

**MMC Asia and the Pacific**

**QUARTER 4 2023**



# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia and the Pacific

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers Asia and the Pacific. The core countries of focus for this region are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Australia. 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.

MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels. For more information on MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit [mixedmigration.org](https://mixedmigration.org) and follow us at [@Mixed\\_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

### MMC's understanding of mixed migration

"Mixed migration" refers to cross-border movements of people, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking, and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people engaged in mixed migration 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. Mixed migration describes migrants travelling 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 and the Pacific

## Quarter 4 - 2023

### Key Updates

- **Increased displacement amid renewed armed clashes in Myanmar:** [Operation 1027, a series of coordinated offensives](#) launched by a coalition of ethnic-based armies and pro-democracy fighters in Myanmar's north has, [according to some experts](#), tipped the trajectory of the conflict in favour of the resistance. The fighting resulted in the internal displacement of [660,000 individuals as of December 15](#), along with the displacement of [5,000 individuals](#) to China.
- **Human trafficking issues connected to cyber scam industry in Southeast Asia:** Despite increasing efforts to address the issue, including [China's recent crackdown](#), rescue operations by [Malaysia](#), [Vietnam](#), and [Thailand](#), and a [coordinated sanction](#) by the UK, US, and Canada, gaps remain in ensuring the adequate protection of victims of human trafficking.
- **Deepening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan amid a surge in returns from Pakistan and Iran:** The surge in returns in response to crackdowns in [Iran](#) and [Pakistan](#) has significantly heightened humanitarian needs in Afghanistan.
- **Ongoing debate on immigration detention policies in Australia:** While human rights groups celebrated the [landmark ruling on unlawful indefinite immigration detention](#), another subsequent [preventative detention law](#), allowing re-detention of those released, continues to fuel the debate on immigration detention policies in Australia.
- **Malaysian authorities intensify crackdowns on undocumented migrants:** [1,101 undocumented migrants](#) were arrested in the recent raids in Kuala Lumpur in late December, with [plans announced for more raids](#) targeting settlements where undocumented migrants live throughout the country.

## Regional Overview\*



\*Information on the map relates to selected updates and does not represent all mixed migration within and out of Asia and the Pacific.

# Mixed Migration Regional Updates

## Escalating armed clashes between the military and resistance groups in Myanmar fuel widespread internal and cross-border displacement

This quarter, intensifying conflict and violence in Myanmar continues to fuel widespread displacement, both internally and across borders. On October 9, a [military assault on a refugee camp near Kachin](#) state resulted in 29 casualties and 59 injuries. While in northern Shan state, [Operation 1027, a series of coordinated offensives launched by Three Brotherhood Alliance](#) has been suggested as [a turning point for the resistance movement](#) in the country's civil war which erupted after the military take-over in 2021. Heightened armed clashes across the country have led to the internal displacement of [660,000 individuals as of December 15](#), bringing the total number of internally displaced people across the country to 2.6 million.

Since Operation 1027 was launched in late October in northern Shan state, about [5,000 individuals have also sought refuge across the border in Yunnan](#) province in China. Another [5,000 people fled across the border to Mizoram state in India](#) as conflicts between military and resistance groups in Chin state escalated in mid-November, although many were able to return as the situation improved a few days later.

In October, the [UN Higher Commissioner for Refugees again called](#) for comprehensive international efforts to address the escalating humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. In a significant development in November, [Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the Maldives intervened in the legal case](#) against Myanmar for alleged genocide at the International Court of Justice, signalling a broader international commitment to address human rights violations in the country. In December, the United States also implemented [additional sanctions on Myanmar's oil and gas industry](#) in coordination with Canada and the United Kingdom, targeting individuals and entities supporting the military.

## Thailand pushes refugees back to Myanmar while ramping up arrests of Vietnamese asylum seekers and refugees

This quarter, Thailand has faced ongoing scrutiny for pushing back thousands of refugees at the Myanmar border, raising concerns not only for their safety amid the ongoing political stability in the country, but also in direct violation of international law. Thailand has [historically sheltered around 90,000 refugees](#) in camps along the border since the mid-1980s, with thousands more fleeing to Thailand after the February 2021 coup. However, since October, reports continue to emerge highlighting instances of [forced repatriation of Myanmar refugees to Karenni state](#), despite escalating conflicts in Myanmar, including [an offensive by resistance groups against the military launched that month](#). Between October to November, it is alleged that [2,387 people](#) were forced by the Thai military to return to Myanmar, only to flee again back across the border to Mae Hong Son district in Thailand, to seek refuge.

In light of the intensified violence in Myanmar, Thailand has taken multiple measures to address the potential rise in refugee arrivals. These measures include a provisional plan to establish a [centre at the](#)

[Thai-Myanmar border dedicated to delivering humanitarian assistance](#). Additionally, Thailand is engaging in [bilateral cooperation with Myanmar](#), aiming to establish a joint humanitarian task force. However, some have accused Thailand of [sidelining the Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)](#) by engaging directly with Myanmar's de facto authorities.

Simultaneously, during this quarter, Thailand arrested [11 Montagnard asylum seekers and refugee from Vietnam](#) on November 24, along with apprehension of a [Vietnamese activist](#) on December 7. These individuals were detained in immigration detention centres under the charge of being undocumented, notwithstanding the fact that some of them hold refugee status granted by UNHCR. These recent moves have instilled fear of further crackdowns within the community.

## Pervasive cyber scam industry across Southeast Asia poses ongoing challenges in combating human trafficking

Southeast Asia continues to grapple with the challenge posed by a [pervasive cyber scam industry, primarily concentrated in Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia](#), which has intensified since the COVID-19 pandemic. The industry relies on human trafficking, with victims enticed by false job advertisements promising well-paying opportunities, [only to be coerced into running online scams](#). Victims originate not only from Southeast Asian countries, but also from further afield, including [China, South Asia, East Africa and the Middle East](#). A [recent UN report](#) estimates that 120,000 individuals are held against their will in scam compounds in Myanmar and 100,000 in Cambodia, facing forced labour, physical and sexual abuse.

Efforts to address these pressing issues are gaining momentum, with regional crackdowns and rescue operations by countries within the region, including [Malaysia](#), [Vietnam](#), and [Thailand](#). Additionally, a [coordinated sanction](#) targeting individuals and entities connected in the cyber scam industry by the UK, US and Canada was announced in December.

The cyber scam industry, particularly in Myanmar, is primarily run by [Chinese organised crime syndicates](#). These groups have collaborated with [local elites and authorities](#), including military forces, generating millions of dollars in illicit funds in compounds situated in emptied-out borderland casino towns on the China-Myanmar border. In response to this, Chinese authorities have [intensified their crackdown on the cyber scam](#) industry through joint operations with Myanmar, leading to the repatriation of [over 31,000 Chinese citizens between September and November](#). However, persistent challenges remain in the protection of trafficking victims due to the transnational nature of this issue, as well as [China's inclination towards arrests](#), rather than prioritising victim identification and support.

## Bangladesh's new bilateral MoU and repatriation efforts from Libya

In October, [the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding](#) between Bangladesh and Libya is anticipated to establish more regular pathways for Bangladeshi migrant workers, as well as ensure the rights and protection of its citizens. Since the 1970s, some [one million Bangladeshis](#) have migrated to Libya for work. However, more recently, Libya has also been a popular transit point for Bangladeshi migrants embarking on risky irregular routes to Europe. Within Libya, migrants face persistent risks of [systemic human rights](#)

[violations perpetrated by both state and non-state actors](#). These violations include instances of torture, gender-based violence, trafficking, kidnapping and arbitrary detention. In November and December 2023, a total of [534 Bangladeshi migrants](#) in an irregular situation detained in Libya were repatriated. These repatriation efforts were spearheaded by the Bangladeshi Ministry of Foreign Affairs and supported by the International Organization for Migration.

## Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh confront climate-induced displacement and ongoing pressure to repatriate

In Bangladesh, despite proactive disaster preparedness measures that involved the [evacuation of 1.5 million people](#) in anticipation of Cyclone Hamoon, the cyclone's destructive impact resulted in the [displacement of 40,000 individuals, including 800 Rohingya refugees](#).

Meanwhile, this quarter, a delegation from [Myanmar visited Bangladesh](#) to verify Rohingya refugees selected for a pilot repatriation scheme mediated by China. Despite concerns regarding conditions in Myanmar, [three planned pilot projects are currently underway, involving 3,176 Rohingya refugees](#) who had been selected for the repatriation process. However, the Rohingya community have voiced [concerns about the repatriation](#) plans, particularly the lack of assurance of citizenship rights from the de facto authorities, and has raised questions about the voluntary nature of the initiative.

On the international front, the UK announced in October [additional humanitarian assistance of £4.5 million](#) for Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh. Following that, in November, the European Union announced new funding totalling [€105 million](#) for humanitarian aid for people in Myanmar, as well as Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh. Despite these contributions, there are ongoing shortfalls in funding for the Rohingya humanitarian response, with only [50% of the required funding secured](#). These funding gaps have led to [two reductions in food rations earlier this year](#), decreasing from USD 12 to USD 8. While the World Food Programme recently announced [an increase in the food ration to USD 10](#) starting from 2024, it remains below the full amount of USD 12.5 needed for adequate support.

## Divergence in Malaysia on refugee issues

The Malaysian government has expressed [strong solidarity with Palestine amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza](#). Malaysia is currently [host to 602 Palestinian refugees](#), all of whom were displaced prior to October 7. Despite Malaysia not formally recognizing refugee status, exceptions have been made for specific groups who have been permitted to stay and work in Malaysia on a temporary basis, as seen in the case of [Acehnese, Bosnian, and most recently in 2015, Syrian refugees](#).

With the ongoing conflict in the Middle East potentially leading to an increase in arrivals, the situation is spurring renewed discussions between various stakeholders on the status of Palestinian refugees in Malaysia, as well as on broader refugee protection issues. [SUHAKAM, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia, has called for a comprehensive legal framework](#) to address refugee issues in Malaysia, while [former Prime Minister Mahathir](#) alongside a [Minister from Sarawak](#) are calling for refugees not to be granted formal rights.

In the absence of legal frameworks, refugees in Malaysia continue to face multiple challenges including exclusion from the workforce and education, as well as human rights issues stemming from their lack of status. On October 30, Malaysia's Human Resources Ministry, in an attempt to address growing labour gaps in the country, signalled [consideration for granting formal work rights to UNHCR registered refugees](#). However, discussions revolve around limiting employment opportunities to lower-skilled jobs, and have been met with [criticism that the proposal is tokenistic and amounts to 'a human rights facade'](#).

Simultaneously this quarter, the issue of forced marriage and trafficking of [Rohingya refugee girls from Bangladesh and Myanmar into Malaysia](#) was further highlighted. The [deteriorating conditions in the Cox's Bazar](#) refugee camp, marked by [reduced food rations](#), [heightened climate-induced disasters](#), and [increased insecurity](#) have compounded existing livelihood challenges, pushing many young girls and their families to consider marriage in Malaysia as a survival strategy. Reports emerged this quarter of many as young as 12, being trafficked to Malaysia where they are forced into marriage with much older men only to face severe abuse and isolation from their family and community.

## Allegations of migrant exploitation prompt calls for urgent action in Malaysia

In the final week of December, a group of [171 Bangladeshi migrant workers](#) marched to a police station in Johor, a southern state in Peninsular Malaysia, to lodge complaints about being deceived by their recruitment agent. The [Ministry of Human Resources](#) is set to engage with the employment agency accused of defrauding these 171 Bangladeshi migrants while they are held in immigration custody. In response, the SUHAKAM has called for [a probe into the exploitation of migrant workers](#) more broadly in the country and has proposed the establishment of a new ministry dedicated to overseeing migrant affairs. A former Member of Parliament went further to assert that practices in Malaysia are moving more systemically into the [territory of slave labour](#).

On December 21, law enforcement conducted a raid in Kuala Lumpur [targeting businesses run by or employing migrants without documentation](#), resulting in the [arrest of 1,101 undocumented migrants](#). Authorities have also announced [plans to conduct more raids targeting settlements](#), home to undocumented migrants, throughout the country. However, the promise of further raids has sparked [concerns about rising anti-migrant narratives across the country](#) and has led many to call for increased tolerance and recognition of the significant role migrant workers contribute to the Malaysian economy.

## Crackdowns on Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan lead to a surge in returns

This quarter, Afghanistan witnessed a significant rise in the number of returnees from Iran and Pakistan. Between late September and early December 2023, approximately [345,000 Afghans were forcibly returned from Iran](#). Similarly, from September 15 to December 21, [478,800 Afghans returned from Pakistan](#), encompassing both voluntary and forced returns. The surge in returns followed the [announcement of Pakistan's "Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan"](#), which set November 1 as the deadline for undocumented migrants, primarily Afghans, to leave the country despite a [non-return advisory](#) issued by the UNHCR. The

[intensified crackdowns by local authorities](#) compelled many including [Afghans with documentation](#) and [those awaiting resettlement to other countries](#), to flee Pakistan. While the government later extended the stay of [Proof of Residence \(PoR\) holders](#) and those [awaiting resettlement](#) to December 2023 and February 2024, respectively, the situation remains dire for Afghans without documentation in Pakistan, as well as those who have returned to Afghanistan.

On a positive note, in the USA, the state of Oregon has welcomed over 1,400 refugees from Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Efforts to support the new arrivals are bolstered by a [\\$3.6 million grant allocated for integration initiatives](#). Meanwhile, Canada having [admitted 39,730 Afghans](#) as of October 2023, is on track to fulfil its commitment of accepting 40,000 by 2023, and expressed a willingness to accept more in the coming years. Across the Atlantic, in response to the repatriation plan announced by the Pakistani authorities, the UK government chartered [12 flights for Afghan refugees awaiting resettlement](#) in Pakistan.

## Sri Lankans seeking asylum: challenges in Diego Garcia and deportations from Switzerland

While the [judicial decision to deport asylum seekers in the British Indian Ocean Territory \(BIOT\) island](#) of Diego Garcia to Sri Lanka was withdrawn in September, [challenges remain for 61 asylum seekers](#) held on the island. The UK government does not consider BIOT as falling under the same legal jurisdiction as the rest of the UK, and therefore debates the relevance of the 1951 Refugee Convention to people seeking asylum there.

In Switzerland in November, [two Tamil families were deported](#) to Sri Lanka. This decision occurred despite ongoing concerns about the [persistent marginalisation and discrimination against minorities](#) in Sri Lanka.

## Australia's \$160 Million overhaul of asylum processing policies and new climate migration initiatives

In October, the Australian government introduced a [\\$160 million package designed to overhaul the asylum processing system](#) in Australia. The initiative aims to address long-standing backlogs and prioritise new asylum seeker claims. The government states, as highlighted in the [Nixon review](#), that Australia's asylum system has allegedly been '[exploited](#)' by people making '[false claims](#)' as a means to remain in Australia.

On November 10, Australia announced plans to offer [permanent residency to up to 280 Tuvalu residents annually who are displaced by climate change](#). Experts suggest that Australia is strategically leveraging [climate migration as part of a new regional diplomacy strategy](#). Another noteworthy development is the [Australian Refugee Welcome University Sponsorship Consortium](#), led by the Australian National University. This initiative aims to create complementary pathways for displaced students to access higher education in Australia. While awaiting government approval, the scheme proposes a fast-track system for refugees to further their studies in Australian universities.

## Resumption of offshore processing despite landmark ruling on unlawful indefinite immigration detention in Australia

In less than five months since [the evacuation of the last refugee from Nauru](#), [11 asylum seekers intercepted in September](#) were taken to Nauru. This transfer, which included a [17-year-old teenager](#) marked the first transfer of asylum seekers to offshore immigration detention in nine years. [The government has not provided additional information](#), including the country of origin of these asylum seekers, [drawing criticism for its lack of transparency on the matter](#). In late November, another [12 asylum seekers were transferred to Nauru](#) after being picked up off the Western Australia's coast, allegedly arriving from Indonesia. Another report by The Guardian also revealed that the current government has [turned back seven vessels carrying about 200 individuals](#) between May 2022 and March 2023, underscoring the ongoing concerns about Australia's offshore processing system and treatment of asylum seekers.

Among other news this quarter, legal developments included the settlement of [a negligence case involving an infant detained on Nauru](#) and another case that involved the [wrongful detention of 120 Indonesian children](#) as adults. Further on November 8, a [landmark decision by the High Court](#) ruled that indefinite immigration detention is unlawful, potentially leading to the release of [92 people with no prospects of being returned to their countries of origin](#). However, a month after this ruling, [a new preventative law was passed on December 6](#), allowing the re-detention or community supervision of individuals released under the High Court's decision if they have been convicted of a crime or pose a risk of committing serious offences, including sexual offences. [Some criticisms include](#) that the law is discriminatory as it only applies to a small group of migrants and asylum seekers and that the risk assessment is flawed given that, as non-citizens, they are routinely denied access to treatment and rehabilitation, which would heavily weigh against them.

## Refugees in Papua New Guinea at risk of eviction as funding from the Australian government terminated

This quarter, tensions rose as Papua New Guinea [threatened to "send refugees back"](#) to Australia unless they continue funding the [humanitarian program for refugees](#) remaining in PNG under a bilateral agreement between the countries. While many details remain confidential, Australia contends that the [responsibility for the wellbeing of the refugees has now officially shifted to PNG](#), following the conclusion of the offshore processing agreement between the two countries in 2021. Although [plans are in motion to resettle the majority of refugees to New Zealand and transfer those requiring special medical treatment to Australia](#), 62 remaining in PNG face the [risk of eviction and endure restricted access to basic necessities](#) including food, healthcare, and electricity due to the funding shortage. Additionally, [allegations of corruption within the Australia-funded humanitarian program](#) have prompted investigation by both the Australian and PNG governments, adding another layer of complexity to the already strained situation.

## Irregular migration on the rise among Indians

Between October 2022 and September 2023, [96,917 Indians entered the United States irregularly](#), as compared to 19,883 in the same period between 2019 and 2020. The irregular entries were primarily through [the US-Mexican land border, but entries were also recorded through the Canadian border](#). This

dramatic increase in numbers includes [minorities seeking asylum due to the rise of Hindu nationalism in the country, along with others attracted by better economic prospects](#), highlighting the mixed migration dynamics of these movements. In response to a similar trend in the UK, the government has recently decided to [include India, along with Georgia, in its list of safe countries of origin](#) for asylum seekers, resulting in concerning repercussions on how asylum applications among these groups are processed.

## Differing approaches to Sri Lankan and Rohingya refugees in India

Domestically, discussions around the citizenship status of Sri Lankan refugees in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu have gained traction, with a [panel submitting recommendations to the state government](#), signalling an ongoing dialogue on refugee rights and integration. In contrast, Rohingya refugees, including those with UNHCR refugee status, continue to face persistent [risk of arrest and detention](#) in India, with about [270 Rohingya held in detention centres](#) for over two years. While a [petition challenging the legality of the detention of Rohingya refugees was presented to the Supreme Court](#) on October 10, [nationwide crackdowns](#) targeting undocumented migrants continued with 44 individuals including Rohingya being arrested during the quarter.

## Thematic Focus: A shifting tide in Indonesia: international, regional, and federal support essential for sustainable community-driven responses

Within a month between mid-November and mid-December this quarter, [nine boats carrying 1,543 Rohingya](#) disembarked in Aceh, Indonesia, accounting for [the largest number of arrivals since the so-called 2015 Andaman Sea Crisis](#). Once heralded for its open and welcoming approach to Rohingya arriving by boat, particularly by local communities in the province of Aceh, this recent surge in arrivals has marked a substantial shift in Indonesia's response. Communities that were once actively engaged in rescue efforts at sea and providing assistance to Rohingya refugees stand in contrast to increasing [pushbacks and hostilities](#) towards new arrivals. This stark change in sentiment on the ground in Aceh reflects and is likely influenced by broader dynamics in terms of a continued lack of international support, regional cooperation, and federal government commitment to address the displacement of Rohingya across the region. It brings to light the fragility of the current aid mechanisms, which rely on local communities to implement responses alone without adequate support and serves as a stark reminder that sustainable solutions require a united front from global, regional, and national actors.

## Onward movements driven by a lack of durable solutions and deteriorating camp conditions in Bangladesh

According to UNHCR in 2023, [4,490 Rohingya](#) in about 41 boats have embarked on sea journeys from Bangladesh and Myanmar, in search of safety and brighter prospects in other countries, predominantly Indonesia and Malaysia. The majority (62%) arrived in Indonesia, while others disembarked or were intercepted in Myanmar (27%), [Bangladesh](#) (5%), [India](#) (4%), Malaysia (2%), and Thailand (1%). Among these arrivals, a significant proportion comprised women (27%) and children (38%). The boat journeys are fraught with dangers, including overcrowded vessels, treacherous sea conditions, and limited access to basic necessities like food and water. In 2023, a total of 636 were reported dead or missing during their journeys. With the calm water season after the monsoons continuing until April 2024, it is anticipated that the number of boats aiming to reach Indonesia will continue steadily during the first quarter of this year.

These recent arrivals are occurring against the backdrop of [deteriorating conditions in the camps in and around Cox's Bazar](#), hosting close to one million Rohingya refugees. In the camps, refugees face escalating challenges, including rising [gang violence](#), susceptibility to climate-related disasters like [floods, landslides, and fires](#), [limited access to employment and education, restricted mobility](#), overcrowding and food insecurity perpetuated by [cuts in food rations](#). Additionally, despite ongoing pressure from Bangladesh and Myanmar under a [repatriation plan backed by China](#), the conditions necessary for safe, dignified, sustainable, and voluntary repatriation to Myanmar, including [full citizenship and equal access to basic rights](#) including rights to livelihood, religious freedom, and freedom of movement, remain unmet in the context of escalating conflict within the country and persistent systemic persecution of the Rohingya.

The protracted displacement faced by Rohingya, coupled with limited prospects in Bangladesh, has prompted many, including increasing numbers of women and children ([65% in 2023, up from 54% in 2022](#)), to embark on perilous sea journeys in search of a safer future within the region. Furthermore, unlike in the past when Indonesia primarily served as [a transit point for migrants and refugees travelling to Australia and Malaysia](#), it is now increasingly becoming an [intended destination](#) among new arrivals.

## Community driven initiatives need support to ensure their sustainability

Community-led responses have historically played a pivotal role in Indonesia's response to boat arrivals, with local communities in Aceh organising support for Rohingya refugees arriving on their shores and local fishermen conducting [rescue efforts, despite pushbacks](#) from Indonesian authorities. While community-driven responses in this context have previously showcased resilience and compassion, the welcome approach of locals in Aceh is wearing thin. Recent Rohingya arrivals have faced [pushbacks, including through the use of force from local communities](#), threats of [deportation and eviction from shelters led by student movements](#), and [increased border patrols led by Indonesian authorities in conjunction with local fishermen](#).

This shift in sentiment in Aceh is illustrative of the strain placed on primarily poor local communities who have historically been left to confront the impacts of protracted displacement, with limited resources and support, often described as "[solidarity fatigue](#)". Perhaps more importantly, the [imprisonment of three fishermen](#) in 2022 convicted of people smuggling offences for facilitating the embarkment of Rohingya refugees, may have also contributed to the recent change in sentiment within the community. Additionally, an [online hate campaign](#) disseminating misinformation about the Rohingya has further eroded public solidarity and fuelled anti-Rohingya sentiment among the local communities of Aceh, resulting in rejection and protests against this new wave of arrivals.

Pushbacks of boats carrying Rohingya refugees have unfortunately been common throughout the region for some time, as illustrated by the harrowing events of 2015. More recently, against the backdrop of COVID-19, countries such as Malaysia and Thailand have sought to justify continued [pushbacks, arrest and detention](#) of irregular arrivals. This was in contrast to Indonesia's relative [progressiveness](#), particularly at the local level, where scenes of [local fishermen taking part in rescue efforts, and defying authorities' pushback directives](#), were common. At a federal level, Indonesia's commitment to [improving refugee governance](#), including the commendable initiatives in alternative to detention policies and provision of educational rights for refugee children, has earned international acclaim, notably at forums like the [Global Refugee Forum](#). However, the recent official statement by Indonesia's Minister of Foreign Affairs during the [second Global Refugee Forum](#) in December 2023, associating Rohingya arrivals with transnational criminal network and advocating for stronger law enforcement, shows the tides are turning, and raises increasing concerns about the evolving narratives on refugees in the country.

## The absence of international, regional and federal support

At the core of Indonesia's turning tide on the ground in Aceh, is a historic lack of support from the international community, regional counterparts, and the federal government. The international response to Rohingya displacement has diminished amid other humanitarian crises, with neighbouring nations, including Indonesia, facing the brunt of the protracted crisis without adequate support. Regional collaboration, crucial for managing large-scale displacement, is lacking, forcing a handful of nationals within the region to grapple with the crisis in isolation. Eight years after the large-scale irregular maritime movements in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal in 2015 where about [8,000 refugees and migrants were left stranded at sea](#), there has been no concrete action taken to address regional preparedness for such large-scale displacements and risky maritime movements.

This inaction is evident in the recent failure to respond to the UNHCR's [plea for the search and rescue of two boats in distress in the Andaman Sea](#) in early December, reminiscent of 2015. One of the boats [carrying 180 refugees, is believed to have sunk](#) without effective intervention. Furthermore, the minimal contribution from Southeast Asian nations<sup>1</sup> to the [multi-stakeholder pledge for Rohingya refugees](#) during the recent Global Refugee Forum further highlights a lack of regional collaboration. The absence of proactive measures from neighbouring countries, particularly Malaysia and Thailand, coupled with the prevailing pushback practices, generates a ripple effect that intensifies the pressure on Indonesia to take the lead in rescue and protection efforts. Further, at the federal level, while [President Regulation No. 125/2016](#) establishes a refugee protection framework in Indonesia, the [decentralized governance system has led to inconsistent responses](#) at the local level. Moreover, lacking adequate funding and support from the federal government, local administrations are left to manage the crisis independently.

## Call for comprehensive solutions

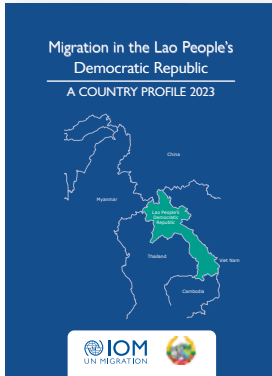
The current situation demands urgent collaboration on multiple fronts. The international community must reassess its commitment to addressing the protracted displacement of Rohingya, recognizing the shared responsibility in providing a sustainable solution. The recent joint decisions by [Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom as well as the Maldives](#) to intervene in the International Court of Justice genocide case filed by the Gambia against Myanmar is one such positive example. While regional cooperation has made progress, especially with the [activation of the Bali Process Consultation Mechanism](#) at the Eighth Bali Process Ministerial Conference in February 2023, it has yet to translate into a clear pathway towards better responses to the increase in maritime movement witnessed in the last two months. Regional counterparts should revive cooperation by leveraging the existing frameworks, particularly the Bali Process, to ensure a coordinated and effective response, thereby preventing the recurrence of incidents reminiscent of the Andaman Sea crisis. At the federal level, the Indonesian government must step up their involvement, not only to alleviate the immediate challenges in terms of local capacity and resource constraints, but also to devise long-term strategies for refugee integration and support within the country.

In conclusion, the shifting sentiments in Aceh and the broader change in responses to Rohingya arrivals in Indonesia reflect the multifaceted nature of the challenges of managing a complex and protracted crisis

<sup>1</sup> The government of Thailand was the only ASEAN member state to have contributed to the pledge.

without sufficient global, regional, and national support. While community-driven responses are essential, sustainable long-term solutions require international, regional, and federal support, as without this support, local communities will likely continue to become fatigued and overburdened, resulting in increasing resentment. Responding to the increase in boat arrivals of Rohingya to Indonesia demands a collaborative effort, emphasizing shared responsibility and a commitment to a sustainable and comprehensive solution.

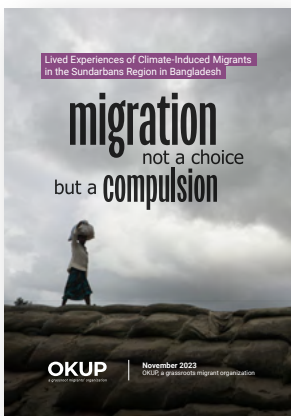
# Highlighted New Research and Reports



## [Migration in the Lao People's Democratic Republic: A Country Profile 2023](#)

**International Organization for Migration (IOM) | November 2023**

The Migration Profile serves as a foundational tool for collecting migration-related data, and facilitating evidence-driven policy-making. The initiative seeks to emphasize the significance of integrating migration into broader policy planning through an evidence-based, collaborative approach. The formulation of the inaugural Migration Profile in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is a substantial breakthrough, amplifying the policymaking capacity of the Government as it looks towards achieving the goals set out in the 9th National Socioeconomic Development Plan 2021–2025.



## [Lived experiences of climate-induced migrants in the Sundarbans region in Bangladesh](#)

**Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP) | November 2023**

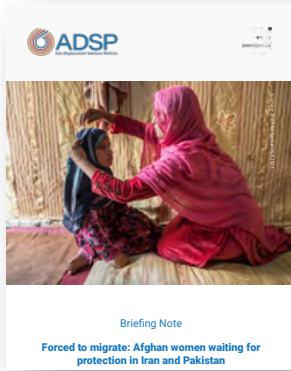
Drawing from the lived experiences and testimonies of both internal and international returnee migrant workers and their families in three Unions namely Gabura, Padmapukur and Kaikhali of Shyamnagar Upazila of Satkhira district in Bangladesh, this report contributes to understanding the interconnections of climate change, migration and modern slavery in the forms of exploitation, forced labour and human trafficking,



## [Wage theft and forced labour among migrant workers in Southeast Asia: Impacts of Covid-19 and policy responses](#)

**Migrant Forum in Asia | November 2023**

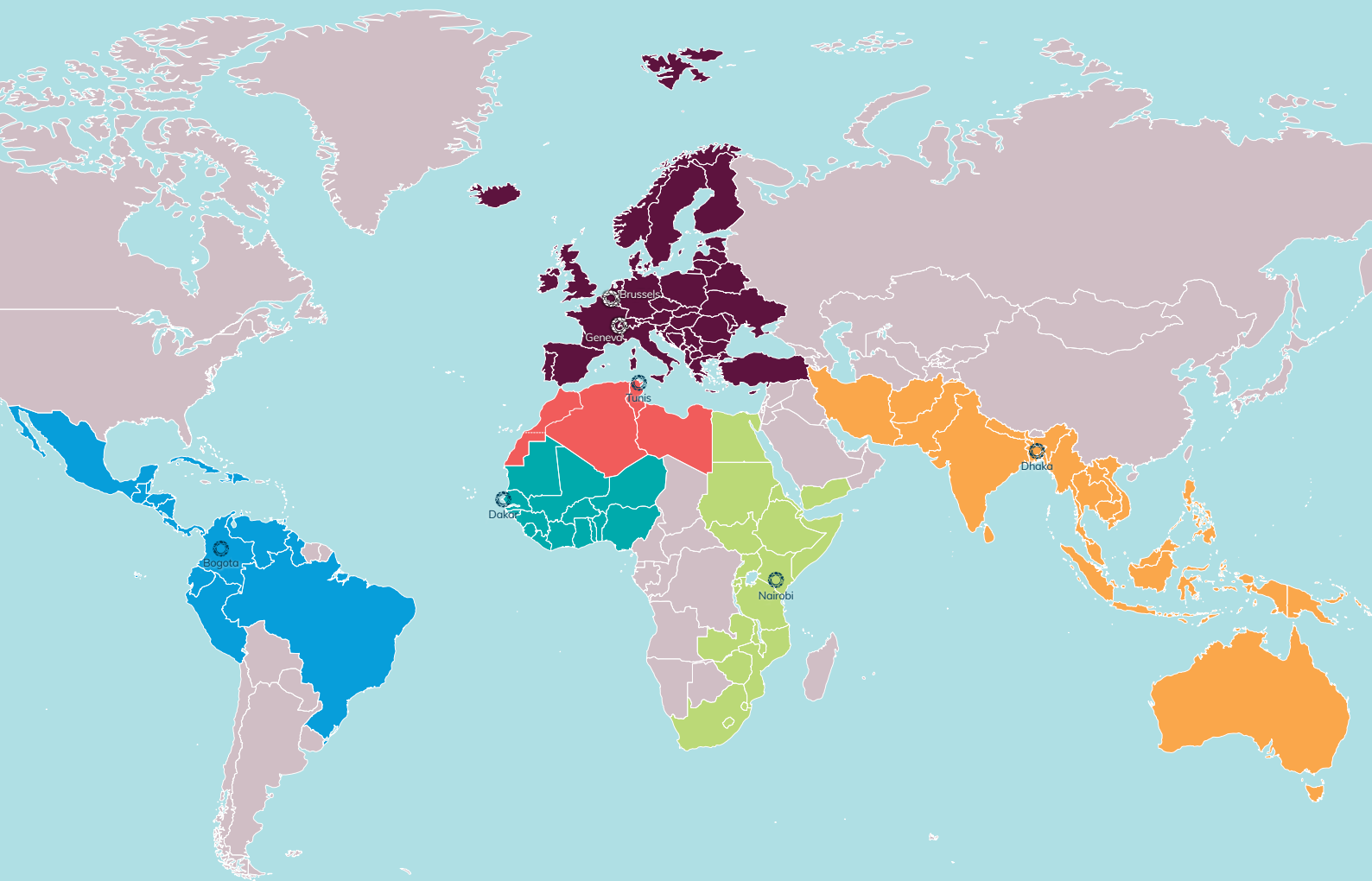
This study examines the linkages between wage theft and forced labour in labour migration within ASEAN, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on this phenomenon. The report seeks to provide an evidence base for policymakers on wage theft, and relatedly counter human trafficking and forced labour measures. The study was carried out in five countries in ASEAN- Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Philippines and Indonesia to capture experiences in both countries of destination and origin.



## [Forced to migrate: Afghan women waiting for protection in Iran and Pakistan](#)

### **Asia Displacement Solution Platform (ADSP) and Samuel Hall | December 2023**

The Afghan displacement crisis has continued given the deteriorating economic conditions, protection risks, loss of social support system, and the loss of rights for women in Afghanistan: whether mobility, employment or educational rights that have been banned for women. This briefing note presents information collected through desk review, key informant interviews and semi-structured interviews and provides a synthesis of available data on the need for protection, solutions and international protection for Afghan women in Iran and Pakistan.



MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels.

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

MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

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