

# Human Rights Protection by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for Stateless Rohingya in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

The term 'refugee' refers to an individual who has been forced to leave his or her homeland to escape persecution, war, or natural disasters. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution, which may be directed towards a specific social group for reasons of religion, race, nationality, political opinion, or membership. This study was conducted to examine the protection of the human rights of Rohingya refugees during their stay in Malaysia. In total, 300 Malaysians were involved in answering an online questionnaire that utilized a Likert scale measurement. The data collected was formulated using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). Overall, following the profiling of the human rights of refugees in Malaysia, the findings indicated that the most significant right of the refugees was the Right to Employment. Refugees should be able to obtain employment rights as Malaysia faces a shortage of workers, especially in certain fields offering '3D jobs'. This refers to industries that are dirty, difficult, and dangerous.

**Keywords:** *Human Rights; NGOs; Perception; Protection; Refugees*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Southeast Asia, refugee crisis involving Myanmar's displaced Rohingya community occurs repeatedly with no clear solution to this issue. Rohingyas were an oppressed minority who had faced several series of cruel treatments and tyranny by military rule in a place name Rakhine in Myanmar. Due to the unstoppable military oppression, most Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh, Thailand, and Malaysia to escape this extreme suppression. For more than three decades, this group of refugees has existed undetectably in Malaysia due

to the policy framework that does not recognize refugees' status. In contrast to the other immigrants in Malaysia, the Rohingya refugees are not permitted to work legally and are not entitled to free healthcare and education in the nation (Letchamanan, 2013). Even though Malaysia does not recognize them, since the end of October 2019, there are some 177,800 refugees and asylum-seekers who have registered with UNHCR in Malaysia. There were 153,200 refugees from Myanmar divided into 98,130 who are Rohingyas, 23,500 Chins, 9,450 Myanmar Muslims, 3,720 Rakhines and Arakanese (UNHCR Malaysia, 2021). The number of refugees increased to 178,920 in 2021 with the vast incline in the number of Rohingya refugees to 102,560 people (UNHCR Malaysia, 2021). However, in Malaysia, they do not stay in the camps but live within the local community. They generally live in crowded low-cost flats in the city where they might find jobs in restaurants and also factories (Letchmanan, 2013). These Rohingya refugees usually live in large numbers with several families in one home (Intan et al., 2021). Malaysians are mostly not aware of refugees as they have often misunderstood them as illegal immigrants (Letchamanan, 2013). Even though Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Kuala Lumpur has become one of the largest cities in Asia to host the urban refugee populations for decades (Avyanthi, 2021). Approximately 150,000 Rohingya who came to Malaysia wish to be transferred to some other regions by the UNHCR programs while the majority of them wish to stay in Malaysia regardless of their illegal status (Azlinariah et al., 2021). The majority of Rohingya refugees who wish to stay in Malaysia live in urban areas and have no right to work (except in agriculture and manufacturing) and no right to send their children to formal school (Abdullahi et al., 2012). In addition, if they are not registered with UNHCR, they are not entitled to 50 percent discount for health costs in government hospitals and clinics. Popular destinations for the Rohingya refugees are Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, predominantly to search for better economic prospects. However, many remain adrift in the Andaman Sea and the Malacca Straits because many countries refuse to passage or host them in their country. The refusal of host countries to accept them has resulted in mass killings, such as the previous discovery of mass graves of refugees which have been linked to cross-border criminal networks on the Thailand-Malaysia border. The growing number of refugees has been attributed to their continued repression and abuse by the military government of Myanmar, which refused Burmese citizenship to the Rohingya communities. More than 150,000 refugees and applicants for asylum who have approached the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Malaysia are registered as being from Myanmar but they are not legally enrolled (World Report, 2019). In the past, most refugees would be arrested by the local authorities as they were considered "illegal immigrants". They would be confined in an unhealthy and crowded immigration detention center. Therefore, some measures have been undertaken by the government to improve the situation, but work is still required to bring about the necessary changes. Although these refugees might be considered illegal immigrants, they also hold rights that must be protected. Following several years of experience with the refugee population, the UNHCR has observed that refugees are generally included in lists of those not monitored or accredited by the host country which leads to the violation of their human rights.

The human rights of refugees have become an important topic of discussion. The basic issue is whether refugees should be given the same rights and fundamental assistance as any foreigner or resident. However, the refugees' economic and social rights could potentially be applied equally but it is uncertain whether this includes support, fuel, housing, and essential infrastructures such as schools and clinics. What exactly is the relationship between human rights abuses and refugee movements? In 2015, Malaysia committed to accommodating 3,000 Syrian refugees over three years (Ifath Sayed, 2018). It is important to stress that Malaysia has not signed the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 which complicates the refugee situation in the country. The Convention on Refugees has no regional legislation or guidelines for refugees, which makes the status of refugees who have migrated to Malaysia uncertain. They are not been allowed to join the workforce or send their children to government schools, regardless whether or not they had registered with the UNHCR. Furthermore, there are employment issues, as the prospects for refugees to find formal work are significantly restricted in Malaysia (DOSM, 2018). The refugees working in the informal sector experience extremely low wages and long working hours. An element of oppression and exploitation is evident when they work in such informal conditions, and sometimes they do not receive any wages (UNHCR, 2018). Meanwhile, the Rohingya refugees who work in the construction, retail, or manufacturing sectors have lower educational access than foreign workers from other countries (Nungsari & Flanders, 2018). Even though more than 130 community-based learning centers for the Rohingya have been operating through an unregulated network, the number of illiterate Rohingya is increasing annually. According to

UNHCR, several challenges exist, including the denial of access to formal public education in Malaysia, the inability to access formal examinations because many do not have a legal certificate, and the lack of data on out-of-school children (UN Refugee Agency, 2015). In addition, Rohingya refugees in Malaysia face a healthcare crisis because they do not have equal entry to the network of public safety. UNCHR cardholders are offered a 50 percent discount on the rates paid at public hospitals. Despite this discount, meeting the expenses of treatment represents a significant problem among refugees, with almost half of the 150,000 Rohingya refugees unable to receive medical services. This critical situation has led the United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and Malaysian Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM) to conduct many sessions to raise awareness on specialized human rights and refugee security issues. These sessions are part of the UNHCR National Action Plan on alternatives to detainment and have been outlined in an MOU with SUHAKAM. This program was initiated to ensure that related parties cooperate to protect the human rights of Rohingya refugees.

## **2.0 NGOs AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION - A CONCEPTUAL VIEW**

Human rights are the inherent privileges and liberties of all citizens worldwide from birth to death. This view should equally applied to all refugees since they have the same basic human rights. Federal and foreign human rights conventions have been held to protect refugees' freedom to operate, as outlined in the Refugee Convention of 1951 (Anna Wirth, 2014). However, the convention that stipulates human rights protection does not operate legally for Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. Most of them are prepared to perform irregular labor that offers limited income, while they are also at risk of being abused. In their election manifesto, the government pledged to provide all refugees registered with the UNHCR in Malaysia with the lawful right to operate. However, until today this promise has never been implemented. Thus, the UNHCR has collaborated closely with the Malaysian government since the past 14th General Election with the expectation that the government would devise a strategy and realistic measures to meet its manifesto promises (Laurence Todd, 2019). The government needs to allow the Rohingya to work legally since the available data indicates that giving these rights to refugees would benefit the national economy. This impact can be inferred from data collected in 2019, which showed that 1.36 million informal workers held a 9.4 percent share of all the jobs in Malaysia yet their employment prospects were extremely restricted (Laurence Todd, 2019).

Furthermore, education is one of the fundamental rights that has been included in various international conventions and declarations. One of the examples is the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 which specify the rights to access education for the refugees and migrants.. Allowing refugees to enroll in formal education will help them to survive not only in the host country but also when they transfer to a third nation. Such transfers are agreed upon through negotiation between the Malaysian government and the particular country. To address the issue of educational rights, the UNHCR has been mandated to protect the refugees and must aim to find sustainable solutions. Educational investments can be regarded as long-term investments in refugees and would have an impact on the nation. Investing in Rohingya refugees staying in Malaysia should be considered by the government as by 2040, their annual contribution to the GDP could rise to over RM6.5 billion, with their annual tax payments amounting to over RM250 million (Laurence Todd, 2019). This will encourage refugees to reach a high level of effectiveness and efficiency when they join the workforce which can be achieved by granting them the right to formal education. This may help the Rohingya to think critically about how to enhance their living conditions and not rely on the welfare aid given by the government, the UNHCR, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is a citizen-based entity that is established independently of the government, typically to provide services or fulfill a social or political function (Rossiter et al., 2015). In addition, the World Bank categorizes NGOs as either operational NGOs, which are mostly focused on development projects, or advocacy NGOs, which are mainly focused on supporting a cause. Meanwhile, Cordery et al. (2019) defined NGOs as an entity whose major purpose is social, rather than profit-making, so it is known as a "not-for-profit" organization. These entities may exist in the public and private sectors. As non-profit entities, NGOs in Malaysia have provided technical assistance to the Rohingya refugee community. This type of assistance can be described as local non-monetary assistance or involve foreign experts. It may comprise an exchange of news and experience, guidance, skills training, work knowledge

transfer, and consulting services, as well as the transfer of technical data (UNESCO, 2017). UNESCO also stated that the objective of technical assistance is to enhance the impact of project applications through a supporting management and administration team, as well as capacity building and policy development. Besides, technical assistance is a broad term used to describe building general capacity and program-specific capacity, as well as promoting collaboration and coordination between these structures. The overall purpose is to bridge the gap between practice and policy of the research. Thus, NGOs have developed strategic and creative partnerships with UN agencies, refugee community leaders, and other actors, who respond to the need for refugees to be guaranteed their rights by demonstrating their understanding of both practice and policy. By doing this, NGOs have managed to create awareness among the authorities on the refugees' existence and helped them to sustain their life in Malaysia.

Next, NGOs also provide refugee communities with assistance and information on the legal processes of obtaining work permits and the registration of businesses, as well as on the employment rights of refugees (Anna Wirth, 2014). Assistance in the form of legal aid would prevent Rohingya refugees from becoming marginalized in the workplace or suffering from other labor-related abuses. These circumstances have led the UNHCR in Malaysia and the Bar Council of Malaysia to urge that more lawyers provide legal assistance to the refugees in the country because the current laws do not provide them these rights due to their illegal status. There is also no comprehensive policy framework to address the issues faced by the refugees in Malaysia, despite their large presence (Gupter et al., 2019). Thus, practical sessions provided by NGOs for refugee communities to explain their legal rights and obligations under Malaysian law concerning employment, immigration, civil law, and Shariah law are extremely vital. This knowledge ensures that refugees do not contravene the rules and regulations. Therefore, this strategic processes may play a significant role in personalized legal services with NGOs offering individual legal assistance that is coordinated with specialized groups. The impact of this would be to establish the strong statutory precedents in the context of employment law in Malaysia (Gupter et al., 2019). The NGOs' roles in the legal context are also to ensure that refugees have freedom of organization which is essential for self-direction, building their lives, safeguarding their integrity, and maintaining their communities while staying in the host country. NGOs have been operating legal and protection programs so that Rohingya refugees seeking protection in Malaysia can know their rights, gain access to protection services and navigate the often complicated legal systems which will make their lives more secured and protected.

Another task of the NGOs is to include Rohingya refugees from all levels so that the community leadership is exposed to news and resources. This will allow the NGOs to acknowledge the refugees' rights and freedom with the support and encouragement from the Rohingya communities themselves. This role is aligned with the International Refugees Congress's (2018) suggestion that NGOs should provide committed and long-term political and financial support that can assist in achieving the equal involvement of refugee organizations in the policy and program formulation forums that affect their rights. This includes developing the structures and mechanisms that could help refugee organizations to ensure the continuity of their networks and involvement. Thus, the involvement of refugee community organizations at the national and local levels as well as through humanitarian coordination systems should be implemented as a standard practice in ensuring refugee protection programs run smoothly. This is because the Rohingya refugees live in scattered areas throughout Malaysia. Their NGOs must operate in parallel at the national and local levels to ensure all refugees can access their aid programs. By doing this, the Rohingya refugees would be engaged and participate in issues involving their short-term needs and assistance as well as their medium- and long-term needs, plans, and aspirations. In addition, participation generally refers to taking on positions of power which can enable people to make or influence decisions. It is an opportunity for powerless groups to address more powerful stakeholders and hold them accountable (Irom et al., 2021). Thus, active participation from the Rohingya communities, through their NGOs, will allow their voices to be heard by the policymakers. This aligns with a study by Drozdowski and Yarnell (2019), who stated that when making decisions about policies and programs, it is essential to include those refugees who will be fundamentally impacted by the decisions. Therefore, the Rohingya NGOs in Malaysia are working to provide additional opportunities for the refugees to shape policies and priorities and for them to gain meaningful participation which will be addressed at the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) forum.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objective of this study, a questionnaire design using a quantitative approach was used in the data collection. A questionnaire is often combined with other methods of data collection to provide a well-rounded data collection for the study. Quantitative data focuses on precise measurements using a formal and validated data collection method (Apuke, 2017). The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents using the convenient sampling technique, while the purposive technique was used to ensure the respondents fulfilled the specific requirements of this study: they had to be Malaysian and have information about the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. These two requirements were measured through two descriptive questions located in the respondent background section of the questionnaire.

Next, the instrument was developed based on the variables studied, which were the rights to employment, education, and medical aid. Employment refers to human work. Human work is a dynamic, flexible, and multifaceted operation that not only enables the workers but also must be understood from different perspectives. It has been pointed out, for instance, that discussions of work refer to human activities, whether on a personal or community level (Apuke, 2017). Work can be a wellspring of fulfillment and self-acknowledgment, as well as a major aspect of developing the subject and his or her strategic life. Different methodologies ascribe negative meanings to work (Brock, 2011). Thus, employment can be measured by a time study, which refers to recording the times and rates of the work elements of a specific job within a specified situation to obtain the time needed and determine the level of performance (Brock, 2011). Furthermore, learning is integral to the development and has no end beyond itself. Education is strongly linked to growth yet, at the same time, education itself has no final destination. According to Aristotle, education is the process of training a man to achieve his goal by exercising all his faculties to the fullest extent as a member of society. Education is also defined as an interaction that occurs with any association between adults and children. This is a field or a state in which educational work is underway. In addition, healthcare is measured through tangible products that may be touched, felt, viewed, counted, or measured physically (Mosadeghrad, 2013). The characteristics of healthcare, such as its tangibility, heterogeneity, and simultaneity, make it possible to define and measure its quality (Mosadeghrad, 2013). Therefore, the instruments used in this study are reliable and valid for measuring public perceptions of the NGOs that protect the human rights of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia.

For data analysis, SPSS was used to develop the inferential and hypotheses testing in the study. Several statistical analysis processes were used, such as descriptive analysis, correlational analysis, and regression analysis. Before the analysis stage, the researchers ensured the data collected were free of errors and that the assumptions for the statistical analyses were fulfilled. This would prevent any mistakes in analyzing public perceptions of the NGOs that protect the rights of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia.

### 4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results of the study were explained using the Reliability Test, Normality Test, Pearson Correlation Analysis, and Multiple Regression. The demographic profile of the respondents was clarified through statistics derived from frequency analysis. The study also relied on the reliability and normality test to assess the measure of goodness of the statistical results. A correlation analysis was conducted for the hypothesis testing the public perception of the NGOs protecting Rohingya refugees by analyzing the relationship between the right to employment, right to education, and right to healthcare toward public perception. Lastly, multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the variables that most affect public perception.

**Table 1: Reliability Analysis**

Variables	Cronbach Alpha, $\alpha$	Items
Employment Right	.600	7
Educational Right	.733	6
Healthcare Right	.696	6
Dependent variable: Public Perception	.632	6

\*no items deleted

Table 1 justified that all items used in the study are reliable and valid. This is due to the value of Cronbach Alpha,  $\alpha$  which are all above the accepted value of .5 (Field, 2015).

**Table 2: Normality Tes**

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
Right of Employment	.268	.046
Right of Education	-.045	.559
Right of Healthcare	-.057	.951
Perception Towards NGO	0.72	1.387

Table 2 represents the normality test to ensure the study fulfilled the measure of goodness for testing the developed hypotheses. All Skewness and Kurtosis values are within the accepted value  $\pm 2$  (Field, 2015). Thus, the items used in this study are fit to be tested using Parametric Test.

**Table 3: Respondents Profile**

Profile	Unit	NGO Should Protect Refugee Rights	
		Agree	Disagree
<b>Place of Residents</b>			
Urban	143	123	20
Semi-Urban	87	57	30
Rural	70	20	50
<b>Educational Level</b>			
High School	75	50	25
Undergraduate	220	200	20
Postgraduate	5	4	1

*N: 300*

Table 3 represents the background of respondents involved in the study. Out of 300 respondents, 143 of them stay in urban residential areas with 123 respondents agreeing and 20 disagreeing with the issue that NGOs should protect the human rights of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. 57 respondents from semi-urban areas agreed that NGOs protect Rohingya refugees while 30 people objected to that particular idea. Lastly, the majority of the respondent (50 persons) from the rural area perceived that NGOs should not protect Rohingya refugees' human rights as compared to those who agreed (20). The study also found that 50 respondents who have high school certificates agreed with NGOs protecting Rohingya refugees' human rights and most of the respondents (200 persons) who are graduates believed that NGOs should act on behalf of refugees while 4 out of 5 respondents with postgraduate academic certificate agreed on this issue.

**Table 4: Correlational Analysis**

Variables	1	2	3	4
<b>1. Perception of NGOs</b>	-			
<b>2. Employment Right</b>	.67**	-		
<b>3. Educational Right</b>	.68**	.47	-	
<b>4. Healthcare Right</b>	.67**	.35	.45	-

\*\*sig:p<.05

Based on Table 4, there was a strong significant positive relationship between the right to employment and healthcare right towards the public perception of NGOs protecting Rohingya refugee in Malaysia ( $r=.67$ ,  $p=.00$ ). Besides, there was also a strong significant positive relationship between educational access and public views on NGOs that help in protecting the human right of Rohingya refugees ( $r=.68$ ,  $p=.00$ ). The Pearson Correlational Analysis statistical analysis justified that the hypotheses of the study which intended to determine the significant correlational effects between public perceptions on Ngo's roles in protecting the human right of Rohingya refugees should be accepted.

**Table 5: Regression Analysis**

Variables	Beta	Sig	Tolerance	VIF
<b>Employment Right</b>	.89	.00	.77	1.29
<b>Educational Right</b>	.61	.00	.59	1.69
<b>Healthcare Right</b>	.52	.00	.61	1.63

DV: Perception,  $R^2$ : .64

Table 5 above explained standard enter regression analysis to derive the main variable that influenced public perception on the issue of NGOs protecting the human rights of Rohingya refugees while they stay in Malaysia for life protection. The results showed that the main variable that influenced the perception was employment rights ( $\beta=.89$ ,  $p=.00$ ). This statistic explained that economic factors were the main determinant in shaping public perception of NGOs that work to assist Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. In addition, the  $R^2=.64$  inferred that public perception model was at 64 percent with employment, education, and healthcare as the predictors. While the remaining variables were not explained by these predictors thus more study is needed.

From the findings, refugee community organizations helped by supporting refugees and acting as promoters. The study findings are similar to those of previous research in terms of the rights to employment and the perceptions of NGOs as the key actors helping Rohingya refugees. These findings can be utilized by the government, which must give "sympathetic consideration" to assimilating the rights of all refugees concerning wage-earning employment (Laurence Todd, 2019). Refugees who lawfully live as asylum seekers in any country must have the right to find work that is similar to the citizens' claims to the right to fair wage payments. According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), this right extends to all non-nationals such as refugees, claimants for asylum, stateless citizens, foreign workers, and victims of human trafficking, irrespective of their legal status and documentation. This view has been verified by the committee that monitors compliance with ICESCR (World Report, 2019). 2010 and the first quarter of 2011 saw important trends, where opportunities for employment models were developed by the UNHCR to present to the government of Malaysia. This contained proposals for establishing a legal and administrative framework for managing asylum and providing economic aid to the Rohingya refugees. The UNHCR was also willing to work alongside the government to protect the right of refugees to find employment (Anna Wirth, 2014). Furthermore, while the Immigration Act denies their right to work, over 60,000 refugees in Malaysia are estimated to be working informally. Although well-known institutions often hire Rohingya refugees, law enforcement officials are turning a blind eye to this. Thus, proper guidelines and procedures for hiring Rohingya refugees should be introduced by the government to ensure the refugees are not oppressed or exploited by their employers. In addition, most

refugees seek employment in the maritime and palm oil industries as migrant workers. In July 2013, the government of Malaysia announced its issuance of refugee work permits. Given this announcement, the government's cooperation with the previous agreement remains uncertain (Sedgwick, 2014). In the coming years, Malaysia is expected to increase its GDP by 21.8 percent, making it a prime candidate for the integration of refugees into the country and making it possible to obtain sixth place out of 189 countries in terms of the unemployment rate, which stands at 3 percent (Sedgwick, 2014). This explains the growth in the number of NGOs in the country that aim to alleviate these refugees' problems through direct support, government activism, and education. Besides, education is recognized as an active and complex process that occurs continuously in one's life through different experiences, whether formally or informally. The knowledge and information obtained through the learning process may contribute to a successful future. There are many positive features of education, such as a good career, social status, and self-confidence. Thus, the right to education itself plays a crucial role in the development of individual potential, as well as a country's success in terms of its economic development, social justice, spiritual strength, and moral as well as ethical standards (Ryan, 2019). As Rohingya refugees are not allowed to enter formal schools, an alternative and limited form of education are offered through an unofficial parallel system of more than 133 community-based learning centers. These centers are administrated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), charities, and the refugee community, and they also depend on donations and international aid. The UNHCR in Malaysia has now developed educational units and collaborated with the Rohingya NGOs and local NGOs, which are the implementation partners managing these 133 learning centers. These parties also cooperate in organizing programs such as teacher training and compensation for teachers. These efforts aim to raise the enrolment percentage of Rohingya children in the alternative education system provided by the NGOs. However, these learning centers do not have the facilities that would usually be offered by a typical school, such as classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. Therefore, the current educational programs run by the UNHCR should be strengthened in terms of funding, infrastructure, and human resources. It is vital that the government, through the Ministry of Education (MOE), intervene in this case. Advice and assistance from the MOE would strengthen the educational programs offered by preserving the quality of the syllabus taught in the NGO-run schools. Frequent checks and reviews must be undertaken to ensure the schools are following the national education policy goals, even though the Rohingya are seeking only temporary protection in this country.

Furthermore, the Rohingya refugees have no equal access to national health programs, clinics, and dedicated health centers, so this is required through the help of the NGOs. The cost of healthcare is increasing as the government has amended the Medical Fees Act, which has led to a 100 percent increase in foreigners' hospital and clinic bills (Wake & Cheung, 2016). This explains why collaboration between NGOs, private insurance companies, funding institutions, and the UNHCR is greatly needed. To address this issue, the UNHCR launched the Refugee Medical Insurance (REMEDI) plan for the Rohingya, with RHB Insurance as the funding partner. The aim was to reduce the existing obstacles and improve the refugees' access to secondary and tertiary medical treatment. Following the implementation of such a medical plan, registered refugees may seek general hospitalization and personal injury insurance for a fairly small annual fee, which covers various health and specialist services. The plan extends to their spouses and children under 18 years old. This plan not only includes government medical institutions but also extends to reliable private hospitals and clinics. Rohingya refugees only need to tender their UNHCR card to receive health treatment in the medical institutions nationwide without any payment, once they have registered with the plan. The majority of Rohingya refugees work in 3D industries (dirty, dangerous, and difficult), so this plan is essential for this group of employees as they often suffer accidents and fatalities. In addition, NGOs protecting the human rights of Rohingya refugees have adopted strategies needed to help the Rohingya, who are the most vulnerable group seeking protection in Malaysia. However, they have encountered obstacles and limitations. Therefore, government agencies and authorities must be involved in helping the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia (Irom et al., 2021). Besides, the government remains the main actor responsible for addressing and resolving the long-standing problems of the Rohingya refugees, because this issue is not only related to protecting human rights and lives but also affects the country's security and sovereignty (Abdullahi et al., 2012). Thus, the government cannot wait another decade to resolve this as yet another unresolved issue, given that the first migration of the Rohingya to Malaysia occurred in 1995. A holistic approach must be adopted to cater to the migration and integration of the Rohingya from Myanmar into Malaysia as the situation in Myanmar has shown no signs of improvement.



Therefore, it is believed that more Rohingya will migrate from the Rakhine region to seek protection in Malaysia. This humanitarian crisis will directly affect the country's human rights image if it is not properly addressed.

The biggest obstacle for refugees to work in Malaysia is the absence of an identification document such as a UNHCR card or passport as the existence of it can help them to secure employment, alternative education, and access to health facilities. However, holding the UNHCR card is still an incomplete form of legal documentation. CARE (2021) has stated that the public at large often has misperceptions based on false assumptions about refugees who are usually established at the local level as there will be a conflict between the local population and refugees themselves. One refugee said that 'Rohingya people are often detained at their workplace, even though they have a UNHCR passport' (Wake & Cheung, 2016). This has proved that the UNHCR card is not the sole solution for a better livelihood for Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. Due to conditions, they need a platform for better management of their lives during their stays in Malaysia before being transmitted to the third countries. Therefore, they have established NGOs which function as service providers for their communities in terms of alternative education, financial, and health aids. Bedi (2021) has argued that NGOs need to improve cooperation and prevent prejudice against individuals who need protection, especially among the local community. While local communities must be educated that the Rohingyas are the most affected by the action taken by the military government in Myanmar. The collaboration between NGOs, UNHCR, and the representative of the Malaysian government will give a significant impact on the Rohingya refugees' livelihood in Malaysia. Therefore, it is important to study the roles that can be played by the Rohingya's NGOs to help their communities that have faced several challenges in re-starting their lives in Malaysia. This is also to ensure a proper plan can be drafted as most of the basic human needs are not the responsibility of the government as Malaysia is not a signatory country to the Refugee Convention 1951 and the Protocol 1967. Thus, the Rohingya refugees just rely on UNHCR and their NGOs to sustain life in the country which has different languages, ethnicities, and norms compared to their country of origin. In conjunction with this, a study on NGOs can provide a significant view on the importance of Rohingya NGOs to the problem-solving framework that can be adapted by the government to cater to long-standing issues on Rohingya refugees.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, based on this research finding, NGOs play an active role in protecting and helping the refugees in Malaysia. In terms of health, diseases do not only affect the Rohingya refugees but also society as a whole, hence NGOs need to provide health care and medical assistance to the Rohingya refugees to keep them healthy and disease-free. In terms of education, NGOs do provide learning opportunities to the Rohingya refugees with casual learning environments. The syllabus is kept at the refugees' learning pace. And lastly in terms of advocacy, each organization advocates according to their roles. Advocacy is important to spread awareness of refugees' rights and needs. NGOs advocate indirectly and offer education. This is the NGO's dominant role in protecting the refugees. NGOs believe that with education, the Rohingya refugees can change the way of their lives and will be able to prepare themselves for the future. Thus, the findings from the research will help various parties that are involved directly or indirectly with the issue of Rohingya refugees in terms of making a policy to regulate this group as no such policy exists in Malaysia currently.

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