

Forced Migrant Youth Journeys

Among 65 million forced migrants in the world, nearly half are children under 18 years old¹. Many originate from countries in conflict, especially from Syria, Myanmar, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Somalia.²

FACT: 28 million youth have been forcibly displaced from their home countries due to violence and conflict.³ They are *on the move*, across the globe.

The mean duration of time spent in exile is 10.3 years.⁴

Many youth were born into or have spent most of their lives in transit. They occupy a precarious space defined by both vulnerability and resilience, where statelessness, societal exclusion, and cultural disconnection necessitate a reimagining of what identity and belonging mean.

Among the hardest hit by persecution and armed conflict are the Rohingya people in Myanmar, with nearly one million displaced including 700,000 having fled to neighbouring countries.⁵ They are stateless even in their country of origin.⁶



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrine the right to a name and identity documentation, to live in a family, to play, get an education, and be protected from life-threatening harms.⁷

The **Youth Migration Project** asks youth living as forced migrants in Thailand and Malaysia about their identity and goals. Youth want the world to understand they are typical young people who want what most young people want: to get an education, have a stable place to live, make friends, be creative, have fun, get health care when ill, help others, and contribute to society. Yet, many countries deny forced migrants these normative entitlements.

The Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim for all people to have access to basic resources to survive and thrive, quality education, dignity, equity, justice and peace.⁸ Forced migrants are not included in most countries' programs to achieve these goals.

Forced migrant children and youth are at high risk of permanent unemployment due to low/no education or job skills, physical and mental health problems including suicide, assault, and being trafficked.

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participants describe forced migration as a trauma that uprooted their families and life course. They describe "dealing with it" as a kind of project: changing their assumptions, plans, choices, and goals, and learning new skills to adapt and find moments of hope and joy.

Forced migrants can contribute to achieving the SDGs and enriching societies.⁹

A majority of forced migrant youth in Malaysia want to be given a chance to resettle in Canada. But most are not even on a prospective resettlement list with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Getting on the list is the ultimate immediate goal.

Many people mistakenly think all forced migrants are refugees and all refugees are resettled in a new country. Most forced migrants never get refugee status and are forced to return to their country of origin or live forever on the margins and on the move.

1 UNHCR, 2017.

2 World Bank, 2016.

3 UNICEF, 2016.

4 World Bank, 2016.

5 IOM, 2020; World Population Review, 2019; UNHCR, 2017.

6 Asia Pacific Refugee Rights, 2018.

7 Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990).

8 UNGA, 2015.

9 IOM, 2018.



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