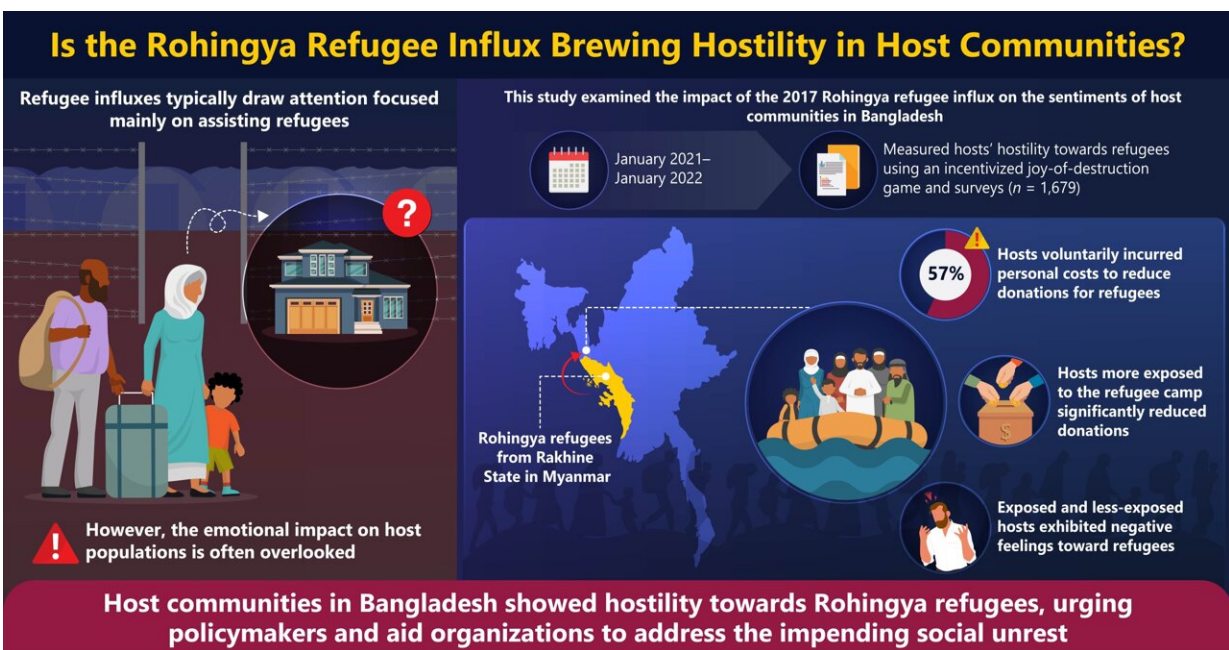


Once-welcomed Rohingya refugees now face hostility from their hosts in Bangladesh, researchers find

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From hospitality to hostility: Impact of the Rohingya refugee influx on the sentiments of host communities
Higuchi et al. (2024) | *Economic Development and Cultural Change* | DOI: 10.1086/730704



The hosts, the Bangladeshi Muslim population, have expressed an alarming level of hostility towards the Rohingya refugees due to their extended stay and its subsequent negative consequences, like competition over limited resources.

Credit: Yuki Higuchi / Sophia University, Japan

The number of refugees has sharply increased in recent decades,

reaching 37.8 million in 2022. Amidst this surge, host communities—locals residing in areas where refugee camps are situated—are also positively and negatively impacted by the refugee influxes.

The [negative impacts](#) include competition over scarce resources and in the unskilled labor market. While the [international media](#) and aid organizations put the spotlight on assisting refugees, the challenges faced by [host](#) communities are frequently sidelined.

In 2017, over 700,000 Rohingyas—a Muslim minority group from Rakhine State in Myanmar—fled to their neighboring country, Bangladesh, amidst a large-scale Rohingya clearance operation by the Burmese government.

The hosts—the Bangladeshi Muslim population—were initially sympathetic toward the refugees because of their shared religion and language. Yet, their sympathy faded over time due to the extended stay of refugees and other negative consequences, including high fertility rates. Overlooking such adverse impacts on host communities can stir social unrest among them.

Against this backdrop, a research team led by Associate Professor Yuki Higuchi from the Faculty of Economics at Sophia University, Japan, examined how the 2017 Rohingya refugee influx impacted the public sentiments of host communities in Bangladesh.

Their paper, published in [Economic Development and Cultural Change](#) on March 16, 2024, was co-authored by Mohammad Mosharraf Hossain from the Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences at the University of Chittagong and Mohammad Sujauddin from the Department of Environmental Science and Management at North South University.

Dr. Higuchi asserts, "The 2017 Rohingya refugee crisis persists even after five years. International attention and support are fading, worsening the situation. We emphasize that this crisis is still ongoing, and Rohingya refugees, along with the host communities who are also poor, are in a difficult situation. The world must act now."

To this end, researchers surveyed 1,679 households in refugee-hosting districts of Bangladesh from January 2021 to January 2022. Respondents received 400 Bangladeshi Taka, or BDT (equivalent to 4.7 US Dollars or USD), as an honorarium for their participation in the survey. They were also informed that researchers pledged to donate 400 BDT per respondent to a non-governmental organization (NGO) supporting the refugees.

Respondents then played a joy-of-destruction (JOD) game where they were given a choice to contribute part of their honorarium to reduce the pledged donation. Each BDT paid led to a fivefold deduction from the donation. The amount paid was then used to measure hostility towards the refugees. Additionally, researchers used satellite imagery to assess environmental changes.

"Surprisingly, 57% of the hosts paid a non-zero amount to reduce donations for refugees, indicating their intention of harming the refugees even at a personal cost. Here, 15% of the hosts even paid 80 BDT (0.9 USD), which is closer to their average daily per capita income, to nullify the donation entirely," says Dr. Higuchi.

Specifically, hosts closer to the camp—exposed hosts—paid significantly more to reduce donations than those far away from the camp—less exposed hosts. The amount paid increased by 1.4% for every kilometer closer to the camp. This is likely because exposed hosts face more hardships due to lower incomes, higher prices of commodities, forest degradation, and perceived higher crime rates.

Both exposed and less exposed hosts expressed negative feelings toward Rohingya refugees. Though exposed hosts did not express more negative feelings than less exposed hosts, their deep-seated hostility towards refugees was evident in the JOD game.

This contrast between what the hosts expressed during the surveys and what they did during the JOD game suggests that the incentivized game elicited genuine hostility toward refugees.

Overall, the refugee influx has dramatically impacted both the host communities and the environment in Bangladesh. Dr. Higuchi further elaborates, "Host communities in a developing country are also as poor as the refugees. So, even though the hosts receive some support from aid agencies, they still show an alarming level of hostility toward the refugees.

"Policymakers and aid organizations must address the current situation and prevent impending tensions. Sufficient compensation for hosts and initiatives to reconcile with refugees are necessary to foster social cohesion."

In conclusion, as the number of refugees increases, so does the strain on host communities and the risk of social unrest, necessitating urgent international support.

More information: Yuki Higuchi et al, From Hospitality to Hostility: Impact of the Rohingya Refugee Influx on the Sentiments of Host Communities, *Economic Development and Cultural Change* (2024). [DOI: 10.1086/730704](https://doi.org/10.1086/730704)

Provided by Sophia University

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