

MMC Asia

QUARTER 1 2019



# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers Southern and Southeast Asia. The core countries of focus for this region are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar, India, Nepal, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. Depending on the quarterly trends and migration-related updates, more attention may be given to any of the countries over the rest.

The QMMUs offer a quarterly update on new trends and dynamics related to mixed migration and relevant policy developments in the region. These updates are based on a compilation of a wide range of secondary (data) sources, brought together within a regional framework and applying a mixed migration analytical lens. Similar QMMUs are available for all MMC regions.

The Mixed Migration Centre is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration.

For more information on the MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit [mixedmigration.org](https://mixedmigration.org) and follow us at [@Mixed\\_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

### **MMC's understanding of mixed migration**

"Mixed migration" refers to cross-border movements of people, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking, and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have a range of legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel - often travelling irregularly, and wholly, or partially, assisted by migrant smugglers.

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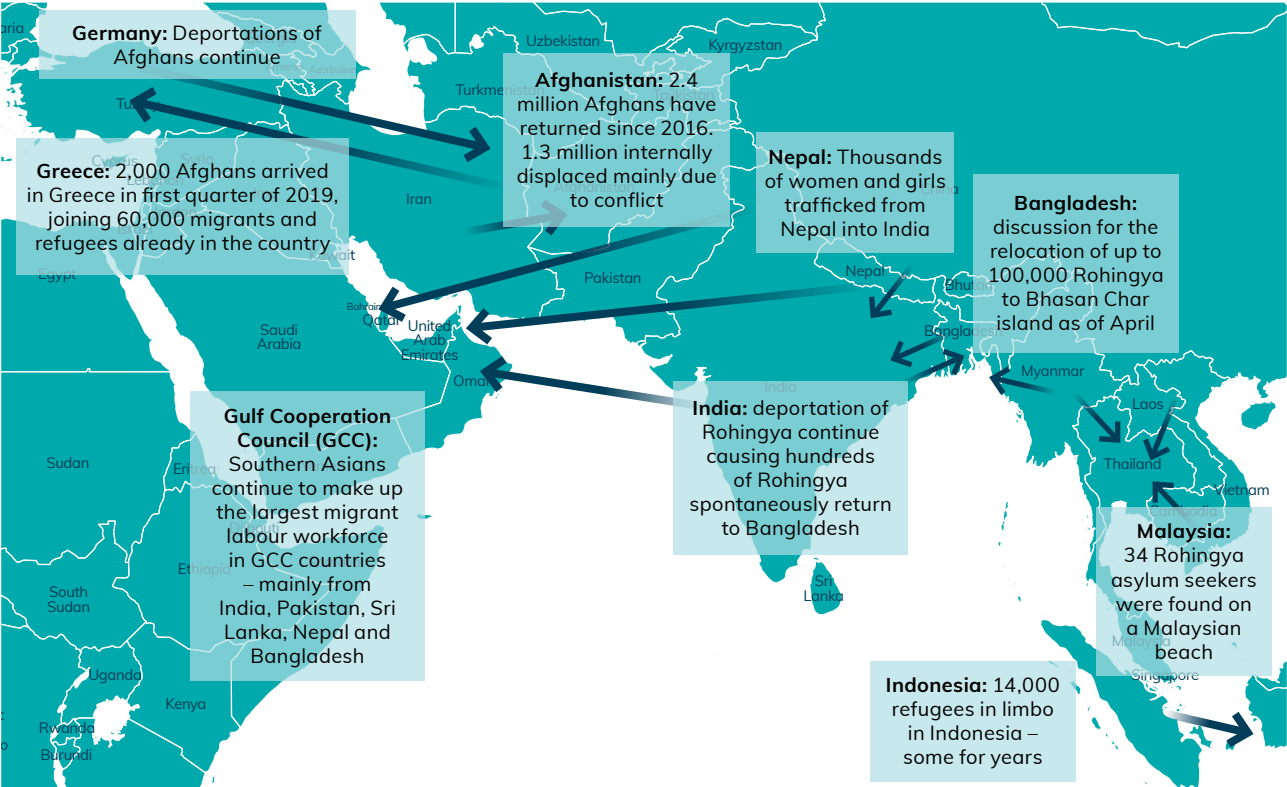
# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia

## Quarter 1 - 2019

### Key Updates

- **Rohingya displacement:** deportations from India to Myanmar have caused some Rohingya to return to Bangladesh while others have tried to leave by boat from Bangladesh with smugglers. A group of 34 were found stranded on Malaysian beach – others were intercepted by Bangladesh security forces. Bangladesh hosts over 900,000 Rohingya refugee and meanwhile has stated it wants an end to the refugee flows and stands ready to start moving up to 100,000 Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char – an island in the Bay of Bengal. Also this quarter the Joint Response Plan of the UN and others was launched.
- **Mixed Migration movements from/to Afghanistan:** multi-directional mixed movement continues with thousands returning from Iran and Pakistan as well as some deportations from Europe, but refugees and migrants continue to leave Afghanistan for work in Iran as well as those seeking asylum in Europe. Afghans are the largest group of new arrivals in Greece and Bulgaria.
- **Mixed Migration towards Europe:** people in mixed flows from Asia continue to be stranded in Greece and are joined by new arrivals as smugglers continue to bring Afghans, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis towards Europe, albeit in far smaller numbers than previous periods and previous years.
- **Trafficking and exploitation** are a strong characteristic of mobility and labour migration in many parts of Asia. This includes trafficking of south Asian females to China and brides which Cambodia has committed itself to fight, and continued movement of Nepalis into India, mainly young females as trafficked sex workers.
- **Thailand's crackdown on irregular migration:** Thai authorities continued their 'Operation X-Ray Outlaw Foreigner' campaign with mass arrests of undocumented migrants, with hundreds of people from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia arrested in early 2019.
- **Arriving to Australia by air instead of by sea?** While hardly anyone is arriving in Australia by sea, increasing numbers are arriving by air, claiming asylum upon arrival. According to the Australian government, the large majority are rejected and immediately put on return flights.

### Regional Overview



# Mixed Migration Regional Updates

## Mixed migration from Asia to Europe

### Afghan refugees and migrants continue to arrive in Europe

Although overall numbers of irregular arrivals in Europe have [steeply declined](#) from the 2014-2016 peaks<sup>1</sup>, in early 2019 Afghans using irregular pathways were recorded as the most numerous nationality arriving in [Bulgaria and Greece](#).

In Greece, during January and February (2019) [1,649 new arrivals](#) from Afghanistan by sea were registered, forming 49 per cent of all new arrivals in Greece by sea in those months and more than 5 times the number of Syrians. The new arrivals landed on various Greek islands close to Turkey, the most arrived on Lesbos. Around 35 per cent of all new arrivals (land and sea) in January and February made the land crossing through Evros at the Bulgarian/Turkey border, where Afghans were also the most numerous. There are over [60,000 refugees and migrants 'stranded' in Greece](#), including many Afghans.

### Afghan recognition rates confusion continues

Asylum seekers continue to face an ['asylum lottery'](#) in Europe as the chances of obtaining a form of protection vary dramatically from one country to another, even for asylum seekers coming from the same country. According to [reported statistics in Europe](#), in 2018 recognition rates for Afghan asylum applicants (i.e. successful applicants) varied from 98.4 per cent in Italy to 24 per cent in Bulgaria. Slovenia (77.7%), Finland (73.4%) and Greece (70.9%) had considerably high rates, contrasting with Sweden (33%), Belgium (50.6%) and Germany (52.2%).

### Indirect Refoulement continues in 2019

Since 2017, throughout 2018 and now into 2019 a new body of case law has emerged on the suspension of Dublin transfers to countries in Europe where an asylum seeker would unfairly be denied international protection and would face removal to his or her country of origin. Such suspensions on account of what is known as [indirect refoulement](#) have been most prominent in relation to Afghan applicants. In some cases, domestic courts [have ruled against transfers of individuals](#) to Germany, Austria, Belgium, Sweden, Finland and Norway, due to risks stemming from their higher rates of non-acceptance of applications from Afghans - meaning if Dublin regulations were respected and the asylum seekers were sent back to first country of record in Europe they would stand a strong chance of being returned to their country of origin (i.e. indirect

<sup>1</sup> In 2016, Afghans were the 2<sup>nd</sup> reported nationality group in Greece, in 2017 they were the 3<sup>rd</sup> one but in the second half of 2018 Afghans represented [46 per cent of all new arrivals](#) in Greece. However, since the peak years of 2015 / 2016 (approx. [250,000 Afghans](#) arrived in Europe) there has been a sharp decline in annual numbers of Afghans arriving in Europe along with [decreasing rates of acceptance](#) (as refugees) by EU countries

refoulement). Despite this [deportations of Afghans continue](#) into 2019, albeit in smaller volume than before, despite [major concerns](#) as to the safety in Afghanistan. (see next point).

## Afghan counterflows: displacement, migration and returnees

Drivers compelling people to migrate from Afghanistan continue to be meagre economic opportunities and the impact of 17 years of war compounded by an ever-deteriorating security situation. Data from 4Mi this quarter shows that a significant proportion of those leaving Afghanistan are labour migrants going to Iran for work (mostly seasonal) while others target Turkey and then Europe as both asylum seekers and economic migrants. 4Mi data shows that of those going to Iran over 70 per cent are moving for purely economic reasons while just 6.4 per cent of those interviewed claimed their movement was driven by political / security concerns. For those interviewed intending to move to Turkey or Europe approximately 30 per cent cited political reasons while just 11 per cent chose economic concerns as being their primary reason for movement. Of this 30 percent moving for political reasons, almost 80 per cent identified conflict/war/ political violence/fear of conscription/forced labour and previous persecution or fear of future persecution as their reasons for joining mixed flows.

[A UN report released this quarter](#) states that 2018 was the most lethal year for civilian deaths (3,804) and injuries (7,189). More civilians were killed in Afghanistan last year than in any of the previous nine years when records started and the killing continues: in this quarter a single event on [January 14th 2019](#) killed 4 people and injured over 110 predominantly civilians. Internal displacement is high at [1.3 million](#) and tens of thousands are planning and attempting to leave Afghanistan as migrants and asylum seekers. At the same time large numbers are returning.

Categorising return as *forced* or *voluntary* may be too simplistic in the current environment where over [2.4 million Afghan refugees have returned](#) from Iran and Pakistan [since 2016](#) to a very troubled situation in Afghanistan – for some worse than when they initially left. A detailed explanation of these returns that continue into this first 2019 quarter as well as conditions and aspirations of returnees can be found in a [new MMC publication recently released](#).

Additionally, rejected asylum seekers are forcibly returned from Europe following the [2016 Joint Way Forward agreement](#) between the EU and Afghanistan. According to Amnesty international in addition to the 10,000 Afghans that were forcibly deported from Europe in 2015 and 2016, another 500 were deported in 2018. Deportations continued into the first quarter of 2019 with the [first deportation flight](#) leaving Germany in early January.

## Demise of mention of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis in reported flows

Despite past evidence of [Bangladeshis \(9% of total in 2017\)](#) and [Pakistanis](#) joining mixed flows from South Asia to Europe, this quarter there is no evidence they are using these routes in any significant numbers. An IOM summary of [all movement into Europe](#) in 2018 through Spain, Italy, Malta, Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus makes no mention of Pakistanis or Bangladeshis. In January 2019, while 1,649 Afghans were [recorded by UNHCR](#) as having entered Europe (Bulgaria and Greece), just 57 Bangladeshis were listed, and no Pakistanis.

Meanwhile, Bangladeshi citizens continue to join mixed flows within and outside of the region. Reportedly, more than a million Bangladeshi workers [live in Malaysia](#), nearly half of whom are irregular.

## Mixed migration within South East Asia region

### Human trafficking across the Nepal-Indian border and beyond

Generally, human trafficking continues to be a [deep problem](#) in South Asia. Specifically, the Nepal-Indian border is reportedly one of the busiest human trafficking corridors in the world and continues to be high risk for women and girls trafficked from Nepal into India. One study suggests [23,000 women and girls were victims of trafficking in 2016](#). The Indian armed border force said detected cases of trafficking from Nepal to India had [risen by 500 per cent since 2013](#). Numbers could rise to 40,000 Nepalese victims a year according to NGOs and quoted in a January [media report](#). According to the [2018 Trafficking in Persons report](#), [Nepali women and girls](#) are subjected to sex trafficking in Nepal, India, the Middle East, Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Nepali men, women, and children are subjected to forced labour in Nepal, India, the Middle East, and Asia in construction, factories, mines, domestic work, begging, and the adult entertainment industry.

### Cambodia pledges to end 'bride' trafficking to China

At the end of March, Cambodia's Interior Minister Sar Kheng [announced a series of deals](#) to fight transnational crimes, including human trafficking, however no details were made available.

Over the past decade, reportedly tens of thousands of Southeast Asian women have been lured to China by criminal networks promising lucrative jobs, but later are sold as brides in China to meet the Chinese gender imbalance of tens of millions of men – a result of the [previous one-child policy](#).

## Natural disasters driven displacement

South Asia continues to experience high [risk of natural disasters](#) and population displacement from the impact of heavy monsoons, flooding, drought, cyclones, earthquakes compounded by recent impacts of climate change. Some suggest climate induced migration will be a [major driver in the future](#). A [new study released this quarter](#) suggests Nepal can expect more seismic disruptions in the near future. Nepal has a long history of earthquakes, and the study shows that the one which struck Nepal on April 25, 2015, killing 9,000 people and razing entire villages, and significant displacement '[did not release all the energy that accumulated in that area in previous centuries](#)'. Earthquakes of low intensity hit parts of [Gujarat and Maharashtra](#) in India on January 20th 2019. In Gujarat, quakes were recorded in the Kutch and Saurashtra regions while in Maharashtra, Palghar near Thane was hit but no population displacement was caused.

## Continued economic and labour market differentials drive large scale international (often irregular) migration within the region and to the Gulf

Southern Asians continue to make up the largest [migrant labour workforce in Gulf Cooperation Countries](#) – mainly from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. India itself is the [top source country for migrants globally](#) and one of the top destination choices, particularly for those in the region.

Southern Asia is among the largest recipients of remittances in the world (India tops the ranking) and therefore labour migration is a significant contribution to survival, poverty alleviation for many communities. The [World Bank estimates remittances to South Asia](#) increased by 13.5 per cent to \$132 billion in 2018 – more than double the growth in 2017. However, the [treatment of labour migrants](#), rights violations and potential exploitation involved has been a long-standing unresolved issue of concern.

In 2015, [just over 85 per cent](#) of the 14.1 million international migrants in Southern Asia originated from other countries in the subregion. Often these workers find work in the informal sector as, inter alia, construction labourers and domestic workers with precarious status and living and working conditions. Apart from [other exploitation](#), trafficking of [women into the sex industry](#) is evident as is the use of deceptive and exploitative employment agencies benefiting from worker's irregularity.

## Thailand's 'Operation X-Ray Outlaw Foreigner' affecting those in mixed flows

Thailand's crackdown on irregular migrants continued this quarter with various [mass-arrests](#) being reported. The government multi-phased campaign is not only targeting foreigners overstaying visas and arriving without visas but also those involved in criminal activities. In early 2019 those reportedly arrested include, inter alia, hundreds of people from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. Approximately [7,000 people have been arrested](#) since the operation began. The operation is part of a [stricter implementation of Thailand's](#)



[immigration policies](#) and laws and reduction of corruption of immigration officials. The current crackdown is part of a longer strategy to criminalise irregular migrant labour. In 2014, threats of a crackdown against migrant workers reportedly [resulted in 220,000 Cambodians leaving Thailand over a two-week period](#). An estimated 4 million migrants—primarily from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos—were employed in Thailand in 2017. Most migrants move irregularly across borders, either on their own or through smugglers.

According to UNHCR there are currently [97,021 refugees](#) living in 9 refugee camps in Thailand (as of February 2019). Most refugees are ethnic minorities from Myanmar, mainly Karen and Karenni but are not part of the Rohingya displacement occurring on the south-west side of Myanmar.

## Malaysia – a continued regional magnet for mixed migration

Despite its human rights record and relatively harsh environment for foreign workers and asylum seekers, Malaysia continues to be a major magnet for mixed flows including economic migrants and refugees/asylum seekers. Apart from a fast growing, labour intensive economy, being a predominantly Muslim country is an added attraction to populations from Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and for Rohingya from Myanmar. Illegal entry and stay in Malaysia is criminalized and migrants if caught, frequently serve time in prisons before being transferred to one of the twelve administrative “immigration depots” while awaiting deportation. In 2017 the [Global Detention Project](#) estimated almost 50,000 foreigners were in detention.

Apart from over 2 [million registered foreign workers](#) in Malaysia, IOM estimated at the start of 2019 there may be between [2 to 4 million additional](#) undocumented migrant workers in the country. Major countries of origin of foreign workers are reportedly Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Myanmar, among smaller numbers from other Asian countries. The high number of irregular workers and the reported corruptibility of certain officials means Malaysia has a history of human trafficking where Malaysia is mostly a destination country. The US state department has Malaysia on a ‘Tier 2 Watch list’ according to the [2018 Trafficking in Persons report](#), previously it was ranked as Tier Three - the worst ranking.

[According to UNHCR](#) as of end January 2019, there were 164,620 registered refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia, even though Malaysia never ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol (along with most Asian countries). The result is that without status and protection, unable to work (except a small number in plantations) or pursue education many feel [their lives are in limbo](#), and [‘barely accepted and not appreciated’](#). The vast majority are from Myanmar (142,370, of which more than half are Rohingya (84,030)). The two other larger groups are 25,700 Chins (25,700) and Myanmar Muslims (9,770). There are also some 22,250 refugees and asylum-seekers from other countries, including some 6,110 Pakistanis, 3,140 Yemenis, 3,020 Syrians, 3,000 Somalis, 1,760 Sri Lankans, 1,740 Afghans, 1,480 Iraqis and 800 Palestinians.

## Refugee tragedy highlights pain of limbo in Indonesia

In early February 2019, a 24-year old Afghan asylum seeker held in Indonesia for 17 years died after [practicing self-immolation](#) after an earlier, failed hunger strike. The tragedy has highlighted the role of Indonesia as a transit and destination country to asylum seekers, mainly hoping to travel on to Australia. Despite the fact that Indonesia has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention or its protocols, UNHCR and IOM are active assisting up to [14,000 registered refugees](#) who prefer to live in limbo in Indonesia rather than return to their countries of origin. At the end of December 2018, most refugees in Indonesia came from Afghanistan (55%), Somalia (11%) and Myanmar (6%)

Indonesia has been an important transit country for mixed migration flows to Australia but since 2014 when stricter border policies and the '[stop the boats](#)' strategy were implemented by Australia thousands have become stranded in Indonesia without rights and freedoms and that some refer to as an '[open prison](#)'. Between 1996 and mid-2013, [about 58,000 asylum seekers](#) reportedly passed through Indonesia and departed by boat to Australia, with over 25,000 irregular arrivals in Australia in 2012/13, most also departing from Indonesia as their last port.

MMC's December Monthly Summary suggested smuggling could resume from Indonesia. In particular, opponents of the [Australian medevac bill](#) that became law in late February ([welcomed by UNHCR](#)) and that allows detained migrants and asylum seekers in Nauru and Manus Islands access to health in Australia claimed that the bill would restart the flow of boats. However, to date this has not been the case and it is [not seen as credible by those stuck in limbo](#) in Indonesia. Nevertheless, other media reports [interviewed people-smugglers](#) who viewed Australia's passing of the bill and re-[opening of Christmas Island](#) detention centres as evidence of Australia's borders re-opening and their intention to re-start lucrative smuggling operations.

## Has irregular migration from Asia to Australia shifted from sea to air?

According to the [government's statement](#) Australia's tough border protection policies are designed 'to protect Australia's borders, combat people smuggling and deter people from attempting dangerous boat voyages across the open ocean'. [Operation Sovereign Borders](#) has been active since 2013 – the period when the highest number of maritime arrivals were recorded (over 25,000 between 2012-2013). But in this quarter information has emerged of the scale of irregular arrivals by air of asylum seekers which may suggest the strict maritime policies led asylum seekers and smugglers to switch tactics.

In 2017-18, when close to 28,000 asylum seekers flew into Australia, just [1,425 protection visas were granted](#). Another source suggested that since 2014 [64,000 people](#) have arrived by air claiming asylum. The Home Affairs Department website shows 27,931 protection visa applications were made last financial year by plane arrivals. The government claims most air arrival asylum seekers are rejected and immediately put on return flights.

# Thematic focus: The Rohingya displacement crisis

## Continued violence against Rohingya in Myanmar

In this quarter the security situation in northern Rakhine continued to deteriorate with humanitarian access, already highly restricted, further curtailed and [camps for the displaced closing](#) down. The situation for the Rohingya in Myanmar has also worsened following [recent fighting between an ethnic Rakhine insurgent group](#) – known as the Arakan Army (AA) – and Myanmar security forces. In January, the Myanmar government [accused the AA of having ties](#) to the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a Rohingya insurgent group denounced by the government as a terrorist organization - this despite widespread anti-Rohingya sentiment among the ethnic Rakhine who make up the Arakan Army. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar ([banned from access](#) to Myanmar by the government) [discussed this with additional elaborations](#) in her address to the 40th session of the Human Rights Council on the 11th March 2019.

## Joint statement of concern from international NGOs in Rakhine State

Following the [mass exodus that began in August 2017](#), only a few hundred thousand Rohingyas remain in Myanmar, mainly in isolated villages in northern Rakhine state. On April 1st international NGOs supporting communities throughout Rakhine State delivered another [joint statement](#) – this time expressing their 'deep concern with the continued fighting between the Myanmar Security and the Arakan Army Forces'. Previously they delivered a [joint statement](#) in January. The main concern is that conflict is causing civilian casualties, displacing communities, and 'worsening the already precarious humanitarian situation' in central and northern Rakhine State – a situation that will inevitably increase the numbers of refugees hoping to enter Bangladesh or possibly leave for Malaysia and beyond with smugglers by boat.

## Launch of third Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya refugees

This quarter, the United Nations aid agencies led by UNHCR and IOM as well as NGO partners launched the [2019 Joint Response Plan](#) (JRP) for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis. The appeal seeks to raise US \$920 million to meet the 'massive needs of more than 900,000 refugees from Myanmar and over 330,000 vulnerable Bangladeshis in host communities'. The 2019 JRP is the third joint humanitarian appeal and this year working with 132 partners comprising UN agencies, international and national NGOs and government bodies in a collective effort that has three strategic objectives: to deliver protection to refugee women, men, girls and boys, provide life-saving assistance and foster social cohesion.

## Bangladesh continues to host the largest number of refugees in the sub-region.

In the region, Bangladesh also stands out as a host country [for 907,840 Rohingya refugees \(as of February 2019\)](#) from Myanmar fleeing state violence and persecution.) Around 741,000 arriving since August 2017. Forced displacement from Myanmar continued into 2019 causing [Bangladesh to protest](#). Providing protection and meeting the needs of the refugees is a [major challenge for Bangladesh](#) and the international agencies supporting them. Bangladesh told the United Nations Security Council in late February this quarter that it [cannot take any more refugees](#) from Myanmar. Controversial ideas of moving large numbers of refugees to the Bay of Bengal island - Bhasan Char – [continued to be pursued](#) this quarter.

## Relocation of Rohingya refugees to Bay of Bengal island planned for April 2019

Despite international criticism and delays of their plans to relocate up to 100,000 Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh mainland (congested camps at Cox's Bazar and Kutapalong) to a remote island in the Bay of Bengal, authorities have stated they intend to start the relocation [from April 2019](#). Plans emerged as early as 2015 despite reluctance on the part of Rohingya leaders and United Nations officials and warnings that the island - the uninhabited Thengar Char island - recently renamed Bhasan Char - was [flood-prone and unsuitable](#).

Following a visit in late January to Bhasan Char island by UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, said she feared a ["new crisis"](#) if Rohingya were taken to the island. "There are a number of things that remain unknown to me even following my visit, chief among them being whether the island is truly habitable."

In early March, however, the UN's [World Food Programme \(WFP\) supplied the Bangladesh government](#) with plans of how it could provide for thousands of Rohingya transported to the island within weeks. WFP stressed that any relocation should be done "in accordance with humanitarian principles and code of conduct".

## Rohingya and UN continue to resist voluntary repatriation to Myanmar

Following [protests](#) by Rohingya refugees in late 2018 in camps in Bangladesh and evidence of continued violence against Rohingya in Myanmar, plans to repatriate some of the almost one million refugees [have been delayed](#). In late 2018 the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar came to an [agreement concerning repatriation](#) plan for Rohingya which was condemned by the UN as being premature as conditions were not right for return. [Plans to issue refugees with ID cards](#) were also resisted by refugees as they feared they would be used to force refugees home. In the first quarter of 2019, strong resistance to

repatriations continue. Following interviews with newly-arrived refugees from Myanmar in February 2019, [one report claims](#) 'the potential for the return of Rohingya refugees to their homes in a safe, voluntary, and dignified manner becomes less likely by the day'. The same report claims that since mid-January 2019, the government has blocked access to rural areas of northern Rakhine to all but two international aid organizations.

## Evidence of new attempts by Rohingya to leave Bangladesh by boat

In early February the Bangladesh authorities reportedly [intercepted three separate attempts](#) by migrant smugglers to transport Rohingya away from Bangladesh (presumably to Thailand or Malaysia) by boat. Authorities have previously warned that [more departures were looming](#), and the December MMC Monthly report also warned of an expected increase in irregular maritime movement from Bangladesh as [conditions in the refugee camps](#) continue to be difficult and people are tempted by offers made by smugglers and possible traffickers of better future's elsewhere. "Rohingya will continue to risk their lives on boats unless there are tangible solutions to their plight," a [UNHCR spokeswoman told AFP](#). It is not known how many other boats have evaded interception, but the finding of Rohingya refugees on Malaysia beaches in early March (see below) suggests the irregular route is still active or has been revived, as anticipated. Law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh this quarter report that at least [100 Rohingya refugees have been rescued](#) from smugglers / traffickers this year in Cox's Bazar, reportedly most trying to get to Malaysia - some were found held against their will in houses and according to the authorities were '[abducted](#)'.

## Rohingya families fearing deportation to Myanmar flee India

In October 2018 the Indian government [deported seven Rohingya men](#) to Myanmar, reportedly causing a [spontaneous return](#) to Bangladesh by '[hundreds](#)' of Rohingya families which [continued in January 2019](#). [Another three](#) were deported in March 2019, drawing criticism on the 2nd April by top UN chiefs who claim the [deportations are prohibited by international law](#). Some suggest 2,000 have left India following heightened anti-Rohingya rhetoric. UNHCR reported that those that arrived in Bangladesh were being looked after but India estimates that 40,000 Rohingya live in camps and informal settlements across India with only 16,500 having UNHCR identity cards. The Indian government does not recognise the UN cards and disagrees with the UN that deporting the Rohingya violates the principle of non-refoulement. The MMC issued a [new report](#) on Rohingya travelling to and living in India on the 1st April.

## Smuggling of Rohingya through Thailand to Malaysia revived

In what is the first recorded event in 2019, [thirty four Rohingya asylum seekers](#) were found on a Malaysian beach after being reportedly smuggled through Thailand and then by sea to Malaysia. It was not clear if their journey began in Bangladesh or Myanmar itself. [A new report by Fortify Rights](#) documents events

surrounding the smuggling of thousands of Rohingya in 2015 involving severe abuses including trafficking, extortion and murder.

## Aid agencies and refugees in Bangladesh prepare for monsoon season

The end of March and start of April - with the first monsoon rains of 2019 only weeks away - saw aid agencies, the UNHCR and Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh [prepare for monsoon season](#). Despite work done in 2018 refugees living in the hilly and congested settlements in eastern Bangladesh, remain at risk from flash flooding and landslides.

## Highlighted new research & reports



### [Rohingya migration to India: patterns, drivers and experiences. Mixed Migration Centre. April 2019](#)

The Mixed Migration Centre has issued a new report on the patterns, drivers and experiences of Rohingya travelling and living in India - a less documented aspect of the mass displacement of Rohingya from Myanmar in the last 2 years. While the vast majority of the Rohingya that fled Myanmar are in Bangladesh (almost 1 million in total) there are an estimated 18,000 Rohingya asylum seekers and refugees registered with UNHCR in India.

Some of the key findings are that while the threat of deportation from India and increasing harassment by police authorities and intelligence agencies may discourage Rohingya from coming to India, the tough conditions in Myanmar and plans in Bangladesh to begin 'repatriating' the Rohingya serve as on-going push factors for Rohingya migration to India. Migration of the Rohingya to and from India is therefore on-going. Travel to India is often facilitated by smugglers with significant risks to safety at border crossings. The most vulnerable are women and girls, who have limited to no agency in their movements but once inside India all Rohingya are at high risk of exploitation by police, lawyers and employers. Despite this most preferred to stay in India although some onward movements were on the rise.



## [“Sold Like Fish” - Crimes Against Humanity, Mass Graves, and Human Trafficking from Myanmar and Bangladesh to Malaysia from 2012 to 2015. Fortify Rights. March 2019.](#)

In March, Fortify Rights with the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), released an important report documenting the egregious crimes committed between 2012-2015 against the Rohingya. The report collects evidence and testimony concerning the abuses at sea and in camps run by traffickers in Malaysia and Thailand. The authors of the multi-year investigation make the argument that crimes against humanity were conducted by a human-trafficking syndicate responsible for deceiving Rohingya refugees to board ships bound for Thailand and Malaysia and then abusing them and enslaving them in remote camps along the Malaysia-Thailand border.

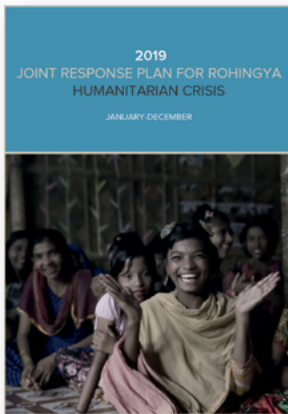
Opening the report with the quote from one human trafficker in Malaysia in 2014; “People are being sold like fish, from one hand to another. That’s why the price [of release from captivity] is increasing,” sets the tone of this damning report in which complicity by state officials is also identified. The report ends with an analysis of the violence against Rohingya within the framework of relevant international law.



## [Distant Dreams: understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees. Mixed Migration Centre. January 2019](#)

This quarter MMC released this analysis produced by Seefar for the Mixed Migration Centre Asia to address gaps in the evidence base on return and reintegration in Afghanistan. Millions of refugees and migrants have returned to Afghanistan since 2012; most from Pakistan and Iran but also Europe. Afghans return to a context characterised by conflict, violence, drought and economic hardship.

While some initial reintegration experiences may be positive – particularly reunions with family members, there is ample evidence of widespread economic, social and psychosocial needs. The study’s aims were to understand the varied intentions and aspirations of returned Afghan refugees and migrants; determine how challenges experienced during the migration, return and reintegration processes influence future plans (including interest in re-migration); and to assess how humanitarian and development actors can better respond to support the needs of returnees and those embarking on re-migration journeys.



## [2019 Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis January - December](#)

Led by mandated United Nations agencies the 2019 Joint Response Plan January – December 2019 released in February sets out a comprehensive programme shaped around three strategic objectives – deliver protection, provide life-saving assistance and foster social cohesion. This is in response to mass migration from Myanmar of the Rohingya people who have faced decades of systematic discrimination, statelessness and targeted violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar.

The 2019 Plan covers all humanitarian sectors and addresses key cross-cutting issues, including protection and gender mainstreaming. The Plan also aims to strengthen emergency preparedness and response for weather-related risks and natural disasters, with a focus on community engagement. Priorities for 2019 include supporting strengthened government leadership and accountability, including in the camps, and the effective participation of the refugee community in decisions affecting their lives.



## [“You Cannot Exist In This Place”-Lack of registration denies Afghans protection in Turkey. Refugees International. December 2018](#)

At the end of 2018 Refugee International released their analysis of the refugee situation in Turkey with specific focus on the impact of changes relating to refugee registration for Afghans. Turkey currently hosts the largest population of refugees in the world, including a growing number of Afghan refugees fleeing either violence and conflict in Afghanistan or the lack of opportunities and protection for Afghans in Iran.

Although far less numerous than the 3.5 million Syrians in Turkey, Afghan refugees in Turkey reportedly face many difficulties, including in accessing housing, education, and employment. In September 2018, the Turkish authorities fully transferred responsibility for the registration and processing of asylum applications of non-Syrians from UNHCR to Turkey’s Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). Although the transfer had been planned for at least two years, its implementation was sudden and came in the wake of a surge in Afghan arrivals in 2018.

The RI report offers analysis (and recommendations) of the obstacles to registration and the consequences of being unregistered in Turkey. It concludes that now that the registration and processing of international protection cases lies solely with the Turkish authorities, certain gaps have become apparent. They make the case for the Turkish authorities to make the changes needed to ensure that Afghan (and all) refugees in Turkey have access to their most basic rights.





## [Avoiding a Crisis Within a Crisis - Addressing the risks of human trafficking, migrant smuggling and related exploitation arising from the situation in Cox's Bazar. The ADFM Secretariat. March 2019](#)

To compile this risk assessment, the Secretariat of the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) conducted interviews and research in 2018, releasing this report in March 2019.

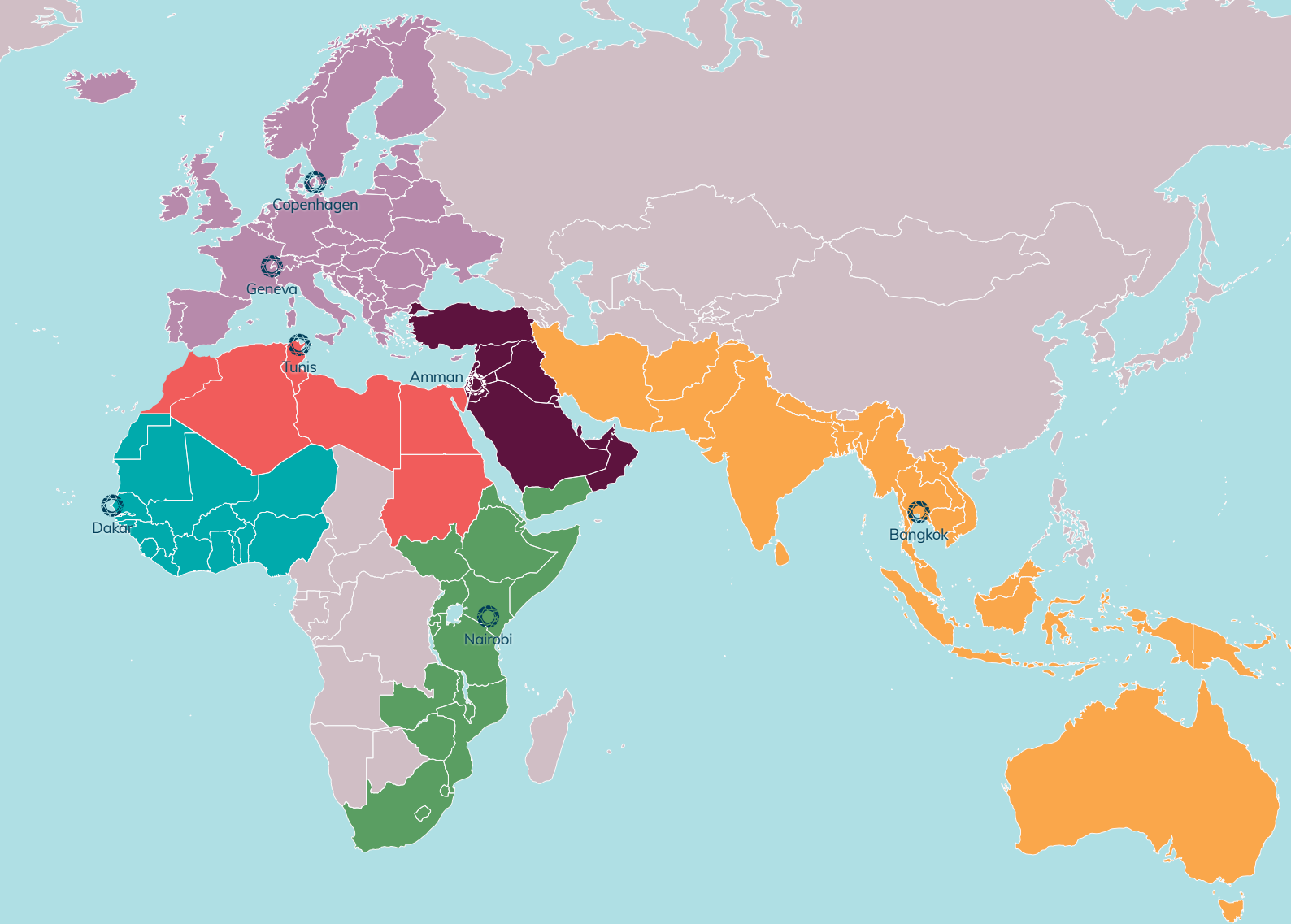
Alarmingly, the assessment finds that the conditions for high levels of trafficking, smuggling and related exploitation are present and will only intensify with time, affecting both the Rohingya and Bangladeshi populations. It concludes that more needs to be done by the Bangladesh government and international players to address protection concerns.



## [Contribution to the expert symposium on international migration and development. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific \(ESCAP\). February 2019.](#)

In mid-February the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) offered a contribution to the United Nations Expert Symposium on International Migration and Development in relation to Asia and the Pacific.

This short summary contribution focuses on stating DESA's intention to fully support the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the region, referring to the compact frequently. It notes that while labour migration largely characterises movements, other migration trends remain important, including those related to the forced migration of refugees, 'such as those from Afghanistan to Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran and of Syrians refugees fleeing to Turkey and the impact of the ongoing crisis in Myanmar'. It also cites the highly gendered nature of migration in the region and the protection deficits.



The MMC is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Amman, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

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