



REIMAGINING REFUGEE INTEGRATION, REALIZING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

*Progress and Barriers in
Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Japan*

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Reimagining Refugee Integration, Realizing Sustainable Development Goals: Progress and Barriers in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Japan

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Chapter 7

The Rohingya Refugees in Aceh, Indonesia: The Challenges and Chances of *De Facto* Local Integration

Muhammad Riza Nurdin

Introduction

“Even for 100 years they can sit [stay] here [in Aceh]. No problem.
It’s up to the Indonesian government to accept them
as either guests, illegal migrants,
or..... permanent residents”
[hoping for a harmonious life with the Rohingya]
(Interview with an Acehnese informant, Lhokseumawe on 17 November 2020).

Despite the fact that Indonesia is not a State Party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of the Refugees and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of the Refugees, Indonesia has been a major refugee destination in Southeast Asia. In search of new homes, perhaps Australia or nowadays even Malaysia (which is also not a signatory to the Convention), hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers have landed in Indonesia over the decades. As of July 2020, Indonesia hosts 13,653 registered refugees (UNHCR Indonesia 2020).

In the past, especially from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, Indonesia had accommodated more than a hundred thousand Indochinese asylum seekers on Galang island (in Batam off Sumatera island), before sending them, in coordination with the UNHCR, to third countries. Since the late 2000s, there have been waves of irregular migrants arriving via the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. The

Bangladeshi and Rohingya migrants are primarily asylum seekers. The situation which received the most publicity was the ‘2015 crisis’, during which thousands of stranded asylum seekers were rejected by Indonesian, Malaysian and Thai authorities. However, these ‘boat people’ were received by the people of Aceh, “a rare place of welcome” (Jones and Walden 2020), a province located in the northwest of Sumatra island, Indonesia.



FIGURE 7.1 Map of Indonesia (Wikimedia Commons)

For the Acehnese, hosting asylum seekers, particularly the Rohingya, is not a new experience. The first recorded arrival of Rohingyas in Aceh was in January 2009. 193 asylum seekers were hosted on Sabang island. A month later, 198 asylum seekers were stranded in Idi Rayeuk, East Aceh. The most recent influx of Rohingya refugees was in September 2020, when 297 asylum seekers, most of whom women and children, arrived at Lhokseumawe, the northern part of Aceh. A total of 3,064 asylum seekers have arrived in Aceh over the decade (see Table 7.1). As there have been influxes of forced migrants arriving in Aceh and more are expected to arrive, this study examines whether Aceh can be a temporary or permanent sanctuary, particularly for the Rohingya.

TABLE 7.1 Waves of arrival of asylum seekers in Aceh Province, Indonesia, 2009-2020

| Year | Date | Number | Location in Aceh |
|------|--------|--------|--------------------------|
| 2009 | Jan-07 | 193 | Sabang |
| | Feb-03 | 198 | Idi Rayeuk, East Aceh |
| | May-14 | 55 | Nagan Raya |
| 2011 | Feb-16 | 129 | Krueng Raya, Aceh Besar |
| 2012 | Feb-01 | 54 | North Aceh |
| | Feb-26 | 124 | North Aceh |
| 2013 | Apr-07 | 76 | Pulo Aceh, Aceh Besar |
| | May-10 | 578 | Seuneuddon, North Aceh |
| 2015 | May-15 | 46 | Seruway, Aceh Tamiang |
| | May-15 | 678 | Kuala Langsa, Langsa |
| | May-20 | 433 | Julok, East Aceh |
| | Apr-05 | 5 | Kuala Idi, East Aceh |
| 2018 | Apr-20 | 79 | Kuala Raja, Bireuen |
| | Dec-04 | 20 | Kuala Idi, East Aceh |
| | Jun-24 | 99 | Seuneuddon, North Aceh |
| 2020 | Sep-07 | 297 | Ujong Blang, Lhokseumawe |
| | Total | 3064 | N/A |

Source: Data from different sources, compiled by the author.

Methodology

This qualitative study is based on data gathered from fieldwork conducted in Aceh in October and November 2020. I conducted semi-structured interviews and had informal conversations with

20 individuals, including government officials, volunteers, humanitarian workers and villagers. As some of the interviewees preferred not to be named, I decided to maintain anonymity for all research participants. More data was obtained through my participation in a webinar, “Bridging the gap in refugee response in Southeast Asia”, organized by the *Jakarta Post* at 3.00-5.00 pm Jakarta time on 7 October 2020 (hereafter shortened to the JakPost Webinar). The speakers were prominent figures, namely, Febrian Alphyanto Ruddyard (Multilateral Cooperation Director General, Indonesian Foreign Ministry), Achsanul Habib (Director for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, Indonesian Foreign Ministry), Haryo Mojopahit (General Manager for Advocacy of Dompot Dhuafa, one of the largest Indonesian philanthropic organizations), and Indrika Ratwatte (Director for Asia and the Pacific, UNHCR).



FIGURE 7.2 A view of a refugee camp at the training centre, Lhokseumawe
Source: Author

On 16 November 2020, I visited and observed a refugee camp that hosts 336 refugees (most of whom had arrived in 2020, see Table 7.1). The camp is situated at Balai Latihan Kerja (training centre) Mee Village, Muara Dua District, Lhokseumawe Regency, Aceh Province. Due to security and ethical issues, I did not interview any refugee. I also conducted desk research to gather relevant data.

The research questions are:

1. What are factors that facilitate or hinder the integration of the Rohingya refugees into Indonesian, particularly Acehese society?
2. What can we learn from the situation of Rohingya refugees in Aceh to improve Indonesia's policy towards refugees?

De Facto Local Integration of Protracted Transit Refugees

Several factors force asylum seekers and refugees to stay in a transit country much longer than usual, leading perhaps to 'permanent' residency. First, the trend of forced migration is increasing. As of December 2019, UNHCR statistics indicate that there are 79.5 million forcibly displaced persons around the world, including 26 million refugees and 4.2 million asylum seekers (UNHCR 2020). About 85% of these people are temporarily hosted in transit countries. Second, funding is getting limited. Third, protracted refugees are increasing because of border restriction policies by such state party countries as Australia and the United States of America. Lastly, the current unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has affected most countries, including the developed ones which are now facing economic as well as public health crises. Welcoming refugees will be a burden for most countries at the moment. Therefore, the phenomenon of protracted transit refugees has become increasingly common globally.

Transit can be temporary or permanent, depending on whether transit countries welcome or reject refugees (Missbach 2015). However, it is rare for transit countries to welcome refugees. As protracted refugees are in limbo, they typically have two choices: living in a state of stuck in-between-ness or coping with the restrictions and uncertainties (Briskman and Fiske 2016; Rachmah and Pestalozzi 2016; Sampson et al. 2016; Brown 2017; Harvey 2019).

Theoretically, three options, or "durable solutions", are available for refugees, namely voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement into third countries. In the context of protracted refugees, "local integration has great potential as a solution when repatriation or resettlement are not viable options" (Fielden 2008: 1). In Indonesia, however, where the existing regulations do not permit local integration, is this even possible?

I argue that the local integration of refugees is possible in Indonesia, despite the fact that it is hindered by existing regulations. However, the integration is not *de jure* (formal), only *de facto* (informal). In this context, I echo Missbach (2018: 201) who argues that “*de facto* integration is about to happen in Indonesia and elsewhere in the region”.

In this study, I use the three interrelated dimensions of local integration proposed by Crisp (2004), namely legal, economic and social. The legal aspect of local integration occurs when a host state grants such rights and entitlement to refugees as access to employment and public services, e.g., education. Refugees are allowed to stay, leading to permanent residency or citizenship. The economic aspect of local integration pertains to the rights of refugees to establish sustainable livelihoods and become independent, so that, in the long run, refugees are not reliant on assistance from such external parties as UN agencies, humanitarian groups or the state. The last dimension, social, is a process that involves interaction between refugees and the local population such that refugees become part of the local community and both parties can live together harmoniously.

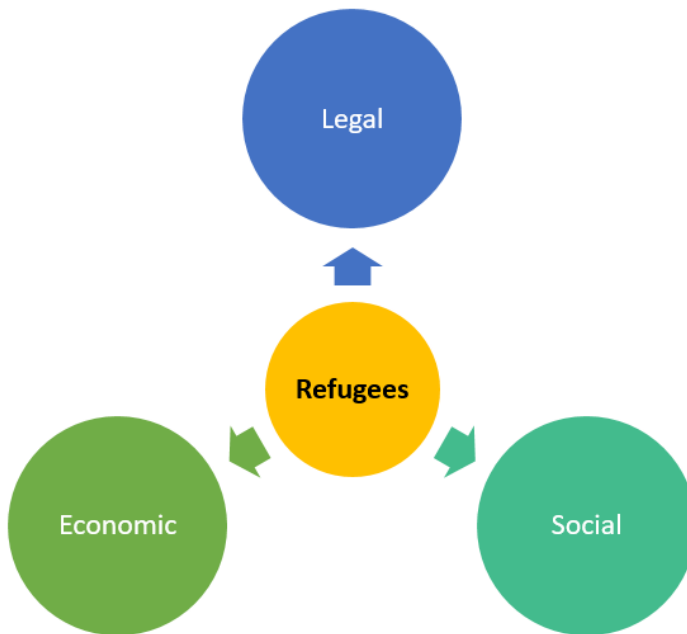


FIGURE 7.3 Dimensions of local integration (Crisp 2004)

The Legal Dimension of Local Integration

As this study examines the practices of *de facto*, not *de jure*, local integration, it is apparent that the legal process is much more challenging, compared to the economic and social processes. Regarding *de jure* integration, the first Indonesian regulation concerning refugees or asylum seekers was the “Circular Letter of the Prime Minister No. 11/R.I./1956 of 1956 on Political Refugees”, which was valid for only three years (Nurdin et al. 2020).

The most recent regulation was the Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 125/2016 on ‘Handling of Refugees from Abroad’. The Perpres is viewed positively as it partially meets the general principle of the Refugee Convention (Nurdin et al. 2020). However, the Perpres is applicable for emergency and humanitarian purposes, not for long term situations. In particular, the Perpres provides refugees with temporary shelter and basic needs but does not cover such other important aspects as employment authorization or access to education. In Indonesia, the main responsibility for refugee management falls on UN agencies (UNHCR and IOM), in close coordination with the Indonesian government.

In the context of the Rohingya in Aceh, the common practice was that the Indonesian government provides the buildings for shelter, while UNHCR was responsible for refugee management. The Indonesian government gave permission for the stranded Rohingya to land in Aceh and provided assistance, which was deemed for emergency purposes. Therefore, although the Indonesian government is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention, the country would act whenever possible to be humanitarian. In a webinar on the Rohingya, an Indonesian Government official confirmed this position.

“Regardless of [whether Indonesia is] Party [to the Convention] or not, the work is there, in front of our eyes... It is about saving lives..... Please note that this Indonesian generosity should not be abused.” (Febrian A. Ruddyard, Indonesian MoFA, Multilateral Cooperation Director-General, JakPost Webinar on 7 October 2020).

However, the Indonesian government also seems to be aware that the possibility of resettlement in a third country would be difficult. Another Indonesian government representative implied that the

Indonesian government is willing to host refugees on a longer-term basis, if there is support from international donors. I interpret the following statement to mean that, although *de jure* local integration is not possible due to legal restrictions, *de facto* integration is possible as long as there is sufficient funding, which is a major problem.

“We ask them now [the international community and NGOs] to also contribute to the long-term management of the refugee in a more durable solution.” (Achsanal Habib, Indonesian MoFA, Director for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, JakPost Webinar on 7 October 2020).

Another important aspect of the legal process is citizenship. According to Indonesian Law 12/2006 on Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia, citizenship can be obtained through marriage, birth or meeting certain requirements. As the process is quite complex, there is no evidence of refugees being granted citizenship by the Indonesian government.

However, in practice, there is a so-called ‘political’ naturalization process. This has occurred in the ‘national interest’, even when the applicant has not met the prerequisites for citizenship (such as the requirement of residing in Indonesia for a minimum of five consecutive years). To date, Indonesia has naturalized more than 30 foreign individuals (Galang 2020).

It is fair to say that conferring citizenship, to some extent, is a political rather than humanitarian measure. Refugees have not been a top priority for the Indonesian government. In 2017 it was suggested that the Indonesian government naturalize refugees, particularly the Rohingya. Facing the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea crisis, Fadli Zon, in his capacity as Deputy Chair of Indonesian People’s Representative Council, challenged the government’s political will for the naturalization of refugees. In a media interview with CNN Indonesia, he said, “In my opinion, if the government is brave, it should open itself (naturalization) to refugees” (Sasongko 2017). He further suggested that the naturalized Rohingya can be settled on certain islands. He referred to the Indonesian Government’s experience in settling Indochinese refugees on Galang island. Unfortunately, there has been no follow up to Fadli Zon’s statement.

Another legal dimension of local integration is the birth certificate. As Indonesia has ratified the Convention of Rights of the Child, children born to refugees should be issued birth certificates, which are not certificates of citizenship but evidence that a child was born in Indonesia. In practice, this has not yet happened. Indonesian civil society organizations (CSOs) have raised this issue with the government. During the Webinar on the Rohingya, a representative from Dompot Dhuafa suggested the Indonesian authorities provide Proofs of Birth for refugee children born in Indonesia as alternatives to formal birth certificates. (Haryo Mojopahit, Dompot Dhuafa, JakPost Webinar, 7 October 2020).

Economic Dimension of Local Integration

The economic aspects of local integration have a better chance of being realized, compared to the legal process. Refugees in Indonesia do not have the right to work or access to economic opportunities or entitlements. For many Indonesians, including policymakers, allowing refugees to work may create competition with the local population. However, if refugees can work or establish their own businesses, they can also contribute to the local economy. Such refugees would be independent and would not become burdens to the host country.

“We hope that the Indonesian government supports the effort to empower refugees by allowing them to have micro-businesses that can contribute to the local economy.” (Haryo Mojopahit, Dompot Dhuafa, JakPost Webinar, 7 October 2020).

Hence, Indonesian policymakers need to change their perceptions of refugees. Instead of viewing refugees as burdensome, particularly because of budget constraints, the Indonesian government should view them as opportunities to strengthen the local economy. During my fieldwork, I came across as an example of such a change in perspective. An interviewee closely associated with the Mayor of Lhokseumawe mentioned that the local government was considering providing capacity building training to the Rohingya refugees and placing them in workplaces (Interview with a representative of Indonesian Red Cross Lhokseumawe Chapter, Lhokseumawe on 16 November 2020). While it is still premature to see whether the Mayor will provide such a training, I would argue it is a good start.

From casual conversations with local activists, I determined they already have ideas about how the Indonesian Government can integrate the Rohingyas into the local economy. One suggestion was selling traditional Rohingya food or products. The refugees would require training in such skills as food handling, safety and packaging. During my interviews and casual conversations, I found that generally the Acehnese do not view the Rohingya as competitors. Instead, the Acehnese see the Rohingya as a part of the Muslim family. They would not object if the Indonesian Government can empower the Rohingya refugees in the livelihood sector and help them stand on their own feet. The most important consideration for the local population is that the Indonesian government should have a clear plan for the economic integration of the Rohingya, including preventive measures to ensure that the local population is not disadvantaged.

During my visit to the refugee camp, I observed that informal economic activities were already taking place. As the refugee camp in Lhokseumawe is located in Mee village, one of its walls borders the villagers' houses. Beside that wall, there were three stalls set up by the house owners. They sold household items and such daily needs as vegetables, fruits and fishes. The stalls opened in the early morning and closed at sunset. In the Indonesian terms, the stalls were like a *pasar kaget* (sudden market) as they appeared suddenly and without prior permission.

Interestingly, this economic activity was permitted by the camp coordinator (UNHCR) and also particularly welcomed by the Head of Village. The main reason is that the stalls provide benefits for both villagers and refugees. The villagers earn extra income from this livelihood interaction, while the Rohingya's daily needs are met. The Rohingya are not allowed to go outside the camp, just as the villagers cannot go inside the refugee camp for security concerns. In terms of financial support, the refugees received funds, primarily from their relatives or spouses in Malaysia.

The stall owners and refugees communicated in Indonesian or the Malay language. A few refugees were able to speak Malay because they had been in Malaysia before. Another refugee told me he learned some words while he was in the camp, which indicates his ability to learn a foreign language fast. I also observed one refugee, who spoke fluent Malay, acting as a reseller for one of the stall owners. In return, his daily needs (food, etc.) were provided for.



FIGURE 7.4 Economic interaction between Rohingya refugees and a local villager

Source: Author

Social Dimension of Local Integration

Social integration requires the local or host population to have positive attitudes (Bulcha 1988; Alrababa'h et al. 2021). Bucha (1988: 90) stated specifically that the social structure of the receiving society and the attitudes of its members towards immigrants are variables that determine the speed, the direction and the level of socio-cultural integration.

For local integration to be successful, a welcoming host society is important. This study has determined that, generally, the Acehnese have positive views and attitudes towards the Rohingya. This has been demonstrated by the acts of the Acehnese people who spontaneously help stranded Rohingya at sea.

'Boat people' have been rejected or turned away elsewhere. Australia, for instance, is known for its boat "turnback" policy. A study has shown that, between 2001 and 2003, and between 2013 and 2018, the Australian government rejected 38 boats with a total of 1,424 asylum seekers and returned them to Indonesian waters (Spinks 2018).

In 2015, dozens of Rohingya died at sea because they had been rejected by the Indonesian, Malaysian, and Thai authorities. In contrast, the Acehnese had saved Rohingya at sea brought the Rohingya safely ashore at Aceh. These actions have been praised by many, including human rights activists (Corben 2015; Walden 2020).

This study confirms scholarly explanations (Jones and Walden 2020; Missbach 2017; Listriani, Rosmawati and Kadir 2020) that these humanitarian acts are due to such factors as the indigenous maritime customary law (*Hukum Adat Laot*), the culture of welcoming guests (*peumulia jamee*), Islamic solidarity, and the shared experiences of having experienced conflict. Missbach (2017) termed the Acehnese acts as “facets of hospitality” and claimed that they are short-term. I propose to term these humanitarian acts as “cultural capital” and, unlike Missbach (2017), I consider there are some aspects which are “limited but crucial” and some which are “indefinite”. Both categories are essential for the social dimensions of local integration.

Let us discuss briefly Acehnese cultural capital. First, we shall discuss the “limited but crucial” aspects which are demonstrated in the practice of *Hukum Adat Laot* and *peumulia jamee*. The former, maritime customary laws, have existed for centuries. One of these unwritten customs is that, at sea, fishermen have to provide assistance to those who need help. This explains why Acehnese fishermen spontaneously helped the stranded Rohingya in 2015 and 2020. Another aspect, *peumulia jamee* is part of Acehnese cultural traditions, derived from Islamic teachings, to respect guests. This tradition has been practiced for centuries. For instance, in 1599, the Aceh King, Sayyid al-Mukammil (who ruled from 1589 to 1604) warmly welcomed a Dutch adventurer, Frederick de Houtman, who had just arrived in Banda Aceh. Frederick was served food and drinks, dance performances and souvenirs, as respect accorded by the King to a foreign guest (Hadi 2008: 104). Today, the culture of welcoming guests still takes place in the daily life of the Acehnese. This custom has become even more formal with the slogan, “*peumulia jamee adat geutanyoe*” (“welcoming guests is our tradition”), introduced by the Aceh government. It is worth noting that the *adat laot* and *peumulia jamee* while crucial, are limited because the former is only valid at sea (and not anywhere else), while the latter is typically practiced only for a few days.

Another category of cultural capital is indefinite, that lasts longer than the first category. They are manifested in three forms, namely, Islamic solidarity, the Acehnese expression (*hadih maja*) about helping others, and the shared experience of having survived armed conflict. Islamic solidarity is derived from religious teaching on the importance of helping others. Islam encourages believers to meet the needs of others. For instance, the Quran (5:2) advises: “help one another in acts of piety and righteousness. And do not assist each other in acts of sinfulness and transgression. And be aware of Allah. Verily, Allah is severe in punishment”. Likewise, the Prophet’s sayings also echo the same message, for example, “the believers, in their mutual love, mercy and compassion, are like one body: if one organ complained, the rest of the body develops a fever”. Islamic solidarity emphasizes the unity of all Muslims with different backgrounds under the notion of *ummah* (Dar al-Iftaa Al-Missriyyah n.d.).

Another form, the *hadih maja*, is Acehnese local wisdom, which “should be followed and be applied by the Acehnese in their daily life.” (Gusti and Ginting 2016: 458). There are many wise expressions regarding helping others such as *jaroe unen tak, jaroe wie tarek* (right hand chopping left hand pulling) and *meutjulok mata wie, meuie mata uneun* (left eye was hit, right eye was teary).

Finally, there is the shared experience of having been refugees. The Acehnese experienced prolonged armed conflict between 1976 and 2005. The memories of having been displaced or asylum-seekers in the past were still fresh in the minds of some interviewees. I found many of the Acehnese expressing the following narrative, “we help the Rohingya refugees because we have been through this before”, which indicates the shared feelings and burdens between the former and the latter. One respondent also said:

“[We helped the Rohingya] because of one bond, because they are Muslims. If they are for example Christian and eating pork there, we would not welcome them there [in our village]” (Interview with an Acehnese respondent, Lhokseumawe on 17 November 2020).

I also encountered some Acehnese who have negative perceptions towards the Rohingya. This is particularly in the case of Bireuen (Rohingya refugees who arrived in 2018, see Table 7.1). The Acehnese had the impression that the Rohingya were dirty, lazy, violent, had an

entitlement mentality, took advantage and were ungrateful. Some of these negative perceptions were highlighted by Missbach (2017). One Acehese informant expressed concerns that:

“We can’t accept their [bad] behavior. I want to know what their culture is. We the Acehese [were also refugees in the past] but not like them.....Even in Malaysia they are considered as troublemakers” (Interviewed with an Acehese respondent, Bireuen on 20 November 2020).

However, although some Acehese locals could not accept the bad behavior of the Rohingya, it does not mean that they reject the arrival of the Rohingya. The Acehese believe that the behavior of the Rohingya can be changed through education and intensive cross-cultural interaction. From my interviews, all of the Acehese agree to host the Rohingya and welcome them to be part of the local community, if permitted to do so by the Indonesian government.

During fieldwork, I encountered an interviewee, who managed a *pesantren* (boarding school) in North Aceh who wanted to admit some Rohingya children into his school. Unfortunately, he was unable to obtain permission from the authorities. Another interviewee said:

“Even for 100 years they can sit [stay] here [in Aceh]. No problem. It’s up to the Indonesian government to accept them as either guest, illegal migrants, or... permanent resident” [hoping for a harmonious life with the Rohingya] (Interview with an Acehese interviewee, Lhokseumawe on 17 November 2020).

The statement above demonstrates that Aceh can be not only a temporary but also long-term or permanent sanctuary for the Rohingya, who share a similar religious identity with the Acehese. However, local integration requires equal interaction from both sides. Despite the warm welcome and positive attitudes of the Acehese, most, if not all of the Rohingya, do not wish to remain in Aceh. As I could not interview the refugees directly because of security issues, I obtained this information from social workers in Lhokseumawe. It has become an “open secret” (*rahasia umum*) that most, if not all, of the refugees wish to be reunited with their relatives or spouses in Malaysia. They also prefer Malaysia because they believe they would be able to work and earn money there. As a result, many refugees escaped from their camps in Aceh. For instance, in 2015, most of

the 319 refugees in a temporary camp in the North Aceh district escaped through the neighboring province, North Sumatera, and finally reached Malaysia (Bonasir 2016). The UNHCR Representative in Malaysia, Richard Towle, confirmed this 2015 escape through his statement that “a considerable percentage of the people who finished up in Indonesia have drifted across, under their own devices, towards Malaysia.” (Vit 2016).

Malaysia, like Indonesia, is not a state party to the Refugee Convention. In the past, Malaysia had welcomed the Rohingya out of Islamic solidarity. Today, there are currently around 100,000 Rohingya in Malaysia (UNHCR Malaysia 2020). However, this ‘soft policy’ has changed, driven by concern of uncontrolled transmission of COVID-19 within the refugee community. Xenophobic treatment and arrests of ‘illegal migrants’ are now common in Malaysia (Kim 2020; Kipgen 2020) especially in recent years. Government leaders have spoken out through different platforms, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean). The Rohingya in Aceh seem to be unaware of these changes. With the 2020 arrivals, there were also reports of refugees who managed to escape from the camp. It is still unknown whether they reached Malaysia successfully.

Adding to these complexities is the issue of human trafficking, which involves international networks and actors, including individuals within the Rohingya community (France24 2020; The Jakarta Post 2020). These two issues – pull factors in Malaysia and trafficking – are the main challenges for the social dimension of local integration in Indonesia. Therefore, an enabling environment for local integration is important.

Studies (Briskman and Fiske 2016; Rachmah and Pestalozzi 2016; Sampson, Gifford and Taylor 2016; Brown 2017; Harvey 2019) of other cases of refugee settlement in Indonesia have suggested that, to some extent, the refugees are able to cope with restrictions, uncertainty and precariousness. This research confirms the findings from the above studies that *de facto* local integration is happening in Indonesia. The extensive discussion of the social dimension indicates that the chance of *de facto* social integration is far greater than legal and economic integration.

Conclusion

This chapter provides narrative evidence that, although Indonesia does not allow (*de jure*) local integration, *de facto* local integration is happening, at least partially. This study does not ignore the challenges of local integration, particularly in the legal and economic dimensions. However, from the perspective of the local population, there is a possibility for *de facto* local integration, thanks to the Acehnese ‘cultural capital’ mentioned earlier. Contrary to Missbach (2017), hospitality is not temporary and, indeed, it can be the basis for policy improvements by the Indonesian government to ensure that these refugees are not left behind, which is consistent with the mandate of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This study shows contradictions between the Indonesian government and the local community and NGOs. This is particularly evident in the aspects of legal and economic integration. For local integration to happen, the Indonesian government should soften their policies towards refugees, while ensuring that the same policies are not pull factors attracting other refugees. Small steps such as providing proofs of birth to Rohingya children born in Indonesia, temporary employment authorization, issuing permits for small businesses and teaching Indonesian language and culture can be readily taken to help the Rohingya.

The local Acehnese also have different views towards the Rohingya refugees. Negative perceptions of the locals towards the Rohingya can be changed through inclusive or comprehensive humanitarian intervention that focus on medium to longer term objectives such as language, culture, skills and changing the mindset of the Rohingya so that they consider Aceh as their sanctuary instead of Malaysia. Therefore, creating an enabling environment is important.

Finally, as durable solutions, particularly resettlement, are getting more complicated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying shifts in policies, Indonesia’s hospitality needs to be supported through regional cooperation and international funding. Last but not least, it is also important to ensure that Indonesia’s hospitality is not abused.



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REIMAGINING REFUGEE INTEGRATION, REALIZING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Progress and Barriers in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Japan

Refugee populations play an important role in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When refugee populations are highly integrated into a host country's societal structure, they serve as facilitators and/or actors in fulfilling the SDGs, both within their own communities and in the hosting society at large. In countries where refugee populations are not officially recognized, they are often left behind. This book presents empirical and conceptual studies of current refugee integration and SDG-related initiatives in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Japan. We collectively argue that, while refugee integration is still viable, challenges and barriers remain systemic. This necessitates the reimagining of current refugee integration initiatives and leveraging the collective vision of the SDGs.

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