

MMC Asia

QUARTER 2 2021



Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers Southern and Southeast Asia. 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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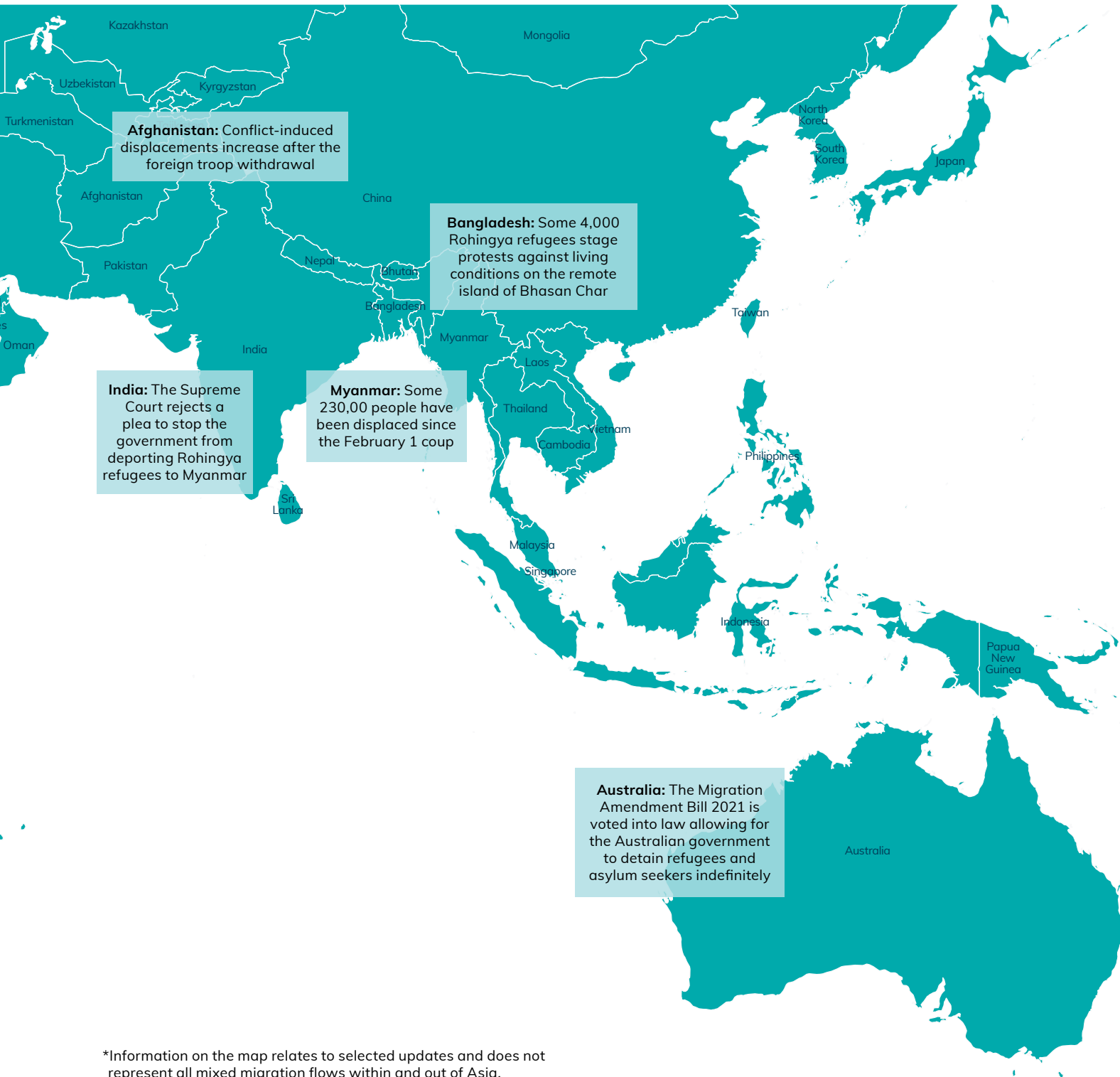
Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia

Quarter 2 - 2021

Key Updates

- **COVID-19 restrictions cast continued uncertainty over labor migration from South Asian countries:** As the deadly surge of COVID-19 caused by the Delta variant [sweeps across South Asia](#), labor migration grinds to a halt. The future of those who were [forced to return home](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic also remains uncertain.
- **Refugees and migrants across the region struggle to access COVID-19 vaccines:** Limited vaccine supplies coupled with [large increases in COVID-19 cases](#) have resulted in many Asian countries [locking out marginalized groups](#), including refugees and migrants from accessing the vaccine.
- **Climate change triggers displacement and migration across the region:** This quarter saw large-scale displacement across the region as a result of climate change-induced natural disasters including in [Indonesia, Timor-Leste](#), and [India](#). Meanwhile, drought continues to significantly affect many in [Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan](#).
- **Rising mental health concerns continue for refugees and migrants across the region:** Concerns for the mental health wellbeing of refugees, people seeking asylum, and migrants continue in [Australia](#) and [Singapore](#).
- **Cross-border migration from Myanmar to Thailand and India continues, fueled by the military coup:** Myanmar civilians, including those defecting from the security forces, continue attempting to find safety in [Thailand](#) and [India](#), sparking warnings that mass migration movements could quickly unfold.
- **A perfect storm for continued crisis in Afghanistan:** Intensified violence, conflict, the [pandemic](#), and economic depression are exacerbating existing humanitarian and migration crises in Afghanistan.

Regional Overview*



Mixed Migration Regional Updates

COVID-19 restrictions cast continued uncertainty over labor migration mobility from South Asian countries

As the deadly surge of COVID-19 continues to [sweep across South Asia](#), labor migration from the region has ground to a halt. This has impacted the future migration plans for a large number of labor migrants who were recently [forced to return home](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel bans preventing South Asian nationals from entering major labor receiving countries such as [Thailand](#), [Malaysia](#), [Singapore](#), and the [UAE](#), have all but ceased labor migration movements, and negatively impacted the economic stability of labor exporting countries such as India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

This reduction in migration has reduced remittance flows to South Asian nations. A report by the World Bank documented that countries including India and Nepal witnessed [a drop in remittances](#) of 0.2% and 2% respectively in 2020 compared to the previous years. Remittances are predicted to further decrease in 2021 due to continued job losses for migrant workers. For instance, over the course of 2020 and into 2021, employment in jobs typically held by Nepali migrants declined by [30% in the UAE and Malaysia and 20% in Qatar and Saudi Arabia](#).

Meanwhile, social and economic reintegration for those forcibly returned remains a challenge. An estimated [half a million people](#) have returned to Nepal since the pandemic began with very limited access to reintegration support. With continued [government suspension of international flights](#), along with bans on labor migration in host countries, the opportunity for remigration is bleak.

Travel bans affecting South Asian migrant workers have also impacted labor receiving countries with labor shortages in sectors that have previously relied on South Asian migrant workers. In Singapore, for example, companies that have traditionally [relied on migrant workers](#) reported to expect project delays and disruptions due to labor shortages.

Refugees and migrants across the region struggle to access COVID-19 vaccines

As of 19 June 2021, [more than 2.4 million COVID-19 vaccine doses](#) have been administered in more than 100 countries. However, people in [irregular situations](#), including undocumented migrants and refugees, as well as those forcibly displaced, are at particular risk of exclusion from vaccination programs. According to IOM, as of May 2021, [at least 53 countries](#) are blocking access to vaccines for refugees and migrants. Meanwhile, in countries with more inclusive vaccination plans, [shorthanded health systems, red tape, or fear of arrest](#) also keep refugees and migrants on the outside.

With vaccines in short supply and a [large increase in COVID-19 cases across the Asian region](#), many countries have [locked out marginalized groups](#), including refugees and migrants from accessing vaccines. India, one of the world's main COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers, is among countries whose vaccination

programs exclude displaced people, refugees, and migrants. Its ongoing vaccination drive is only open to Indian citizens and those with any of the [11 identity documents](#) required by the government.

Meanwhile, India's coronavirus crisis has depleted COVAX stocks produced in the country. Bangladesh had been scheduled to receive nearly 11 million Indian produced AstraZeneca doses by the end of May. However, as a result of India's [export restrictions](#), the plan to launch the vaccinations in Cox's Bazar refugee camps covering [some 130,000 people in higher-risk groups](#) has been put on hold. On 1 June, UNHCR announced that ["not a single vaccine"](#) has been administered in Rohingya refugees amid the rising COVID transmission in the crowded camps.

Unlike India and Bangladesh, Pakistan has amended its plans to make COVID-19 vaccinations [more inclusive](#). Accordingly, by early May 2021, the [first refugees](#) were vaccinated in Pakistan as the government extended the same criteria applied to Pakistan's citizens to refugees.

Climate change triggered displacement and migration across the region

This quarter saw large-scale displacement across the region as a result of climate change-induced natural disasters. In April, tropical cyclone Seroja swept [Indonesia](#) and [Timor-Leste](#), displacing hundreds of thousands of people in both countries. Meanwhile, in India, on 17 May, more than 200,000 people were evacuated from their homes in Gujarat as the [most powerful cyclone](#) in more than two decades made landfall in the state. Mass displacement in these countries, coupled with COVID-19 infections, piles more pressure on the [already struggling populations](#). According to a report by ActionAid International, climate change could force some [63 million people](#) from their homes in South Asia alone by 2050.

However, with the increasing frequency of extreme weather across the region and COVID-19 related border controls, migration is no longer an easy adaptation option. For example, for a long time, rural Afghans have migrated to neighboring countries to [cope with the effects of drought on their livelihoods](#). [Enhanced border restrictions](#) to contain the COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for Afghan nationals to migrate to neighboring countries. Meanwhile, with dry weather, poor crop yields, and water shortages also hitting [Iran, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan](#), Afghan migrants in these countries are increasingly impacted alongside host communities and left with limited livelihoods options.

India continues plans to detain and deport Rohingya refugees

During this quarter, India continued to detain and deport Rohingya refugees. On April 8, India's Supreme Court [rejected a plea](#) to stop the government from deporting Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, despite ongoing fears of persecution and instability due to the coup. The decision paved the way for [some 170 Rohingya refugees detained in Kashmir's Jammu area](#) to be sent back to Myanmar

Simultaneously, there have been rising concerns about the living conditions of Rohingya refugees who remain in India including those in the community and detention facilities. In May, rapid testing carried out in a Jammu detention center showed that [53 refugees were positive](#) with COVID-19. Most of the refugees were detained for [not having "valid travel documents"](#) and are being held in crowded and unsanitary conditions.

There are an estimated 40,000 Rohingya refugees in India with the majority living in poor conditions with limited access to basic services. On 12 June, [a fire](#) broke out at a Rohingya refugee camp in southeast Delhi destroying the shelters of around 270 Rohingya people. Alongside this Rohingya refugees now face an [additional risk](#) of deportation back to Myanmar by India's Hindu nationalist government.

Continued concerns for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

On 24 May, Myanmar's de facto authority leader Min Aung Hlaing announced that the military will not ["go beyond" Myanmar's refugee laws](#) to accept refugees, casting doubt on the feasibility of returning hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to Myanmar. The statement came amid the continued deterioration of the situation for Rohingya refugees in both Cox's Bazar refugee camps and Bhasan Char Island.

This quarter on 2 April, a fire destroyed more than 20 shops near the camps, killing [at least three Rohingya](#) refugees. This tragic incident followed several fires which occurred last quarter, [killing 15 people and destroying thousands of homes](#). Besides the risks of fire, a [sharp rise in COVID-19 cases](#) has led Bangladesh to order a strict lockdown in five camps in Cox's Bazar, further limiting the freedom of movement of Rohingya refugees.

Against this backdrop, UNHCR's [Assistant High Commissioners visited Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char from 20 May to 2 June](#), to assess the situation of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The visit observed reduced humanitarian presence in the camps and associated protection risks, particularly for Rohingya women and children. Fears are also mounting that the [coming cyclone season](#) will only worsen the situation in the camps.

Meanwhile, in Bhasan Char, where [some 18,000 Rohingya refugees](#) have been relocated from Cox's Bazar since December 2020, reported violence against refugees continues. On 27 April, Human Rights Watch released a statement calling for an investigation of the alleged [beating and arbitrary detention](#) of Rohingya refugees by Bangladesh security forces in early April on the Island. The alleged violence against Rohingya refugees on Bhasan Char has been previously documented, with cases of arrest, [torture, and sexual assault](#). As a result, on 1 June, [some 4,000 Rohingya](#) refugees staged protests against their living conditions on the island. An international rights activist said police used [batons to disperse the protesters](#), leading to several being injured.

Rising mental health concerns for refugees and migrants across the region

This quarter, concerns about the mental health of refugees, people seeking asylum, and migrants continued across the region. In Australia, on 1 April, the Australian Medical Association submitted an [urgent call for action](#) to ensure that all asylum seekers and refugees are released from detention and receive appropriate mental health care. Also, in June, the University of South Australia published two studies, indicating that more training should be done for [frontline workers who support people of refugee backgrounds](#) to recognize and respond to signs of suicidal ideation.

Meanwhile, in Singapore where migrant workers account for well over 90% of 60,000 total COVID-19 cases, there is an urgent need for mental health support for [nearly 300,000 migrant workers](#) who have faced [significant anxiety and stress](#) during COVID-19. Some local NGOs such as HealthServe and the Migrant Workers' Centre are providing [counseling services to migrant workers](#) who have faced anxiety and worries in the country. Besides mental health support, the Minister of Manpower in Singapore also announced that it will continue facilitating migrants' access to [essential services](#).

New law allows Australia to detain refugees and people seeking asylum indefinitely

On 13 May, the Migration Amendment Bill 2021 was voted into law which will allow for the Australian government to [detain refugees and asylum seekers indefinitely](#) in cases where it cancels someone's visa but cannot send them back to their country of origin. The law also gives the government power to withdraw a person's refugee status, stripping them of international protection and putting them at risk of deportation.

The new legislation sparked controversy among human rights groups and further exposed the cruelty of Australia's immigration detention system. Reports have shown the [number of detainees in Australia has increased](#) since the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in calls for the government to close immigration detention facilities. Meanwhile, in late April in Australian offshore detention centers in Papua New Guinea, armed gang members reportedly [attacked 15 asylum seekers](#). Australia's Human Rights Law Centre said the attack is further evidence the Australian Government needs to end its offshore detention policy.

Meanwhile, there has been an increase in public pressure on the government to ensure the right to seek asylum and uphold international protection responsibilities. On 15 April, [protests occurred in Brisbane](#) calling for the government to release asylum seekers brought to Australia for medical care from offshore facilities, many of whom have been detained for over a year. The government also faces calls to allow more than [3,000 Myanmar citizens](#) to stay in Australia once their visas expire, amid fears about persecution back in Myanmar.

Post-coup mass displacements in Myanmar

By the end of June, the February 1 Myanmar military coup has displaced [some 230,000 people](#), according to the United Nations. New fighting in [Kachin](#) has uprooted some [5,000](#) people, marking the state's first large-scale displacement since 2018. Fighting has escalated in other states and regions, displacing thousands of people, including [more than 10,000](#) people in Shan state and almost [177,000 civilians](#) in Karen state. The military coup has reignited or exacerbated some of Myanmar's long-running civil wars, and pushed the country [deeper into crisis](#), with resulting [economic fallout and food insecurity](#).

Cross-border migration from Myanmar

The crisis in Myanmar has spilled into neighboring Thailand and India as civilians and defecting security forces attempt to find safety, sparking warnings that a large-scale humanitarian crisis could quickly unveil. On April 30, [thousands of ethnic Karen villagers](#) in Myanmar were poised to cross into Thailand as fighting

intensified between the Myanmar army and Karen insurgents. Irregular movements by boat from Myanmar to Thailand also started in this quarter, with [11 Myanmar nationals being arrested](#) after arriving on reservoir shore in Khao Daeng, Thailand on 29 June.

While pushbacks at the Thai border continue, Myanmar nationals also face the risk of arrest and deportation from Thailand. On 11 May, three senior reporters and two activists from Myanmar were arrested and detained in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for “[illegally entering](#)” the country. They may face deportation to Myanmar where they will likely face persecution from the military.

Meanwhile, rising COVID-19 infections in both Thailand and India pose another threat. Since 1 February, some estimated 15,5000 Myanmar nationals are being sheltered in Mizoram of India. With the COVID-19 cases spiking in India, it is reported that [several hundred](#) Myanmar nationals have tested positive for COVID-19 with one death in Mizoram. Meanwhile, in June, it was estimated that over [600 Myanmar migrant workers](#) were COVID-19 positive in Mae Sot, the border province of Thailand, and some 250 others in southern Thailand. These migrant workers are reported to have received [little to no support](#) from the Thai government.

Thematic Focus:

National insecurity, mass returns, and the drought: A recipe for mass migration from Afghanistan

Nearly two decades after the 2001 US-led coalition intervention, Afghanistan is still grappling with violence, conflict, and humanitarian crises. The commencement of inter-Afghan Peace Negotiations in September 2020 raised temporary hopes for an improvement in the situation for civilians. However, in the six months between October 2020 and March 2021, UNAMA recorded a [38% increase in civilian casualties](#) compared with the same period one year earlier. Meanwhile, some estimated [16.9 million people](#) – more than 40% of the population – face crisis or emergency level food insecurity.

Intensified conflicts induce mass displacements and hard-to-reach populations

The protracted conflict [between the Taliban and the Afghan National Security Forces](#) has triggered an increasing number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Afghanistan. Reports from Amnesty International in March 2021 estimate that there are currently [four million IDPs](#) in Afghanistan, many of whom are living in cramped and unsanitary conditions due to [conflict and natural disasters](#).

[Conflict-induced displacements](#) are reportedly higher after the US military began withdrawing its remaining troops from Afghanistan. Within the two months of May and June, [dozens of Afghanistan's districts](#) have fallen as Taliban fighters [expanded their occupation](#). In one incident on 5 May, [thousands had to flee](#) from Helmand province to avoid fighting which erupted between government forces and the Taliban.

Aid agencies say [120 of Afghanistan's roughly 400 districts](#) – more than a quarter – are considered “hard to reach”, due to remoteness, active conflict, or multiple armed groups vying for control. People in these areas, including some 3.3 million children, are deprived of accessing essential services, such as healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities. Without this access, they will likely be forced to leave to find those services by migrating internally or internationally.

Mass returns and deportations

In 2020, more than [865,000 Afghans returned or were deported to Afghanistan](#) from Iran and Pakistan, mainly due to COVID-19 related job loss. The trend continues in 2021 with the first five months witnessing [nearly 480,000 total returns](#), mainly from Iran. Alongside of mass returns from neighboring countries, the forced deportations of Afghans from Europe resumed in late 2020 as EU member states argued that big cities in Afghanistan were considered ‘safe’. Since 2016, [more than 1,000 Afghan people](#) have been deported from Germany alone, with deportation flights being set to continue amid the escalating security situation in the country.

The prospects of those returning or deported to Afghanistan are limited. With intensified [conflicts and civil unrest](#), as well as an economic depression, returnees are likely to become [internally displaced and face significant financial hardship](#). MMC's 4Mi survey conducted between 16 February and 25 April 2021 with [706 Afghan returnees](#) found that more than half of all respondents perceive themselves not to be economically reintegrated after return, with major challenges on return including finding decent work, debt, and violence. A third of the respondents also reported that they had to migrate internally to a new location in search of livelihood opportunities or to escape violence.

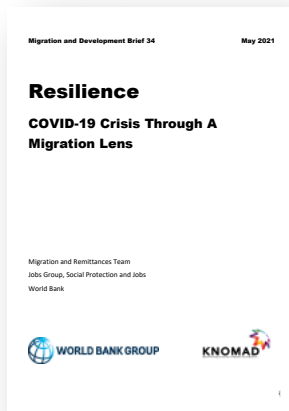
Future of migration

Violence, conflict, the [pandemic](#), and economic instability are perfect ingredients for an exacerbated humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan. Migration, therefore, is seen as the only viable option for many people living and returning to Afghanistan. MMC's 4Mi survey found that with [a very small proportion of returnees](#) receiving assistance and support (16%) in Afghanistan, 41% reported that they were planning to re-migrate, either to their previous country of migration (29%) or to another country (12%).

Afghanistan's population is also facing [a growing array of environmental problems](#) due to climate change, with more frequent and severe floods, landslides, and droughts. In a country where a significant percentage of the population lives in rural areas and depends on farming to survive, droughts have a [devastating effect](#). A drought in 2018 affected 22 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces and internally displaced [at least 250,000](#) people, [forcing around 10,000 people](#) to migrate to Pakistan and Iran. The coming drought in 2021 is predicted to trigger new [waves of internal displacement and migration](#) across Afghanistan.

The mixed migration movements of Afghan nationals to neighboring countries and beyond has not only been the direct consequence of Afghanistan's crises but also a coping mechanism for many seeking safety and better livelihood opportunities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered mass returns of Afghan nationals, mainly from Iran and Pakistan since early 2020, placing significant strain on the Afghan economy. Further, many others have been deported from Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Europe. Upon return, most face struggles reintegrating, finding decent work, and rising levels of debt. A worsening drought may also be the final straw in the growing migration and humanitarian disasters facing Afghanistan.

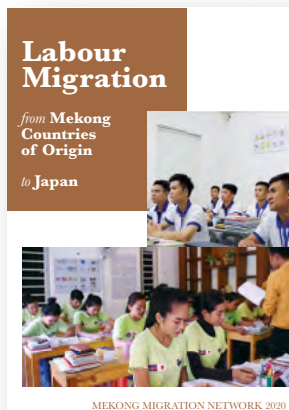
Highlighted New Research and Reports



[Resilience: COVID-19 Crisis Through A Migration Lens](#)

World Bank Group | May 2021

This Migration and Development Brief provides updates on global trends in migration and remittances. It highlights developments related to migration-related Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators for which the World Bank is a custodian: increasing the volume of remittances as a percentage of gross domestic product (SDG indicator 17.3.2) and reducing remittance costs (SDG indicator 10.c.1).



[Labour Migration from Mekong Countries of Origin to Japan](#)

Mekong Migration Network | May 2021

This report attempts to bridge existing knowledge gaps by centralizing information on recent changes in Japan's migration policies, as well as migration frameworks and recruitment practices in Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Based on MMN's preliminary observations of recruitment procedures under the TITP and SSW, it highlights key issues faced by migrant workers from the three surveyed GMS countries of origin, as well as the gaps in protection mechanisms set up to assist them.



[Including Migrants and Communities in Socio-Economic Recovery: Experiences from the UNDP-IOM Partnership](#)

IOM/UNDP | June 2021

This report includes an analysis of key findings for ensuring success and sustained impact through this joint UN partnership. It also outlines a suggested path forward for integrated approaches to migration, COVID-19 and sustainable development that rests on collaboration between the UN, local and national governments, civil society organizations, diaspora and migrant associations and so many more essential partners. The report is intended to serve as a quick

glance at what can be achieved when we work together to empower migrants to build strong, safe, resilient communities that can withstand challenges, such as the current pandemic.



[No safe haven: The plight of Rohingya children across Asia](#)

Save the Children | June 2021

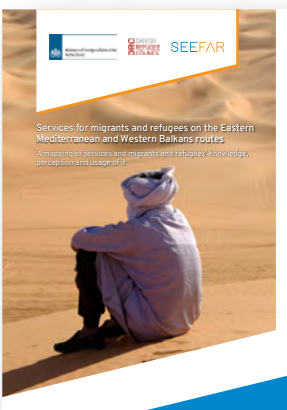
This report examines the situation of Rohingya children in five countries in southeast and south Asia: Myanmar, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. Based on in-depth desk research, key informant interviews, and analysis of national laws, the report examines three areas affecting Rohingya children’s lives and enjoyment of their rights: legal status and access to identity documentation; access to education; and risks to security and wellbeing, in addition to other child protection concerns. The report seeks to provide a snapshot of the challenges – in law, policy, and practice – that prevent Rohingya children in these countries from living their lives in safety and with dignity, equality, and respect for their rights.



[Magnifying Inequalities and Compounding Risks - The Impact of COVID-19 on the Health and Protection of Women and Girls on the Move](#)

CARE | June 2021

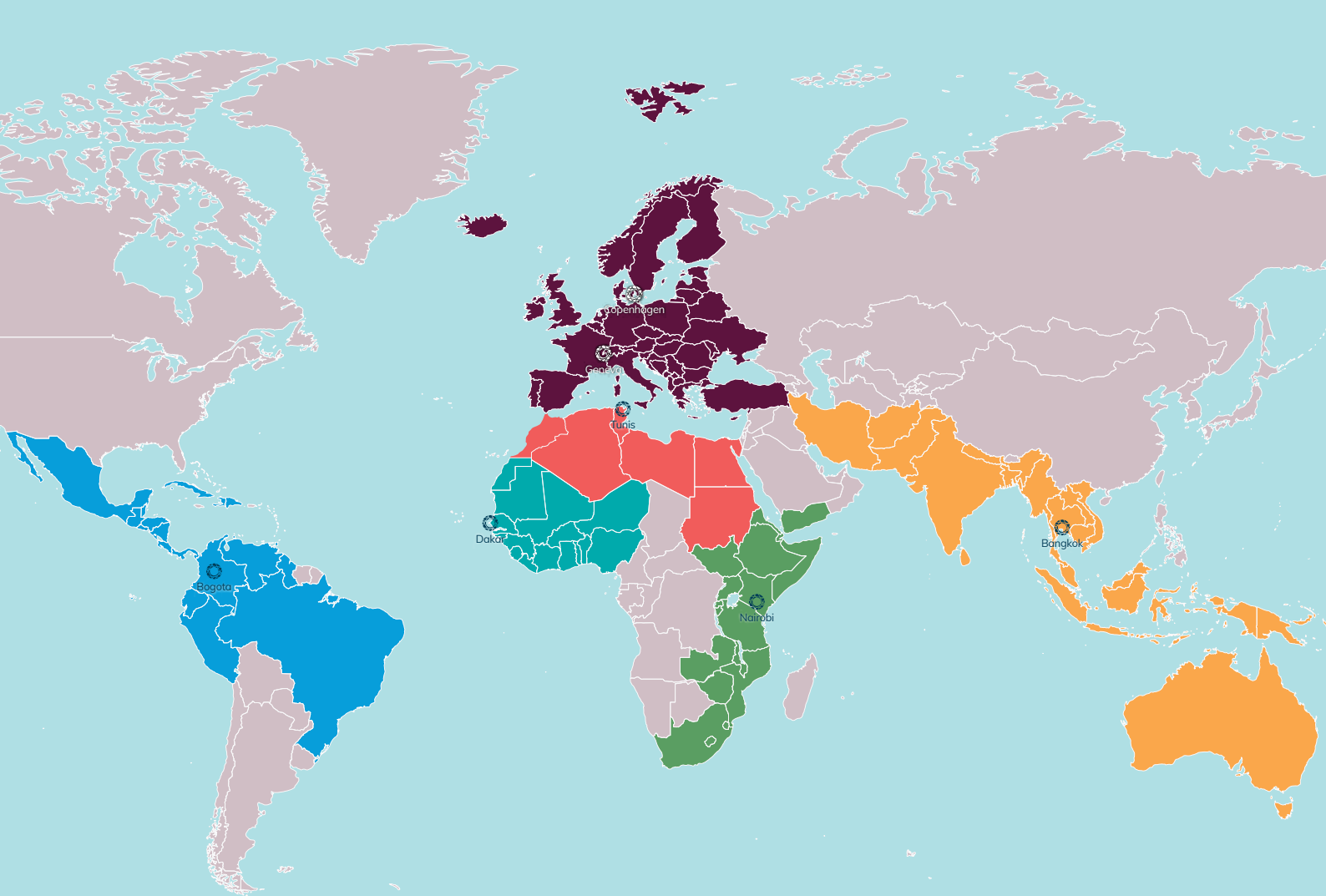
Placing gender at the center of its humanitarian and development responses, CARE undertook new research in Afghanistan, Ecuador, and Turkey between April and May 2021 to better understand how COVID-19 is impacting the health and protection of women and girls on the move. The three countries represent different types of forced displacement across multiple regions: internally displaced persons and refugee returnees in Afghanistan; more recent migrants and refugees due to the Venezuelan crisis in Ecuador; and longer-term Syrian refugees living under temporary international protection in Turkey.



[Services for migrants and refugees on the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans routes: A mapping of services and migrants and refugees’ knowledge, perception and usage of it](#)

DRC | June 2021

This study aims to improve the understanding of factors affecting access to services for Afghan migrants and refugees travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean Route and the Western Balkans Route. The findings are based on the results of a literature review and primary data collection: 46 semi-structured interviews were conducted with migrants and service providers across Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria and Serbia.



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 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)

