

# Rohingyas in Faridabad

*A situational Assessment*



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## INTRODUCTION

Rohingya community is often called the most persecuted minority in the world today for a reason. Burmese government has refused to grant them any legal status. Since their Buddhist fellow citizens turned on them they have fled to reach any land that would spare their lives. They are fleeing persecution in Burma to reach Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Bangladesh and their numbers are increasing in India.

On reaching India many of them may have escaped the ultimate clutches of death but their living conditions have touched the new lows. In many parts of India in Jammu, Hyderabad, Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and other locations, they have settled in small clutters in makeshift set up that freezes in winters, melts in summer months and sinks at slightest shower of Indian monsoon. Indian Government has either turned a blind eye to them on purpose or they are simply invisible entities to be seen in the light of the day. They are not offered any basic healthcare; their children have never attended or have less access to schools. Their shanties are loathsome even in comparison to the most underprivileged Indian slums. The local population remains oblivious to their background, situation, fears and needs.

A team of SLIC visited the Rohingya settlement area in sector 82, Faridabad, Haryana on 16 July 2015. This settlement is approximately 2.5 years old. The crowd had gathered to welcome the team. Eyes filled with hope, gazed with a sense of overwhelming relief of having been discovered. Each one had a story. Each one had specific needs. Gradually each poured out similar story of abandonment grief and horror. The team interviewed the 37 family household heads comprising a total population of **one hundred and twenty five** (62 males and 63 females), the team also conducted interview of individuals and in groups. The following table shows the type of identification that these families have.

S.No	Type of Identification	Number of families
1.	Refugee ID cards	19
2.	Asylum Seekers	12
3.	Appointment Dates with UNHCR	5
4.	Yet to Approach UNHCR	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>

## **OBJECTIVE**

Rohingyas are victims of modern day ethnic cleansing. They sadly remain intentionally displaced people whose civil rights have been systematically destroyed. Sole objective of this study was to realize their current conditions and witness several obstacles that they face each day. This study was in fact undertaken to spread awareness about the plight of suffering Rohingya at all levels. It was indeed painful to watch that the most basic human rights are being violated of Rohingyas. It was appalling to realize that this community is knee down in poverty, abused victims of possible human trafficking and is easiest targets of bonded slavery.

There is a need to make concerted efforts through operations and services to strengthen protection, improve the quality of life and seek solutions for them. There has to be a concentrated rescue effort made to pull them out of their miseries and to find sustainable solution to their problems. They are in dire need of security and development on humanitarian grounds. The present report provides the estimates of characteristics relating the slum conditions of the Rohingyas refugees in Faridabad.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The survey was carried out for the essential assessment of the conditions of Rohingya community settled in Faridabad, Haryana. The team adopted methodologies such as observation, community mapping, focus group discussion for gathering primary data from the target community. Household head of each family, individuals and groups were interviewed. The mapping was done in a participatory way with members of the community to capture the settlement location and government service institutions. Gender wise information gathering from different age groups (18-25, 26-45, 46-65, 65+) was emphasized in Focus Group Discussion.

The team collected data on structural aspects of dwelling units and basic housing amenities such as drinking water, bathroom, sewerage, latrine, electricity including children education, medical services, employment conditions, eviction threat, local perceptions etc made available to them. This survey was essentially exploratory in nature, designed to give a detailed account of hardships faced by Rohingyas. A further attempt was made to question women separately to collect general particulars in the same schedule of inquiry.

The report is presented in seven sections.

- Living Conditions
- Access to water
- Health and Sanitation
- Education
- Women and Children
- Employment
- Local threat and legal issues

## LIVING CONDITIONS

Life in India is far from easy for Rohingyas. There are uncountable dangers they face in their everyday lives here. They have been denied basic rights as health care aid nor offered minimalistic security assurance which must otherwise be the legal obligation of the Indian government towards every person living within its territorial land. Many of basic requirements mandatory for human survival are far from being fulfilled. From the social point of they have been pushed away in the corner and left to fend for themselves. They are desperate to integrate themselves with the immediate social milieu.

Housing condition is one of the most important indicators of the socio-economic development of a community. Part of the city that this particular settlement was located was slightly aloof from main civilization. The Rohingya population settled in shabby makeshift set up made of bamboos, plastic sheets, wood, gunny sacks, metal or some sort of waste material. At least 4-8 family members live, eat and sleep in the same room arrangement. The congested clutter definitely deprived them of sunshine and the air reeked of sewage. The huts are made amongst lying garbage, with cattle roaming through the huts and scattering the place with droppings. The area is infested with flies, which can be seen wherever the sight goes. Rag picking is their sole source of livelihood. They find many objects for their daily needs such as old clothes, woolen for winters, rejected machines in the garbage that they segregate every day.



The camp had a huge ditch of viscous black water at its entrance. When it was said to them that it could become the cause of many diseases among them and should be covered, the leader of the camp told the team that this ditch was the only way they could find prevent water logging inside their homes. They say that water fills as high as the knee level in their homes during monsoons.

They cook on twigs collected from around the settlement, and some have access to small fuel cylinders.

Electricity is provided through the land owner but face successive power cuts to which they pay a total sum of **Rs. 300** monthly. Sometime habitants go without electricity for more than four days at a stretch in the scorching heat. The land where the Rohingyas are settled is owned by a local person who charges **Rs. 1300/-** from each household per month as rent including electricity and water charges.

### **ACCESS TO SAFE WATER**

There is no provision of adequate potable water and have no water storage system. There a single water pump used all the families. Very few of the community know about diseases that spread from contaminated water. Those who do, express their helplessness at being unable to do anything to prevent it. Water is available to them once in the morning and once in the evening. In these circumstances storage is indispensable. This community hardly has any access to proper storage techniques. They do not use and cannot afford any water filtration or purifying mechanism. Such condition and practices poses enormous health risks among the community members.

### **HEALTH AND SANITATION:**

With no access to hospitals or even dispensaries, these families under all circumstances consult the local chemist for medication for their cure. They have to borrow money from the local contractor each time a person falls ill, to buy medicines from the chemist. They are perpetually under debt. There is no Government hospital in and around the settlement area. **The Badshah**

**Khan Government Hospital** is about 12 km away from the settlement area. The team came across person suffering from tuberculosis and others from hernia, malaria and typhoid. There is no indication of immunization program being conducted by Government or local NGOs for them.

There are in total three damaged dysfunctional common toilets for 37 families. Dwellers admitted that they visit open grounds every morning to defecate.

During the rainy season, their huts bog down in dirt and filth. Their living conditions demonstrate the most hopeless conditions.

With poor sanitation and close living quarters, sickness and disease come in unwelcomed. Rag picking as their sole means of livelihood, they dump their garbage collection near the settlement site which could leads to constant fear of infection spreading which may prove fatal for the young, elderly and the weak.

## **EDUCATION**

There are **55 children** in the settlement. Children have no access to formal or informal education. Local schools will not accept their children for lack of legal documents. The parents tried to take some of their children to the government school situated 5 km from their settlement area but admission was denied due to lack of documents. The children also do not understand the local language; the only language they know is Rohingya. There is Government primary school in sector 29 which is 7 km from the settlement area. They even tried to go to private school but they cannot afford the fees and are unable to furnish the required documents.

## **WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

Women had specific needs, vulnerabilities and protection concerns. Mindset of their fathers and husbands remains rigidly conservative. These poor, illiterate women are tied to the domestic chores and upbringing their off springs.

Women have no proper access to sanitary material and suffice with whatever available mode they could afford. Like in other places, the women in Faridabad generally give birth in huts and seldom approach Government hospital which is 10-12 km away. This poses risk of mothers dying at child birth or incident of mortality of child during birth.

The children looked malnourish and loiter between the piles of excrements which sadly happen to be there playground. All male children are engaged in rag picking profession as means of additional financial support system to the family members.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

Rohingyas are a conservative Muslim community with rigid defined rules for men and women. Husbands are the breadwinners and wives remain house runners. Since working is strictly not permissible for women, they focus on domestic chores and child rearing. The burden on earning is alone shouldered by Rohingya men.

According to the information collected during the assessment, Rohingya men remain largely uneducated and illiterate with absolutely no or very little formal education attained. Most members have at the most made it to primary school and dropped out way before reaching 5th standard. Having no skill knowledge has put them on slippery grounds. Currently this community is stuck in an unknown territory and a foreign language is imposed upon them to earn a livelihood. Language barrier seems like their first and foremost hurdle.

They are rag pickers subjected to chemical hazard and infections. Their professional obligation requires them to hunt for used bottles, thrown plastic, metal parts, glass pieces and alike. Because of malnutrition and regard to their unfortunate background they remain susceptible to diseases like typhoid, jaundice, cholera, malaria, tuberculosis etc due to their exposure to hazardous materials. Their sole source of income remains rag picking and unfortunately they remain tied to it. Daily income of an individual range from Rs. 80 to Rs. 100/-.



## **LOCAL THREAT AND LEGAL ISSUES**

Rohingya men largely complained of having fear of local police for any arrest or detention. They are well aware of the fact that they are squatting in another country and fear of being sent back is what makes them reluctant to fight back harassment. There has been incident of police questioning their identity and non receptive when shown refugee ID cards. They have complained of police threatening them with force, and hence they have to flee their hutments from time to time. Family members of 4 Rohingyas arrested by police in Faridabad were also interviewed. These four Rohingyas were booked under 14 Foreigner's Act on charges of illegal stay. The matter (State vs. Ali Hussein) is still proceeding in Faridabad court.

The group cited of local resentment towards them. The locals generally question their stay in the area and incidents of manhandling and discrimination.

## CONCLUSION

The assessment report indicates gloomy picture of Rohingyas in Faridabad. They have no protection from almost all corners given the abysmal situation and condition. Access to public services is negligible mainly due to lack of awareness and lack of documents. The refugee ID cards cannot fully guarantee their protection or access to Governmental institutions such as education or medical services. They do not understand the local language, which adds to their plight, since they cannot seek any new avenues on their own.

The team witnessed that Rohingyas struggle every day to make two ends meet in the midst of uncertainty and adverse situation from locals or police. The condition of women and children are even insignificant with no access to education, basic nutrition, maternal care etc. The women were of the mindset that their work should be confined to the domestic chores and showed no inclination to work outdoors.

There is a need for immediate intervention to address the living condition of the Rohingyas in areas pertaining to access to healthcare, education, non hazardous employment and legal protection. Language problem seemed to be the major challenge for the group. Language is the nucleus of all their problems, it restricts them from availing opportunities to basic Government medical institutions, possible access to Government schools and better job opportunities.