

<input type="checkbox"/> Worldwide Refugee Information	
<input type="checkbox"/> Worldwide Refugee Information	<input type="checkbox"/> Country Report: Bangladesh
<input type="checkbox"/> Refugee Voices	<p>At the end of 2000, Bangladesh hosted approximately 121,600 refugees. Of these, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognized 21,556 ethnic Rohingya from Burma and 71 persons from Somalia, Iran, and other countries as refugees.</p> <p>The U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) also considered as refugees some 50,000 to 100,000 other Rohingya who have fled to Burma since 1993. Although they fled Burma for reasons similar to those of the recognized refugees who entered in 1991 and 1992, Bangladesh classified them all as illegal immigrants.</p> <p>During the year, 1,323 Rohingya repatriated to Burma with UNHCR assistance. Some 300,000 Biharis were living in Bangladesh in refugee-like circumstances, and an estimated 60,000 Chakma and other Jumma peoples were internally displaced in Bangladesh.</p> <p>Burmese Rohingya Some 250,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh from Burma in late 1991 and early 1992. Local people, who are closely related to the Rohingya ethnically and culturally, initially welcomed the refugees. However, relations between the refugees and the local residents turned sour shortly after their arrival. Between mid-1992 and 1999, more than 230,000 Rohingya repatriated to Burma. Some returned voluntarily, but Bangladesh forced or coerced most into returning.</p> <p>At the end of 2000, only some 21,000 of the Rohingya who entered Bangladesh in 1991 to 1992 remained there, mostly living in camps run by UNHCR. Although Bangladesh wants the refugees to repatriate, most adamantly refuse to do so. The Burmese authorities have approved about 5,000 of the refugees for return. However, Burmese authorities refuse to permit some 15,000 others to repatriate to Burma. Burma claims that they are not citizens or former residents of Burma. Consequently, long-term prospects for the 15,000 not allowed to return to Burma, and for those among the 5,000 allowed to return who do not wish to repatriate, remain uncertain.</p> <p>Donor governments have been increasingly reluctant to fund UNHCR's assistance programs in the camps for the Burmese. UNHCR has therefore sought to introduce projects aimed at helping the refugees become more self-sufficient and facilitating the agency's eventual withdrawal from the camps. However, the Bangladesh authorities, fearful that the refugees might become too well established in Bangladesh, have rejected many of these proposals.</p> <p>The government of Bangladesh, which says that the presence of Burmese refugees has had negative economic, social, and political</p>
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consequences for the country, has refused to acknowledge Rohingya who have entered Bangladesh since 1993 as refugees. Bangladesh has also barred UNHCR and nongovernmental organizations from assisting the newer arrivals. By doing so, Bangladesh has hoped to stem the flow of new refugees into the country and encourage refugees already there to repatriate.

Bangladesh's efforts to curb new arrivals have had only limited success. Since 1993, continuing abuses by the Burmese authorities have led some 50,000 to 100,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. Because Bangladesh denies them legal status and assistance, they live in difficult conditions.

Biharis Some 300,000 Biharis, many of whom consider themselves citizens of Pakistan, live in Bangladesh in refugee-like circumstances. The Biharis, who are Muslims, were among a larger group who moved from India's Bihar State to then-East Pakistan in 1947, at the time of the partition of India.

In 1971, following a bloody struggle for independence, East Pakistan became Bangladesh. After the conflict, many Biharis, having supported Pakistan in the war, migrated from Bangladesh to Pakistan. However, most were too poor to make the move. The residual population remained stranded in Bangladesh, waiting for the day when Pakistan would send for them.

Pakistan's failure to resettle the Biharis (sometimes referred to as the "stranded Pakistanis") results both from the cost of large-scale resettlement and from fears that the Biharis' arrival could exacerbate existing ethnic and political tension in Pakistan.



Conditions in the Bihari camps are poor; sanitation and the water supply are inadequate. Crime is also a problem, and young Bihari women are reportedly targeted by sex-traffickers.

The Bihari leadership continues to demand that Pakistan honor its obligations toward them. However, a growing number of camp residents—particularly young Biharis who were born in the camps and have never been to Pakistan or Bihar—are tired of waiting to go to Pakistan and have expressed their preference to live permanently in Bangladesh.

Returned and Displaced Chakma In the mid-1980s, Muslim settlers' appropriation of land belonging to ethnic minorities in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts region caused some 64,000 members of those groups, the vast majority Chakma, to flee to India and more than 60,000 others to become internally displaced.

In December 1997, the government of Bangladesh signed a peace accord that ended a 25-year conflict with the Shanti Bahini, an insurgent group primarily comprised of ethnic Chakma. The signing of the accord paved the way for the repatriation of the entire refugee population. However, the situation of the more than 60,000 Chakma who had become internally displaced during the previous three decades remained unresolved at the end of 2000.

