Protection at Sea in South-East Asia

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS
On 7 September, 297 Rohingya refugees were rescued and disembarked in Aceh, Indonesia. After some seven months at sea in desperate conditions, survivors were in a weakened state and needed immediate medical attention. Over 30 are estimated to have died at sea before they were rescued, and one young man and two young women passed away shortly after disembarkation. Survivors have reported physical and sexual abuses at the hands of smugglers.

TREATMENT OF PERSONS RESCUED AT SEA
Upon disembarkation in Aceh, the authorities and humanitarian actors immediately mobilized to address the medical and other needs of the rescued persons. Given the predominant concern of COVID-19, health screening and quarantine measures were implemented. In addition, UNHCR and protection partners have deployed experts to identify survivors with specific needs and provide specialized services. Vulnerable people include potential victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated children, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES
The local community in Aceh has a history of solidarity and compassion towards those in need. Acehnese fishermen have fulfilled on multiple occasions the duty to rescue those in distress at sea in line with international maritime law. More than 20 local NGOs have contributed to the response to the needs of the Rohingya from the boats rescued on 25 June and 7 September. UNHCR will continue supporting local capacities for basic humanitarian assistance and essential services in reception areas.

Most people moving irregularly across the Andaman Sea are Rohingya refugees, a stateless Muslim minority from Myanmar. The Rohingya suffer serious limitations on their fundamental human rights in their country of origin.

Methodology: Mixed maritime movements are by nature clandestine, making the data on such movements difficult to independently verify. The information in this report is compiled and triangulated from various sources including governments, partners, media reports and interviews with refugees. All data is provisional and subject to change.
Key Developments: Maritime Movements of Rohingya Refugees in South-East Asia in 2020

RECOMMENDATIONS
As long as the root causes of displacement remain unresolved, refugees will undertake dangerous journeys in search of safety. A regional comprehensive response to mixed maritime movements remains essential to address threats to life at sea and ensure more equitable and predictable responsibility-sharing.

Such an approach should include:
1) Prompt search and rescue operations.
2) Timely disembarkation in a place of safety.
3) Support regional solidarity and countries of disembarkation in their response to the needs of rescued persons and search for solutions.
4) Effective prosecution of smugglers and traffickers.
5) Expand prevention measures such as safe legal pathways for refugees to reduce the need for dangerous journeys.
6) Support efforts to address the root causes of displacement in the country of origin.

The current crisis in the Andaman Sea is a crisis of solidarity. Without a regional response, States will continue adopting unilateral policies endangering life. ASEAN and the Bali Process have a responsibility to foster the needed equitable and life-saving arrangements.

3-7 May: Bangladesh authorities rescued 306 persons stranded at sea after being abandoned by smugglers.

15 April: Bangladesh authorities rescued 392 persons. 70 died or went missing at sea.

11 February: 60 died or went missing following a shipwreck. 73 people were rescued by Bangladesh authorities.

25 June: A boat in distress carrying 99 people was rescued by Indonesian fishermen and brought to shore. They had been abandoned by smugglers.

7 September: 297 people landed in Aceh after some 7 months at sea. 30 died before they were rescued. Three more individuals died shortly after disembarkation.

8 June: A boat in distress carrying 269 persons was rescued within Malaysian territorial waters. More than 30 people died or went missing before the rescue.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.