

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As of March 2020, there are some 179,520 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR in Malaysia, with Rohingyas comprising the largest group at more than 100,000 people (UNHCR, 2020). As the crisis persists, Myanmar is at risk of becoming a terrorism flashpoint in Southeast Asia. The Islamic State's publications and media productions had called for jihad in Myanmar, while Al-Qaeda's media urged Muslims to rise against "apostate" forces that are against Islam in the regions under attack (Bashar 2019). The former head of Malaysia's Counter-terrorism Division (E8), Datuk Ayob Khan had also confirmed the use of the Rohingya narratives for ISIS recruitment (Channel News Asia 2018). Although the targets are primarily Malaysians sympathetic to the Rohingyas' cause, displaced Rohingya refugees could be vulnerable to recruitment (Kumar 2018).

Observing this situation, IMAN Research embarked on a project to examine the risk of vulnerable communities, particularly Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, of getting radicalised and recruited into violent extremism. The project involves Rohingya refugee communities in Peninsular Malaysia, divided into four regions: Northern, Central, Southern and East Coast. Data was collected through a mix of qualitative approaches, namely in the form of shadowing observations, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The findings revealed four themes in the discourse of radicalisation among Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, which are: (1) refugee vulnerability, (2) sentiments towards violence, (3) feelings and (4) Rohingya networks. Four central conclusions can be made from these four themes.

Refugee vulnerability: Rohingya refugees in Malaysia are vulnerable due to their prolonged experience with persecution and violence, on top of the restraints they face in being self-sufficient in Malaysia.

Sentiments towards violence: Most Rohingya experience discrimination, injustice and persecution back in Myanmar. Although they renounce the use of violence, some Rohingya individuals justify violent recourse against the Myanmar government to protect themselves and reclaim their rights.

Feelings: Rohingya refugees in Malaysia often demonstrate feelings of distrust, frustration, anger, disappointment and alienation. These feelings are usually directed towards the Myanmar government, military and their overall plight.

Rohingya networks: Rohingya refugee communities have close-knit relationships with members of their own community, either internationally or in the country they are living in. In some cases, they interact and connect outside their community, especially with migrants and locals in Malaysia.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

National Policy on Refugee Rights

A national policy on refugees would help the government to establish their own database on refugees in Malaysia, encompassing personal information, healthcare and workplace records. For the refugees, a national policy on refugees should be established to guarantee their right to work in Malaysia, access to financial and healthcare services.

Education program

Access to quality education is an important step in P/CVE. Some Rohingya refugee communities establish their own community schools to educate their children. We proposed a collaboration between the Rohingya community, federal government and Zakat body to strengthen the establishment of their community schools. This collaboration will be able to introduce a federal examination scheme to these community schools with the state Zakat body coming in to improve the infrastructure of the school.

Peace building initiative

Peace dialogue between the Rohingya community, Myanmar government and international agencies should be held. This is to ensure the community that international bodies and the Malaysian government are doing their best to alleviate the crisis. At the same time, this will counter the sentiments of violence as an option to return their rights that is embedded in certain Rohingya individuals. Therefore, educational programs to promote peace among the Rohingya refugee community can also be held for the same purpose as above.

CONCLUSION

Rohingya refugee groups are one of the vulnerable groups out there in the community. Their past experiences on violence and their current situation made them even more susceptible towards violent extremism. As such, it is important for the Malaysian government to take a more proactive approach in managing refugees in the country. It is within our self-interest to ensure the self-sufficiency of refugees in our country while they reside amongst us.