



UNHCR Indonesia Statement Reduced numbers of Rohingya refugees in Lhokseumawe, North Aceh

2 February 2021

Following two disembarkations in Aceh in June and September 2020, nearly 400 Rohingya refugees were registered and provided with shelter and assistance at a site in Lhokseumawe, North Aceh. UNHCR applauds the Indonesian Government and the local community in Aceh for receiving and offering protection to the refugees, after they spent many months at sea and were repeatedly denied disembarkation in the region.

As of 1 February 2021, the population at the site was confirmed to be 111 individuals, indicating that approximately 280 individuals had left the site over the preceding months.

While UNHCR is not able to confirm the current location of all the individuals who have departed, we know from interviews upon their arrival in Aceh that the majority of the Rohingya refugees had family links in Malaysia and that they had initially intended to travel there to rejoin family. Many had been separated from their immediate family members, including parents and spouses, for many years. UNHCR offices in Indonesia and Malaysia have been in close contact on the protection and other needs of the group.

Refugees often move through irregular and risky channels as there currently are no legal options for refugees to seek safety and reunite with family members. Staff from UNHCR and partner organizations, including those at the site in Lhokseumawe, have repeatedly counselled refugees on the risks of travelling irregularly, including through the use of smuggling networks.

The fact that vulnerable women, men and children continue to make these dangerous journeys – even with an awareness of the inherent risks – highlights once more the need to ensure alternative safe and legal pathways. UNHCR hopes that States in the region will expand access to legal pathways, including through family reunification, educational and labour mobility schemes. These would help to curtail irregular movements in the region and prevent further human rights violations and loss of lives.

To mitigate the risks of further irregular movement, UNHCR and the relevant Indonesian authorities are in discussion on additional counselling to refugees and monitoring measures for the site in Lhokseumawe. UNHCR looks forward to continue working in close coordination with the Indonesian Government and the local community to ensure that refugees can have a dignified life until longer term solutions are found for them.

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