



Madrasas, in particular, flourish in the camps.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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In informal camps, which host the majority of the refugees, students only have access to education up to class five. All education provided in the camps is unaccredited, meaning students don't receive any certificates and are unable to sit for national examinations—which would allow them to continue on to or finish high school.

This has meant an uneven education for Rohingya children with changing curriculums leading to many having to repeat years of school or dropping out in the process. Overcoming these barriers, by repeating grades in their camp schools and excelling in official PSC and JSC exams, some students managed to enroll in local high schools with the encouragement of their camp teachers and schools impressed with their good grades.

One student interviewed by Human Rights Watch said his family borrowed money and used savings to be able to pay Tk 3,500 for a Bangladeshi birth certificate. Another, 15-year-old Mohammed Yunus said he worked in the brickfields to pay to attend the local school—now that he has been expelled, he works full time as a day labourer.

"The Bangladeshi government's policy of tracking down and expelling Rohingya refugee students instead of ensuring their right to education is misguided, tragic, and unlawful," said Bill Van Esveld, a senior researcher of children's rights, in a statement released by Human Rights Watch in April. "Education is a basic human right. The solution to children feeling compelled to falsify their identities to go to secondary school isn't to expel them, but to let them get the education they deserve."



Rohingya children, comprising 55

percent of the camps' population, and adolescents have been termed by the UN as a "lost generation" for having no access to formal education or vocational training.

"Young people who attended school back in Myanmar now just roam around the camps without any hope and children are growing up in a society where there is a lack of every right except food," says Razia Sultana, a Rohingya activist who has lived in Bangladesh since childhood.

"Now, most essential for my community is basic education up to the eighth grade in the camps. The facilities and circumstances currently allow only up to the third grade and that too, is not actual education but are more like day care centres," she continues.

"Education is key to moving forward and for the self-identity of the refugees."

Those who were able to escape the dreary confines of education in the camps, have seen rewards. While many parents struggle to ensure secondary schooling for their children in or outside the camps, some of those who managed to finish high school in Myanmar or here in Bangladesh have managed to even attend higher education.

19-year-old Formin Akter, is one of 25 Rohingya students enrolled in the Asian University for Women in Chittagong. She was profiled in a Reuters story, where parallels between her and her sister's lives were drawn—Formin and her older sister Nur Jahan both managed to complete their high school diploma back in Myanmar, the first from their village to finish high school. They, along with other family members, fled to Bangladesh in late 2017.

While Formin is now off at university on a full scholarship, Nur Jahan being the eldest of the siblings was married off to a fellow refugee last year. She now teaches younger children in a learning centre in Kutupalong camp, as did Formin before arriving at university.

Formin agrees that the learning centres are not adequate for a good education. "There are only learning opportunities for small children—they are learning their ABCs, songs, and basic writing," she says. "It is not good enough for older students."

While Formin is a recently arrived refugee and spent only a year in the camps, her 21-year-old classmate Rupia Mahabuba comes from a family who have lived in Ramu upazila in Cox's Bazar for generations. She studied at the local school and is now attending university. In comparison, Rohingya women and girls their age and younger are generally seen in the camps doing chores, running households, and raising children in the camps.

While Formin was able to attend university only because she managed to finish high school through sheer persistence back in trouble-ravaged Rakhine and Rupia lived outside the camps, those inside face an uphill task to even complete their primary or secondary schooling let alone think of university.



PHOTO: REUTERS/JIRAPORN KUHKAN

Bangladeshi students from the class where Rohingya students were expelled by the authorities are seen at Leda high school, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Feb 9, 2019.