

Summary of Discussions: 14th ADFM Meeting Bangkok, 21-22 August 2025

This year has brought significant challenges for displaced people across Southeast Asia, marked by unprecedented cuts to aid and resettlement, intensifying conflict in Myanmar, and the highest death toll at sea since the 2015 Andaman Sea Crisis.

Against this backdrop, the 14th Meeting of the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) was convened in Bangkok, Thailand on 21-22 August. This meeting was the first following an external review of ADFM's first decade, which found that 75% of respondents agreed the forum had a positive impact, 75% recognised its legitimacy, and 89% affirmed the need for an initiative like ADFM. More than half also noted real-world changes stemming from ADFM discussions. The review encouraged ADFM to continue its work while adapting to emerging challenges.

The 14th ADFM Meeting brought together 30 participants from eight countries, including senior government officials, parliamentarians, academics, UN and civil society leaders, and people with lived experience of displacement: all of whom attended in their personal capacity. The ADFM Dinner, held on 21 August, featured an insightful panel of Thai MP Kannavee Suebsang, New Zealand MP Phil Twyford and APRRN Co-Secretary General Hafsar Tameesuddin, who shared their personal reflections from years of work in this space. As all discussions took place under the Chatham House Rule, what follows is a high-level summary of the event. The final page contains a list of key proposals the ADFM Secretariat will be taking forward from the meeting.

The urgency of addressing humanitarian needs

The meeting opened by acknowledging the dire humanitarian situation, with a record 123 million forcibly displaced persons globally and 17.3 million in the Asia Pacific region. Humanitarian responses are severely under-funded, with UNHCR's operations only receiving around 37% of required resources. This financial strain has led to drastic program reductions, including vital support for women and girls, and has exacerbated food insecurity in refugee and internally displaced persons camps.

Ongoing conflict in Myanmar means conditions are not yet conducive to safe, dignified, durable and voluntary repatriation, and more must be done to improve conditions both in Rakhine State and for those displaced across the region who are waiting to return home. The alarmingly high death toll at sea, especially among Rohingya, was highlighted as an indicator of the desperation continuing to drive irregular movements. Displaced people are known to be increasingly vulnerable to human trafficking and related exploitation, and participants were seriously concerned about the likelihood of an increase in dangerous maritime and overland movements and deaths at sea in the coming months.

Learning from recent positive policy reform

Despite the challenging situation, the past year also brought significant progress on issues that the ADFM Secretariat and meeting participants have been working on, including:

- Streamlining [access](#) to nationality and permanent residence for nearly 500,000 long-term displaced people in Thailand; the largest reduction in statelessness globally. Thailand is also [allowing](#) all working-age Myanmar refugees (about 42,000) in border camps to legally work, benefiting not only refugees but also the Thai economy.
- The Malaysian government has [committed](#) to creating a registration system for irregular migrants, opening pathways to work, education, and healthcare. The Malaysian Ministry for Home Affairs is also [consulting](#) with local and international NGOs to develop community-based ATD policies in line with national laws and regulations.
- The Philippines is [continuing](#) to grow its "CPath" program, which welcomes Rohingya refugees from Malaysia and Bangladesh to the Philippines to study at higher education institutes.
- In Indonesia, civil society organisations are convening monthly with government from July-December 2025 to provide suggestions and priorities in revising Presidential Regulation 125/2016,
- At the regional level, ASEAN is [moving toward](#) appointing a longer-term Special Envoy on Myanmar and finalising its [Guidelines](#) on ATD, led by Thailand's ACWC Representative.
- Australia has maintained its resettlement quota and is committed to expanding its complementary pathways programs, including a new "Train to Hire" pilot.
- The Bangladesh Interim Government convened a Stakeholders Dialogue in Cox's Bazar directly after the ADFM Meeting, leading up to the [High-level Conference](#) on the Situation of Rohingya Muslims and other Minorities from Myanmar on 30 September in New York, to increase global attention on this issue.

While this year has brought many interlinked challenges, the ADFM meeting focused on concrete opportunities to make progress at both the national and regional level, building on the above positive steps. Many agreed that this

year could mark a turning point to shift from short-term crisis thinking to building a more inclusive, sustainable system for the long term: one that better protects displaced people, supports host communities, and strengthens regional stability. Solutions were discussed along the following themes:

Do more to address the root causes of displacement: particularly the protracted conflict in Myanmar and violence carried out by the military. Participants stressed the need for external pressure on the military regime, particularly in the lead up to proposed sham “elections”, and recognised that long-term political instability and “toxic nationalism” had long been primary drivers of forced migration in the region. Participants highlighted the upcoming High-Level Conference on the Rohingya on 30 September and the Global Refugee Forum progress review in December as two opportunities for states to re-commit to addressing root causes.

States should coordinate to save lives at sea. It is inevitable that large numbers of people will be trafficked across the Andaman Sea this year and likely in record numbers. States should avoid a repeat of the May 2025 incident when no action was taken and two boats sank, killing 427 individuals on board. States in the region, including Australia, should engage in coordinated search and rescue efforts to save lives. While no one disputed the urgency or importance of this issue, participants were split on which institutions are best placed to take the lead. The ADFM Secretariat will follow up with the Bali Process Task Force on Planning and Preparedness (TFPP) and the AHA Centre as a first step to exploring capability and capacity in this space.

Prioritise civil registration and documentation for all displaced persons in the region, to improve access to services and address national security concerns. The Bali Process Regional Support Office (RSO)’s updated Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Toolkit was recognised as a valuable resource. Participants also emphasised that education campaigns could assist in addressing misconceptions that registration equates to citizenship.

Enable local labour opportunities, linked with mobility pathways: Expanding labour market access for refugees emerged as a “win-win” opportunity in the region. Empowering refugees through dignified work enhances self-reliance while helping countries address labour shortages. Participants emphasised the importance of identifying unmet needs in the local job market and then either matching them with existing skillsets, or developing necessary skills within refugee communities. These policies will differ in each country, and would benefit from further research and analysis. States with low levels of unemployment can work with the private sector to develop industries that provide employment for both refugee and host communities.

Scale involvement of the private sector: Galvanising support from companies to regularise refugee employment across the region was also identified as an opportunity. The Bali Process Government and Business Forum could be a useful existing platform to bring relevant groups together to discuss how to regularise employment for groups who are vulnerable to trafficking, including refugees, while addressing modern slavery risks in supply chains. The potential of “refugee employer champions” and leveraging pledges from the Global Refugee Forum were also discussed.

Streamline localisation of aid: Participants also discussed ways to increase the proportion of global resources directly reaching communities on the ground. This could involve major donors reviewing their policies to enable more direct funding to local and refugee-led groups, and reviewing reporting requirements and audit processes to increase flexibility. The effectiveness and cost-efficiency of local groups were emphasised, with examples of successful subgranting for training and emergency response.

Build support for regional responsibility-sharing. While politically challenging, building formal frameworks for responsibility-sharing and multilateral collaboration could make a crucial difference through integrating national efforts, and sharing resources where they can have the most impact. This has been attempted before, but many noted that the current funding crisis could provide the right galvanising conditions to try again.

About the ADFM

Established in 2015, the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) is an independent Track 1.5 forum for dialogue on the critical forced migration issues facing the region. The ADFM has contributed to changes in governance, policy and practice benefiting refugees, stateless, and trafficked persons, in partnership with the region’s institutions and national governments. The ADFM Secretariat is convened by the Centre for Policy Development (CPD) in Australia, the Indonesian National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia and the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, Thailand.

For more information or to discuss any of the above further, please contact adfm@cpd.org.au.

ADFM Secretariat Recommendations:

To create long-term solutions, address root causes and ensure solutions are being developed in partnership with affected communities:

- States attending the High Level Conference on the Situation of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar on 30 September 2025 reiterate that solutions for the Rohingya can only be found in Myanmar, and make commitments to:
 - Enhance humanitarian support to the refugee response, including support to local and refugee-led groups.
 - Do more to create conditions conducive for safe, voluntary, dignified and durable return to Rakhine State, including peace-building, and amending the 1982 Citizenship Law.
 - Scale up third country solutions and resettlement options for Rohingya people and others displaced from Myanmar throughout the region.
- UNHCR and IOM finalise their proposed 'route-based approach' to refugee and mixed movements in the Asia Pacific, with input from government, refugee-led and other civil society organisations across the region. This approach could include not only humanitarian support and resettlement commitments, but also collaborative investment from 'resettlement countries' into education and training to support both labour market access in place, as well as labour migration pathways.

To reduce reliance on humanitarian aid, address security concerns and empower individuals in place:

- States should implement registration of undocumented migrants within their territories, including refugees and asylum seekers, as a form of good governance and to address risks of human trafficking and related exploitation. This is in line with the commitments made at the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Ministerial Meeting in June 2025. States can draw from the good practice shared in the Bali Process RSO's CRVS Toolkit.
- States should develop national policies that allow access to livelihoods for refugees. Research would be beneficial to support this, including 1) skills mapping of existing refugee populations, 2) labour market needs assessments of the local economy, and 3) identify training/capacity development to address any gaps between 1 and 2.
- The Regional ATD Peer-Learning Platform should work with the ASEAN Commission on the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) to support finalisation of the incoming ASEAN Guidelines on ATD, and how to support their operationalisation at the national level.
- The Bali Process Government and Business Forum (GABF) should add to its agenda discussion of ways to bring irregular migrants into regular labour processes, thus reducing exploitation in supply chains. This regional conversation could bring together business champions who then continue this work at the national level, in partnership with government.

To save lives, address known risks of exploitation and dangerous maritime movements, and address the immediate humanitarian needs on the ground:

- Regional states should strengthen response capabilities to ensure the region avoids a repeat of the 2015 Andaman Sea Crisis. This should begin now and continue in the lead up to the end of the year when boat movements typically increase. Given the membership and existing expertise in the Bali Process, this could be done through the Disruption Working Group and Taskforce on Planning and Preparedness. The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre) could also play a role in enhancing regional preparedness for such movements.
- Develop regional guidelines on victim identification and enhance 'Disaster Victim Identification' for missing and deceased migrants in the Andaman Sea region, as a means of providing closure to families of the missing, and to gather more detailed data on boat movements and trends. As a first step, IOM and partners can explore both how comfortable or open refugees would be with this process, as well as the level of interest and capability in affected states.
- Donor states simplify their funding procedures to better enable humanitarian funds to reach the local level including through pooled funding, private sector partnership, removing unnecessary red tape and exploring creative partnerships through the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Zakat funding options.