



Monthly Summary

The following trends analysis is put together on the basis of available secondary data at the time of publication and aims at providing an overview of key developments in mixed migration trends in the Asia region.

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) was established in February 2018. It brings together various existing regional initiatives – hosted or led by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) – engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration issues into a new global network.

Through the provision of credible evidence and expertise on mixed migration, the MMC aims to support agencies, policy makers and practitioners to make well-informed decisions, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to contribute to protection and assistance responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in the sector responding to mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights, protection and assistance.

The MMC focuses on five core regions: Eastern Africa & Yemen, North Africa, West Africa, Middle East & Eastern Mediterranean and Asia.

For more information visit: mixedmigration.org

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Background:

Mixed Migration in Asia

Mixed migration trends in Asia are characterized by:

- The lack of legal frameworks protecting refugees and migrants, who hence tend to move along [the same irregular migration routes](#) facilitated by smuggling and trafficking networks. None of the countries discussed in this summary has ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and related protocols.
- Significant economic, political and social diversity and the presence of [uneven economic development](#) patterns within the region, which have led [to massive labour migration movements in recent years](#), and still today account for one of the primary drivers of cross-border movements.
- Asylum seekers, labour migrants, vulnerable migrants and victims of trafficking are largely treated as irregular migrants, and are exposed to protection risks related to harassment, detention and deportation along the routes and in destination countries.

In December 2018, the [Global Compact on Refugees \(GCR\)](#) and the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration \(GCM\)](#) were endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly. Despite being non-binding, these resolutions represent the new legal framework for any intervention targeting refugees and migrants' movements and lay out programmes of actions and priority areas of intervention in countries of origin, destination and transit.

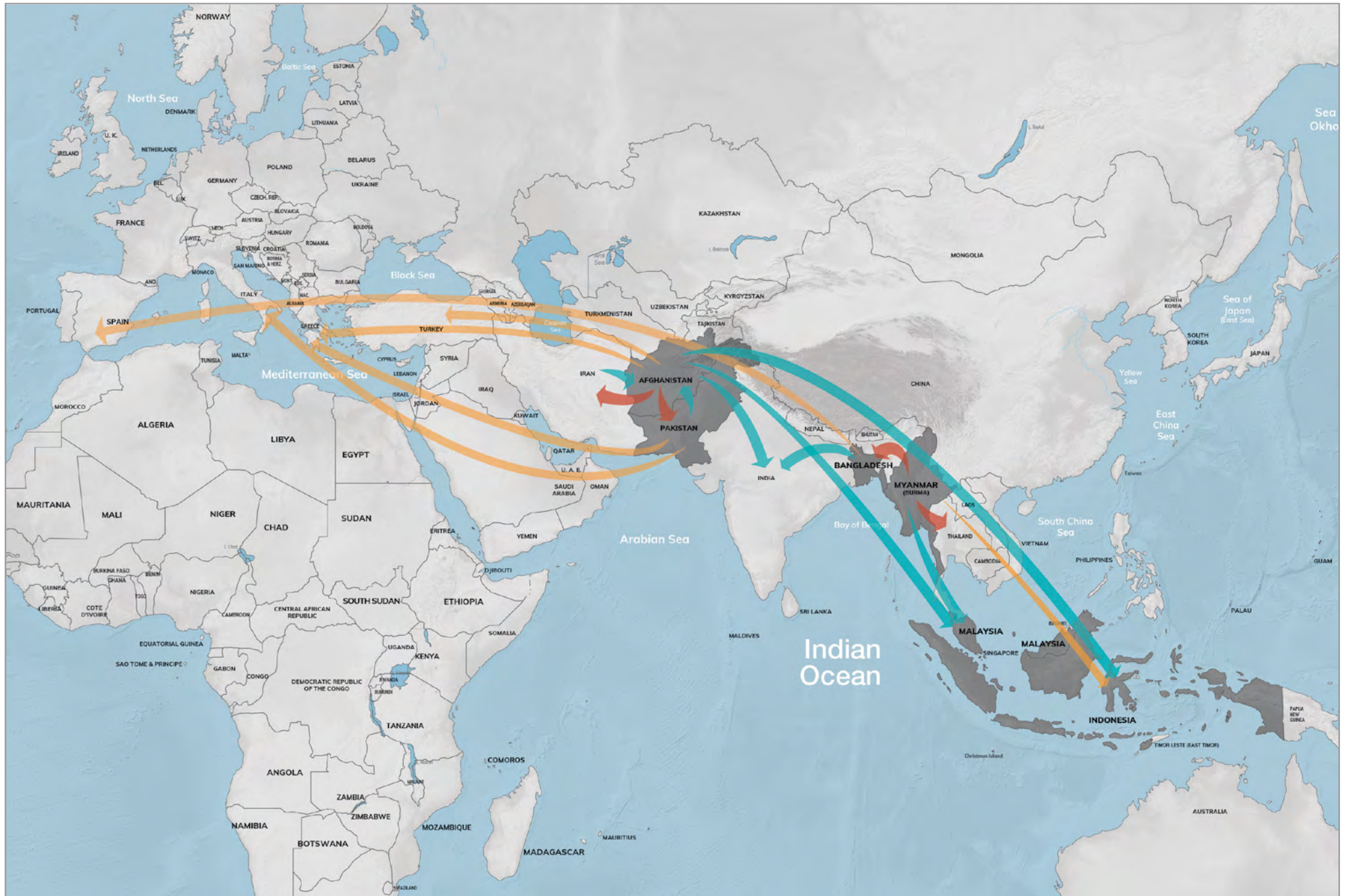
All countries in the Asia region have endorsed the GCR and GCM, with [Indonesia and Thailand](#) especially supporting the process, and stressing the need to strengthen regional and national mechanisms to ensure the successful implementation of the GCM. Australia abstained from the vote, as the GCM states that migration detention should only be used as a “measure of last resort” and as such may oppose the use of offshore detention facilities on Manus and Nauru Islands.

This brief provides an overview of key developments in mixed migration trends in the Asia region. The report mainly focuses on flows from the region to Europe and to South-East Asia as illustrated in the map below. The brief also includes a dedicated thematic section about the mixed maritime movements in the Andaman Sea since early 2018.

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.

Map 1: Key mixed migration flows in the region in 2018



Magnitude ■ Large ■ Medium ■ Small

Mixed migration trends from Asia to Europe

An increased number of Afghans join mixed migration flows to Europe

Despite the overall reduction in the number of refugees and migrants arriving to Europe,¹ as of September 2018, **the number of Afghans arriving in Europe has increased** compared to 2017 figures, with [5,635](#) new arrivals in 2018 compared to [3,493](#) in 2017. Afghans continue moving along the Eastern Mediterranean Route, and this **trend is expected to continue** as the security situation and access to basic services remain precarious in many areas of the country. Afghans accounted for **the first nationality among new arrivals recorded in Greece in October 2018** ([1,537](#) registered originating from Afghanistan).

Afghans who attempt **leaving Greece** to reach other European countries have been confronted with [restrictive border policy implemented by Croatia](#) since January 2018. In November 2018, Afghans represented **the second nationality of new arrivals recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina** ([2,590](#) registered originating from Afghanistan).

While further research is needed to assess the key drivers of this increase in Afghan mixed migration flows to Europe, the [economic downturn in Iran](#) and [renewed hostilities in Afghanistan](#), may account among the [precipitating factors](#) of these movements. Despite the deterioration of the state of security in the country, around 500 Afghans have been forcibly returned from Europe in 2018.² In a report published in July 2018, [Amnesty International](#) calls to halt Afghan deportation from Europe.

Pakistanis still scoring high amongst arrivals in Europe and using different routes

In contrast to the overall decrease in 2018 in mixed migration flows to Europe compared to 2017, by the end of 2018 flows from **Pakistan** are likely to reach 2017 levels, as [1,695](#) arrivals had already been registered as of September 2018³ compared to the [2,021](#) recorded at the end of 2017.

In November 2018, a **larger presence** of refugees and migrants originating from **Pakistan** was **registered in reception centres in Serbia**. As of November 13th, Pakistanis represented [46 per cent](#) of the total number of refugees and migrants registered since the beginning of the year ([3,428 out of a total of 7,453](#)). In 2018, Pakistanis have also increasingly entered neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, accounting for [34 per cent](#) of registered new arrivals ([7,339](#) out of a total of 21,584 new irregular entries registered) since the beginning of the year. Such data points to a relevance in closely monitoring potential evolutions in secondary movements of Pakistanis in Eastern Europe in the coming months.

1 - As of November 11th, 2018, [135,607](#) refugees and migrants have entered Europe since the beginning of the year according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), representing an 80 per cent reduction compared to the [712,807](#) registered in 2017. Almost half of those recently arrived have entered Europe via Spain ([61,441](#)).

2 - In 2018, Finland forcibly deported [75](#) people; Germany [366](#); the Netherlands [28](#); and Norway [15](#).

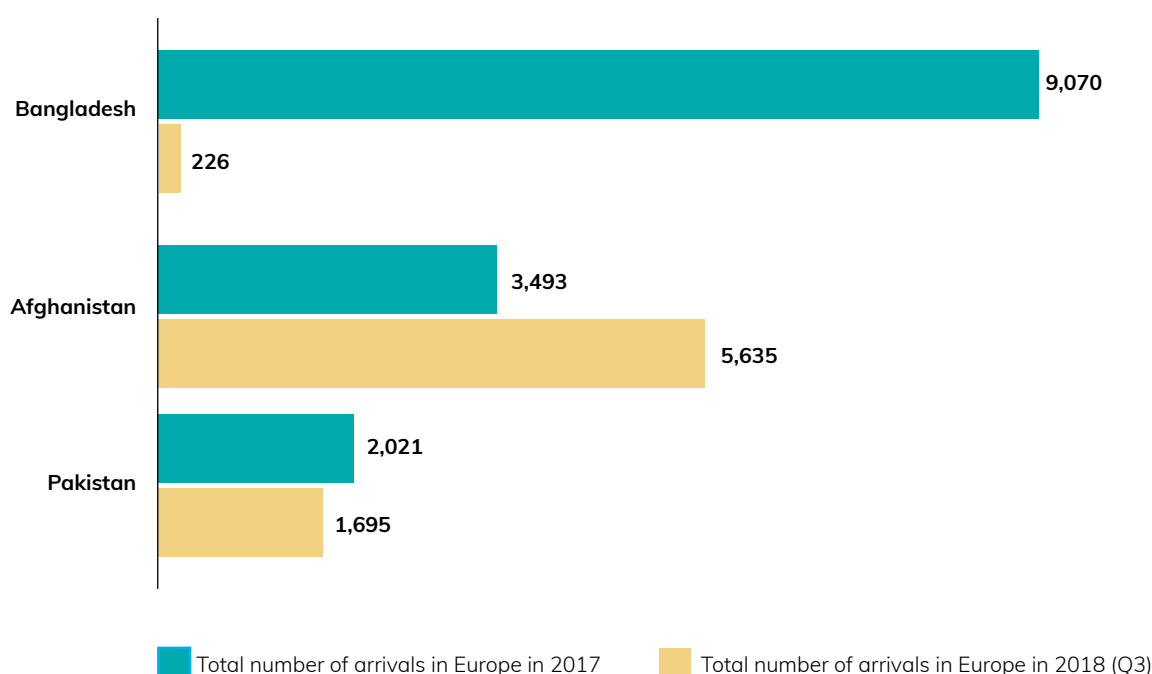
3 - Latest available numbers at time of publication.

Despite their large presence along the Eastern Mediterranean route, unlike Afghans, in 2018 a larger number of Pakistanis also attempted to reach Europe through the **Central Mediterranean Route** compared to 2017 figures.⁴ As of December 17th 2018, Pakistanis account for the fifth nationality of arrivals to Italy in 2018 ([1,589](#)).

Decrease in arrivals from Bangladesh through the Central Mediterranean Route leads to rerouting hypothesis

Finally, mixed migration movements from Asia to Europe in 2018 have been characterized by a sharp decrease in arrivals originating from **Bangladesh**. In 2017, over [9,000](#) Bangladeshi refugees and migrants arrived in Italy from Libya, while as of September 2018 **no refugees and migrants originating from Bangladesh** reached Europe through the Central Mediterranean Route. As [224](#) Bangladeshis have reportedly arrived in Spain in 2018, the possibility of a [shift to the Western Mediterranean Route](#) needs to be further examined.

Graph 1: Number of arrivals in Europe in 2018 (as of September) compared to 2017, by selected country of origin



Source: [IOM \(2018\), Mixed Migration Flows to Europe, Quarterly Overview \(Jul – Sep 2018\)](#) and [IOM \(2017\), Mixed Migration Flows to Europe, Yearly Overview \(2017\)](#).

4 - According to IOM, in 2018 [80 per cent](#) of refugees and migrants originating from Pakistan reached Europe through the Central Mediterranean Route, with the remaining moving along the Eastern Route. In 2017, refugees and migrants from Pakistan equally used the two routes ([50 per cent each](#)).

Mixed migration trends within South East Asia region

Cross border dynamics between Myanmar and Thailand

Border regions between Myanmar and Thailand continue to experience large cross border movements. According to [UNDESA](#) (2018), Thailand is the country of destination of [63 per cent](#) of Myanmar nationals living abroad (1,835,106 people).⁵ Myanmar refugees and migrants originating from Kayin often engage in [daily border crossing in search of work opportunities](#). According to an [IOM report](#), published in September 2018, and looking at the profiles and vulnerabilities of Myanmar migrants to Thailand, **the main drivers of mixed migration from Myanmar** include a combination of unemployment, lack of economic opportunities, and fragile livelihoods which are often interlinked with enduring ethnic conflict in some regions of the country. The IOM report describes the **increasing feminization of migration from Myanmar**, which has otherwise historically been largely [male dominated](#), with women now accounting for [46 per cent](#) of the registered Myanmar population in Thailand.

“Operation X-Ray Outlaw Foreigner” - Afghans and Pakistanis targeted in Thailand

In Thailand, refugees and migrants originating from Afghanistan and Pakistan have been severely targeted by the so called “Operation X-Ray Outlaw Foreigner”, launched in July 2017 by the Royal Thai Police, says [Amnesty International](#). The operation requires police forces to identify and deport foreign nationals residing in the country without valid documentation within a very short time. In the absence of a legal framework protecting refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand, Amnesty international requests the Government to safeguards the human rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, especially in relation to the principle of non-refoulement, in compliance with international human rights law.

Mixed migration movements to Malaysia continue

Malaysia is one of the **main refugee hosting countries** in the region. As of November 2018, there were [163,600](#) refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR in Malaysia. Among them, the large majority ([141,700](#)) originates from Myanmar. Malaysia has historically been a country of destination for Rohingyas fleeing persecution in Myanmar and engaging in perilous maritime movements across the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. As of November 2018, UNHCR has registered [81,760](#) Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. In 2018, Malaysia was reported as the intended destination for the around 500 Rohingyas⁶ who engaged in mixed maritime movements across the Andaman Sea (see thematic focus at page 8 for more information).

Besides those originating from Myanmar, Pakistanis ([6,020](#)) and Afghans ([1,740](#)) also continue to account for the top nationalities of refugees and asylum seekers identified by UNHCR in Malaysia.

5 - in 2017 there were 2,894,741 Myanmar nationals residing outside their country of origin. Thailand represents the main country of destination for refugees and migrants originating from Myanmar, according to UNDESA (2018) 1,835,106 (63%) were officially registered in Thailand.

6 - Author’s own calculation based on reports from local and international press.

Greater recognition of the rights of undocumented workers

In **Malaysia**, despite the persistent lack of a framework safeguarding the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, a [joint independent committee composed](#) by top civil servants, activists and lawyers among was set up to promote greater recognition of the rights of undocumented workers in the country. The work of the Committee especially focuses on regulating the recruitment market and improving living conditions of almost [three million](#) foreign nationals working in the country. The Committee is expected to issue a report and formulate policy recommendations by the first quarter of 2019.

In December 2018, reports of cases of trafficking of Indonesian young girls to Malaysia received attention in [international media](#). The National Agency for Placement and Protection of Indonesian Workers has documented more than [2,600](#) cases of missing or dead migrants since 2014.

Onwards movement: as resettlement programmes tighten, sea crossings from Indonesia may increase

As Australia's former home minister stated in July 2018, [there are currently 14,000 refugees and migrants in Indonesia](#) who may consider [engaging in dangerous sea crossings](#) to Australia in order to exit the limbo of their stay in Indonesia. Raising [religious tensions](#) in Indonesia and [limited chances to access resettlements programmes](#) - as Europe, the United States and Australia have reduced their quotas - may drive more refugees and asylum seekers (especially Afghan and Rohingya) to continue their journey and engage in mixed maritime movements towards Australia.

Australia abstained from the voting of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

As previously mentioned, Australia abstained from the voting of the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#), claiming that a signature would undermine the country's migration policy of deterrence. Among the most discussed points of the agreement, the use of migration detention as a measure of last resort would have required a change in Australia's policy of offshore processing of requests for international protection and the management of offshore detention facilities on Manus and Nauru Islands. According to the UN, this practice is considered illegal under [international law](#) and has been reported to have produced severe consequences on the mental health of refugees and migrants, according to a [report](#) issued by Médecines sens Frontières (MSF) in November 2018.

Thematic focus: Rohingya maritime movements in 2018

Since the beginning of 2018, more than **500** Rohingyas have reportedly joined maritime movements in the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal.⁷ While there is a [growing concern](#) that the phenomenon may regain the magnitude registered in 2015⁸ there are some key differences in the dynamics of the movements.

1. Mostly originating from Sittwe region in Rakhine State (Myanmar)

The majority of Rohingyas who have recently joined maritime movements have reportedly departed from **displacement camps in Sittwe, Rakhine State, Myanmar** with only two out of the nine intercepted vessels having departed from Bangladesh. The movements thus indicate a change in points of departures compared to 2015, when approximately [90 per cent \(30,700\)](#) departed from the [Bangladesh-Myanmar maritime border](#), and especially from an area covering from Teknaf in Bangladesh to Maungdaw in Myanmar, and the remaining [10 per cent \(2,000\)](#) the coast near Sittwe.

2. Higher risks of detention and fatalities

According to [UNHCR](#), “boats are smaller and hold few passengers compared to those used in 2015”, when smugglers started loading up to [1,000 people](#) on relatively bigger boats in order to reduce the costs. Despite the reduced size of the boats that makes them harder to intercepts, sea crossing attempts face tougher border controls. As [UNHCR](#) reports, “more robust efforts are being made by the authorities both in Bangladesh and Myanmar to prevent the boats from setting out to sea in the first place” compared to 2015. Furthermore, among those who succeeded to embark almost **half** of the reported vessels transporting Rohingyas in 2018 have been **intercepted at sea** by state authorities and returned to either Myanmar or Bangladesh. The increase in border control may hence account among the key factors discouraging Rohingya to resort to sea crossing.

3. New destination and disembarkation points

As explained by UNHCR, “there are now indications of boat movements resuming with different destinations and disembarkation points” compared to 2015. Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia accounted for the [top destinations](#) in 2015, whereas local and international press report that **Malaysia** has been indicated as the only **country of intended destination** by interviewed Rohingyas who joined mixed maritime movements in 2018. In 2015, maritime movements extended beyond the Bay of Bengal, with [1,000](#) (out of the total 33,600 intercepted) attempted to cross the strait of Malacca and to reach Australia from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

4. Unpredictable movements

In 2015, [33,600](#) Rohingyas joined mixed maritime movements, with the large majority of them ([31,000](#)) departing between January to May 2015. The decrease in departures that characterizes the monsoon season (May to October), was coupled with increased scrutiny by authorities at both departure and arrivals points, which led to a sharp reduction in maritime movements registered in the second half of 2015. In 2018, trends in departures have only partially followed the monsoon season; the majority of reported departures took place in April and November 2018 but a new fall in the number of reported sea vessels was registered in the second half of December 2018.

7 - Author's own calculation based on international and local press reports. For more information please see Annex 1.

8 - In 2015, approximately 33,600 refugees and migrants moved in South East Asia in mixed maritime movements. For more information please see: [UNHCR \(2015\), Mixed Maritime Movements in South-East Asia in 2015](#).

5. Expected increase in maritime movements from Bangladesh

According to international media sources, the voluntary repatriation programme between Bangladesh and Myanmar was launched on November 15th. [Human rights activists](#) have recently stated that “the threat of being sent back to Myanmar could be pushing refugees to turn to smugglers and engage in perilous journeys across the sea”. As of December 18th, no [Rohingya](#) has reportedly applied to the repatriation programme in Bangladesh.

Highlighted Research and Reports

Mixed Migration Review 2018, MMC, December 2018

The first publication of the annual Mixed Migration Review by the MMC includes a dedicated section on key developments related to mixed migration flows in Asia and the Pacific region. The section highlights that:

- Most mixed migration movements now originate and take place within the Asia and Pacific region, as the number of refugees from Middle East and South Asia transiting towards Australia has been declining since 2015:
- Efforts aimed at improving the regulation of the employment sectors in Thailand and Malaysia registered in 2017, have resulted in increased penalties and risk of detention for undocumented refugees and migrants. In the first six months of 2018, Malaysia reportedly arrested 19,969 irregular migrants.
- The Australian Government's controversial policy on asylum seekers arriving by sea has led to long time detention and poor condition for refugees and migrants whose applications for international protection are processed in Manus and Nauru Islands.
- Despite the renewed violence that led to the displacement of some 640,000 people in Afghanistan as of June 2018, the number of Afghans returning from Iran has more than doubled in the first months of 2018 compared to the same period in 2017, according to IOM.

Migration, displacement & education: Building bridges, not walls. UNESCO, December 2018.

A new global report published by UNESCO looks at the migration-education nexus, highlighting the challenges and opportunities in terms of access and quality of education services, for people engaged in mixed migration flows, host community and other displaced populations. The report makes a series of recommendations aimed at supporting the achievements of the objectives related to education set by the two Global Compacts for migrants and refugees.

The key findings related to mixed migration movements in the Asia region include:

- Afghan girls in Pakistan face large barriers in accessing education opportunities: in 2016, their primary net enrolment rate was half that of boys and less than half the primary attendance rate for girls in Afghanistan.
- Afghan children have suffered from limited access to education opportunities in Greece. A new legislation has been enacted by the Greek Government in June 2018 to formalize refugee education structures.
- Among the top 10 countries for number of refugees hosted, only Bangladesh has excluded refugee children from its national education system. Rohingya children are hence often denied access to education.

Indefinite despair. Médecines sans Frontières (MSF) November 2018.

MSF has published a report on the conditions of refugees and asylum seekers on Nauru Island. MSF started operating on the island in November 2017 with the view to provide free of charge psychological and psychiatric treatment to Nauruan nationals as well as to refugees and asylum seekers residing on the island due to the Australian migration policy of offshore processing of requests for international protection. According to the report, refugees and asylum seekers on Nauru island are exposed to extreme mental suffering , including:

- 30 per cent (63) of the refugee and asylum seekers patients having attempted suicide;
- 60 per cent (124) patients having suicidal thoughts;
- Among them, children were found to have suicidal thoughts, two have committed acts of self-harm or attempted suicide;
- 62 per cent (129) refugees and asylum seekers were diagnosed with moderate or severe depression, 25 per cent (52) people with anxiety disorder and 18 per cent or 37 people with post-traumatic stress disorder;
- 6 per cent (12) were diagnosed with resignation syndrome, a rare psychiatric condition where patients enter a comatose state and require medical care to keep them alive.

Most of the refugee and asylum seekers treated by MSF teams were Iranians (76%) followed by Somalis (5%) and Rohingya from Myanmar (3%). In October 2018, the Government of Nauru has requested MSF to halt operations and evacuate all staff.

Annex 1: accounts of mixed maritime movements in 2018

Date	Number of people	Nationality/ ethnic group	Reported country of origin	State	Country of arrival	Reported intended destination	Source
April - 1st week	5	Rohingya	Myanmar (Rakhine state)	Landed	Indonesia	N/A	UNHCR
April - 1st week	56	Rohingya	Myanmar (Rakhine state)	Landed	Malaysia	Malaysia	UNHCR
April - 3rd week	79	Rohingya	Myanmar (Rakhine state)	Rescued	Indonesia	N/A	UNHCR
November - 2nd week	106	Rohingya	Bangladesh	Returned	Bangladesh	Malaysia	RFA
November - 3rd week	39	Rohingya and Bangladeshi	Bangladesh and Myanmar	Returned	Bangladesh	N/A	NST
November - 3rd week	93	Rohingya	Myanmar (Rakhine state)	Returned	Myanmar	Malaysia	The Guardian
November - 4th week	38	Rohingya	N/A	Returned	Myanmar	Malaysia	The Guardian
December - 1st week	20	Rohingya	N/A	Landed	Indonesia	Malaysia	The Guardian

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