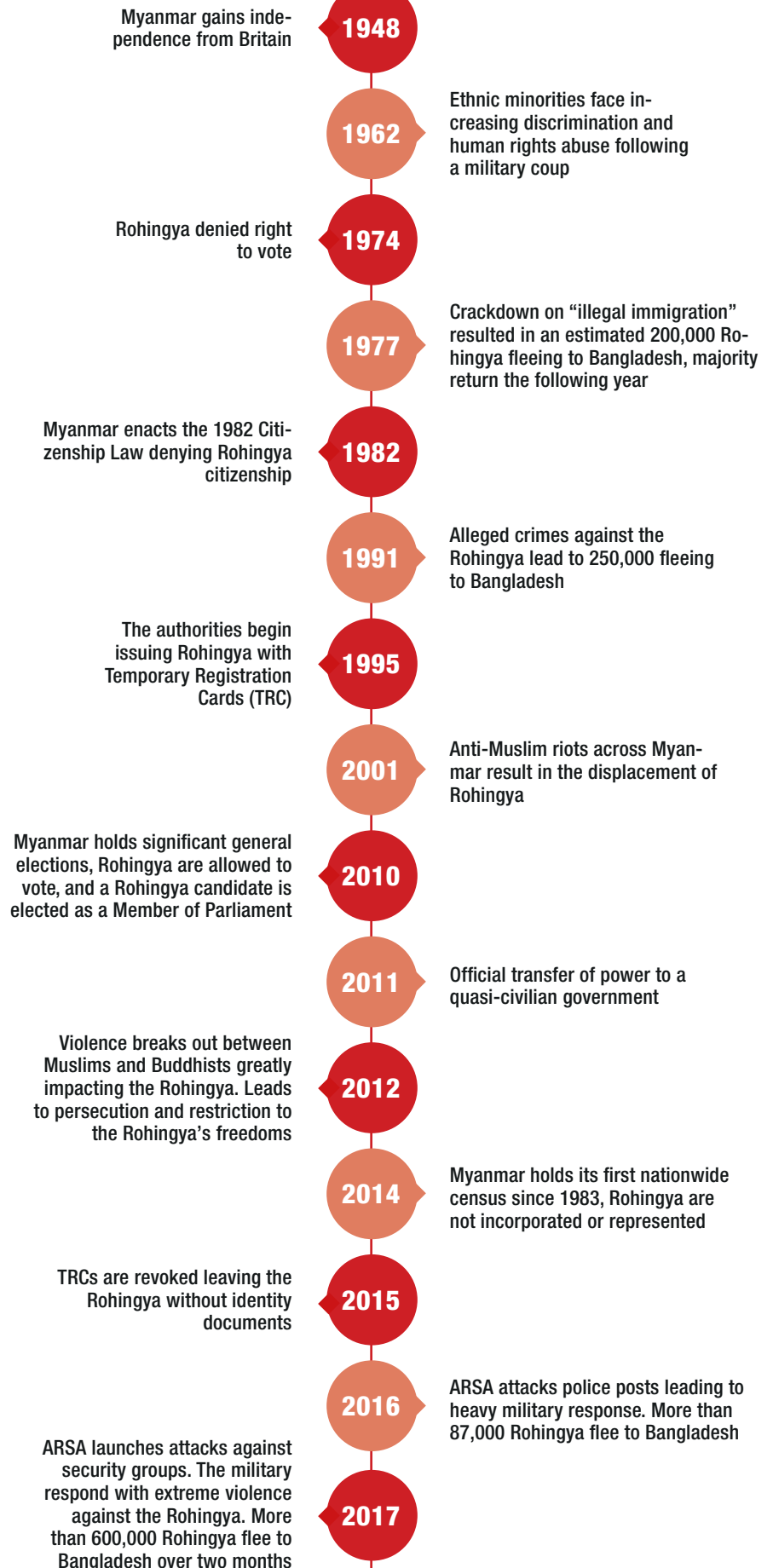
The Rohingya and other Muslim populations in Rakhine State face official restrictions on movement and segregation from other communities. Rohingyas in Rakhine State must obtain official permission in order to travel between townships or outside of the state, a process which is notoriously bureaucratic.⁹ Across Northern Rakhine, travel between villages requires passing through checkpoints, making the Rohingya vulnerable to threats, extortion and physical violence. In these areas of the state, curfews are also often in place, prohibiting people from leaving their homes or travelling at night.¹⁰

Since the 1970s, a number of 'crackdowns' on the Rohingya have resulted in mass expulsions – most notably in 1978 and 1991-1992 – which sent hundreds of thousands over the border to Bangladesh, where they have remained.

⁹ Amnesty USA, *Caged without a Roof: Apartheid in Myanmar Rakhine state* (2017) <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Caged-without-a-Roof-Apartheid-in-Myanmar-Rakhine-State.pdf> pg12

¹⁰ Amnesty USA, *Caged without a Roof: Apartheid in Myanmar Rakhine state* (2017) <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Caged-without-a-Roof-Apartheid-in-Myanmar-Rakhine-State.pdf> pg12

TIMELINE





In the wake of political reforms in Myanmar, communal tensions and outbreaks of violence increased markedly in Rakhine State. Two waves of intercommunal violence between Muslims and Buddhists swept across the state in June and October 2012, and there is strong evidence to suggest the violence was coordinated and encouraged by the security forces. This resulted in widespread injury and death, destruction of property, and the displacement of 140,000 people, most of whom remain segregated in internment camps near the state capital, Sittwe, five years on.¹¹ Unsurprisingly, 2012 saw the start of a mass exodus to Malaysia by boat, with hundreds of thousands facing extreme dangers at sea and predation from unscrupulous human traffickers. The sea route has been disrupted since mid-2015, when governments in the region cracked down on maritime smuggling networks.¹²

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The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (**ARSA**), formerly called Faith Movement or Harakah Al Yaqeen, are a Rohingya insurgent group active in Northern Rakhine State, Myanmar. The group have been training people since 2013. The Central Committee for Counter-Terrorism of Myanmar declared the ARSA a terrorist group in August 2017. The group refute this claim, stating its main purpose as defending the rights of Rohingyas.

”

In October and November 2016, some 300 Rohingya men ostensibly from a previously unknown insurgent group calling itself Harakah al-Yaqin, or “The Faith Movement”, attacked three border posts in Maungdaw and Rathedaung townships in Rakhine State, killing nine police officers. The Myanmar military responded with a brutal crackdown in a major security operation. During this operation, government troops were accused of myriad human rights abuses. As a result of this, 87,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh.¹³

On August 25th 2017, the same group, which had rebranded itself as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, or ARSA, is believed to have orchestrated attacks on 30 police posts and an army base, killing 11 members of the security forces. This was the bloodiest day of fighting since conflict broke out in 2016 and marked a significant turning point in the state’s campaign to remove Rohingyas from Northern Rakhine. The Myanmar military responded, supported by the Border Police and armed ethnic Rakhine villagers, by launching sweeping attacks against Rohingya villages. Despite official denials, there is overwhelming evidence indicating that the Myanmar military targeted the Rohingya population as a whole rather than the individuals responsible for the attacks.

As a result, more than 600,000 additional Rohingya have fled Northern Rakhine to Bangladesh. Satellite images analysed by Human Rights Watch show a 100-kilometre-long area in Rakhine State razed by fires following the crackdown.¹⁴ This area is five times larger than where burnings by Myanmar security forces occurred from October to November 2016.

11 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, 25 September 2012 (A/67/383), paras. 56–58, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/GA67session.aspx>

12 Vivian Tan, Over 168,000 Rohingya likely fled Myanmar since 2012 - UNHCR report, 03 May 2017 <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2017/5/590990ff4/168000-rohingya-likely-fled-myanmar-since-2012-unhcr-report.html>

13 Amnesty USA, Caged without a Roof: Apartheid in Myanmar Rakhine state (2017) <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Caged-without-a-Roof-Apartheid-in-Myanmar-Rakhine-State.pdf> pg9

14 Human Rights Watch (HRW), Burma: Satellite Images Show Massive Fire Destruction, September 2, 2017 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/02/burma-satellite-images-show-massive-fire-destruction>



Methodology

The objective of this research was to collect, analyse and make freely available for further dissemination, data collected on the journeys, and events and incidents committed against the Rohingya in Northern Rakhine which triggered the mass exodus to Bangladesh from Myanmar. This research combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies in order to address the following research questions following the August 25th military operation:

- Types of incident(s) committed against the Rohingya;
- Perpetrators of the incident(s);
- Migration patterns and dynamics of the exodus.

A Senior Researcher was sent to Bangladesh to train two local teams of enumerators, fluent in the Rohingya language, who were then deployed to Cox's Bazar district. They interviewed Rohingya refugees who had entered Bangladesh from Northern Rakhine as a result of events on or after August 25th 2017. The data collection team focused in particular on the number and types of incidents that occurred, as well as the routes taken by the refugees from their hometowns in Myanmar to Bangladesh.

Between 15th September and 15th October 2017, the team collected 1,360 interviews in Cox's Bazar district, which included detailed testimonies on the events and incidents/abuses they had either experienced personally or had witnessed before or during the journey to Bangladesh. The team was comprised of 3 male enumerators and 1 female enumerator. The team's female enumerator focused on interviews with women, to ensure that interviews were conducted in a gender-sensitive manner.

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For the purpose of this survey, an "incident" was defined as an event or abuse of some kind that was considered serious or meaningful enough to the respondent to push them to flee their home in Myanmar.

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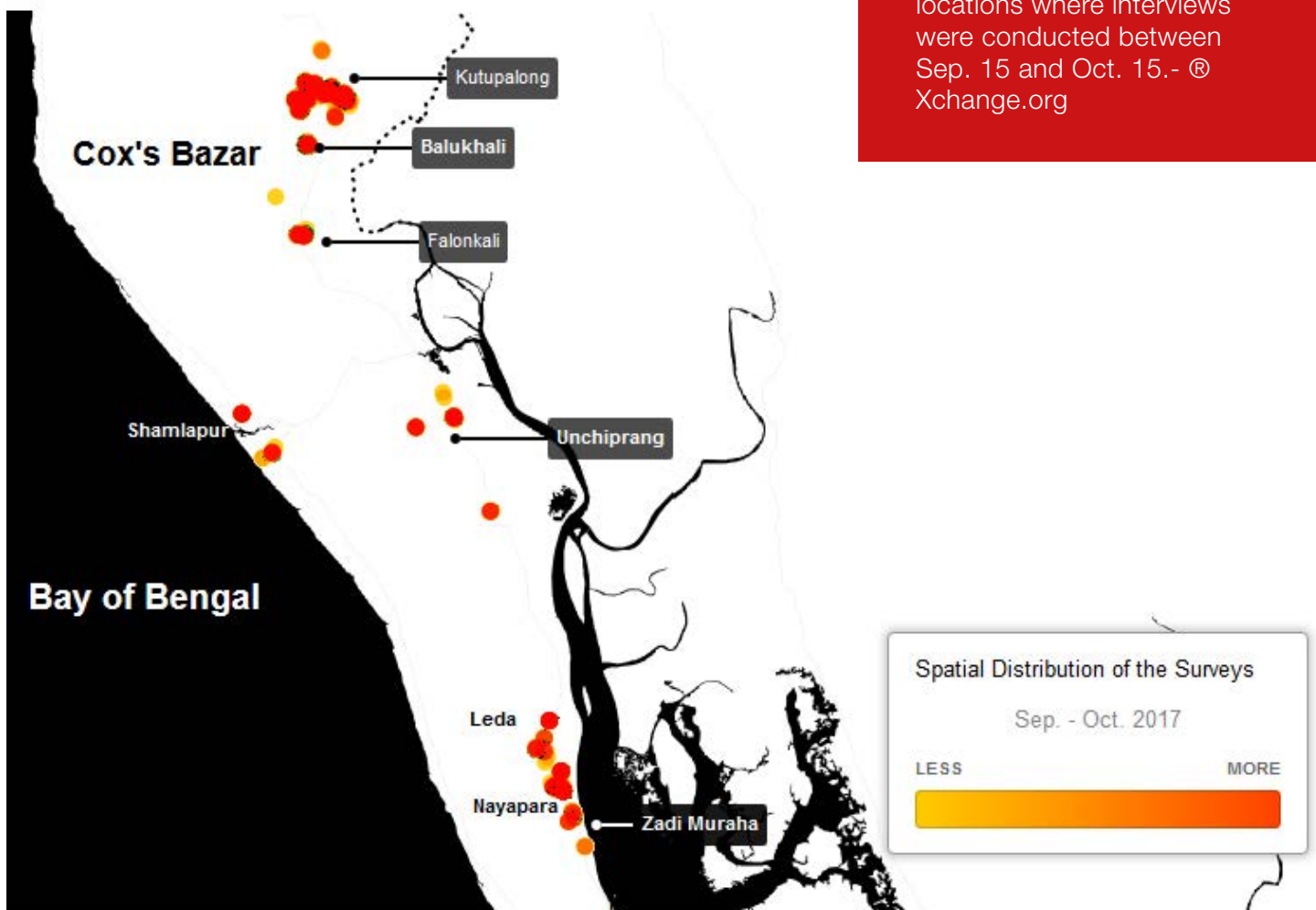


Xchange's enumerators collecting data in Cox's Bazar - © Xchange.org , Sept. 2017



The 'Northern' data collection team was formed of two male Rohingya enumerators, who collected data in Kutupalong, a registered camp that hosts most of the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar district, as well as the unregistered camps of Balukhali and Falonghali. The 'Southern' data collection team was formed of two Rohingya enumerators (one male, one female) who covered Nayapara registered camp, Leda and Zadi Murah camps, as well as the host-village of Shamlapur.

Map showing the GPS locations where interviews were conducted between Sep. 15 and Oct. 15.- © Xchange.org



All interviews were conducted inside the respondent's tent, or secluded areas nearby to ensure privacy and preserve the dignity of the respondents. The principle of confidentiality was also explained to all respondents. Within this report, all respondent's names have been changed to protect their identities. Finding individuals to interview was done through random identification of residents on site across the camps, without prior announcement of the enumerator's arrival.



The data collection team gathered written and audio testimonies, as well as photographic evidence of abuses.¹⁵ Each respondent was asked what village they previously resided in before leaving Myanmar, in order to locate and map their places of origin and to divulge where incidents they reported had taken place. This was done in order to map where these incidents occurred and corroborate the findings with satellite images, as well as track routes taken across to Bangladesh.¹⁶

However, each village of origin has dual toponymy; a Rakhine (or Burmese) name and Rohingya name. Interviewers asked for both names, as well as the township of origin. The government-recognised Burmese names have been geolocated by the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU)¹⁷, a data portal for humanitarian actors in Myanmar, while Rohingya-language names are not displayed on official maps. As many of the respondents were only able to report the Rohingya name, the remote team had to locate the corresponding Burmese name.

In addition to this, the remote research team used other secondary research, including authoritative, third-party reports on the events prior to and following August 25th.¹⁸ The team also consulted recent online newspapers and social media reports from Myanmar and Bangladesh on the situation, to cross-reference events and allegations of human rights violations.

Survey Mode

The data was collected through face-to-face interviews, recorded or typed directly into a mobile application. The use of the application allowed the data to be collected offline and uploaded to the server later. The data was collected simultaneously from the seven locations in Cox's Bazar district.

Sampling and Representativeness

In order to ensure a heterogeneous sample of respondents from Northern Rakhine, the data collection team spread their interviews widely, where many of the newly arrived Rohingya refugees settled. The respondents were chosen from seven locations in Cox's Bazar district. Of these locations, most of the data was collected in Kutupalong, Nayapara and Zadi Murah camps which host a larger number of refugees.¹⁹

¹⁵ Where appropriate and approved, the interviewers took photos of injuries sustained

¹⁶ See Journeys

¹⁷ Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU), Buthidaung, Maungdaw & Rathedaung Rakhine State http://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/State_Map_VL_Buthidaung_Maungdaw_Rathedaung_MIMU501v04_02Nov2016_Topo_A0.pdf

¹⁸ See, for example: Amnesty International, Myanmar: "My World's Finished". Rohingya Targeted in Crimes against Humanity in Myanmar (18 October 2017) available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/7288/2017/en/>;

¹⁹ Based on data from ISCG, <https://cxbcoordination.org/reports/>



The aim of this survey is to obtain a broad sample of Rohingya refugees who fled Northern Rakhine en masse after August 25th attacks. The number of refugees that entered Cox's Bazar district after August 25th is uncertain, however the Inter Sector Coordination Group harmonizing the humanitarian response in Bangladesh has estimated a total of 620,000 new arrivals into Cox's Bazar district as of November 2017.²⁰ The data collection team gathered enough respondents to deem the study representative of the Rohingya refugee population as a whole.²¹

Limitations

Time

Preparation time for the survey was limited, as was data collection training time. As a result, the data collection team acted as interpreters and translators as well as enumerators. Due to the large number of interviews conducted and the need to release the data in a timely manner, the quickest and most practical method of collecting testimony was by typing the testimony directly into the app, rather than using audio recording and transcribing it later. This resulted in testimonial data that varied in quality, particularly due to the variable levels of English fluency of the data collection team. Consequently, there is a lack of depth in description of events, and not all data collected was used.

The sensitive nature of the incidents

The numbers associated with incidents as collected by the enumerators are likely to understate the severity of the actual incidents that occurred on or after August 25th in Northern Rakhine. The enumerators were trained on interview ethics and therefore recorded according to the respondents' wishes. Some respondents may not have wished to disclose serious and traumatic incidents experienced, particularly those of a sexual nature. The privacy available for interviews in a camp setting was also limited; particularly in the temporary shelters. Therefore, the figures for sexual abuses are likely to be greater than they appear due to the stigma and culture of shame around the subject and the social costs of disclosure.

Dates

A number of respondents struggled with recalling the precise dates on which incidents occurred. This may cause inaccuracies in the data.

²⁰ Based on data from ISCG, <https://cxbcoordination.org/reports/>

²¹ Assuming an underlying population of no more than 1,000,000 Rohingyas in Northern Rakhine prior to the August 25th violence, with a minimum sample size of 1,316 we can infer this data to have an estimated margin of error of 2.7% at a 95% confidence interval.



Geolocation of incidents

Each respondent was asked for both toponyms, but in many cases they did not know the place name in Burmese, nor the correct spelling. As no official register exists for these dual toponyms, to geo-locate villages, web-based research was used. This included using sources from Rohingya based news outlets and social media feeds, as well as through on-the-ground networks developed by the enumeration team. Through these sources, the corresponding Burmese names for 80% of the villages were found and geolocated by cross-referencing responses with the names of villages listed in MIMU datasets.²² Therefore, the geolocation of some villages of origin may not be entirely accurate.

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The Rohingya villages have dual toponyms: a Rakhine (or Burmese) language name and a Rohingya-language name.

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Rohingya refugees moving across Kutupalong refugee camp, Cox's Bazar.- © Xchange.org - Sept. 2017

²² Available at: <http://themimu.info/map-and-data-requests>

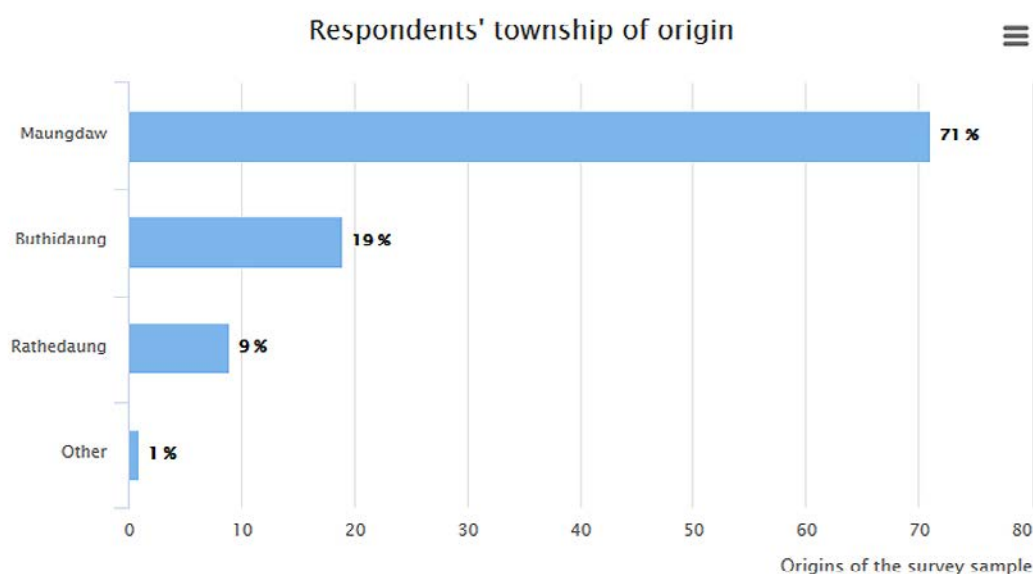


Demographics

The Xchange team interviewed a total of 1,360 ethnic Rohingya who fled Northern Rakhine and recently arrived in Bangladesh after the events of August 25th 2017.

Place of origin

All respondents came from Northern Rakhine in Myanmar, where the August 25th military operations took place. Maungdaw township represented the worst affected region.²³



The participants came from 120 unique villages across Northern Rakhine. The most commonly reported villages of origin were:

- Ah Lel Than Kyaw (Maungdaw)
- Kyein Chaung (Maungdaw)
- Chien Khar Li (Rathedaung)
- Tha Win Chaung (Maungdaw)

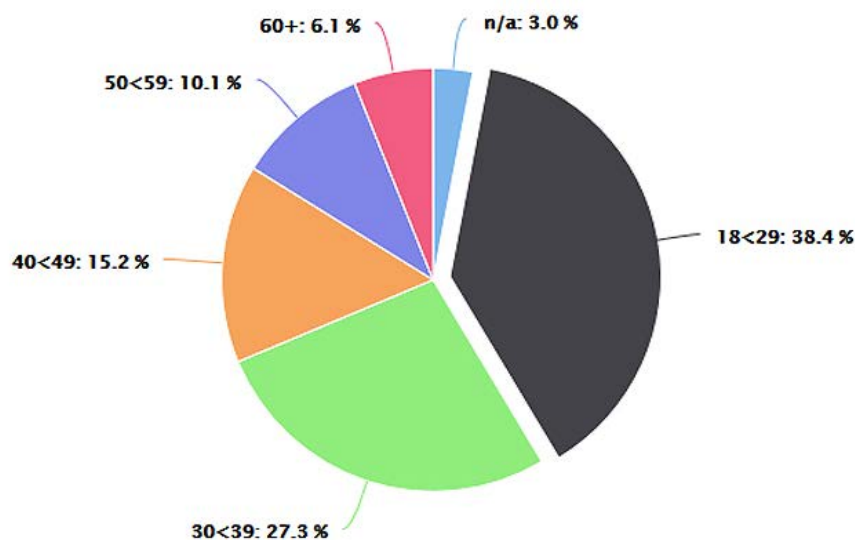
²³ Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Burma: Satellite Images Show Massive Fire Destruction*, September 2, 2017 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/19/burma-satellite-imagery-shows-mass-destruction>



Age

The sample ranged in ages from 18 to 92 years old, though the majority (65%) were between 18 to 40.

Age Breakdown



Gender

Of the 1,360 research participants in the survey:

- **61%** male
- **39%** female²⁴

Identification documents

The research team asked respondents what, if any, forms of identification they possessed. This included any documentation provided by the Myanmar authorities, the Bangladesh authorities, or UNHCR.

- **94%** reported not being in possession of any form of identification.
- **5%** were in possession of 'White Cards' - temporary, non-citizen identification documents deemed invalid by the Myanmar authorities in 2015.²⁵

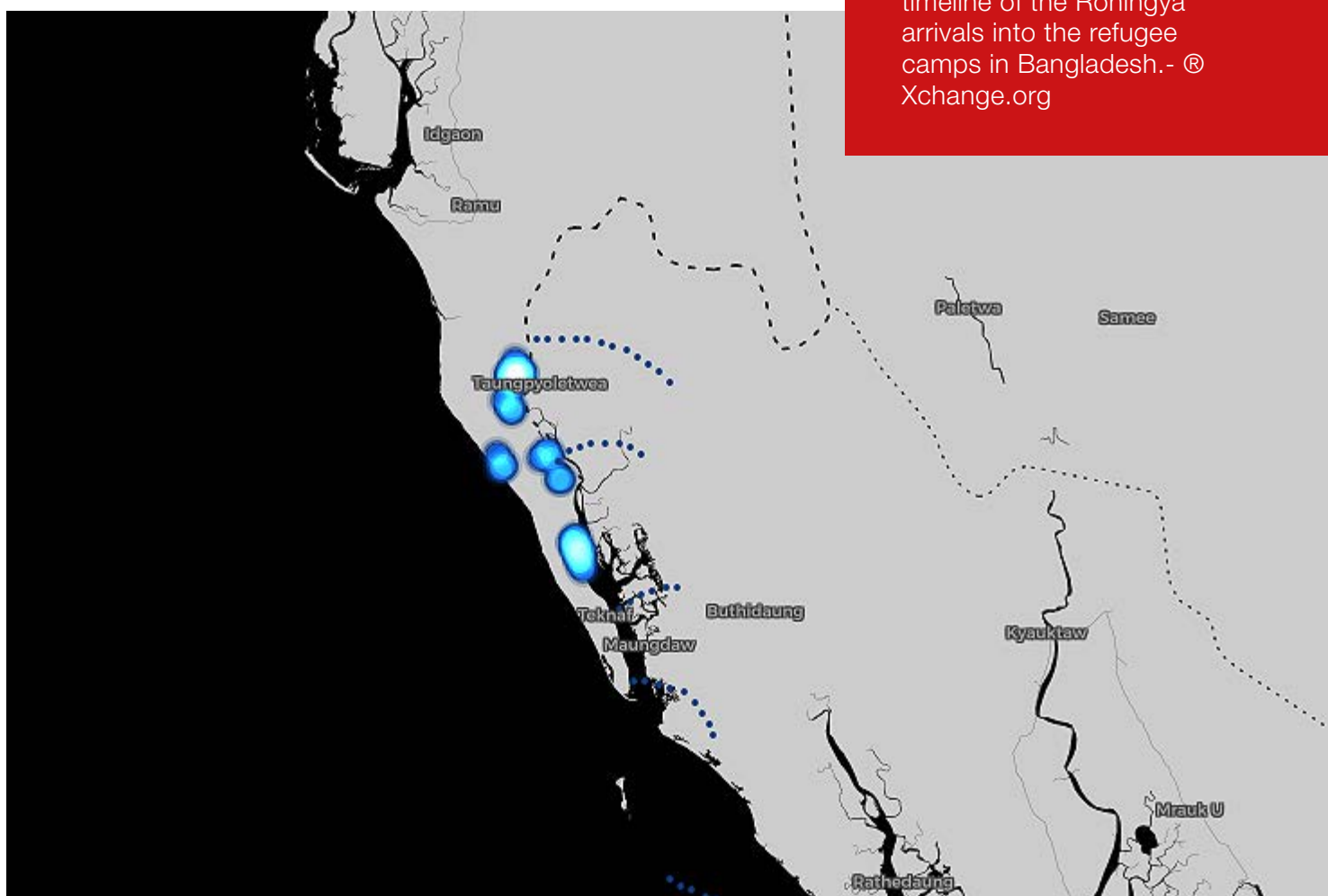
²⁴ This lower percentage reflects the limited number of female enumerators available for the research. See above section, Methodology: Limitations.

²⁵ Residents Of Burma Registration Rules, 1951 http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/Residents_of_Burma_Registration_Rules-1951.pdf



It is also worth noting that the majority of respondents had not been registered as refugees yet and therefore did not have documentation acquired in Bangladesh. However, as the interviews were conducted between one to six weeks after their arrival in Bangladesh, in the early stages of the mass migration, respondents are now likely to have identification documents as the chaos of the first few weeks has settled into a protracted crisis.

Map showing an animated timeline of the Rohingya arrivals into the refugee camps in Bangladesh.- © Xchange.org

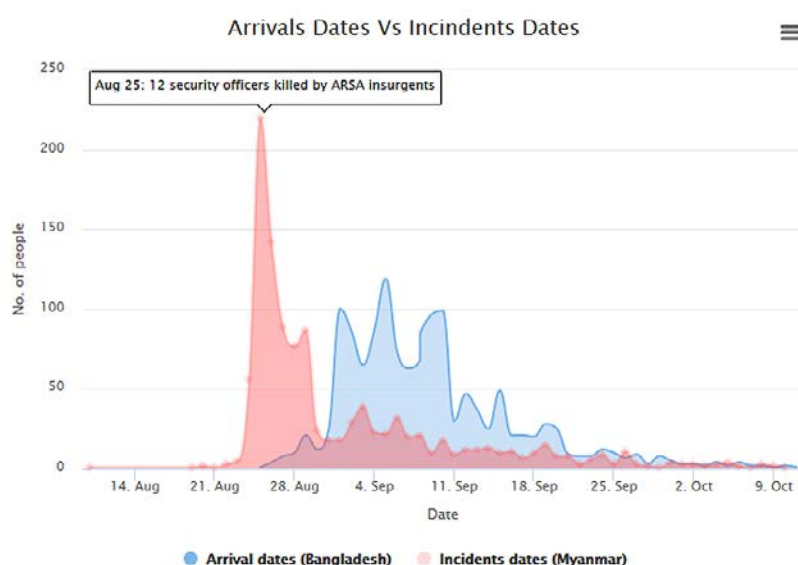




The Journey

Most Rohingya refugees fleeing Northern Rakhine in Myanmar did not travel far: Northern Rakhine is immediately adjacent to Bangladesh, with Maungdaw Township lying on the border; Buthidaung and Rathedaung townships border Maungdaw. The refugee camps in Bangladesh have been established in Cox's Bazaar district, on the relatively thin peninsula immediately across the Naf river from Myanmar. This represented an exhausting journey, and for many, also included -sometimes treacherous- river or sea crossings.

The average journey time taken, from the date of departure until the date of arrival in the camp, varied according to the proximity to the border of the respondent's home. For those originating from Maungdaw, the findings show an average journey time of between 1-5 days. For Rathedaung, individuals took between 5-15 days, and Buthidaung, 6-17 days²⁶.



As demonstrated in the table, mass arrivals increased sharply from August 31st onwards. This trend continues to be evident until the 26th September. The majority of the sample (62%) arrived in Bangladesh over a period of just ten days, between 1-10 September. Although this may be simple correlation due to the survey collection period being immediately afterwards, the UNHCR has also found that the majority of arrivals occurred in September²⁷.

²⁶ 198 respondents reported their journey taking longer than 20 days

²⁷ Government of Bangladesh, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, RRRC Fact Sheet - Family Counting (as of 23 October 2017) https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/rrrc_dashboard_hh_counting_oct23_2.pdf

“

On 15th Sept, at 12pm, I tried to cross the river at the border to escape, but the boat's engine failed and it started taking on water. My wife, elder son's wife, and granddaughter were in the boat. They all drowned.

”

Zubair, 50,
Chut Pyin (Rathedaung)



These figures reflect the build up of intercommunal tensions preceding as well as in the wake of events following August 25th.

The Xchange research team discovered fifteen main entry points to Bangladesh. For the purpose of this survey, entry points are defined as the first villages that the respondents reached upon entering Bangladesh, whether by boat across the Naf river or on foot. Almost all of the respondents stated that they had to walk for some or all of their emigration. Almost all entered into Bangladesh by crossing the Naf river that separates the two countries.

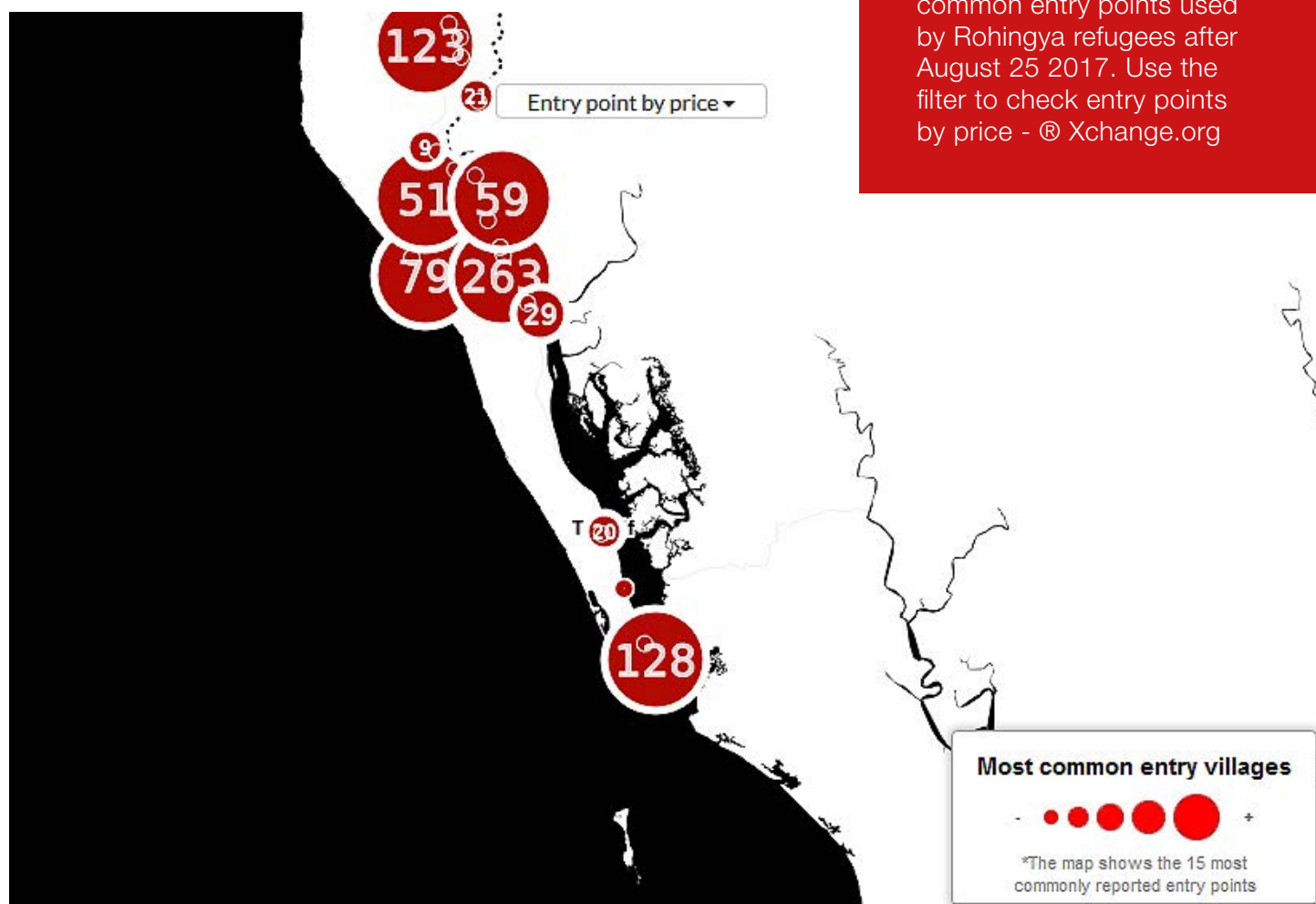


Rohingyas had to rely on smugglers with boats to cross the Naf river; 85% of respondents paid a smuggler to cross the border. Anecdotal reports inform us that these smugglers were exclusively Bangladeshis who capitalised on the mass exodus in order to turn a quick profit. Most were not professional smugglers, but found their services in demand by virtue of having access to a boat.

Unchiprang (entry point)
- © Xchange.org , Sept.
2017



Map showing the 15 most common entry points used by Rohingya refugees after August 25 2017. Use the filter to check entry points by price - @ Xchange.org



The amounts paid by refugees varied widely. However, there are some observable trends in the average price paid at each major entry point. The prices reflect the width of the river at each entry point and how much time it takes to cross: the wider the river, the higher the price. Additionally, the research team were informed that smuggling prices depended on the smugglers' assumptions about the wealth of the individuals crossing and would accept jewellery or gold in lieu of money in some cases. Some respondents reported being robbed or otherwise abused by the smugglers.

In areas further north, the width of the river narrows significantly, making the use of boats superfluous: 11% of respondents answered that they crossed narrow parts of the river without a boat (entry points; Ajukaya, Tumburu, Dial Fara, Amtoli). Of these respondents, practically none reported having paid a smuggler.

“

When I was crossing to the Bangladesh border by small boat the local Bengali snatched my wife's ornament in place of money because I didn't have enough money to give.

Ahmed, 46,
Tha Pyay Taw (Rathedaung)

”



79 respondents reported that they did not enter Bangladesh by crossing the Naf river but via Shamlapur, a coastal fishing village, which they reached by undertaking a longer sea journey. These respondents took an average of 7 days from the place of origin to Bangladesh. The respondents who made this crossing originated mostly from Maungdaw (41) and Rathedaung townships (34) and paid on average a significantly higher price to undertake this journey (\$77) than those crossing the Naf river.



The Enumerators explain the profile of the smugglers according to the Rohingya

> <https://soundcloud.com/user-516296448/the-enumerators-explain-the-profile-of-the-smugglers-according-to-the-rohingya>



Incidents

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the push factors that led to the mass migration of Rohingyas following the events of August 25th in Northern Rakhine. To do so, it was necessary to elicit the event(s) or incident(s) that led to the respondents departure. The survey questions were as follows:

Have you suffered or witnessed any major incident in Rakhine since October 2016?

If the question was answered in the affirmative, a description of the incident was requested with the following prompts:

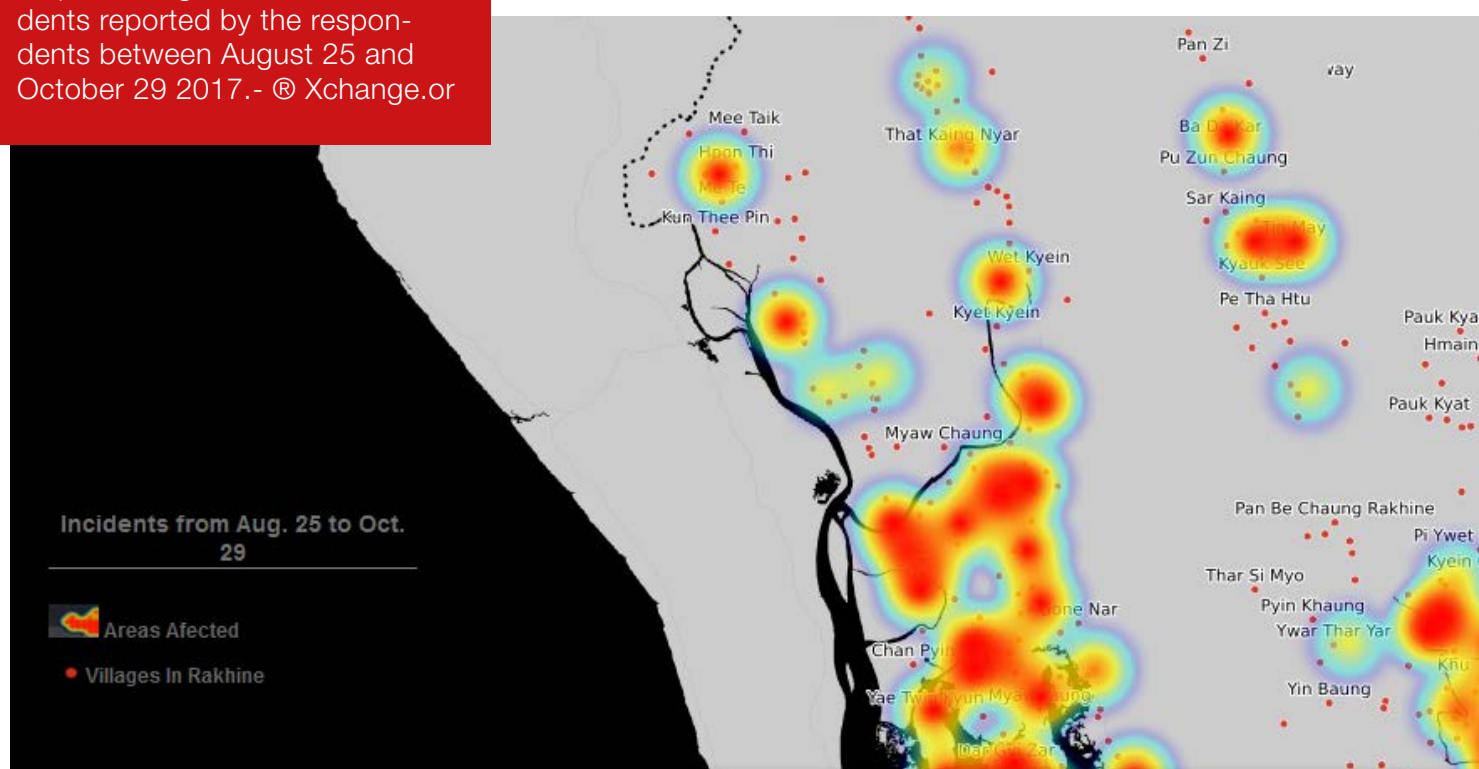
- Date of the incident.
- What happened?
- Who committed the incident?
- Where did it happen?

“

For the purpose of this survey, an "incident" is defined as an event or abuse of some kind that was considered serious or meaningful enough to the respondent to induce them to flee their home in Myanmar. This question was intended to elicit responses relating to incidents personally experienced or directly witnessed by the respondents. Incidents that occurred in a neighbouring village, where the respondents were not physically present, were not considered.

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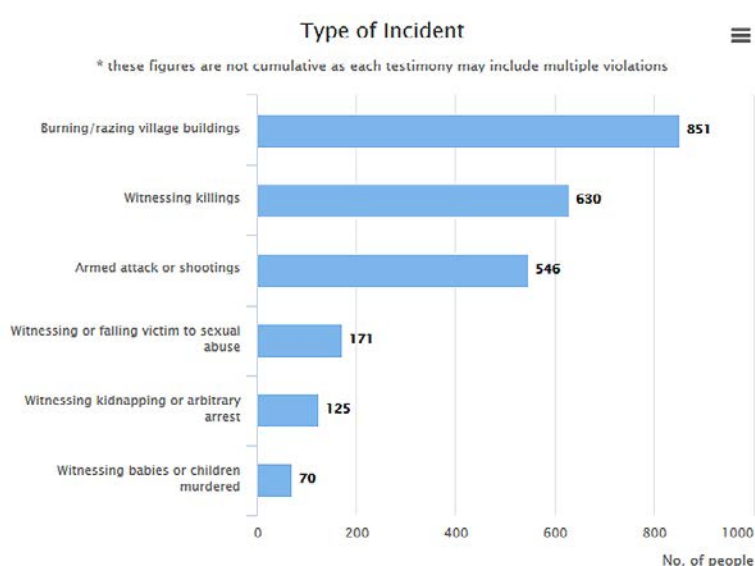
Map showing a timeline of incidents reported by the respondents between August 25 and October 29 2017.- © Xchange.or





Of the 1,360 respondents interviewed by the Xchange team, 92% answered yes to having suffered or witnessed a major incident that prompted them to flee to Bangladesh. These testimonies were then recorded by the field team and later analysed by the remote research team.

A basic statistical analysis of these testimonies reveals the most common type(s) of incident(s) experienced or directly witnessed by the respondents. Out of 1,360 responses, the frequency of each type of incident reported was as follows;²⁸



“

The military came to my village and started shooting at the people. The military and Rakhine took away 53 people; one was my husband. The military killed my husband by shooting him and he fell near a river. The military and Rakhine burnt all the houses in my village. I was fearful and so I came to Bangladesh with my little baby.

”

Azara, 19,
Pan Kaing (Rathedaung)

Many accounts list multiple rather than singular incidents that amount to gross human rights violations.²⁹ Although the details of incidents reported varied, the testimonies of most survivors held certain consistencies. The following testimony is representative of many of the abuses recorded;

Perpetrators

The majority of respondents mentioned one or multiple groups of perpetrators committing the abuses. An overwhelming number of respondents (96%) stated that the Myanmar military³⁰ were the perpetrators of these

²⁸ These figures are likely to be an under-representation of incidents, as some respondents may not have wished to disclose serious and traumatic events, particularly those of a sexual nature. Respondents may also not have disclosed all incidents that they experienced.

²⁹ Report of OHCHR mission to Bangladesh: Interviews with Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016, 3 February 2017 <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport-3Feb2017.pdf>

³⁰ Often referred to as the Burmese Military



abuses. A further 51% reported that local ethnic Rakhine ‘extremists’³¹ were involved. However, the involvement of ethnic Rakhine civilians was usually in a supportive role to the military. These civilians attacked Rohingyas, burned buildings, and committed other violent crimes that had the effect of driving Rohingyas away from their homes:

“ In the morning, the Burmese military entered into my village and they killed more than 10 girls. The Burmese military together with Rakhine extremist groups sexually abused them. A dozen were killed and the whole village was burnt. That's why I left my motherland (Myanmar). ”

Laila, 25, Maungdaw City Quarter 4 (Maungdaw)

Police were also frequently mentioned committing abuses against the Rohingya, often in collaboration with the other groups:

“ The police burned two houses and killed four children by shooting them in my village. After that my family and I were trying to cross the river and at that time I saw some local Rakhine throwing children into the river. ”

Amir, 22, Ba Da Kar (Buthidaung)

A few respondents mentioned the involvement of civilians from other ethnic groups, including Mro, Daingnet,³² and Hindu people, alongside Rakhine civilians.



A Rohingya man describes the people who attacked him

> <https://soundcloud.com/user-516296448/a-rohingya-man-describes-the-people-who-attacked-him>

³¹ According to our understanding, these are civilian vigilantes from Northern Rakhine

³² The Mro and Daingnet are ethnic Buddhist communities residing in Rakhine State, Myanmar



“ The military and local Rakhines, as well as Murun, Hindu and Sakma (Mro, Hindu and Daingnet) had long knives in their hands and killed over 200 Rohingyas in my neighbouring villages (of Garothi Bill and Shait Kanna Fara). After that some Rohingyas carried injured persons by shoulder and some died.

”

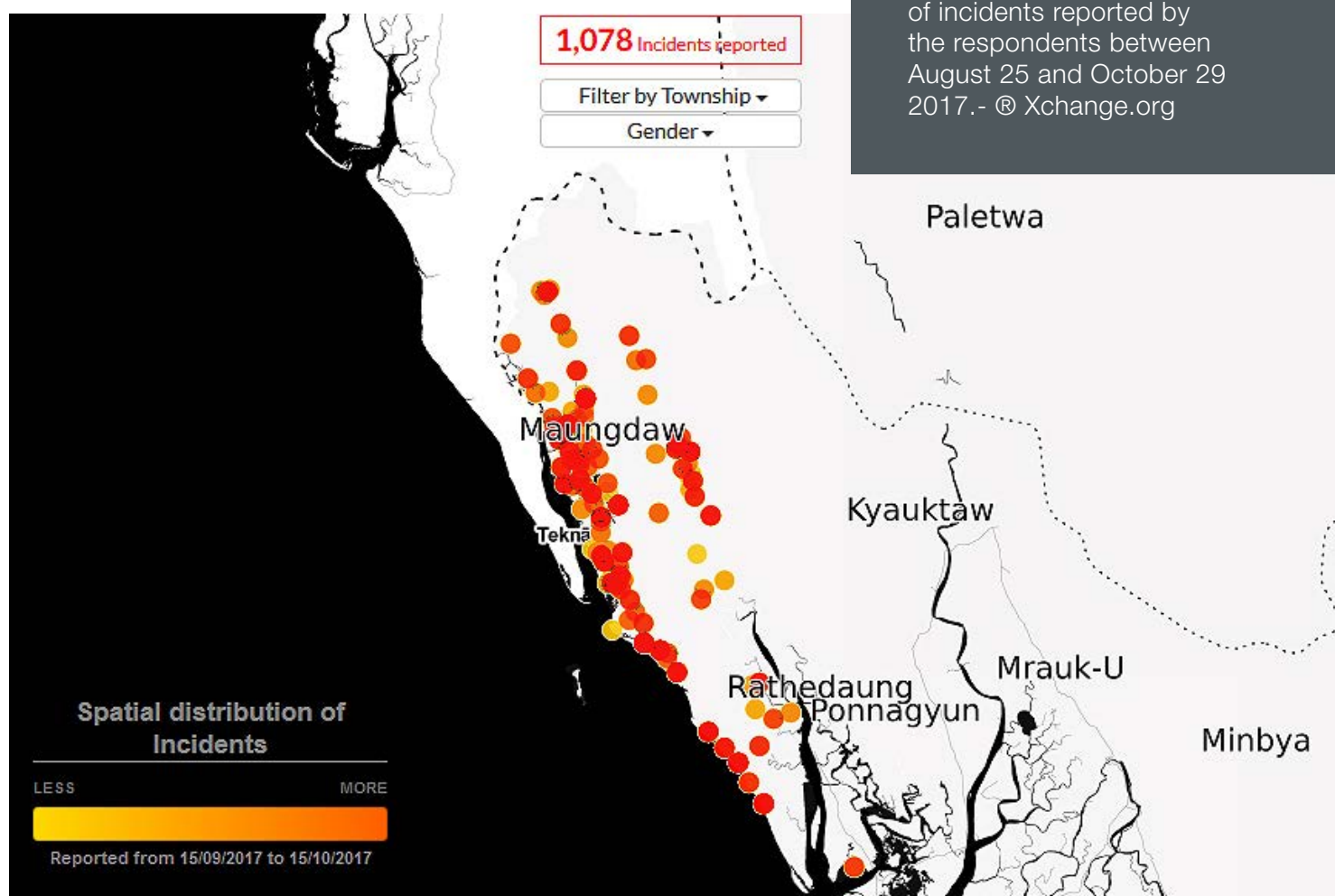
Kobir, 46, That Kaing Nyar (Maungdaw)

“ The Burmese military, together with a Buddhist extremist gang, were terrorising us and all the Rohingya, emptying and razing our houses, and attempting to hound us out of the country.

”

Aziza, 60, Kyaung Taung (Maungdaw).

Map showing a timeline of incidents reported by the respondents between August 25 and October 29 2017.- © Xchange.org





Burning of buildings

The destruction of property by burning was the most commonly reported incident. This was often committed with the use of petrol, rocket launchers or by air strikes from helicopters, which resulted in widespread destruction of homes and often entire villages. This destruction was a major catalyst for respondents to flee Myanmar.

“ The military burned half of my village. I saw them kill a whole family near my house. The next morning the local Rakhine burned the other half of my village. I then went to another village (Hair Fara) and stayed one night. The military burned that village (Hair Fara) and so I went to another (Bolla Fara) where I stayed for seven days before going to Bangladesh with my family.

”

Yousuf, 15, unknown village (Maungdaw)

The use of fire for the destruction of homes and the razing of entire villages appeared to be systematic and coordinated:

“ On 12th September, the military entered my village at about 1am, surrounding and setting fire to it in secret. One villager noticed and started screaming, waking the other villagers up. This made the military start to shoot at the man. Around 3am all the villagers woke up with the shooting and found their village in flames and quickly fled. One of my brothers was shot 3-4 times, as well as his nephew. My whole village was reduced to ashes.

”

Showfik, 65, Myin Hlut (Maungdaw). Reported by enumerator

Many testimonies indicated that rocket launchers and helicopter attacks were commonly used by the Myanmar army. Civilian attackers and members of the security forces alike used petrol and homemade grenades to set Rohingya villages ablaze.

“ The Burmese military set fire to my house and killed more than a dozen people. The entire village was burned down. The military were using helicopters and petrol bombs.

”

Zafor, 50, Kyee Kan Pyin (Maungdaw).

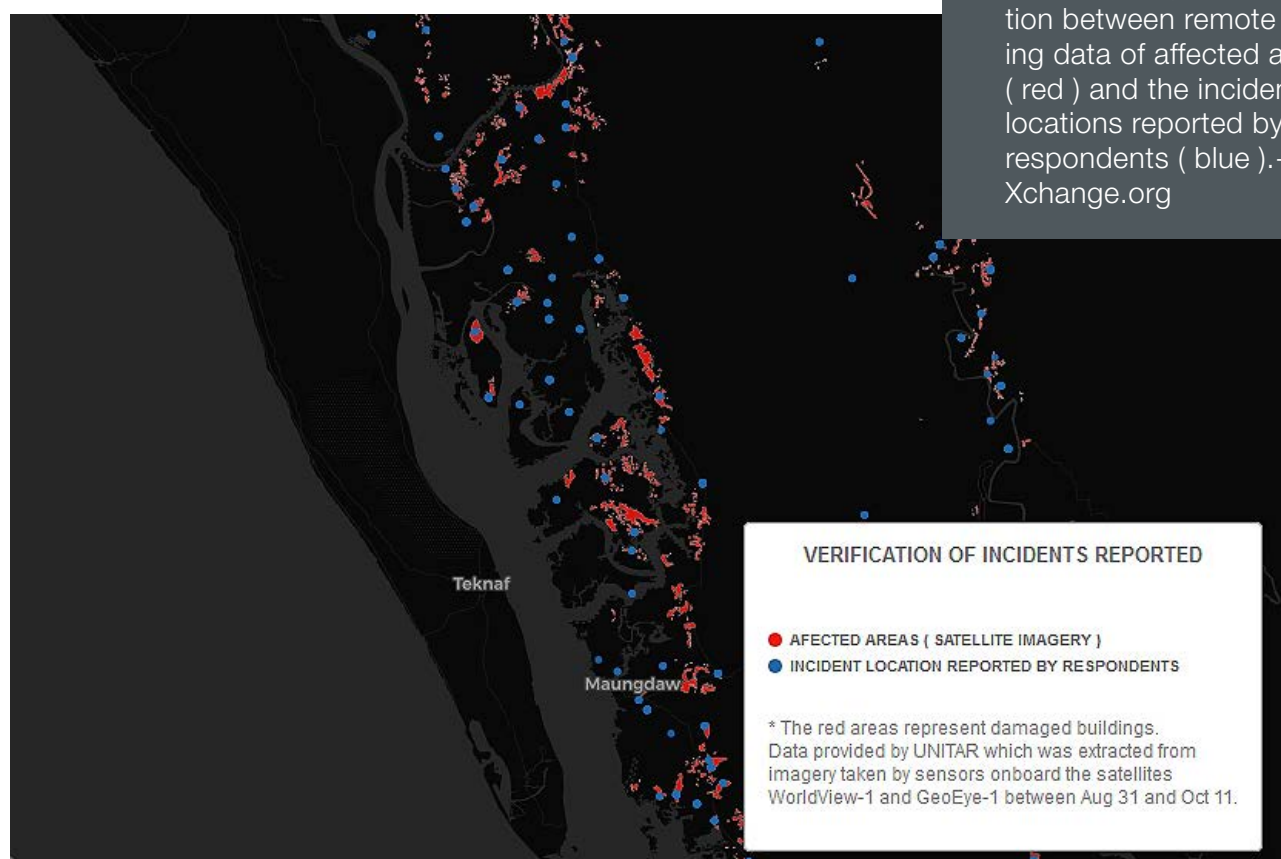


“ The military shot the [rocket] launcher and burned down my whole village. After that I went to the mountain with my family and stayed 10 days. Again, they shot another launcher in the mountain at 20 Rohingyas there.

Sultan, 30, Ah Lel Than Kyaw (Maungdaw). ”

Satellite imaging analysis conducted during the dates of reported incidents verify these testimonials. Imaging conducted independently by UNITAR - UNOSAT³³, Human Rights Watch³⁴, and Amnesty International³⁵ provide evidence of this. They independently show widespread fires across the three townships.³⁶

Map showing the correlation between remote sensing data of affected areas (red) and the incident locations reported by the respondents (blue).- @ Xchange.org



33 United Nations Institute for Training and Research (unitar) and unosat, Myanmar: Maungdaw District Rakhine Rakhine Damage Zones 1 November 2017 | http://unosat-maps.web.cern.ch/unosat-maps/MM/CE20130326MMR/UNOSAT_A3_Rakhine_damage_zones_20171001_Portrait_o.pdf

34 Human Rights Watch (HRW), Burma: Satellite Images Show Massive Fire Destruction, September 2, 2017 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/02/burma-satellite-images-show-massive-fire-destruction>

35 Amnesty International, Myanmar: Scorched-earth campaign fuels ethnic cleansing of Rohingya from Rakhine State 14 September 2017 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/09/myanmar-scorched-earth-campaign-fuels-ethnic-cleansing-of-rohingya-from-rakhine-state/>

36 Human Rights Watch (HRW), Burma: Satellite Images Show Massive Fire Destruction, September 2, 2017 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/02/burma-satellite-images-show-massive-fire-destruction>



The remote research team geolocated the villages where the respondents originated from and mapped them, in order to triangulate oral testimony with satellite data. There was a strong correlation between the villages in the satellite imaging and our own reports.³⁷

A number of respondents reported witnessing mosques in their respective villages being targeted by assailants. The targeting of religious structures provides evidence that suggests religious discrimination and targeted attacks to instil fear and force local Rohingyas to leave.

“ The military entered my village and started looting shops and setting fires to five or six mosques. When I saw this, I left my house. Between 50-60 houses were burnt in my village. ”

Nur, 35, Godu Sara (Maungdaw). Reported by enumerator

In addition to severe destruction of property, arson was also allegedly used to murder individuals and families by intentionally trapping people inside burning buildings. There were numerous reports of fatalities caused both incidentally and intentionally by these operations.

“ I was in my house at the time. My children were at the madrassa when the Burmese military set fire to the mosque. It was burned down with my children inside. ”

Fatama, 29, U Daung [Kone Tan] (Maungdaw)

Armed Attack & Executions

Many respondents described witnessing the military attacking villages in systematic offensives, charging into villages and shooting indiscriminately.

“ The military started shooting at the people forcing them to run away to the hills. On returning I saw some dead bodies. ”

Ajimullah, 65, Than Dar (Maungdaw).

³⁷ See map above



Testimony indicates that there appears to have been a series of coordinated attacks across the region, directly aimed at forcing the Rohingya to flee.

“ The military were shooting in my village, killing some of the villagers near my house. I then went to the river side and stayed there for three days. After that the military were shooting at the river side.

”

Yasin, 35, Kyauk Pyin Seik (Maungdaw)



Despite the fact that independent investigators are barred from Northern Rakhine, the frequency and quantity of similar reports indicates widespread use of these tactics across the region. The Xchange team met numerous respondents with injuries that appeared to be caused by gunfire.

Enumerators collected numerous reports that claimed indiscriminate gunfire and/or targeted assassinations by the military or other groups resulting in a large number of casualties. Many respondents report witnessing the death of a fellow villager or a family member.

Interview at Leda make-shift camp with man injured during gunfire
- © Xchange.org , Sept. 2017

“ The Military were shooting in my village. They shot and killed my son in front of my house.

”

Sirajul, 55, unknown village (Maungdaw)



Sexual Abuse

Many respondents either witnessed or experienced varying forms of sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, and sexual assault, committed against both minors and adults. Rape, at times, resulted in death, or was quickly followed by other abuses that resulted in death. Often, family members or members of the public witnessed the abuse, or the victim of the sexual abuse was made to watch the murder and/or abuse of their family members. Thus, multiple violations and trauma were incurred in a short period of time for many respondents:

“ The military started fires in my village. They forcibly entered my house. They raped me and stabbed my husband in the stomach. My young child was taken away from me and thrown into the fire. When I started crying, they raped me again.

Hala, 35, Sein Hnyin Pyar (Buthidaung)

”

Respondents reported that the perpetrators made calculated decisions to target women and girls by rounding them up, or kidnapping them after storming the villages, indicating a calculated campaign of sexual violence against women and girls.

“ The military entered my village when I was in my house, searching for people and young girls. When the young girls were found, the military raped them.

Rama, 50, Ka Nyin Tan [Pa Din] (Maungdaw)

”

“ The military and Rakhines took numerous teenage girls away from my village. They raped them and then sent them back to the village after two or three days.

Anwar, 45, Kyun Pauk Pyu Su (Maungdaw)

”

Often, women were raped by multiple perpetrators in a gang rape, either in front of family members or in public to terrorise them, instil fear, or humiliate and shame them. The fact that many of the reports of sexual violence were not from the victims themselves but witnesses – often to gang rapes - demonstrates the public nature of the incidents. The Myanmar military and ethnic Rakhine ‘extremists’ were identified by witnesses as the perpetrators of these crimes.



“ The Burmese military stripped the women naked. A soldier held a knife to the throat of one and began to rape her. 15 soldiers took turns raping the women over several hours. I felt like they would kill my wife.

Abusayed, 36, Kyar Gaung Taung (Maungdaw)

”

In some cases, there were accounts of sexual assault and torture by mutilation, where women's body parts were also cut off during the rape:

“ She witnessed women being sexually assaulted (the nipples of women cut off, and other parts of the body mutilated) and raped.

Somira, 30, Kyaung Taung (Rathedaung). Reported by enumerator

”

Torture was also corroborated by other accounts:

“ I was at my house when the Burmese military and extremists were torturing girls. 32 girls were raped and 23 people were shot and killed.

Azida, 22, Maung Ni fara (Maungdaw)

”

Women and young girls were also subjected to “stripping” and sexual assault, in isolation or before they were raped:

“ The military ripped my baby away from me. The military and Rakhine extremists stripped the women naked. Many were brutally killed. The military then burned down the houses in his village.

Roshid, 52, Kyein Chaung (Maungdaw)

”

“ I lost my baby girl, they stripped down my girl so that, I am sorry for my girl.

Shaju., 28 Doe Tan (Maungdaw)

”

It is worth noting that the actual incidence of sexual violence is likely much higher than reflected in this data set, as there is a culture of stigma and shame around sexual assault and rape could dissuade reporting, particularly by victims themselves.



Attacks on Children and Infants

An alarming, yet frequent category of incident was the targeted murder of children and infants as part of the attacks.

“

In the morning around 8 am, the Burmese military were surrounding different villages including my own village. Several homes were burnt with petrol bombs; many people were brutally murdered by the Burmese military together with Rakhine extremists. Kids were slaughtered by the Burmese military.

”

Bitani, 48, Chein Khar Li (Rathedaung)

A total disregard for life and dehumanisation of the Rohingya is demonstrated by such reports:

“

The Burmese military ripped my baby from my arms and kicked him like a football

”

Azara, 29, Kyar Gaung Taung (Maungdaw)

The use of fire was widespread in these attacks. The most common incident of this type reported by survivors involved babies being taken by the military and thrown into fires:

“

In the morning the military and extremists killed more than a dozen and women were sexually abused. I witnessed more than 20 people being killed... my two sons were thrown into the fire and burnt alive.

”

Dil, 31, Dar Gyi Zar (Maungdaw).

“

The Rakhine extremists and military entered into people's houses to search for any valuable things, taking whatever they wanted. They used bombs to burn down houses and the village. They threw many children into the open fire.

”

Rofiq, 47, Remmyá Dáung fara (Maungdaw)



In addition to being thrown into fires, other reports describe babies being thrown into rivers;

“

The Myanmar military and local Rakhines killed the children with a knife and threw the children into the river.

”

Shofika, 38, Kyun Gaung (Maungdaw)

These incidents paint a picture of extreme dehumanization, where infants and younger generations of Rohingya may have been actively targeted for eradication by the Myanmar military and Rakhine extremists.

Other Violations

Although the violations described in this report are representative of some of the most commonly heard and extreme forms of violence carried out against Rohingya populations, since 25th August, this list is by no means exhaustive. As noted above, the structure of the survey question on incidents was descriptive and open-ended, to allow the respondent to describe, in their own words, what they had witnessed or experienced first-hand. Other categories of violence included:

Robbery and Looting

Robbery and looting was commonly conducted against Rohingya homes and businesses. Testimony indicated that the military was responsible for entering villages, shops, and homes and either demanding payment, or taking possessions without permission. These items commonly included cash, valuables, and cattle.

“

There had been gangs disturbing them since October 9th, and finally the military came with the gangs into the village searching for valuables and looting places. They demanded money from every person; whoever refused had to flee or was shot.

”

Hair, 25, Kyar Gaung Taung (Maungdaw)

“

In the morning of September 4th, the military/extremists entered my village with five trucks. They were checking big houses, and found rice, potatoes, and other items. They looted whatever they found. After half an hour, another truck came with soldiers who started shooting at everyone.

”

Anwar, 31, Ah Lel Than Kyaw (Maungdaw)



Kidnapping or arrest

Some testimonies report that the military and/or police arrested, kidnapped, or took away civilians without due cause or explanation. Some respondents reported the disappearance of their family members with some still unable to contact them, and others found dead.

“ The Military and Rakhine burned all the houses in my village. They took away my husband from my house. I do not have any news about him since arriving in Bangladesh with my two sons.

Layru, 30, Khamangsi (Maungdaw). Reported by enumerator

”

“ The military came just one day after the violence occurred. They started arresting the people from the villages, accusing them of joining a terrorist group and threatening to take them to the police station, but they were killed by the military. The dead bodies were handed over to the families and their families could not even recognise their faces. After that day, my village was burnt down and I had to leave the country.

Mohammed, 50, U Daung [Kone Tan] (Maungdaw). Reported by enumerator

”

Curfews and restrictions on movement

Restrictions on Rohingya freedom of movement have been in place since at least 2001, but restrictions increased in severity following the 2012 violence. These restrictions have also been imposed on other Muslim minorities across Rakhine State.³⁸ Respondents regularly described curfews or restricted movement from their villages imposed by security forces. Although such restrictions had been in place in Northern Rakhine for a long time, the events of August 25th and the subsequent crackdown resulted in their intensification.

Respondents describe restrictions that amounted, in effect, to an existence under house arrest, enforced by a dense network of checkpoints and bureaucratic restrictions (such as permits) that limited their ability to move freely:

³⁸ Amnesty USA, *Caged without a Roof: Apartheid in Myanmar Rakhine state* (2017) <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Caged-without-a-Roof-Apartheid-in-Myanmar-Rakhine-State.pdf>, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ASA1674842017ENGLISH.PDF>



“ The military and Rakhine enforced a curfew on my village. I had a job but the military and Rakhine didn't give me permission to go to my job.

Faruk, 40, Min Gyi [Tu Lar Tu Li] (Maungdaw)

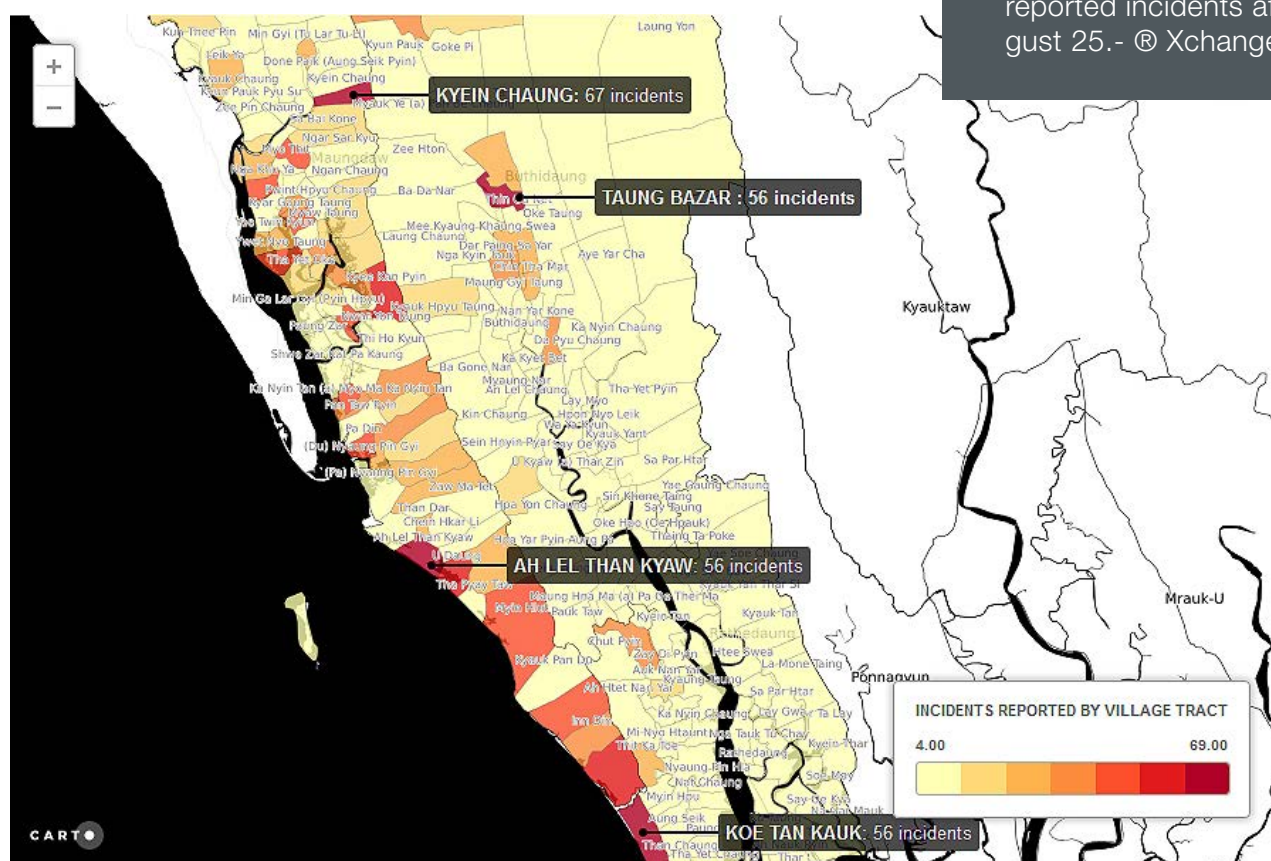
”

“ The military and Rakhine placed a curfew on my village and I couldn't move anywhere.

Abdumalek, 40, Thin Ga Net (Buthidaung)

”

Map showing the village tracts where respondents reported incidents after August 25.- © Xchange.or





Conclusion

As a result of the events of August 25th, a rapid mass migration of some 600,000 Rohingya occurred from Myanmar to Bangladesh. The Xchange team sought to understand the journeys they had taken in an attempt to reach safety, and to document the push factors that compelled them to leave. After conducting 1,360 surveys with Rohingya respondents between 15th September and 15th October, in seven different refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district, the team gained detailed insight into the types and extent of abuses the Rohingya were subject to that caused them to flee.

The respondents originated from 120 different villages across Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung townships in Northern Rakhine. Their journeys took a range of between 1-17 days, depending on the distance between their village of origin and the Bangladeshi border. These journeys were primarily conducted on foot, although many needed to pay Bangladeshi smugglers to transport them across the Naf River or the sea crossing via the Bay of Bengal. The price of these journeys varied considerably.

An overwhelming number of respondents (92%) either personally witnessed or directly experienced violence on or after August 25th. While the specifics of each incident were different, there were distinct trends and patterns of violence observable in collected testimonies. As such, there is strong evidence to suggest that violence targeting Rohingya communities has been both well-coordinated and systematic. In addition to this, the acts were often committed by more than one group of perpetrators, almost always by the Myanmar military (96%), often in collaboration with civilian vigilante groups.

The most common category of incident reported was the destruction of property and mass-scale burning of villages (63%). By destroying Rohingya villages, perpetrators gave their erstwhile inhabitants no choice but to flee. These attacks were often accompanied by indiscriminate heavy shooting (40%), resulting in mass fatalities and serious injuries.

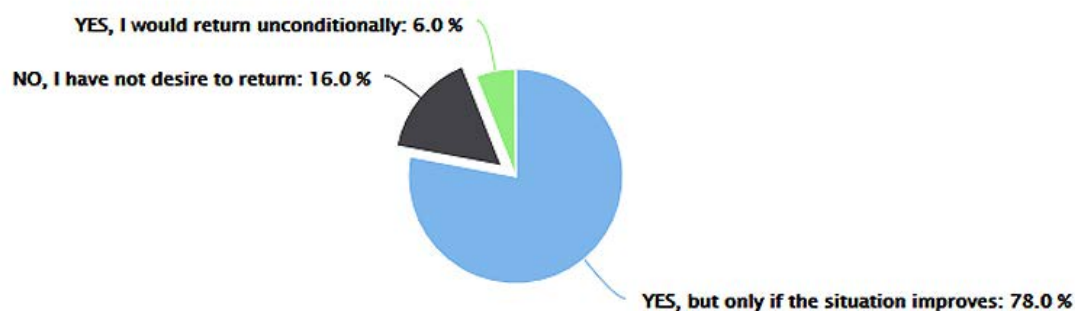
Other frequently recorded abuses were of a degrading and dehumanising nature, including sexual abuse committed against Rohingya women and girls (13%). Women and girls were subjected to rape and gang-rape by multiple perpetrators, often in public, in what appeared to be a coordinated campaign of sexual violence. These abuses acted to traumatise and create a culture of shame and stigma with an intent to break apart communities.



There were multiple reports of the targeted murder of children and infants (5%). These reports appeared to demonstrate a total disregard for human life, as the security forces and civilian perpetrators stand accused of murdering babies and children by burning or drowning. The frequency with which such incidents were reported may demonstrate an intent to eradicate younger generations.

The final question of the survey asked the respondents if they would consider returning to Myanmar in the future. Despite the atrocious incidents documented in this survey, 78% stated that they would willingly return if the situation improves; 16% had no desire to return; 6% would return unconditionally.

Would you return to Myanmar?



Though attitudes can change with time, these responses demonstrate that the Rohingya refugees would be open to returning to their homes if conditions in Myanmar were to improve. What constitutes an adequate improvement to conditions in Myanmar, however, is a question that lies outside the scope of this survey. The large number of respondents willing to return to Myanmar can, in part, be explained by the fact that there are very few opportunities for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Generations of Rohingya refugees living in the camps following previous expulsions from Myanmar continue to live in poverty without access to adequate services, and have limited mobility rights or opportunities for advancement.



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