

MMC Asia

QUARTER 3 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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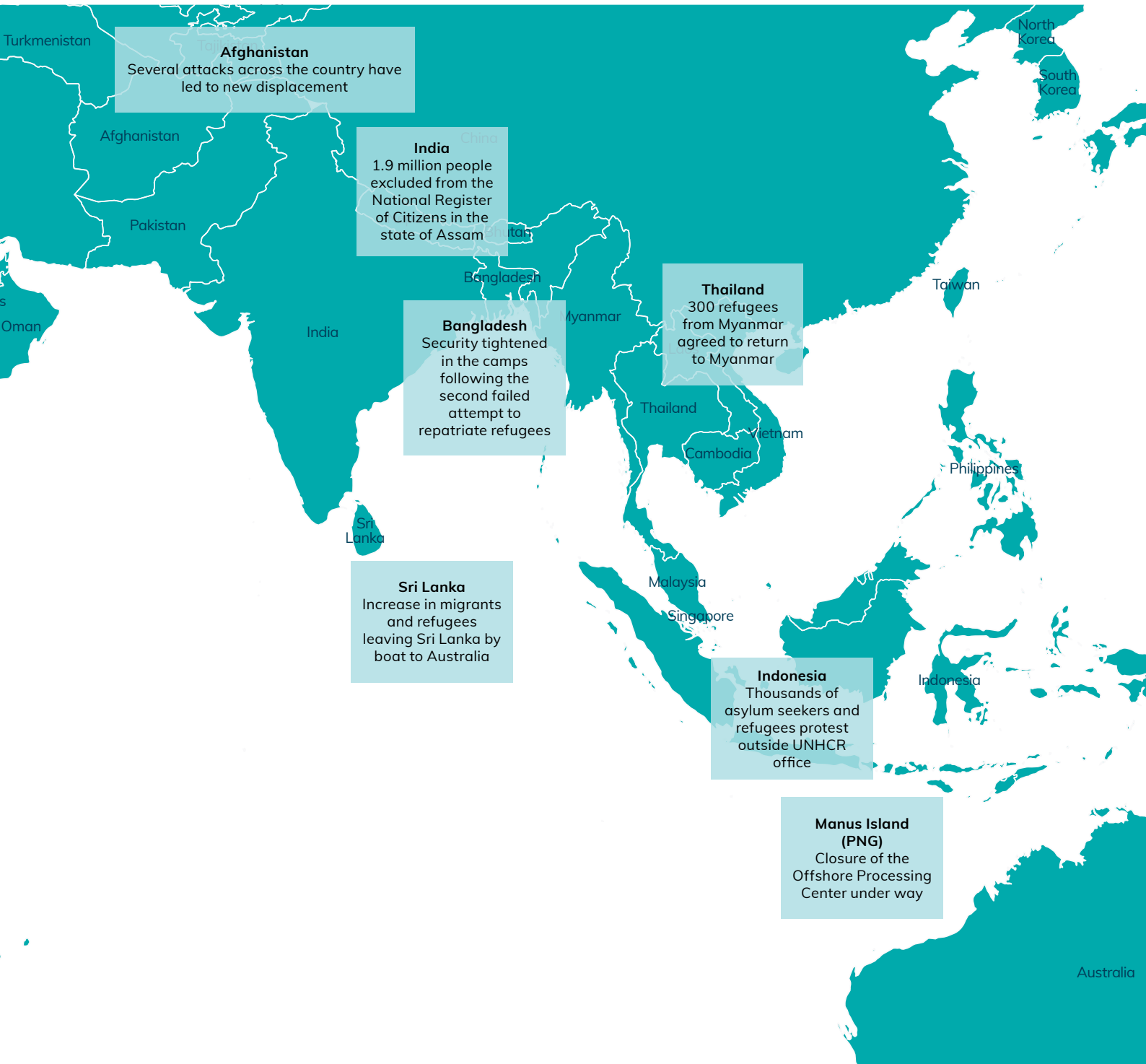
Quarterly Mixed Migration Update Asia

Quarter 3 - 2019

Key Updates

- **Second failed attempt to repatriate Rohingya from Bangladesh:** The second attempt to repatriate Rohingya from Bangladesh failed as the concerned persons refused to return under the current conditions.
- **Increased pressure over the government of Myanmar:** the International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar closed and handed over its report containing evidence of serious crimes under international law to the new UN Human Rights Council mechanism, the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.
- **India excludes almost 2 million people from its list of citizens:** Around 1.9 million people were left off a list of citizens released by the authorities in the state of Assam; as “foreigners” they are now at risk of deportation and statelessness.
- **Protests in Indonesia:** thousands of asylum-seekers and refugees have been demonstrating outside UNHCR Offices in Jakarta against the lack of support and dwindling resettlement places
- **Maritime movements towards Australia:** several boats carrying migrants and refugees from Sri Lanka have been intercepted by the Australian authorities since January, including during this quarter.
- **Closure of the Offshore Processing Centre in Nauru:** talks are under way to close the Offshore Processing Centre in Manus and find resettlement options for those who have been found in need of international protection.

Regional Overview



Mixed migration from Asia towards Europe

Continued mixed migration of Afghans to Iran, Turkey, Greece and further to EU

Iran, based on 4Mi data, is still the main destination for Afghans who leave the country. Most of the journeys to Iran are irregular, via smuggling networks, and for economic purposes. However, the percentage of respondents who mentioned Iran as their main destination in the third quarter of 2019 (42%) has fallen compared to the same period last year (54%); this may be partly due to [the renewed US sanctions on Iran](#), which sent its currency into freefall and boosted inflation, limiting employment opportunities and increasing the cost of living for Afghans. Considering the dim economic prospects in Afghanistan, dramatic expected growth in the country's population, and an average of [400,000 new entrants to the labor market](#) each year, these labor movements to Iran, as well as to Pakistan and Gulf states, are a significant contribution to survival and poverty alleviation in Afghanistan. According to [World Bank estimations](#), remittances to Afghanistan increased from US \$17.6 million in 2008 to US \$668.7 million in 2017. Of course, these figures underestimate the true remittance flows due to the prevalent use of informal Hawala money transfer system among Afghans for the purpose of cross-border value transfer.

In Greece, since 2018, Afghans have overtaken Syrians as the largest national group arriving from Turkey. Between January 2019 and 24 September, 41,615 refugees and migrants [arrived](#) in Greece by land and sea: 39% of sea arrivals were from Afghanistan. On 29 August, [546 people](#), mostly Afghans, arrived on 13 boats on Lesbos island together in one day. The number of refugees on the Aegean Islands has reached its highest since 2016, resulting in a drastic deterioration of conditions. A report by [Amnesty International](#) on the death of a 15-year-old Afghan in August, in the 'safe zone' of the Moria camp, highlighted the gravity of the situation for children in Moria. In the last week of September, a [fire broke out at Moria camp](#), in which one child and one woman reportedly died, triggering protests by angry refugees and asylum seekers within the camp.

Mixed migration within Asia

Bangladesh: two years on and no solution in sight

The large number of Rohingya seeking refuge in Bangladesh remains by far the main humanitarian challenge in the Asia-Pacific region. Movement through the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh continued throughout 2019, albeit at a slow pace. As of 15 September 2019, there were [913,981 Rohingya](#) from Myanmar in Bangladesh.

Although the Bangladeshi government and the international community have made great efforts towards providing for the basic needs of the Rohingya in Bangladesh, conditions in camps remain challenging. In August 2019, [NGOs released a statement](#) expressing concern regarding conditions in camps and reiterating the need for an enabling environment where the Rohingya have access to livelihoods, education and protection on both sides of the Bangladesh/Myanmar border.

In August 2019, a second attempt to begin repatriation with a group of 3,450 Rohingya [failed](#) as [not a single refugee](#) seems to have agreed to return to Rakhine State for [fear that their safety would not be guaranteed](#). The government of Bangladesh has confirmed that it will [not return](#) Rohingya to Myanmar against their will. The failed repatriation efforts coincided with the [second anniversary of the 2017 crackdown](#) in Rakhine that led to the displacement of more than 740,000 people. A [gathering](#) of tens of thousands of Rohingya was organized at the Kutupalong camp on the 25th of August to mark this anniversary.

Citing state security and public safety concerns, the government of Bangladesh has tighten security measures in the camps between June and September, asking operators to [shut down mobile phone services](#) and [banning some NGOs](#) from working in the camps. It has been said also that the government intended to erect [barbed-wire](#) fencing around the camps to limit the movements of people and limit the expansion of camps.

In September, the Bangladeshi government doubled down on [its intention to relocate 100,000 refugees](#) to an island in Bay of Bengal – known as Bhasan Char, or the “floating island” – where it has built a facility for this purpose. International and non-governmental organizations have expressed [significant reservations](#) regarding living conditions on the island, including severe limitations to freedom of movement, and the fact that it seems to be particularly prone to cyclone.

Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea: small-scale resumption of maritime movements

According to a new report published by UNHCR, at least [1,597 migrants and refugees took the sea](#) across the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea between January 2018 and June 2019 – 762 persons in 2018 and 835 between January and June 2019. This represents a small-scale resumption of such movements after a two-year interruption in 2016 and 2017.

India: 2 million people at risk of statelessness and forced deportation

In August 2019, the Indian government published the updated National Register of Citizens (NRC) for the state of Assam, which does not contain the names of many people who came to India from Bangladesh before Bangladesh declared independence in 1971. Concerns have been expressed that some [1.9 million residents of Assam will be considered as “foreigners” and as such potentially subject to deportation](#). According to some reports, [India started to build large immigration detention centres](#) in Assam shortly after the release of the NRC. Bangladesh is unlikely to accept the residents not included in the register, leaving many people at risk of [statelessness](#).

India: the deportation of Rohingya challenged in the Supreme Court

Since October 2018, there have been several instances of [Rohingya being deported to Myanmar](#), including people registered as asylum seekers by UNHCR. The deportations have been condemned by [human rights experts](#) as contravening international law and have caused a large number of Rohingya to leave India and [return to Bangladesh](#) for fear of deportation to Myanmar. The plan to deport the Rohingya to Myanmar has been [challenged in the Supreme Court](#) on the basis that the 40,000 Rohingyas have been registered and recognized by UNHCR as refugees.

Indonesia: protests as asylum seekers are left in limbo

Since late June 2019, thousands of asylum seekers and refugees [have held protests](#) in front of UNHCR's offices in cities such as Jakarta, Makassar, Tanjung Pinang, Batam and Surabaya. Demonstrators denounced in particular a lack of support that has left them destitute since Australia's decision in March 2018 to [cut funding to the International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#) to support new arrivals in Indonesia, as well as the [lack of resettlement opportunities](#) since Australia's freeze on resettlement out of the country in 2014. Of the 14,000 asylum seekers and refugees registered by UNHCR in the country, [an estimated 5,000 are without any support](#).

Malaysia: criticism for returning a Turkish asylum-seeker and his family

There have been reports that the Malaysian authorities [returned a Turkish asylum seeker](#) and his family to Turkey in August 2019 despite the fact that they were registered by UNHCR. The authorities justified the return by arguing that the concerned person “[was involved](#)” in terrorism. The move prompted significant criticism from civil society organizations calling for Malaysia to respect the principle of non-refoulement.

Malaysia: more could be done to help the Rohingya in Malaysia

On the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2019, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir Mohammad, [condemned](#) the “genocide” perpetrated by the Myanmar authorities against the Rohingya and [pledged](#) to continue to help the Rohingya in Malaysia. It has also been reported that Malaysia was preparing a [strategic paper](#) to determine the role the government could play to support the Rohingya. At the end of August 2019, there were [177,690 refugees and asylum seekers](#) registered by UNHCR in Malaysia, more than half of them Rohingya. A significant number of Rohingya are currently in Malaysia and are [not registered](#) by UNHCR.

Myanmar under increased international scrutiny

In July 2019 the Australian Strategic Policy Institute published satellite data analysis conducted by over parts of northern Rakhine State that were burned, damaged or destroyed in 2017. They found [minimal evidence](#) of preparation for the return of the Rohingya to Myanmar, raising significant concerns about the conditions that the Rohingya would face on returning to Myanmar.

In August, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar established by the Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2017 handed over its [report](#) containing evidence of serious crimes under international law to the [Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar](#) (IIMM), a new mechanism mandated by the HRC to follow up and prepare files for criminal prosecutions in relation to the 2017 crackdown. Among other things, the report found that the circumstances and context of the 25 August 2017 operations against the Rohingya “gave rise to an inference of genocidal intent”.

The Human Rights Council adopted a [resolution on the Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar](#) during its 42nd regular session held in Geneva in September 2019. The resolution *inter alia* “expresses grave concern at continuing reports of serious human rights violations and abuses in Myanmar, including against Rohingya Muslims and other minorities”; it urges Myanmar “to take concrete steps towards the creation of a conducive environment for the voluntary safe, dignified and sustainable return of the forcibly displaced Rohingya residing in Bangladesh”; and encourages the international community “to continue to assist Bangladesh in the provision of humanitarian assistance to forcibly displaced Rohingya Muslims and other minorities until their return to their places of origin in Myanmar”. Only the Philippines and China [voted against](#) the resolution.

Thailand: limited returns to Myanmar from the refugee camps

Not much progress has been done regarding the repatriation of Burmese refugees from the camps at the border with Myanmar. In July 2019, UNHCR announced that around [300 Myanmar refugees](#) among the [93,500](#) who have been living in nine camps– or “temporary shelters” –along the Myanmar border for decades agreed to return to southeast Myanmar under UNHCR-facilitated return process. Between 2016 and February 2019, only [700 refugees](#) had returned to Myanmar despite concerns about the [drastic reduction of humanitarian aid](#) in the camps. Considering the low rate of formal returns, discussions are ongoing between UNHCR, the Royal Thai Government and other stakeholders regarding [local solutions](#) within Thailand.

Singapore accused of returning members of the Arakan Army to Myanmar

On 18 July 2019, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Sanghee Lee, made a [statement](#) following the end of her mission to Thailand and Malaysia in which she expressed concerns regarding the deportation by Singapore of six Myanmar nationals suspected of having supported the Arakan Army, potentially in breach of the principle of non-refoulement under international customary law. The concerned persons were allegedly arrested upon their return to Myanmar.

Thailand reports an increase in rescued victims of trafficking

According to data released by the Thai anti-trafficking division in July 2019, Thai police had rescued [974 victims of trafficking](#) during the first semester of the year, a significant increase compared with 622 people in 2018. Most of the concerned persons were found while being transported to the border with Myanmar, where demand for cheap labor is high. It is not clear, however, if all of them were indeed victims of trafficking [or if they were being smuggled](#) to Malaysia.

Thematic focus: Australian migration policy with regard to sea arrivals showing further cracks

In July 2019, the Australian policy of sending and incarcerating asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru in an effort to “stop the boats” hit the six-year mark. On 20 July, [demonstrations](#) took place across Australia to protest against this policy. During those six years, more than [3,000 people](#) have been transferred to these islands and an estimated [9 billion USD](#) have been spent by Australia to keep these facilities functioning. Yet, there are increasing signs that this policy is falling apart.

Dismantling of the Offshore Processing Centre in Manus

Over the past several years the Australian government has inflicted significant harm on asylum seekers and refugee children in its offshore detention centres. Against this backdrop, there have been discussions recently between Australia and Papua New Guinea regarding [the closure of the Regional Processing Centre](#) on Manus Island. As of August 2019, [460 migrants and refugees](#) were still in Papua New Guinea: 343 refugees and 117 found not to be in need of international protection. Most of them have been moved from Manus Island to the capital Port Moresby.

Both governments have been working to secure third countries for resettlement for the refugees from Manus, with a majority of people going to the US. As of June 2019, 580 people had been [resettled in the US](#) from Australian offshore detention on Manus and Nauru. Yet, while the US had pledged to resettle up to 1,250 refugees from Australia offshore detention as part of a [controversial deal](#) with Australia, the US government [might not live up to its commitments](#). A six-year-old proposal by New Zealand to resettle 150 refugees have so far been ruled out by the Australian government for fear that it would have a “[magnet effect](#)” and lead to an increase in arrivals. [Canada](#) may also be an option for some of the concerned persons under the private sponsorship of refugees program. For their part, the asylum seekers who have been found not to be in need of international protection are most likely going to be [returned to their countries of origin](#).

Increase in the number of migrants and refugees from Sri Lanka heading to Australia

Despite Australian policies and the military-led response Operation Sovereign Borders, aimed at dissuading people from trying to reach Australia by boat, movements have not totally ceased. Australian authorities have intercepted at least [13 boats from Sri Lanka](#) attempting to reach Australia to seek asylum between the beginning of 2018 and August 2019.

While the Australian government remains generally silent on such issues, the release of information regarding maritime movements of migrants and refugees has been interpreted as further evidence that the “stop the boats” policy has not been [effective](#). It has also been said that government communications regarding the “[real threat](#)” of an increase in boats from Sri Lanka was an attempt to [sway public opinion](#) following opposition to the relocation in August of a Tamil asylum-seeker whose asylum claim was rejected and his family moved to Christmas Island, where a [detention centre reopened](#) earlier this year, pending their deportation to Sri Lanka.

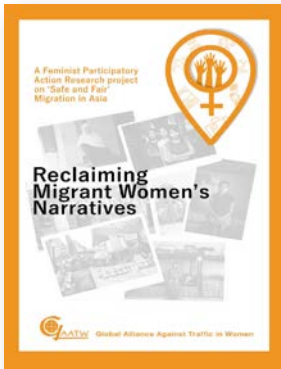
Against this backdrop, [a new bill was proposed](#) in August to prevent asylum seekers who arrived by boat – in particular the thousands of people who were taken to offshore processing since July 2013 – from ever settling in Australia.

Official figures show that there are more arrivals of asylum seekers by plane than by boats

In July 2019, it was announced that the number of protection visa applications made by people who arrived regularly in Australia by plane had [increased over the past years](#) from 9,554 in 2015-2016 to 28,000 in 2017-2018 to reach a total of 81,596 between July 2014 and January 2019. This is much higher than the number of people attempting to reach Australia by boat – [44,581 persons](#) between July 2013 and June 2014 according to the government, thus raising questions regarding the legitimacy and effectiveness of Australia’s operation Sovereign Borders.

The majority of applications have been made by people coming from [China, Malaysia and India](#). While most applications are eventually dismissed, the whole process takes some three years, during which applicants can remain on Australian territory and have full work rights. The number of Malaysian citizens applying for asylum in Australia rose from about 3,500 in 2015-2016 to [9,300](#) in 2017-2018. In July 2019, it was revealed that 1,779 Malaysians had their Australian immigration visas cancelled in an attempt by the Australian authorities to tackle what they call an “[orchestrated scam](#)”.

Highlighted New Research & Reports



Reclaiming migrant women's narratives

The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women | September 2019

A women-centred research, based on focus group discussions and interviews with female migrants in nine Asian countries (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Nepal, Lebanon, Cambodia, Kuwait and Jordan), concluded this quarter. This report presents the study's findings on issues such as migration drivers and push factors, the gendered division of labour and risks of informal work, and the impact of immigration policies. Through the experience of female migrants across different work sectors and countries, the report identifies how the shift of breadwinner role to women is increasing the burden on women, but at the same time, the social stigma and patriarchal limitations on women's freedoms are not keeping pace with this change.



How the Afghan peace process and emotional well-being impact migration decision-making

Seefar | September 2019

This report presents the findings of the fourth stage of a longitudinal study into the dynamics of 240 Afghans intending to irregularly migrate to Europe. It offers insights on how individual experiences and migration decision-making unfold over time in the Afghan context, where potential migrants face long-standing structural challenges and rapidly changing geo-political circumstances. The report also examines key sources of influence and information that are shaping Afghans' irregular migration journeys, as well as external and individual-level factors that influence migration decisions of Afghans planning to irregularly migrate to Europe and those who have abandoned their plans.



Report of the Independent International Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar

Human Rights Council | August 2019

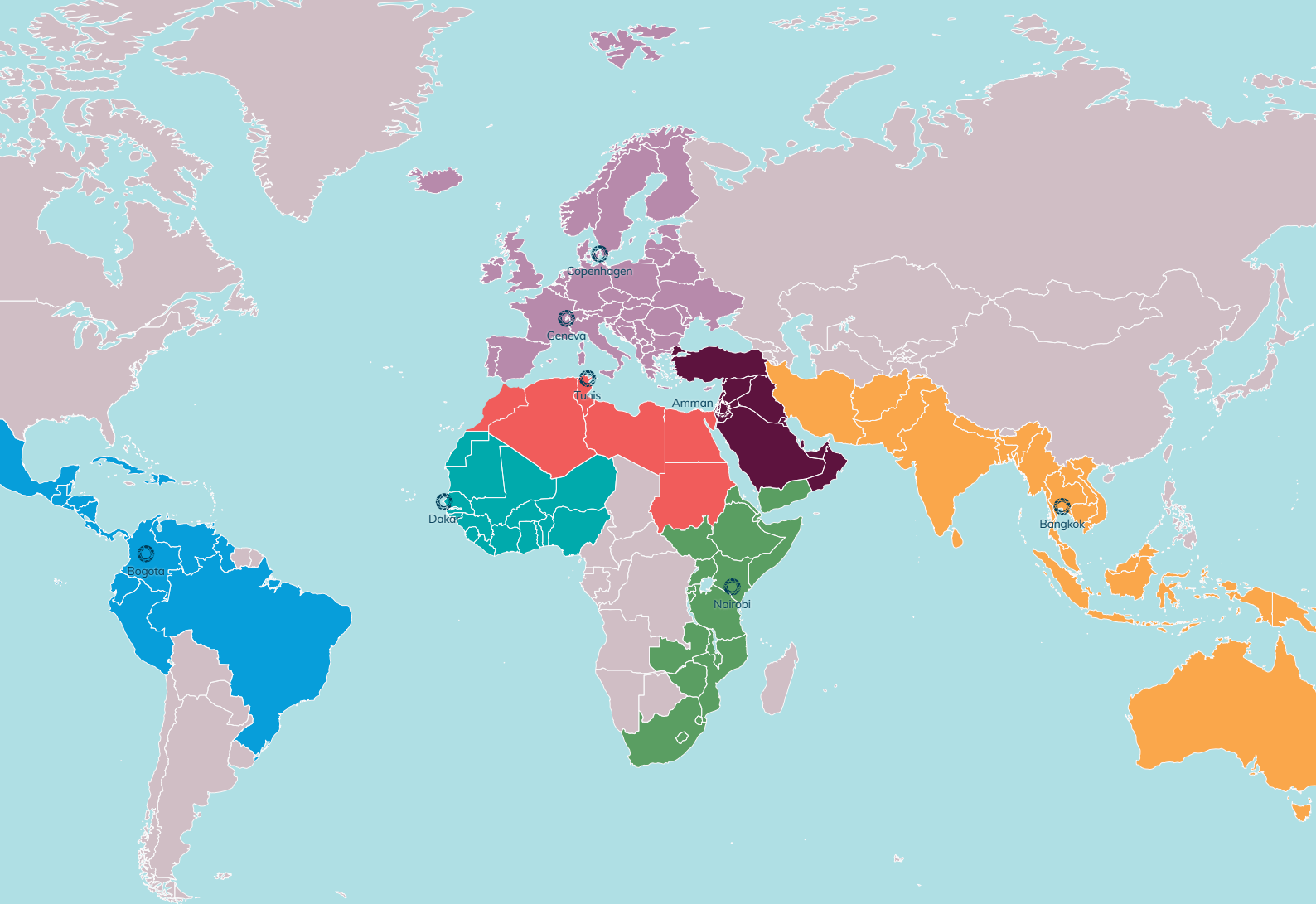
The report contains the findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar since its previous report (A/HRC/39/64). The mission provides an overview of its activities and the consolidation of its findings with a view to its handover to the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar. It details its findings on conflict-related human rights developments in Rakhine, Chin, Shan and Kachin States, and also provides an update on the situation of the Rohingya. The mission concludes the report with its assessment of the situation of impunity and accountability, and a road map and recommendations for the way forward beyond the mandate of the mission.



Refugee movements in south-east Asia 2018 – June 2019

UNHCR | October 2019

This report presents the trends of refugee movements in South-East Asia observed by UNHCR between January 2018 and June 2019, highlighting the serious risks taken by people to cross international borders through irregular pathways.



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)

