



# The Paradox of Human Trafficking in Myanmar Rohingya Minority Groups

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**Abstract.** This research discusses the conflict of human trafficking that occurred in Myanmar, the victims of which are minority groups in Myanmar, namely the Rohingya minority group. This study used a qualitative approach by collecting relevant sources through journal articles, book references, and news obtained through social media in the form of websites. The content of this study discusses several cases in Rohingya, especially cases of human trafficking experienced by the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar. The response from the Myanmar government and the international community is also presented in this study. This study provides results on the conflict between the Rohingya ethnic group and the Myanmar government, the policies in force in Myanmar that are considered discriminatory against the Rohingya ethnic group which ultimately led to human trafficking in Myanmar against the Rohingya ethnic group. In responding to this problem, the Myanmar government is considered not serious and does not side with the Rohingya minority group in its country. The minimal role of the Myanmar government and the international community has caused this problem to continue. In concluding this problem, this study discusses the resolution of the conflict between the Myanmar government and the Rohingya minority group in Myanmar, the need for increased protection for minority groups in Myanmar, especially the Rohingya ethnic group, and the need for legal force to be enforced against human trafficking in Myanmar.

**Keywords:** Human Trafficking, Myanmar, Rohingya.

## 1 Introduction

Until now, many problems regarding global crime have become the main focus for each country to overcome, one example is human trafficking. Human trafficking is one of the crimes at the global level, human trafficking is one of the crimes at the global level that is still difficult to detect because it is illegal so that accurate data is difficult to find. Human trafficking can occur both in the country itself or in the border areas of the country. Human trafficking is also one of the gender crime problems because those who are traded are more women and children than men. It can be seen from the purpose of human trafficking, most of which are for sexual and domestic purposes. This problem is quite a complex problem so that each country must of course implement policies so that cases of human trafficking can be resolved, especially for people who want to migrate. [1].

The importance of educating people who want to migrate about their vulnerability to becoming victims of human trafficking is based on the fact that sometimes people who want to migrate do not fully prepare the documents required for migration, so

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I. D. A. Nurhaeni et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 1st Joint International Conference on Social and Political Sciences: Challenges and Opportunities in the Future (JICSPPS 2023)*,  
Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 884,  
[https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-350-4\\_34](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-350-4_34)

they become the main target of human traffickers. By promising that they will get better jobs in other countries, they actually become victims of human trafficking. The government of each country must certainly pay more attention to the problem of human trafficking that is often carried out when its citizens want to migrate. Governments whose countries border other countries should tighten their border areas so that the opportunity for irresponsible people to carry out human trafficking becomes more difficult. If this is not done, the opportunity for human trafficking to occur will be wide open and will continue to occur.[2].

The problem of human trafficking is a global crime, which occurs in all countries, both as senders and recipients. The Southeast Asian region also has similar problems. [3]. Since Covid in 2020 to 2022, cases of human trafficking in the Southeast Asian region have increased significantly with a total of around 1,387 victims. [4]. The case of human trafficking that occurred in Myanmar is one of the most concerning issues. The complexity of the problem that occurred in Myanmar is based on the fact that Myanmar is a country that has long had ethnic and political conflicts. The occurrence of human trafficking in Myanmar has an impact on the Rohingya minority group, where the Rohingya ethnic group is one of the ethnic minorities in Myanmar. The Rohingya ethnic group, who are often the target of ethnic and religious conflicts in Myanmar, ultimately cause their people to migrate in order to find a safe and comfortable place to live and be free from the conflict that occurs in their home country.

In responding to the conflict in Myanmar, of course the government in that country did not remain silent. However, the policies issued are often considered to discriminate against the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar. Although each country has policies that are implemented in dealing with issues that occur in their country, the international world can also play a role in problems or conflicts that occur, especially in the issue of human trafficking. [5] In the conflict between Myanmar and the ethnic minority, namely the Rohingya, the ethnic minority is very vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking and exploitation. [6] Discrimination by the Rohingya government in educational inequality, health services, employment, so that the social environment ultimately causes minority groups in Myanmar to become marginalized and isolated groups.

In their efforts to escape the conflict in Myanmar, of course, many Rohingya people have become targets of human trafficking crimes [7], irresponsible people promise a better life and freedom from discrimination to victims who ultimately agree to migrate. However, instead of getting a place to live and a decent life, victims who migrate are exploited by doing forced labor, becoming sex workers, and getting a difficult life with very inhumane treatment. In addition to the ethnic conflicts that often occur in Myanmar, political instability in this country is also one of the reasons for human trafficking in the country. The uncertain political situation finally gives criminal groups the opportunity to commit crimes. Political reforms that have not been fully implemented and even the lack of coordination between government institutions in Myanmar have ultimately become opportunities for human traffickers. [8]

The economic inequality that occurs in Myanmar, especially in areas that often face various conflicts, as well as the lack of protection from the Myanmar government for minority groups in their country such as the Rohingya, has ultimately become an opportunity for irresponsible groups to carry out human trafficking. The existence of discrimination in building a social environment in Myanmar has caused minority groups to not get their rights. With the occurrence of these unfavorable conditions in a country, it has finally created security vulnerabilities for its people, especially minority groups in the country. The Myanmar government has made several policies regarding this problem, but it still poses various challenges such as inadequate access to reach remote areas that are often where human traffickers operate. On the other hand, this can also occur due to a lack of communication between institutions in dealing with human trafficking cases. [9] The lack of communication between institutions in dealing with existing challenges will certainly also reduce and hinder the effectiveness of efforts or policies made to overcome the conflict that occurs. The need for communication between institutions in dealing with this in order to find out the root of the problem, and so on. [10].

## **2 Literature Review**

### **Human trafficking**

Human trafficking is a fairly complex problem because it is often faced by people or individuals who are illegal or not officially registered in a country's population. According to experts, human trafficking itself is a very serious crime because it involves the abuse of helpless humans with various criminal purposes that benefit the perpetrators. As is known in the context of human rights, the crime of human trafficking is one of the crimes or violations of individual rights to live a free and dignified life. On the other hand, the existence of a gender perspective also highlights the safety of women and girls who are more vulnerable to becoming victims of human trafficking. Especially, in human trafficking for the purpose of social exploitation. Various expert perspectives have been presented to explain the importance of education and increasing public awareness so that they can be more careful in trusting programs that provide better jobs in other countries.

### **Human Security**

According to experts, human security is security that focuses more on transnational military threats and various other dimensions that are actions or activities that can disrupt the welfare of individuals and humans. In the United Nations development program, it has been explained that human security includes various aspects such as economic security, health, and the social environment. [11] Amartya Sen, an economist and Nobel laureate, explains that humans can be said to have security if they are given the freedom and opportunity to develop their potential in their entirety. On the other hand, Martha Nussbaum, a human rights expert, also said that education, health, and political participation are important components that cannot be taken away and must even be guaranteed in order to be said to have achieved human security in a country. [12]

### 3 Research Methods

The research conducted applies qualitative research methods and uses a descriptive approach to explain the problem of human trafficking that occurs in Myanmar, especially against minority groups, namely the Rohingya. The information obtained and data obtained accurately are carried out by searching for and reviewing data from various media such as books, international journals, and news obtained through social media which of course have relevance to the problem of human trafficking. The research also applies data analysis by providing relevant understanding and mindsets in order to obtain good results. It is hoped that the results of this study will later provide insight into human trafficking cases that occur in Myanmar.

### 4 Results and Analysis

#### **Discrimination and Human Trafficking of the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar**

In Myanmar, the practice of human trafficking experienced by minority groups in the country, especially the Rohingya ethnic group, is a serious case because it greatly threatens human security in the country. As one of the minority groups in Myanmar, the Rohingya have long received unfair treatment. Starting from being ostracized and having discrimination both socially and politically, the Rohingya minority group is the main target of human trafficking practices in Myanmar. [13] The ongoing case until now can be said that the Myanmar government has failed to maintain and protect the human rights of minority groups in its country in the context of discrimination against this minority group, proving that the Myanmar government has committed injustice against the Rohingya ethnic group.

The continuing ethnic conflict has caused conditions in Myanmar, both economically and politically, to become unstable. Discrimination against the Rohingya ethnic group has ultimately widened the opportunities for human trafficking in Myanmar. Human traffickers take advantage of these conditions to smuggle and sell the victims they have obtained to the black market. [14] In 2017 before the genocide, an estimated 1.4 million Rohingya lived in Myanmar. However, due to this never-ending conflict, even the Myanmar government itself discriminated against, the number of Rohingya living in Myanmar has decreased drastically. In 2022, in May, 53,500 Rohingya were recorded as refugees, while other Rohingya still chose to remain in Myanmar and some were detained by authorities in that country. This data is the latest data on the development of Rohingya refugees.

The Rohingya people who live in poverty and without citizenship rights are very vulnerable to false promises of a better life. However, in reality they face sexual exploitation and various other human crimes. The results of the study showed that in various cases of human trafficking that occurred in Rohingya, there were promises of citizenship or work. In this case, most of the victims are women who hope for a better life than what they are currently living. Their beliefs and hopes in living a good life actually lead them to irresponsible individuals. On the other hand, the armed conflict that is still ongoing has ultimately made the living environment in Myanmar for

ethnic minority groups not get law enforcement and protection for civilians who should also receive these rights as citizens even though they are only an ethnic minority group in Myanmar.

The Rohingya ethnic minority group living in Myanmar is often ignored by the local government. This can be seen from the attitude and policies implemented by the government. It is considered to have ignored and created fundamental limitations for the ethnic group. Meanwhile, in the context of discrimination against ethnic minority groups in Myanmar, the local government has a very important role in implementing policies that can help victims so that it can reduce the high level of human trafficking in the country. In discussing the case of human trafficking that occurred in Myanmar, in addition to the need for the role of the government of the country, the role of the international community is also very important. The international community such as neighboring countries and international institutions still have a role and work together or provide warnings to the local government, namely the Myanmar government, in seeking justice for ethnic minority groups living in their country.[15]

On the other hand, cross-border cooperation and the role of regional diplomacy are certainly very important in responding to the issue of human trafficking that not only exists in Myanmar but also in various countries. In the case of human trafficking that occurred in Myanmar, it can be concluded that this condition is quite difficult because it is not only limited to minority ethnic groups but also concerns the dynamics of conflict and political uncertainty in the country and is even related to economic inequality. So of course, in resolving this conflict, a fairly complex approach is needed from various parties such as the government, civil society, and the international community, both state and non-state actors such as existing international institutions.

For the Rohingya ethnic group which is a minority group in Myanmar, their security as a society or as humans is often threatened due to the conflict and violence that occurs in Myanmar. Although various efforts have been made to protect their rights, the human rights that they should have and the occurrence of human trafficking in Myanmar continue to occur periodically. Thus a paradox arises, one of which is the assumption that although the Rohingya ethnic community has received protection or policies implemented by the Myanmar government and international organizations in protecting their rights as citizens and as humans. The Rohingya ethnic group will still be victims of human trafficking practices carried out by irresponsible individuals. Thus it can be concluded how the conflict and violence that occurs especially in Myanmar affects the movement and activities of individuals and social groups to do things that are detrimental to other communities.

### **Response of the Myanmar Government and International Organizations**

In dealing with conflicts and problems that occur in their country, the Myanmar government has implemented various policies to overcome the problems that are currently occurring, namely the problem of human trafficking and human security issues experienced by the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar. The efforts and actions taken by the Myanmar government are as follows. First, in dealing with human trafficking, the Myanmar government has made efforts to improve its law

enforcement. Efforts made by the Myanmar government include improving investigation methods, arrest operations carried out against perpetrators of human crimes, and the Myanmar government has also formed a state agency aimed at monitoring the practice of human trafficking in Myanmar. Although the Myanmar government has conveyed how they handle and form policies regarding the issue of human trafficking and human security. Concerns about the effectiveness of the success of the policies made by the Myanmar government continue to come. These concerns are especially true for areas affected by armed conflict. The lack of access to reach areas in conflict and the lack of communication between Myanmar institutions are obstacles in themselves which ultimately raise public concerns about law enforcement efforts.

In addition to the various policies made by the Myanmar government and the establishment of state agencies to monitor problems and conflicts that occur in the country. The Myanmar government also raises awareness among the people in the country to better understand the risks of human trafficking. Efforts made by the Myanmar government include a socialization campaign carried out in areas that are categorized as conflict-prone areas. The purpose of the social campaign is to provide information and knowledge to the public about the characteristics of human trafficking and procedures for reporting systems that must be carried out by the community. Once again, the efforts made by the Myanmar government still need to be evaluated. After various efforts made by the Myanmar government, of course this study directs how the perspective occurs within the Myanmar government. Because it is inevitable that Myanmar is a country that is still in a state of political uncertainty and economic inequality and the existence of armed conflict involving various actors, making it difficult for the Myanmar government to make maximum efforts.

In the view of the international community, a concrete response is needed from the Myanmar government to the human trafficking cases that occur in their country. This is indirectly a demand from the international community such as other countries, human rights organizations and several international community institutions, one of which is an international humanitarian institution. [16] The demands made by the international community are more about the importance of transparency in enforcing policies and providing access to international organizations in monitoring the human rights process. The international community also encourages the Myanmar government to be more active in overcoming the social and political discrimination received by the Rohingya ethnic group. The international community also emphasizes transparency and participation from civil society in Myanmar to further strengthen efforts to overcome human trafficking in Myanmar. So it can be said that the government should collaborate with various actors, especially in the private sector and involve Myanmar civil society so that it is hoped that in the future it can create solid unity and increase success in overcoming the problems that occur. [17] It is hoped that by involving various actors and working together to overcome significant problems in Myanmar, it can provide progress in efforts to overcome the existing conflict.

In responding to the global crime in Myanmar, namely human trafficking against the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar. ASEAN as an international organization

responded to the conflict in Myanmar as a fairly complex conflict. ASEAN as a regional organization in Southeast Asia plays a role in formulating various standard policies and facilitating cooperation between countries, ASEAN also takes concrete steps to combat human trafficking in its region. In responding to the problems in Myanmar, ASEAN as a regional organization shows its positive attitude with its willingness to play an active role in helping to handle the problems in Myanmar by proposing to hold dialogue or cooperation regionally. [18] One real form of ASEAN's role is in 2015 through the ASEAN Convention to combat human trafficking, especially against women and children (Convention Against Trafficking in Persons). The positive response from ASEAN that wants to play a role in the problem that occurred in Myanmar certainly also has an impact in the future, such as the effectiveness of ASEAN also depends on the results and participation of Member States on this issue. In other words, if the results of ASEAN's participation in this issue want to produce positive results, then the member countries under ASEAN must of course be more proactive, namely they must pay more attention to the issues that occur, especially in the issue of human trafficking and strengthen cross-border cooperation between countries. Member countries in ASEAN support each other and work together in overcoming the issue of human trafficking and human security, so not only in Myanmar, but ASEAN members can also improve human security problems and human trafficking issues in their countries. However, in addition to the need for participation from ASEAN member countries, there are also obstacles in seeing how their member countries follow and comply with the commitments that have been made to overcome cases of human trafficking. A special aspect that must be strengthened if we want to reduce the problem of human trafficking is through cooperation between ASEAN members in the Southeast Asia region with international organizationst.

### **The Paradox of Human Trafficking in Human Security in Myanmar against the Rohingya minority group**

Rohingya as one of the minority groups that has long experienced discrimination and social and political exclusion in Myanmar, the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar is often the victim of human trafficking crimes that violate human rights laws. This abuse shows that Myanmar is one of the countries that is unable to protect human rights, especially minority groups in its country. Although on the one hand the Myanmar government acknowledges that human trafficking in its country is a serious problem that must be followed up and tries to take action, one of which is to create policies that will provide lessons for perpetrators of human trafficking in its country. However, the efforts made by the government to overcome human trafficking that threatens human security in its country often have limitations and are often said to be ineffective. [20] It is said so because the Myanmar government once gave the opinion that they considered the Rohingya minority group in their country to be also guilty of the conflict that occurred, the Myanmar government is also considered less concerned in addressing the problem of protecting the human rights of the Rohingya ethnic group.

The international community, especially international organizations such as the United Nations and ASEAN, have condemned the attitude of the Myanmar

government facing the Rohingya ethnic minority group in Myanmar, not only condemning the actions of the Myanmar government, the UN and ASEAN have also provided humanitarian assistance to minority groups who are discriminated against in the country, especially the Rohingya ethnic group. However, as an international community, these two organizations have still not been able to address the root causes of the conflict and discrimination faced by this minority group. After receiving criticism and encouragement from the international community such as the imposition of sanctions and reductions in aid from other countries for Myanmar, the country still has not shown seriousness in addressing the issue of human trafficking that threatens the security of the Rohingya ethnic group in its country. The impact of this deviation certainly has a major impact on human security not only for Myanmar but for all countries on the face of the earth. In the context of the issue of human trafficking in Myanmar, the Rohingya ethnic group in the country has a very large impact and loss, such as not only physical losses but also psychological and social losses are also experienced by the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar.

The occurrence of the conflict has obscured and even eliminated the rights that should be owned by the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar, such as the right to obtain equal freedom, the right to participate in the political arena, to the right to obtain employment and obtain equal health services. The situation that continues to occur for the Rohingya people is certainly very serious, so a quick way out or resolution is needed in order to fight for the rights of citizens that should be owned by the Rohingya ethnic group. The international community, especially international organizations such as the United Nations and ASEAN, must of course continue to focus on the problems they face. These two organizations should also provide continuous support to the Rohingya ethnic group and pressure on the Myanmar government so that the Myanmar government can act quickly and fairly in addressing the human rights of the Rohingya people. So that by implementing this solution in the future, it is hoped that the issue of human trafficking carried out by irresponsible individuals in Myanmar against the Rohingya ethnic group can be resolved immediately, and the human rights of the Rohingya ethnic group can be restored and can be fully used by the Rohingya ethnic group.

## **5 Conclusion**

The case of human trafficking experienced by the Rohingya ethnic group has long been going on in Myanmar. As victims who have experienced injustice and discrimination, it has certainly had a very bad impact on the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar. One of the impacts is that the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar often experiences discrimination and inhumane treatment such as being involved in human trafficking cases. The responses given and efforts by the Myanmar government are often ineffective, this is because the Myanmar government also feels that the Rohingya ethnic group in their country is also guilty and the conflict that occurs in their country is also due to the Rohingya ethnic group. Although it has received pressure from the international community, especially the United Nations and



ASEAN. However, this has not been able to overcome the root of the problem that occurs between the two parties. Therefore, the conflict between the Rohingya and Myanmar ethnic groups can be resolved with solutions such as increasing law enforcement in Myanmar. The implementation of protection for minority groups such as the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar, as well as improving policies against human trafficking in Myanmar. Thus, it is hoped that the problems that occur between the Rohingya ethnic group and Myanmar can be resolved immediately or at least can reduce the inhumane treatment received by the Rohingya ethnic minority group in Myanmar.

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