

MMC Asia

QUARTER 2 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, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Thailand. 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 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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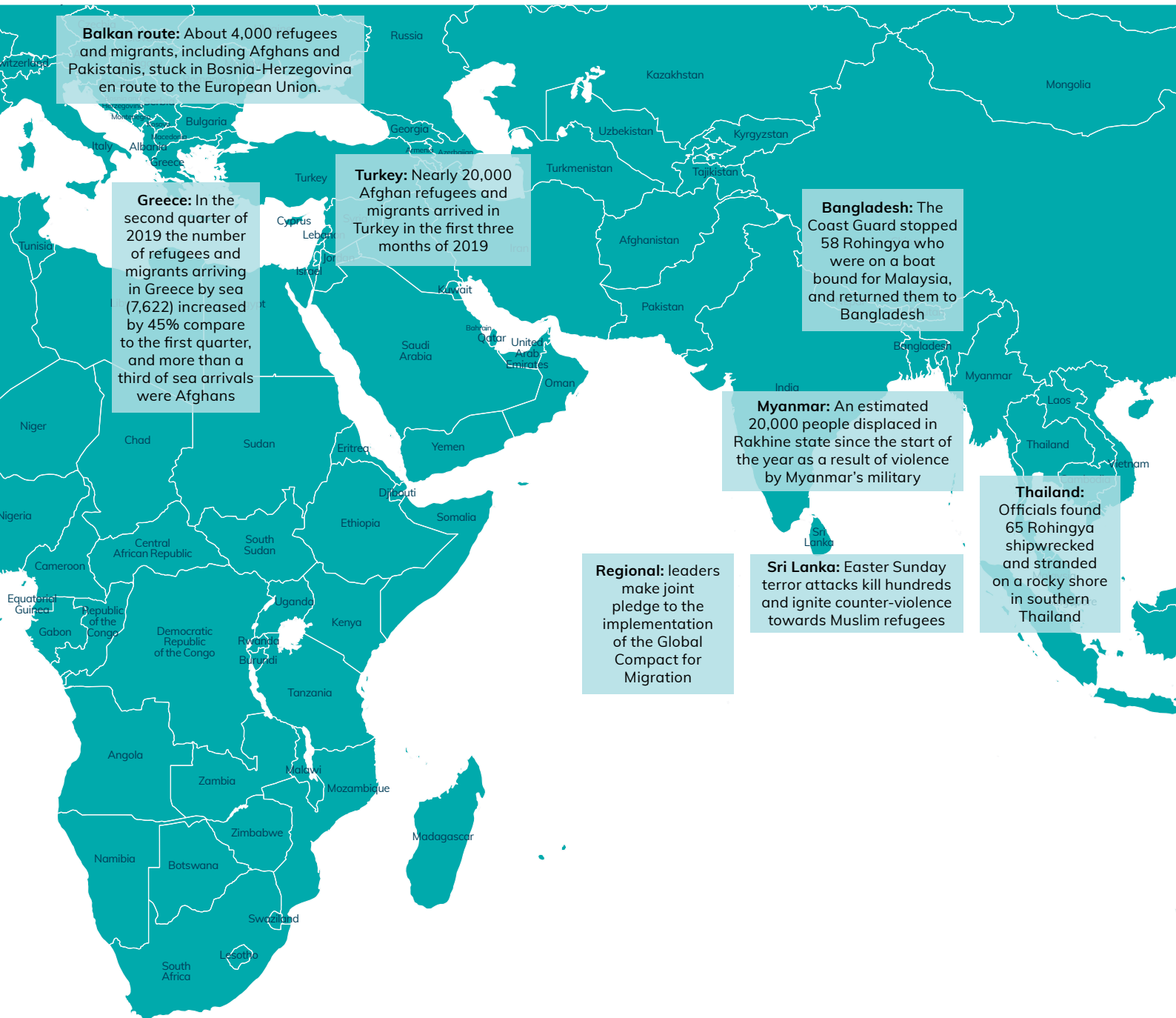
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Quarter 2 - 2019

Key Updates

- **Terror attacks in Sri Lanka:** In the weeks since the Easter Sunday suicide bombings, Pakistani and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers have been driven from their homes by locals, who accuse them of being connected to terrorist groups. They have sought shelter in mosques and police stations near the capital Colombo.
- **Violence intensifies again in Myanmar:** War crimes and other human rights violations against civilians committed by Myanmar's military in the first five months of this year led an estimated 20,000 people to flee from their homes in Rakhine state, with many now staying in informal settlements, according to international civil society organizations.
- **Rohingyas fleeing by sea:** The Bangladeshi Coast Guard stopped 58 Rohingyas who were on a Malaysia-bound fishing boat from making the potentially dangerous sea journey, and returned them to Bangladesh. Thai officials found 65 Rohingyas shipwrecked and stranded on a rocky shore of a small island in southern Thailand.
- **Greek Islands overwhelmed:** The living conditions of 15,800 refugees and migrants – 42% of whom are Afghan – on the Greek Aegean islands are deteriorating and have been described as inhumane and dangerously irresponsible.
- **Regional pledge to the GCM:** Participants in a regional, multi-stakeholder consultation on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), which took place early May in Dhaka, agreed on a joint pledge to promote the implementation of the GCM.

Regional Overview



Mixed Migration Regional Updates

Mixed migration from Asia to Europe

Greek refugee camps overcrowded; conditions inhumane

For people on mixed migration flows from Asia to Western Europe, Greece is often a stop on the way. But since [the European Union's deal with Turkey](#), thousands of refugees and migrants who had hoped to continue to Western Europe have been stopped on the Greek islands. As of the end of May, [15,800 people were in island-based refugee camps](#) that were designed to hold less than 9,000. About a third of all irregular sea arrivals in Greece during the first five months of 2019 [were from Afghanistan](#), and overall 42% of the current refugee and migrant population on the Aegean islands [are Afghans](#). The total number of sea arrivals in Greece [increased](#) in the second quarter of this year by 45% compared to the first quarter, but decreased by 9% compared to the second quarter of 2018.

The living conditions in refugee camps on the Greek islands are “[a scar on the conscience of Europe](#)” according to Amnesty International, and have been described by other civil society organisations as [inhumane, degrading](#), and [irresponsible](#). A [letter by 25 European civil society organizations](#) published on the third anniversary of the EU-Turkey deal stated that the situation on the islands is a result of an EU policy that traps asylum seekers in Greece rather than hosting them on the European mainland, where better facilities are more widely available.

Tensions rising along Balkan route

For refugees and migrants from Asia that move beyond Greece, the most common way to Western Europe is the Balkan route, where border security [is on the rise](#). People trying to cross from Greece to North Macedonia, from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Croatia, or [from Serbia to Hungary](#) are [often violently pushed back](#). About 10,000 irregular migrants are stuck in the Western Balkans according to [an IOM report](#), including almost 4,000 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the shelters are overcrowded and local authorities [impose nightly curfews](#). In May, Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, [launched](#) its first full operation outside the European Union, deploying 50 officers with 16 patrol cars to support Albania in border control and tackling cross-border crime. Frontex officers will support Albanian authorities with border surveillance and will assist in determining the nationalities of people trying to enter the country.

Bangladeshis stranded at sea – repatriated or deported?

More than 30 Bangladeshis who tried to reach Europe by sea and [were trapped on a boat](#) in the Mediterranean for nearly three weeks, have been returned to Bangladesh. The IOM, which [provided air tickets](#) for the repatriated individuals, said the Bangladeshis wished to return home and were not deported. But relatives and local aid groups [claimed](#) that people on the stranded boat were told they would be denied food or water if they did not agree to voluntary return.

Mixed migration within South East Asia region

The ripple effects of Easter Sunday terror attacks in Sri Lanka

The Easter Sunday [terror attacks](#), which killed at least 253 people and injured some 500 at churches and hotels across Sri Lanka, have been linked to the Islamic State group. In the weeks following the attacks, refugees and asylum seekers, mostly from Pakistan and some from Afghanistan, were [driven from their homes](#) by members of local communities, who accused them of being connected to terrorist groups. Around 1,000 of these refugees and asylum seekers have sought shelter in mosques and police stations near the capital Colombo.

Increase in attempts to reach Australia; Christmas Island reopened

On 23 May, a boat carrying 41 Sri Lankans was identified by Australian air force surveillance and [intercepted](#) by Sri Lanka's navy. According to the Australian government, as many as six boats carrying asylum seekers have [recently attempted to reach Australian shores](#), including one that was [intercepted](#) at the end of May, en route from Sri Lanka. The 20 Sri Lankan asylum seekers on board that boat were held for a few days at the detention facility on Christmas Island, and then flown back to Colombo. It was the first time in five years that asylum seekers attempting to reach Australia by sea have been taken to the Christmas Island detention facility, which was [reopened in February](#). In the detention facility in Manus, an island in Papua New Guinea, there have been [a series of suicide attempts](#) and [acts of self-harm](#) by asylum seekers since the 18 May Australian federal election, which was won by a party campaigning on hardline policies to deter asylum seekers. The Australian government announced it is temporarily retaining Paladin – the [controversial company](#) that operates services on Manus Island – and that in the near future the government of [Papua New Guinea](#) will take over responsibilities of handling contracts of service providers in the detention facility.

Thousands more displaced by intensified fighting in Myanmar

Many of the estimated 20,000 civilians who [have been displaced](#) from their homes in Rakhine state in recent months are now staying in informal settlements. The number of people who fled Myanmar to Bangladesh since August 2017 has [surpassed 741,900](#). A report by Amnesty International [published](#) at the end of May documented war crimes and other human rights violations committed by Myanmar's military since January 2019. In April, the UN human rights office [condemned](#) the military's [ongoing attacks against civilians](#) in Rakhine State, and urged the international community to cut off all financial and other support to Myanmar's military. A [statement by the chairman of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations](#), released following the ASEAN summit held 23 June in Bangkok, supported repatriation of Rohingya, and stopped short of condemning Myanmar. Malaysia's foreign minister [said at the summit](#) the perpetrators of massacres and atrocities against the Rohingya must be brought to justice and that repatriated Rohingya should also be granted citizenship.

Movement for the Rohingya population in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, authorities have recently completed registration of more than 270,000 stateless Rohingya refugees. The registration, which is still ongoing, is done using biometric data, fingerprints and iris scans, and results in refugees being provided a unique identity card that includes a photo, and basic information such as date of birth and gender. [According to UNHCR](#), the registration safeguards the right to return home to Myanmar in the future and makes it possible to more effectively respond to their current needs, but some Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh [fear](#) this collection of data may be [used against them](#).

In May, the Bangladeshi government [announced](#) a national plan to combat human trafficking by dismantling the networks that facilitate it. Through these networks, impoverished people who seek economic opportunities outside Bangladesh are lured under false pretences into exploitative situations such as forced labour. Human trafficking is an ever-present threat to Bangladeshis as well as to nearly a million Rohingya refugees.

On 30 June, the coast guard of Bangladesh [stopped 58 Rohingya](#) who were on board a fishing boat to Malaysia and returned them to Bangladesh. Thousands of other Rohingya refugees have attempted to move on from Bangladesh in pursuit of better opportunities [in Malaysia and Thailand](#) and [in India](#).

Regional stakeholders pledge to promote the GCM

On 4 May, the Bangladeshi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IOM, and International Labour Organization (ILO) organized a regional, [multi-stakeholder consultation](#) on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The consultation ended with [a joint pledge](#) by the participants to take actions to promote and encourage the implementation of the GCM. The recommendations adopted include increasing the capacity and resources (human and financial) of consular services, such as shelters, counselling, legal aid, and access to health services; allowing migrants whose legal status is undecided to access the labour market; and introducing health insurance facilities for all migrants.

Thousands of Thais working illegally in South Korea

Lured by higher wages, tens of thousands of Thai people have travelled to South Korea to work in manual jobs at farms and factories. The Thai labour ministry [said in April](#) that of the 165,000 Thais who live in South Korea, more than 143,000 are illegal workers. The Thai ministry [encouraged](#) Thai workers to go and work abroad but to do so in a regulated way, and has been [cooperating with the Korean Workers' Union](#) to improve the well being and working conditions of Thais in Korea.

Thematic focus: International efforts to return Afghan refugees and migrants

A third of Afghans have migrated or have been displaced

There are currently 2.7 million Afghan refugees [worldwide](#), 95% of whom are in Iran and Pakistan, and 5% in Turkey and Europe. Turkey was home to an [estimated 145,000 Afghans as of April 2018](#), but over the past year Turkish authorities have reported a surge in the arrival of people from Afghanistan, including [nearly 20,000 in the first three months of 2019](#). Afghans were the [second largest group](#) among asylum seekers arriving in the European Union in 2018, with 12,290 applications registered, and about a third of them went to Germany. Overall, in the past six years, one in three Afghans has migrated or been displaced, according to a new Displacement Tracking Matrix [report](#).

Growing pressure to return Afghans

On 17 June, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UNHCR met in Islamabad to discuss “Afghan refugees’ challenges”. At the meeting, Iran's Deputy Interior Minister for Security Affairs [called](#) for the implementation of the measures necessary to help Afghan refugees return to their home country. Representatives of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UNHCR [agreed](#) on a 12-point joint declaration on safe and honourable repatriation of Afghan refugees.

European states have openly promoted increasing returns to Afghanistan, [according to the European Council on Refugees and Exiles](#). Afghans whose asylum applications have been rejected by a European Union member state can be returned to Afghanistan based on [a 2016 agreement](#) between the EU and the Afghan government. Since that agreement, Germany has [deported](#) 589 Afghans, with the number of deportees [doubling](#) between 2017 and 2018. In June this year, the German government [decided](#) to continue allowing these deportations and [approved new legislation](#) that makes it easier for authorities to deport rejected asylum seekers, including Afghans. Sweden has been [deporting some rejected asylum applicants back to Afghanistan](#). Non-EU members like [Norway](#) and [Switzerland](#) have also been deporting Afghans, and in May, the Turkish Interior Minister [announced](#) that about half of the 41,192 Afghans who arrived irregularly in Turkey during the first five months of 2019 have been returned.

Since 2012, about 3.2 million Afghan migrants and refugees have returned from abroad, with the vast majority (95%) returned from Iran and Pakistan, according to the IOM's DTM [report](#). In the past five months alone, as many as 185,000 Afghans voluntarily returned from Iran, [according to Afghanistan's Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations](#). The IOM [projects](#) that in 2019 over 570,000 undocumented Afghans will return from Iran and 50,000 will return from Pakistan. These projections appear to be realistic, given that in the first six months of this year, 235,170 Afghans [were returned from Iran and Pakistan](#).

Is it safe for Afghans to return home?

In the latest edition of the annual [Global Peace Index](#), which ranks 163 states and territories based on their level of peacefulness, Afghanistan was ranked the least peaceful country in the world. In 2018, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan [documented](#) the highest ever total of civilian deaths, and more than 360,000 internally displaced as a result of the violence. At least 58 civilians were killed in attacks by the Taliban in Afghanistan between 28 June and 4 July – the highest [weekly death toll](#) of 2019.

Afghanistan is not on the [Safe Country of Origin list](#) of any EU member state, but the German government has [declared](#) some parts of the country are safe, to justify deportations. The UNHCR in Germany has [said](#) that returning people to Afghanistan is currently unrealistic because the security situation throughout the country has worsened, including in the capital Kabul. UNHCR does not in principle reject deportations to Afghanistan, but has suggested that due to constant terror attacks and human rights abuses in the country, returns of Afghans should happen only in exceptional cases.

Afghan returnees have widespread economic, social, and psychosocial needs

A [Mixed Migration Centre report](#) has found that Afghan and international efforts to support returnees often lack resources and insight to adequately address the widespread economic, social and psychosocial needs of returnees, hindering their reintegration in the Afghan society. Beyond the ongoing violence, returnees' chances of securing a peaceful existence are further hampered by the country's economic challenges; Afghanistan has the highest [unemployment rate worldwide](#) and is currently [suffering from the worst drought in decades](#).

Highlighted new research & reports



[The Rohingya Survey](#)

Xchange | 2019

Four Rohingya refugees administered a questionnaire to 1,455 Rohingya adults in the refugee settlements of Cox's Bazaar over a three-week period in March and April. Among other issues, [the questionnaire](#) explores living conditions, the refugees' future plans, and their trust in officials and in civil society organisations. Nearly all respondents agreed there were enough education opportunities for Rohingya children below the age of 12, but the majority of respondents were unsatisfied with the job opportunities available to them and their family income. About 98% of respondents refused to consider relocating to Bhasan Char (a tiny island to which the Bangladeshi government [plans to move Rohingya](#)) for two main reasons: safety fears, and not wanting to move further away from Myanmar.

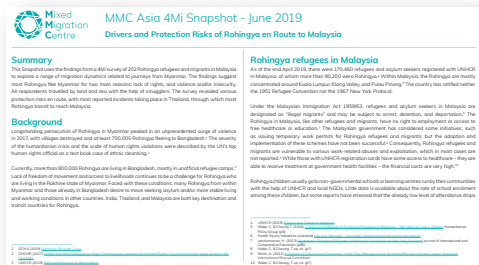


[Economic Impact of Granting Refugees in Malaysia the Right to Work](#)

Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs | April 2019

Over 160,000 refugees and asylum seekers are registered with UNHCR in Malaysia, with the majority coming from Myanmar. These people cannot be legally employed, but most are working in informal jobs, where they are at risk of exploitation. A report [published at end of April](#) concluded that granting refugees in Malaysia the right to work would create over 4,000 jobs for Malaysians. The report's authors estimate that if refugees could legally work their annual tax contribution would increase to over RM50 million (20m EUR) by 2024.

MMC publications

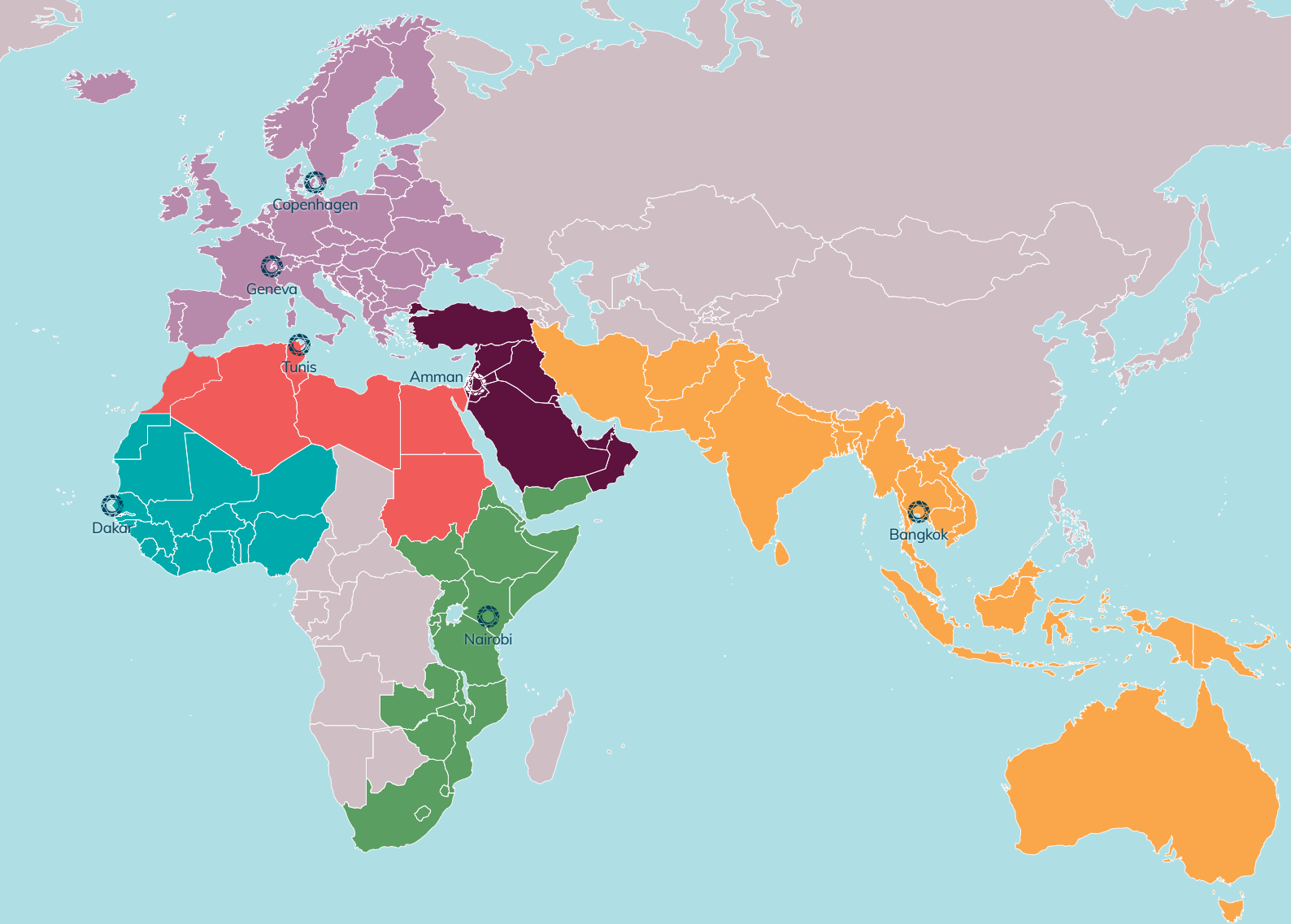


Drivers and Protection Risks en Route of Rohingya to Malaysia

Mixed Migration Centre | June 2019

Findings from a 4Mi survey of 202 Rohingya refugees and migrants in Malaysia suggest most Rohingya flee Myanmar for two main reasons: lack of rights, and violence and/or insecurity.

The survey revealed various protection risks en route, with most reported incidents taking place in Thailand, through which most Rohingya transit to reach Malaysia.



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.

For more information visit:

mixedmigration.org and follow us at [@Mixed_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

