

Kedah Local Community Acceptance towards Rohingya Refugees in Malaysia

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Abstract

The issue of refugees, particularly Rohingya is very sensitive and important for Malaysia due to its involvement with this issue since the conflict started a decade ago. Malaysian government is one of the active entity in International stage who brought the Rohingya issues to United Nations (UN) and Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). Malaysia is not only an outspoken player on this issue but it has also open its door to the Rohingya despite of having criticism and security concern. Although there are number of studies discuss the fact, impact or root cause of the problem, suggestion to the government and so on, there are lack of studies has been done on the local Malaysian community acceptance towards the Rohingya refugees. Therefore this study attempts to identify Kedah local community's awareness on Rohingya in Malaysia by examining their responses towards this group of refugees. Kedah local community is chosen due to its strategic location as among the main gateways that Rohingya refugees could enter Malaysia and their presence could also be seen within the local community. This study will also analyze this local community hopes and expectations to the government in dealing with Rohingya refugees. The study adopts a qualitative research method to avail the objective and the data has been collected through primary and secondary sources. This study reveals that Kedah local community is fully aware on the Rohingya refugee issues. Generally, they show positive responses towards the Rohingya although most of them do aware about the potential security threat there. This study finally illustrates an overall acceptance of Rohingya in Malaysia by the majority of Kedah local community.

Keywords: *Rohingya, Refugee, Kedah, Local Community, Acceptance.*

Introduction

The Rohingya crisis is one of the worst humanitarian crises recently in the 21st Century after World War I and II (Tan, 2024). These humanitarian crises happened because Myanmar Government and Buddha local community introduced one policy that led to the persecuting Rohingya community: the minority Muslim race in Myanmar. Because of this, Rohingya people flee from their country to neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia, India, Indonesia and Thailand (Gopalan et al., 2025).

Besides other countries mentioned earlier, Malaysia is one country that gives special help to the Rohingya people, and Malaysia will not be deported Rohingya refugees. It will continue to help the Rohingya community (Khairi, 2024). As a result, Malaysia received the highest number of Rohingya refugees than other Southeast Asia Country and estimated more than 150000 Rohingya living in Malaysia (Haque et al., 2023). Although Rohingya community can be found in many places in Malaysia, Kedah is the state that became the main gate for them to enter Malaysia. The reason is because of the strategic location of Kedah near with border with Thailand, which is easy to access without being spotted by sea transport. The route is one of the famous sea routes for Rohingya and another illegal migrant to enter Malaysia (Md Shahin & Hasan, 2023).

The entry of Rohingya community into Malaysia has given a lot of feedback and reaction from scholars, non-governmental and Malaysian citizens. Several concerns arise especially non-traditional security threats to the local community (Rashid & Saidin, 2023). One of the issues Malaysian expresses

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is security safety or surrounding by Rohingya people. This is because some Rohingya refugees were involved in being criminals, drug dealers, gangsters, smugglers or have some serious criminal involvement (Md Shahin & Hasan, 2023). Furthermore, the effect of the increasing quantity of Rohingya will rapidly develop the counterfeiting of travel documents such as passports, IC, birth certificates, marriage certificates and mostly UNHCR cards (Gopalan et al., 2025). Besides, regarding the maritime threat, the Maritime Institution of Malaysia (MIMA) in 2018 urged the government to take a stringent policy towards Rohingya refugees that use entrance through the sea route on Malaysia's maritime boundary (Md Shahin & Hasan, 2023).

Meanwhile, the response from the Malaysian government towards Rohingya issues is Malaysia stand on and will continue to support the Rohingya community in any possible way (Missbach & Stange, 2021). Former Foreign Minister of Malaysia, Dato Saifuddin Abdullah state that Malaysia will always be firm and vocal on issues involving oppression against Rohingya community in Myanmar and consistent in helping the refugees from being denied their rights. As a responsible state that promotes harmony and peace in ASEAN, Malaysia will try to bring these issues to the International Criminal Court (ICC) or any other relevant parties for a possible solution to Rohingya issues (Jeong, 2021; Zahed, 2021).

With regard to the Rohingya community issues, there is still lacking awareness and perspective from the local community towards them. There will be a study about the fact, impact and even root cause of the problem, suggestions to the government and so on. There is a research gap to be studied and the researcher intends to investigate on how the local community accepts this group of people in Malaysia (Zakaria & Mohamad, 2025). There are few objectives of this research, namely, first to identify the local community awareness on Rohingya in Malaysia. Secondly, to examine responses of local community towards Rohingya refugees and thirdly, to analyze the local community hopes and expectations to the government in dealing with Rohingya refugees.

Indeed, this research is quite important yet sensitive for Malaysia because Malaysia have involved this crisis since the conflict started decades ago. The action taken by Malaysia government through international stage, voice up in right platform such as United Nation and Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) show that Malaysia are alert and active regarding the humanitarian issues around Malaysia region (Gopalan et al., 2025). More than that, Malaysia also opens its door to the Rohingya despite of having criticism and security concern. Saidin (2023) even this crisis happens, some scholar state that, the government is playing political game that try to influence Malaysian people sympathy and vote in election that give benefit the government to prolong their power.

Beside involvement of government order and policy, Malaysian people also play their part in Rohingya crisis. The sympathy of Malaysian towards Rohingya are quite high especially when it involved aspect of religion (Centre, 2023). Rohingya refugees' religion are dominantly Islam, same like to Malay community where its majority religion in Malaysia. Moreover, when Rohingya people are found in Malaysia, the local community will be the one who will help them in aspect of giving money, food and many more. This behavior and action that made by the local community, the research about Rohingya refugees in Malaysia are the perfect time and to find the answer itself from the local community.

Literature Review

Rohingya refugee's issues are commonly one of the globalization issues that quite interesting to do research on and discover more. This is because Rohingya issues are not only commonly about single aspect but it included a lot of things in politics, human right and many more. Moreover, this issues not one character or organization play important part, but it actually the crisis that everyone needs to take part seriously on it. To understanding more the issues, the researcher needs to find more about how the government and Non-governmental Organization (NGO) treat towards Rohingya refugees on past and currently in Malaysia and other state around neither ASEAN nor global.

Role of State Actors Towards Rohingya Refugees

As Rohingya issues are not occur happen only domestically in Myanmar, it was state as international crisis by many States. But different state different response on this Rohingya issues. There are several different acceptance and conveyance each state towards Rohingya, as this is because it related to each state foreign policy, views and politics domestic on handling this crisis.

Firstly, Indonesia is one of the states that express themselves that willing to help Rohingya refugees. Through its 'Indonesian government policy on Rohingya refugees' by Adiputera & Missbach (2021). Indonesia government' policy towards Rohingya refugees is more likely to humanity solidarity. Whereby Indonesia government allowed to Rohingya refugees to enter and stay in Indonesia soil

territory due to empathy. With clear definition of a definition of refugees under UNHCR Convention 1951 and Indonesian Presidential Decree 125, combined these two important documents given a result that Rohingya can be categorized as refugees in Indonesia under local and international law (Sudrajat et al., 2024). Besides that, Indonesia government actively raised the Rohingya issues at the regional and international level such as United Nation and ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations). Not with that, Indonesia government are pressure quite high to the Myanmar government to stop genocide policy towards Rohingya community in Rakhine (Rosyidin & Dir, 2021).

Bangladesh is the second state that also take part in Rohingya refugees' crisis. According to Xchange Foundation (2018) Bangladesh is not a state that sign 1951 Refugee Convention, meaning that there are only few domestic legal mechanisms for handling asylum cases. Overall Government of Bangladesh actually does not recognize Rohingya as refugees, but more to "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals" (FDMN), which deny any special right status for the Rohingya as legal refugee (Faruque, 2020). Even Bangladesh does not recognize Rohingya as legal refugees, but Bangladesh shows empathy and openness towards Rohingya that fled from their nation by provide temporary shelters, keep open Bangladesh borders open and help of the international community which lead the humanitarian response in these issues (Xchange, 2018). In addition Chowdhury et al (2022) argued that Bangladesh involved a lot of humanitarian aids to the Rohingya refugees since the crisis begin. A lot of Bangladesh agencies take part to help Rohingya refugees in the refugees' camp. Bangladesh have received almost BDT 1 billion from private donations and contribution in aid of the Rohingya. Additionally, the Bangladesh government has directly spent BDT 200 million to help Rohingya community in aspects of education, vocational training and children care.

Thirdly, Malaysia is quite similar to Bangladesh whereby Malaysia does not a signatory of UNHCR Refugee Convention 1951 (Mohd Nor et al., 2025). Malaysia have right to not accept any refugees or asylum seekers into the country. Haque et al., (2023) state that Malaysia government until today still firm with that decision, does not recognize Rohingya refugees as legal status in Malaysia territory. This is because, according to Former Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Shahidan Kassim said that the arrival Rohingya refugees into Malaysia does not bring any benefit to Malaysian, nevertheless increase the security threat and became economic burden to the local people in small business and daily life around Malaysia. Even though, Malaysia government policy does not support Rohingya refugees fully, but the Malaysia government still allowed them to work informally and stay temporarily until situation in Rakhine calm and peace (Sunam, 2023).

Unlike Indonesia, Malaysia and Bangladeshi stand, India and China have completely different view towards the Rohingya crisis. Whereby India seems more friendlier with the Myanmar government despite the cases of genocide that continuously made by Myanmar government towards Rohingya community. The crisis of Rohingya refugees in Myanmar for India stand it just internal matters of Myanmar. Furthermore, the good relation between India and Myanmar it may the reason why the India does not want to take part of this. However, in 'India's Rohingya Shame' by Field et al (2023). The untold story why India does not want to take part of this crisis where it may be because Indian Government as anti-Rohingya in their heinous policy (Isikhan & Khan, 2022). As Modi's government ideology more to far right which extremely on the Hindu movement, it may the reason India does not take part as claiming the Rohingya more to terrorists and "illegal Bengalis".

Beside India, Myanmar has a very structurally support from China regarding Rohingya issues. This is because China quite interest on Rakhine state due to the high economic value. Its region or geographic may give benefit for China. Moreover, China often said that Rohingya issues are likely domestic issues inside Myanmar that should not be include. It made China does not want to include directly or indirectly. The stand made by China about this Rohingya issues show that the Burmese Government's try to attempting on protect its sovereignty and national security.

Role of State Non-State Actors Towards Rohingya Refugees

The Rohingya crisis is not only getting feedback or reaction by state, but the Non-Governmental Organization also react towards this crisis. United Nation, ASEAN, OIC and several local and international non state actors played vital role since Rohingya crisis begin. 'The United Nation Action Towards the plight of Rohingya Refugees' by Magnawa, Oasan and Ramboyong where stated the contribution of United Nation towards the Rohingya refugee crisis. United Nations have taken immediate action to somehow furnish remedy Rohingya suffering but unfortunately Myanmar remains to do excruciating action towards Rohingya refugees. The United Nation know it limit power to penetrate depth to the Myanmar as to solve the problem but United Nation need to do more for a stable future of

Rohingya refugee. As the Rohingya fleeing by boat from their home state, United Nation called all countries around the world to allow Rohingya refugees to enter their nation, establish policy that given guarantee safe and stable life for them and full protection. However, a part of action that have taken by United Nation on these issues, UN still failed to take any strong action against perpetrator and to ensure the protection of millions Rohingya. UN should take more action for ensuring the Rohingya refugees receive basic human rights, socioeconomic rights and political rights.

This issues of Rohingya genocide, ASEAN should be rescreening back very depth as this is because the crisis happens on one ASEAN member which is Myanmar. In 'Impact of Rohingya Crisis on South Asian Politics' shows and exposed the weakness of ASEAN to address the Rohingya refugee issue at regional level. Rohingya refugee's crisis shows the world that how big the lacking and failed of ASEAN in making policy about humanitarian and political crisis, that will became never ended story for Rohingya people. Moreover, ASEAN supposed to play a vital role to maintain the peace and sustainability in the South East Asian Region. But disappointed action made by ASEAN, there are no unified response has been proposed to address the deepening crisis. Even some ASEAN countries like Malaysia and Indonesia agree to give temporarily accommodate to almost 7000 Rohingya, but this decision are more likely bilateral than through auspices of ASEAN.

OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) also have their part to play regarding settling the issues of Rohingya refugees. In articles "Comparative Study of the Roles of ASEAN and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Responding to the Rohingya Crisis" shows that OIC try to helped these issues through internationalize around the global. It makes as a signal that a community that minority groups that adhere to the Islamic religion are being oppressed. In continuously assist Rohingya refugees, OIC invest a lot of money to provide humanitarian assistance and relief for the Rohingya refugees. Even OIC try to contribute efficiently to help Rohingya people but it still not enough yet to settle down the issues of Rohingya.

Research Methodology

This research will use the qualitative design as a research methodology. Qualitative research design is a research method used extensively by scientists and researchers studying human behavior, opinions, themes and motivations. Qualitative research methods are probably the oldest of all scientific techniques, with the ancient Greek philosophers qualitatively observing the world around them and trying to understand and explain what they saw (Duemer, 2007).

Although some people believes that qualitative methods much "easier" or less rigorous than quantitative ones, but the fact is that information of this kind can provide a depth of understanding about phenomena that cannot be achieved in other ways (Hathaway, 1995). So this paper will use primary and secondary data which will be collected from interviews, peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government, and non-government organization reports, and including some articles published in mainstream electronic and print media (Masefield et al., 2020). Apuke & Iyendo (2018) the acceptability of a thesis depends on using an appropriate methodology and should have the benefit of adequate support from credible, academic sources for its observations, assertions, and conclusions (Northeastern University 2012).

There are mainly 8 in-depth interviews that has been taken with a semi-structured interview questions. The interview took almost 20 to 30 minutes for one respondent. The respondents has been chosen based on their profession, educational level, gender, race, religion, relevancy to this study for making a balance and ensuring the presence of different types of people from various background. The researcher has tried his best to make the balance and ensure the neutrality while collecting and analyzing the data. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, researcher won't publish the original name and identity of those interviewees. Instead the researcher will use a symbolic letter to express their views in this paper.

The respondent A is a Malay Muslim government official who is serving as a senior official in local immigration office (Gurowitz, 2000). He has an outstanding career background which make him credible to talk on this issue. The researcher took his interview to understand a local Malay view whose view is simultaneously also reflect as a government servant view (Manaf et al., 2023). Respondent B is a Buddhist Chinese who lives in Changlun, Kedah. She operates her family business near to her residency but she doesn't like to have a Rohingya refugee as worker. So the researcher believes that it was important to take her interview to understand why she doesn't like to have a Rohingya which may reflect a non-Muslim lady's view. Respondent C is also a Buddhist Chinese male. He is also living in Changlun and also a university student, currently doing his Bachelor in International Business

Administration. To make an equal reflection between male's and female's view, his interview was really needed. The interview took place in his university campus in Sintok, Kedah. Respondent D is a Muslim Malay women who is a housewife and studied until SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education).

The researcher took her interview because she has a frequent communication with a Rohingya refugee, so through her experience, the view of a local Malay women was clearly showed in the paper. Respondent E is a Hindu Indian who lives in Napoh, Kedah. She has experience to work with Rohingya in a grocery shop. So her observation showed the non-Muslim view and also ensured the representation of local Indian Malaysian. As, she has a working experience with a Rohingya refugee, so her view will be broader compared to the one who doesn't have it. Respondent F is a Muslim Malay who is serving as a junior Bank officer in Alor Setar, Kedah. He has a Bachelor degree from university. His view reflects the perception of a local youth as he is below 26. He has no direct communication to the Rohingya. So researcher tried to understand whether those people who are not engaged with Rohingya refugee and those who doesn't have direct engagement, have a similar perception or not. It was very important to understand his view. Respondent G is a Hindu Indian who is working in UNHCR Malaysia. She holds a Master degree in International Relation. She is based in Sungai Petani, Kedah. Her response made some of the things clear about the local perception. As she is working in UNHCR, her interview enriched the research paper. Respondent H is a Muslim Malay man. He is the Village Head (Ketua Kampung) of Kampung Teroi, Kedah. His view also important to this study, because he also has interaction with Rohingya. The researcher took his interview in his village in Teroi.

In this research, Hartmut Essers's integration theory has been applied. This theory contains four different levels of social integration, namely, acculturation, positioning, interaction and identification. Acculturation is about touch on individuals possessing essential knowledge and particular skills in order to be able to act and interact in an appropriate, informed and successful manner. Positioning is one of the important components of Essers's integration theories. It is known as an individual's acquirement of a particular social position. The individual is thereby integrated into an already existing social system and its established functions. Positioning can take place through awarding individuals certain rights, such as the right to nationality. It can also further be connected to taking on an occupation, or completing an education. Interaction is the third level of social integration and is described as a form of social conduct, in which individuals take a bearing on each other's knowledge and behavior. Hence, it refers to the establishment of social contacts within an everyday environment. Just like cultururation, opportunities are key to interaction, as is the willingness to accept offers of good neighborhood or friendship on both parts. Finally, identification is explained by Esser as the emotional relationship between individuals and the social system as a whole. This can for example be expressed through collective spirit or national pride. Thus, identification refers to integration as a process of becoming a member of the collective structures on a national, local, or ethnic level. This process is largely dependent on positive and interesting experiences within the host society.

Discussion

Here the researcher discusses the findings of this research that obtained through the data analysis. The findings and results will be presented based on the objectives of the study. The researcher uses relevant graph and pie charts obtained from the interviews to emphasize the result of the study. In addition, the researcher also uses the quotations from the respondents' answers to highlight and personalize the data.

The Awareness of Kedah Local Community on Rohingya

One of the core objectives of this study is to identify the awareness of Kedah local community on the Rohingya refugee crisis. The researcher set up a scale to identify the awareness based on the interpretation of data. There are four main components that has been considered while set up the awareness scale. Researcher mainly focused on how frequently the respondent deals with the Rohingya refugee, whether the respondent has any experience working with the Rohingya refugees or not, the respondent has any direct communication with the Rohingya refugee or not and the respondent's indirect knowledge on Rohingya refugees. Furthermore, the researcher used his own observation which played a vital role to categorize the respondents under each component.

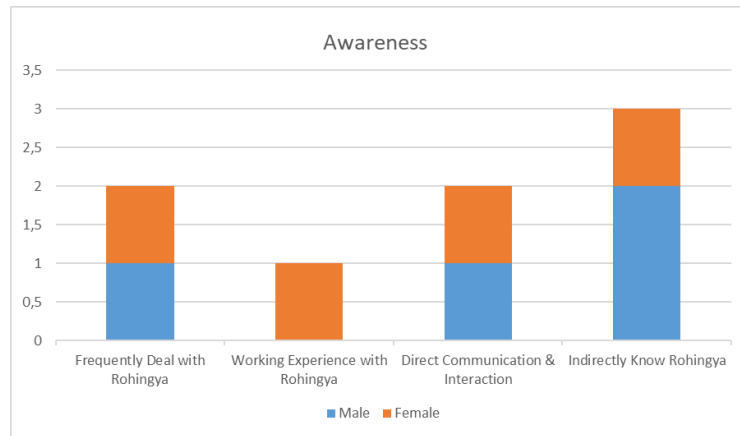


Figure 1. Local Community Awareness on Rohingya Refugees

Figure 4.1 tell us the level of awareness among the local community towards the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. Among the 8 respondents, two respondents particularly, Mr. A and Miss G has to deal frequently with the Rohingya refugees. As a Deputy Director of local immigration Mr. A claimed his awareness with the following words:

Definitely, I know the Rohingya refugee crisis since the conflict unfolds. As an officer in Immigration department, my job requires me to know the crisis very well. You know, Kedah is one of the important route for human trafficker to bring the Rohingya in Malaysia, so I have to deal this type of cases that relates to Rohingya almost every week.

Miss G mentioned her awareness with the following words,

As an officer of UNHCR Malaysia, I can say that I have enough knowledge on Rohingya issue. I can tell you that I need to deal with Rohingya refugee in a daily basis. It's actually Rohingya became a part of my life. Because almost every day, there will be some Rohingya refugees come to UNHCR office for several reasons. Sometimes, I also need to travel to them for collecting data for my office.

One of the female respondents, Miss E has direct experience to work with Rohingya in a grocery shop in Napoh, Kedah. So she knows on the Rohingya issues from her co-worker. Moreover, Mrs. D and Mr. H has a direct communication and interaction with the Rohingya refugees. As per mention before, Mrs. D's son has Rohingya friend who often comes to her house and she knows the Rohingya refugee crisis from that Rohingya. As a village chief, Mr. H also know Rohingya refugees personally who lives in his own village.

However, three of our respondents, Miss B, Mr. C & Mr. F have only indirect knowledge on Rohingya refugee crisis. Because three of them know about the issue from media, newspaper, lecturer and other sources but they don't know any Rohingya personally. Three of them saw Rohingya refugees around their residential and working area but they have no direct communication as mentioned in their responses while answering RQ-1. Hence, all of our respondents has the knowledge on Rohingya issues, although few of them has no direct experience or communication, but they are also have enough knowledge to address the issue. Thus, the researcher believes that the Malaysian local community are fully aware on the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Kedah Local Community Acceptance towards Rohingya

The second objective of this study is to examine the acceptance of local community towards the Rohingya refugee. The researcher posed two research questions (RQ-2 & RQ-3) to get the response from the local community. The researcher mainly divided the responses into two categories, namely negative and positive responses. This will then be discussed under two headings, namely, responses on the arrival of Rohingya and responses on the presence of Rohingya within the community.

The researcher found three main components from the respondents that need to be highlighted to clarify the responses of Kedah local community towards the Rohingya refugees which are finding job, stealing job and finding shelter.

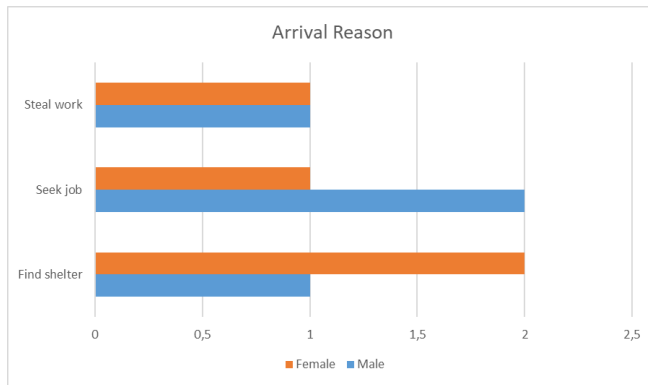


Figure 4.2. Local Community Awareness on Rohingya Refugees

The chart above tells us both types of responses that generated from the informants' answers. This also shows that the respondent who thinks that Rohingya came here to find shelter and to seek jobs were more positive compared to those who think they came here to steal job opportunity from the local community. So, we can simplify that 75% of the respondents responded positively, another 25% responded negatively.

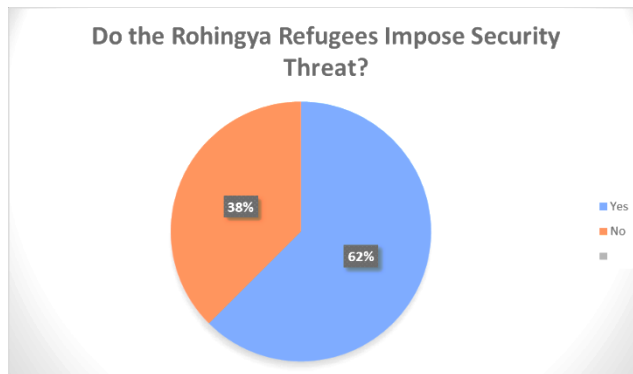


Figure 4.3. Local Community response on social security

All the respondents express security concern due to the arrival of Rohingya in Malaysia. Majority of the respondents believe that the Rohingya cause security concern among the local society. We can see from the pie chart that 62% believes that Rohingya imposed security threat while 38% believes that they don't impose any security concern. For instance, Mrs. D explained her experience in following words,

I never heard of any criminal allegation against Rohingya. As my son has a Rohingya friends who is living near our house, so he plays with my son and came to our house few times. He is a civilized people just like us the local Malaysian. So I don't believes that he is a criminal or he is a threat for our society.

On the other hand, Miss B explained her experience in a negative way. According to her own opinion, Honestly, I don't like to employ any Rohingya in my shop because of security threat. You know, Rohingya refugee has no permanent place in Malaysia. So if I employ Rohingya refugees and they cheat me, then where I can complain? But if there is local worker, I can ask his or her Identity Card (IC) and go to police for the protection if anything happen. That's why I think that this is a security concern for our society as a local Malaysian.

4.3 Local Community Hopes and Expectations towards the Government

The third objective of this paper is to analyze the Malaysian local community's hopes and expectations to the government. Here, the researcher found that the respondents generated a mixed answer where some are in favour of the government decision and others are against the decision by the government. They also have different views on providing basic needs to Rohingya including education and healthcare.

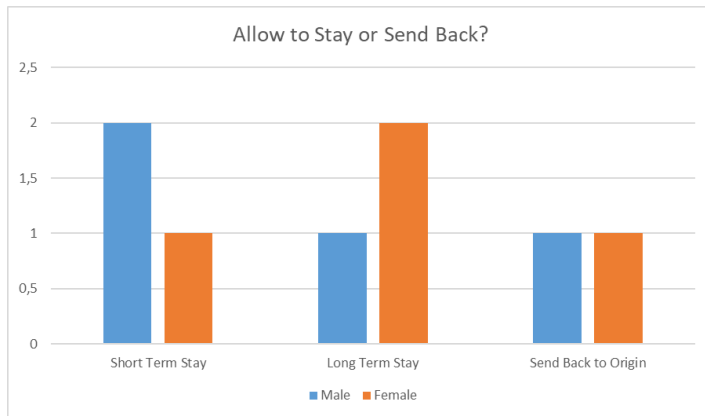


Figure 4.4. Presence of Rohingya in Malaysia

Figure 4.4 shows that 38% of our respondents hopes that government will allow the Rohingya to stay here for a long period. Miss G said in her statement,

I don't believe that the situation will be changed in Rakhine in a near future. Before the situation calm down, if the government think about repatriation, it would be very dangerous. Because we don't know how will be their fate in Myanmar. So I hope government will consider that and allow them to stay here for a long period.

Moreover, another 38% respondents expect that the government will allow them to stay here for a short term basis. They think that once the situation became calm, the government should repatriate them. Mr. A mentioned,

If you allow them here for a long term period, what would happen with their future generation? What we will answer them when they will ask their nationality? So it would be a wise decision to send them to Myanmar after a certain period.

From the figure 4.4, we can see that another 25% respondents has completely different opinion on Rohingya refugee presence in Malaysia. They think that the situation is already calm in Myanmar, so the government should immediately send them back.

Providing Basic Needs to Rohingya

Basic needs is a term used by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other United Nations agencies for the basic goods and services necessary for a minimum standard of living. The UNHCR defines basic needs in terms of access to basic services and assistance in health, nutrition, WASH, food, shelter, energy, education, as well as domestic items and specialized services for people with specific needs. (UNHCR, 2017).

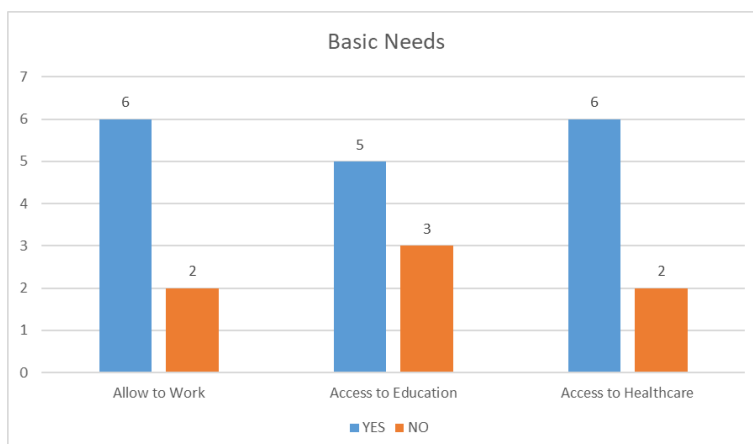


Figure 4.5. Providing Basic Needs to Rohingya in Malaysia

The figure 4.5 explains the local community's overall expectation towards the Malaysian government. We can see that 75% of the respondents were positive to allow Rohingya to work and ensure their access to health care while 25% opposed the ideas. On the other hand, 62% of our respondents expect the government to allow them in local school while 38% of them think that the government should not allow Rohingya to the local school.

The findings of this study demonstrate that perceptions toward Rohingya refugees among local communities in Kedah vary significantly depending on religious identity, ethnicity, occupational background, and degree of exposure to refugees. Respondent A, a Malay Muslim government officer, articulated a dual perspective that aligns with Esser (2001) framework of positioning and interaction, where humanitarian obligation rooted in shared Islamic identity is tempered by administrative concerns related to legality and national security- an observation consistent with previous Malaysian studies highlighting the ambivalence of state officials toward refugees (Khairi, 2024; Rashid & Saidin, 2023). Respondent B, a Buddhist Chinese business owner, emphasized cultural distance, workplace distrust, and perceived security risks, resonating with findings by Du (2014), who noted that non-Muslim communities in Malaysia often rely on mediated narratives rather than direct interaction to form judgments about Rohingya refugees. Meanwhile, Respondent C, a young Chinese male university student, adopted an evaluative stance centered on legality, system capacity, and governance, reflecting the structural assimilation lens in Esser's theory, where younger urban Malaysians assess refugee integration through institutional rather than cultural frames (Wong & Rigg, 2011). Respondent D, a Malay Muslim housewife, showed a mixture of compassion and fear—demonstrating the coexistence of religious sympathy with socially transmitted anxieties, consistent with Gupta (2021) conclusion that women in semi-rural Malaysian communities often express ambivalence toward refugees. These findings collectively support the argument that public perceptions are socially constructed, shaped by religious ideology, community narratives, and differing levels of refugee contact (De Coninck, 2020; Drozdowski & Matusz, 2021). A core weakness emerging from the responses is that several negative perceptions were based on indirect information rather than lived experience, highlighting what Esser (2001) terms interactional uncertainty, where stereotypes fill the knowledge gap in low-contact environments. Despite this, the study successfully illustrates how humanitarian sentiment often collides with practical concerns surrounding safety, resource allocation, and cultural integration—an intersection widely documented in global refugee research. Thus, the diversity of views among the respondents underscores the need for more context-sensitive policies and improved community engagement strategies to reduce misinformation and foster social cohesion.

Final Considerations

Eventually, the researcher obtains few important conclusion. Firstly, the researcher concludes that Kedah local community has a full awareness on Rohingya refugee. The study suggests that although few of the respondents has no direct communication with the Rohingya but still they has clear knowledge on Rohingya refugee crisis. Moreover, many of them has broader knowledge on this issue. If we see the local people, many of them become volunteers to serve Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and even in Malaysia. There are many volunteers group that are working for Rohingya just like Yayasan Salam Malaysia (Ansar & Md. Khaled, 2021)

Apart from that, the study also examined the local community response on the Rohingya refugee. The finding of the study shows that majority of the local community has a positive response towards the Rohingya refugee that they came here for finding a shelter and searching a job. However, the majority also believed that the Rohingya refugees also imposed a security concern for the society due to the lack of legal identification. Apparently, Malaysia become a popular route for the human trafficker who brought the Rohingya from Bangladesh and Myanmar through a dangerous journey. None of the country and its citizen won't expect to be a destination for the illegal smuggler and their associates. Therefore, more than half of the local community believe that Rohingya creates security threat to the society.

Furthermore, this study also analyzed the local community's hopes and expectation towards government. The finding suggests us that the people hope to the government to allow them to stay for at least a certain period. Moreover, most of the respondents expect the government to allow the Rohingya to work legally, allow them in school and ensure the access to healthcare. Therefore, the researcher believes that Kedah local community has a positive acceptance towards the Rohingya refugees.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to all individuals and institutions who contributed to the success of this research, especially the respondents in Kedah for their willingness to share valuable insights, as well as colleagues and administrative staff from Universiti Utara Malaysia and UNHCR Malaysia whose guidance, cooperation, and support greatly facilitated the data collection and completion of this study.

Ethical Considerations

I Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

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