

## PRESS RELEASE: Rohingya in Malaysia remain hopeful for legal right to employment, and be a solution to Malaysia's labour shortage

**25 May 2023 – Dhaka, Bangladesh:** Unable to be formally employed in Malaysia due to lack of legal recognition, Rohingya are relegated to living on the margins of society and finding work in the informal economy. This places many Rohingya in situations of financial precarity and at risk of labour exploitation.

In a recent joint report from the Protecting Rohingya Refugees in Asia (PRRIa) project and the Rohingya community themselves, the existing and potential economic contribution of Rohingya refugees to Malaysia is highlighted. In contrast to the rhetoric that refugees are a burden to public resources, the study finds that the majority of Rohingya refugees are in fact self-reliant, with minimal dependence on the state.

The report also speaks to the skills of Rohingya in Malaysia, including their existing engagement across various sectors and their desire to further contribute.

*“Contrary to public discourse, Rohingya refugees are not a burden on government resources nor are they passive recipients of aid”* said Evan Jones, Manager of the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform. *“Instead, Rohingya are actively eking out livelihood opportunities and are eager to continue learning and developing their skills.”*

At present, Malaysian law does not permit Rohingya refugees to access formal employment. For the estimated 108,000 registered Rohingya in Malaysia, their only option is to seek employment in the informal sector to be able to survive. In many cases, the money earned through this work is insufficient to sustain themselves or their families. It is also inadequate to provide for the necessities of life such as shelter, food, education and healthcare.

Albeit being informally employed, Rohingya constitute a part of the workforce that helps address labour market shortages in industries such as construction – a sector that is a key driver of the Malaysian economy. With their diverse skills, resilience and desire to continue to up-skill, Rohingya refugees have the ability to bridge labour gaps and contribute significantly to local economies.

In addition, refugees possess a high degree of adaptability, resiliency and a desire to learn. They often pick up language quickly and have an entrepreneurial spirit that can directly address the labour shortages that various industries are currently experiencing. By tapping into this talent pool, employers can not only fulfill their workforce needs but also benefit from the fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and cultural diversity that refugees bring to the table.

*“Rohingya not having access to formal employment speaks to the legal chasm in which refugees in Malaysia currently find themselves,”* said Lillianne Fan, Co-founder and International Director of the Geutanyoë Foundation. *“Only with the adoption of a comprehensive legal framework, will Rohingya strengthen ties with local communities, and reach their full potential in supporting the development of Malaysia's economy.”*

**About the research project:**

The PRRiA project, funded by the European Union's Civil Protection & Humanitarian Aid Operations, is a three-year project to address protection risks and needs of Rohingya in Southeast Asia.

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