

Rohingya Refugee Crisis

Posted at: 12/04/2025

Rohingya Refugee Crisis : Challenges of Refugee Management in South Asia

Context:

The **Rohingya refugee crisis**, one of the worst humanitarian crises of the 21st century, has seen over **700,000 Rohingyas** flee Myanmar since **2017**, primarily to **Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh**—now the **largest refugee camp in the world**.

Recently, the **abrupt reduction in funding by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** has intensified the challenges faced by these refugees, worsening food insecurity, health services, and protection mechanisms.

Understanding this issue is essential from the perspective of **international relations, human rights**, and **India's neighbourhood policy**, making it relevant for **UPSC Mains GS Paper II and GS Paper III**.

What is USAID?

The **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** is the **primary agency** responsible for administering foreign aid and humanitarian assistance from the U.S. government.

- **Established:** 1961 by **President John F. Kennedy**
- **Nature:** Independent federal agency under U.S. State Department's guidance
- **Objective:**
 - Promote **global stability, democracy, and economic development**
 - Support **healthcare, education, and poverty reduction**
- **Operational Method:**
 - Funds distributed through **NGOs, foreign governments, international**

organisations, and other U.S. agencies

- **Global Reach (FY 2023):**

- Operated in **over 130 countries**

- **Key Sectors:**

- **Food security**
- **Disaster relief**
- **Healthcare**
- **Gender equality**
- **Environmental sustainability**

USAID's Role in India

USAID has played a crucial role in India's development journey, especially in **education and health**:

- **Since 1951:** U.S. began development aid under **India Emergency Food Assistance Act** (President **Harry Truman**)

- **Education Sector:**

- Helped establish:

- **8 agricultural universities**
- **1st Indian Institute of Technology (IIT-Kharagpur)**
- **14 Regional Engineering Colleges**

- **Health Sector:**

- Supported national programs on:
 - **Immunization**
 - **Family planning**
 - **Maternal and child health**
 - **HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and polio eradication**
 - **Recent Policy Shift:**
 - Since **2004**, India has rejected conditional foreign aid
 - Resulted in a **gradual decline in foreign development assistance**
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Who are the Rohingya?

- **Ethnic Identity:**
 - A **Muslim minority group** from **Rakhine State, Myanmar**
- **Citizenship Status:**
 - **Not recognized** as citizens by the Myanmar government
 - Rendered **stateless** and **vulnerable**
- **2017 Crisis:**
 - Military crackdown involving:
 - **Mass killings**
 - **Sexual violence**

- **Village destruction**

- Led to the exodus of over **700,000 Rohingyas** into Bangladesh

- **Current Status:**

- Most settled in **Cox's Bazar** (largest refugee camp globally)
- **UN** termed it a **"textbook case of ethnic cleansing"**

Impact of USAID Funding Cut on Rohingya Refugees

The reduction in USAID support has **deepened the humanitarian crisis** in Cox's Bazar:

1. Escalating Food Insecurity

- **World Food Programme (WFP)** forced to reduce food rations:
 - From **\$12.50** to **\$8/month per refugee**
 - A **36% decrease**, pushing refugees toward **starvation**

2. Collapse of Healthcare Services

- Closure of **5 hospitals**
- Breakdown of **sanitation and hygiene infrastructure**

3. Loss of Protection Services

- Halted:
 - **Gender-based violence programs**
 - **Psychosocial support**
- Increased vulnerability of **women and children**

4. Funding Gaps Despite Global Efforts

- Other donor pledges (e.g., **EU: €32.3 million**) are **insufficient** to compensate for the funding void left by the USA
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Measures to Address the Crisis

To prevent further deterioration and ensure sustainable support, the following steps can be considered:

A. Strengthen Multilateral Aid

- Encourage more support to agencies like **WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF**

B. Utilize Global Financial Institutions

- Tap **emergency funds** and **soft loans** from the **World Bank** and **IMF**

C. Diversify Donor Contributions

- Engage **emerging economies** and **regional powers** in contributing aid

D. Mobilize Private Philanthropy

- Encourage global **corporate and individual donors** to fund refugee assistance

E. Diplomatic Engagement

- Use **bilateral and multilateral diplomacy** to urge the U.S. to **resume or revise its aid policies**

F. Advocate Long-Term Solutions

- International pressure on Myanmar for:
 - **Citizenship recognition**
 - **Safe repatriation** of Rohingyas

G. Human Rights and Legal Action

- Support efforts to **investigate human rights violations**
- Ensure **justice and reparations** through international legal bodies

H. Invest in Livelihood and Rehabilitation

- Focus on:
 - **Vocational training**
 - **Mental health services**
 - **Educational opportunities**
 - To reduce **aid dependency** and improve **dignity of life**



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