

MMC Asia and the Pacific

QUARTER 3 2024



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, 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 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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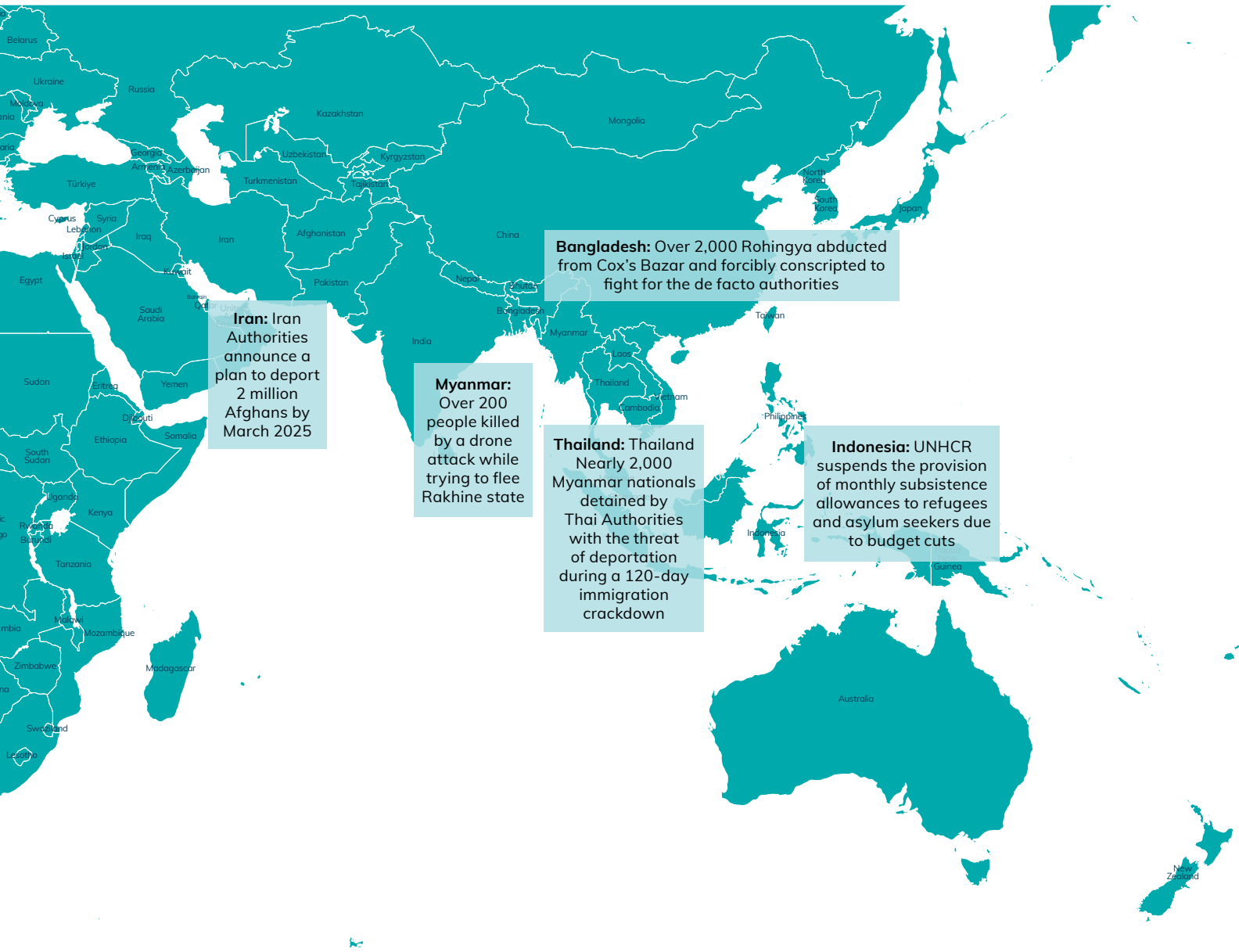
Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia and the Pacific

Quarter 3 - 2024

Key Updates

- **Escalating threat of deportation for Afghans in the region:** This quarter, Iran announced [plans to deport 2 million Afghans](#) by March 2025, while Pakistan advanced on its repatriation plan affecting around 800,000 Afghans in the country. In Europe, [Germany resumed deportations](#) of Afghan nationals for the first time since August 2021.
- **Rising violence and hostility towards Afghans in Iran:** Reports indicate a surge in [anti-Afghan sentiment](#) in Iran, marked by [increased violence and hostility against Afghan migrants](#), including physical assaults and [discrimination](#) in accessing essential services.
- **Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis in Rakhine State:** The situation in Myanmar continues to deteriorate, with [drone strikes causing civilian casualties](#) including among the Rohingya population.
- **Over 320,000 people displaced due to heavy flooding in Southeast Asia:** Severe flooding has [displaced over 320,000](#) people across Southeast Asia in July and September, creating widespread challenges and hindering access to essential services for vulnerable populations, including refugees and internally displaced people.
- **Escalating risks for migrant workers from Myanmar amid crackdowns in Thailand:** Nearly 200,000 Myanmar nationals were [detained during a 120-day crackdown](#) in Thailand, who now face deportation and a two-year work ban. Rights groups within Thailand and the international community have highlighted Thailand's obligations to uphold the international principle of non-refoulement and have raised [significant concerns over their safety](#) if repatriated.

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 deportations of Afghans from Iran, Pakistan, and Germany

This quarter, Afghans faced increased threats of deportation, with Iran announcing a [plan to deport 2 million Afghans](#) by March 2025, Pakistan declaring that it would be proceeding with the [second phase of its deportation plan](#), and Germany [recommencing deportations](#) of Afghans for the first time since August 2021.

Iran's crackdown: Afghan deportations and rising hostility

In September 2024, Iran's police chief Ahmad Reza Radan stated that the [country plans to deport 2 million Afghans](#) by March 2025. UNHCR estimates that [nearly 4.5 million Afghans](#) currently reside in Iran, many of whom do not have legal permits and have not registered for fear of deportation. Afghans often take up informal employment in sectors such as construction and agriculture, occupying jobs that most Iranians are unwilling to work.

This quarter has seen [heightened anti-Afghan sentiment](#), in part fuelled by reports in the Iranian press and social media accusing Afghan migrants of putting pressure on the country's already challenged employment, health, and education sectors. According to the [Iranian human rights group Hengaw](#), there has been a surge of violence and hostility against Afghans in and around Tehran in recent weeks. In many cases, Afghan migrants have faced insults, humiliation, beatings, and knife attacks. There have also been [reports of intensified crackdowns](#), with police allegedly detaining Afghan workers, including by force.

In addition to facing obstacles in securing employment and housing, a decree in September has banned Afghans from [purchasing subsidised bread from bakeries](#). The move stirred controversy in Iran and was initially flagged as misinformation by a news outlet tied to the Iranian judiciary, which later verified it.

Pakistan announces resumption of Repatriation Plan

Meanwhile, the Pakistani government announced on 28 August that it would proceed with [Phase 2 of its Repatriation Plan](#) which includes a roadmap for the deportation of Afghans from the country. This announcement comes after a meeting with the UNHCR's Filippo Grandi on 9 July, who [praised the Pakistan government](#) for suspending the Repatriation Plan and its subsequent commitment to extend the stay of the nearly 1.5 million Afghan refugees with Proof of Registration cards until 30 June 2025.

The commencement date for Phase 2 [has not yet been decided](#). However, it entails the [expulsion of all Afghans holding Pakistan-issued Afghan Citizen Cards](#), estimated to affect around 800,000 people. Phase 2 is expected to be followed by a third phase, which will target UNHCR-issued Proof or Registration card holders, estimated to be around 1.3 million people. Since September 2023, an estimated [733,300 Afghans](#) have returned to Afghanistan.

Germany resumes deportations of Afghans

In August, marking the first instance since August 2021, [Germany initiated the deportation of Afghan nationals back to Afghanistan](#). A total of 28 Afghan individuals, identified by a spokesperson for the German Government as convicted criminals, were deported. This action has faced criticism for potentially breaching international law principles, specifically non-refoulement, by sending individuals back to a location where their lives or freedom could be at risk.

Further details on the impact of deportation plans on Afghan migrants are detailed in the thematic focus section: Afghan migrants face despair as Iran intensifies deportations amid growing anti-migrant sentiments.

Child Immigration Detention: legal wins in Australia, alternatives in Malaysia and concerns in Diego Garcia

In a [landmark judgment](#) delivered in August, an Australian Federal court has found in favour of two children who were detained offshore in Nauru over breaches by the Australian government for medical negligence and abdicating its duty of care. The children arrived by boat with their families in 2013 and were initially detained on Christmas Island before being transferred to Nauru one year later. They were then held in different locations within Australia, Papua New Guinea and Nauru [over the next two years](#). This judgment is significant because it is the [first of 45 similar lawsuits](#) being brought against the Australian Government.

This September marks the [one-year anniversary](#) of the Malaysian Government's Baitul Mahabbah initiative. After a decade of exploring alternatives to immigration detention, the Malaysian Government [created Baitul Mahabbah centres last year](#), intended to house children aged ten and below and serve as an [alternative to regular immigration detention](#). 170 children are now housed in Baitul Mahabbah centres, some unaccompanied. While [there are accounts](#) that the conditions are preferable to immigration detention centres, inhabitants are not allowed visitors and do not have freedom of movement. Further, UNHCR is being denied access to Baitul Mahabbah centres and immigration detention facilities to review asylum claims. While Malaysia's implementation of alternatives to detention for children is a step in the right direction, critics are concerned that the centres are [still a form of immigration detention for children](#) and have argued that long-term community-based solutions need to be developed where children are not placed in any form of immigration detention facilities.

A recent investigation by a senior social worker into the conditions faced by 61 Tamil migrants who have been stranded on Diego Garcia for more than one thousand days has warned the UK Government that the [children are in immediate danger and cannot be safeguarded on the island](#). The Commissioner for the British Indian Ocean Territory has echoed these concerns, formally requesting that the UK Government transfer the most vulnerable migrants, including children, to the UK immediately due to exceptional humanitarian considerations. He [relayed his concerns](#) about the well-being of the children on the island to the UK Foreign Secretary during a meeting on 12 July. Subsequently, on 16 July, the UK Foreign Secretary wrote to the UK Home Secretary, urging her consideration of the matter and requesting that 39 of the most vulnerable individuals from the island be transferred to the UK. In late July, a [mass suicide attempt by 22 of the migrants, witnessed also by some of the children](#), prompted renewed calls and pressure on the

Home Secretary to bring them to the UK. There are 15 children aged between five and 14 on the island. An [ongoing case on the legality](#) of the group's detention is proceeding before the UK Courts.

Southeast Asia faces deadly floods and mass displacement amid extreme weather events

Over the quarter, Southeast Asia has experienced a series of extreme weather events including heavy rainfall that displaced hundreds of thousands in Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand. Typhoon Yagi, which took place in September, has also had a devastating impact across the region, causing extensive flooding and [more than 500 deaths](#).

In Myanmar, [heavy rain at the height of the monsoon](#) at the start of July caused more than 10,000 people in Kachin state to be displaced by flooding after the Irrawaddy and N'mai rivers overflowed. In August, more than a week of heavy rains in Myanmar reportedly led to [11 flood-related deaths](#) in the Bago and Ayeyarwady regions and Kayin states and forced 20,000 people to leave their homes in Bago. [Aid groups reported](#) that those who had been evacuated urgently needed clean water and food. The flooding has exacerbated the many humanitarian issues faced by the people in the area, including armed conflict and [financial difficulties due to a weak economy](#), caused by fighting which has seized the country, including Kachin and Kayin states, for the last three years.

In September, floods from Typhoon Yagi wreaked havoc in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Thailand. In Myanmar, a spokesperson for the de facto authorities [claimed that at least 320,000 people](#) have been displaced, and [226 people have died](#). Regional reports indicate that the death toll may be much higher, with the [UN estimating that up to 630,000 people](#) may need assistance. The 320,000 displaced people have been evacuated to temporary shelters, and in a rare move, the de facto authorities have [sought international assistance](#). In Bangladesh, [tens of thousands](#) of refugees were affected by downpours brought by Cyclone Yagi. Tragically, three refugees in Cox's Bazaar died from a landslide triggered by the torrential rains.

Mixed migration updates from Myanmar

Escalating violence in Rakhine: deadly drone strikes and humanitarian blockades

The situation in Rakhine State has continued to deteriorate, with a drone strike on 6 August that killed at least 200 Rohingya civilians fleeing Maungdaw, [most of whom were women and children](#). The attack followed the forced displacement of Rohingyas just a day earlier to escape the drone attacks. Simultaneously, seeking access to healthcare within the state has become increasingly challenging. Last quarter, in June, [Medecins Sans Frontieres was forced to suspend its services](#) in Northern Rakhine state because of the violence, depriving people of vital medical care and further deepening the humanitarian crisis. In July, it reported that [hundreds of patients](#) showed up at its Aung Mingalar quarter clinic, the only one of its 24 mobile clinics in Rakhine operating, demonstrating the sheer number of people with unmet health needs.

Mixed migration updates from Bangladesh

Abduction and forced conscription of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar amid rising violence

Over [2,000 Rohingya refugees](#) have reportedly been abducted from camps in Cox's Bazar and forcibly conscripted to fight for the de facto authorities this year. Conditions in Cox's Bazar have become increasingly dangerous, with [reports of persistent violence by armed groups and criminal gangs](#). In August alone, [there have been reports of members](#) of the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) carrying out killings, abductions, forced recruitment, extortion, and robbery. Both armed groups, which operate in the refugee camps, have denied forcibly recruiting Rohingya refugees for conscription. Under international law, it is illegal for children under the age of 15 to be recruited or sent to fight. Under an optional children's rights protocol ratified by most countries, including Myanmar, this age is raised to 18. Conscription of civilians of any age by non-state actors, such as ARSA and RSO, is also illegal.

Strained resources in Cox's Bazar: WFP's food allocation and new arrivals

Following two cuts last year, [WFP increased its food allocation](#) for Rohingya refugees to USD12.50 per month in August. While this marks an increase in the USD8 allocated last year, the [need to support new arrivals to Cox's Bazar](#), including many who fled the recently intensified conflict in Rakhine state and reportedly do not have allocations, is requiring the stretching of already limited resources. The Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals Representative Committee (FDMN-RC) estimates that [50,000 Rohingya refugees have come to Bangladesh](#) seeking shelter in the past few months, with the majority arriving after 4 August. Some refugees who [feel obliged to support recently arrived relatives without allocations](#) claim that the gains from the increased allocation amount are negligible.

Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee crisis: Tensions over international support

Bangladesh's interim Prime Minister, Mohammad Yunus, [pledged continued support](#) for the 1 million Rohingya refugees hosted by Bangladesh, a comment which stands in contrast to the position adopted by Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Advisor, Mohammad Touhid Hossain. Hossain stated that Bangladesh is "[not willing to offer shelter to even one more Rohingya](#)", and the Border Guard Bangladesh is using its best efforts to send back the Rohingyas that it can apprehend. While Interim Prime Minister Yunus has demonstrated support for Rohingya, he made it clear during an [address at the 79th United Nations General Assembly](#) in September that Bangladesh is approaching the limits of its hosting capacity and that the only sustainable solution to the protracted crisis would be the [resettlement of Rohingya in third countries](#). In September, Hossain announced a [plan to resettle 20,000 Rohingya refugees](#) to the US every year, with the view of moving 200,000 over the coming decade. While this is a promising development in an environment that has, up until now, relied on Bangladesh to address a humanitarian crisis at significant [economic, environmental and social costs](#), it represents a [tiny fraction of the 1.2 million Rohingya refugees](#)

Bangladesh currently hosts.

Mixed migration updates from India

CERD calls on India to stop hate speech and misinformation about Rohingya

In July, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) [urged India to halt the arbitrary detention of Rohingya refugees](#) and prevent their forced deportation back to Myanmar. India has been criticised for deporting Rohingya back to Myanmar, where they are at risk of serious human rights violations and abuses. As a result, many Rohingya in India continue to live in [fear of detention or deportation](#). According to UNHCR, [676 Rohingyas are in detention](#) in India. However, Rohingya rights activists estimate the actual figure to be 1,000. Forcibly returning Rohingya refugees to Myanmar violates the customary international law principle of non-refoulement since the return puts their lives in danger. The CERD expressed concerns over prevalent racial hate speech and negative stereotypes against the Rohingya in India, perpetuated by various public figures, including politicians. The Committee urged India to eliminate barriers hindering the Rohingya's access to their rights, especially regarding employment, healthcare, and education. It also called for the provision of long-term visas and other necessary identity documents to the Rohingya community.

Caught between conflicts: Myanmar refugees in Mizoram

In July, over [100 refugees from Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts](#) who crossed into southern Mizoram were sent back to Bangladesh by the Border Security Forces (BSF). An additional 30 men from the same group reportedly faced physical assault by BSF members. The refugees had sought refuge to escape the ongoing violent clashes between the Bangladesh Army and the Kuki-Chin National Army in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Hunger strike at Matia Detention Centre: Rohingya protest deplorable conditions

In September, [103 Rohingya refugees went on a hunger strike](#) to protest the conditions of their detention facility, Matia Detention Centre, in Assam, where they have been detained for years. The hunger strike comes after the local administration failed to respond to a written request by 35 of the refugees, seeking resettlement to a third country or transfer to a facility with better conditions. [In July, a Supreme Court](#) bench found the living conditions at Matia Detention Centre deplorable, criticising the lack of adequate water supply, sanitation systems, and proper toilets. Of the 103 detained Rohingya refugees, at least 40 reportedly hold UNHCR cards. However, this has seemingly had no impact on their detention status.

Mixed migration updates from Thailand

Mass detention, deportation, and labour precarity for Myanmar migrant workers

[Thai authorities detained nearly 200,000 Myanmar nationals](#) during a 120-day crackdown on the documentation of migrant workers. It is unclear how many of the detained migrant workers were deported to Myanmar. However, the de facto authorities in Myanmar claimed on 5 September that Thai authorities had repatriated 1,000 migrant workers. The [shadow National Unity Government](#) is reportedly seeking to advocate to the Thai authorities that returning Myanmar migrant workers to Myanmar risks endangering their lives, and is in violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

The Thai Department of Employment claimed that the raids were intended to protect employment opportunities for Thai citizens. Migrant workers already have limited employment opportunities in Thailand and are [prohibited from engaging in 27 specific occupations](#) reserved for Thai nationals. Despite two increases to Thailand's minimum wage this year, labour activists are concerned that many Myanmar migrant workers will not be paid the minimum wage. [Myanmar migrant workers make up 75% of Thailand's](#) migrant worker force and play a vital role in filling labour shortages within Myanmar's economy. Despite this, they live in a precarious situation and are often afraid to avail of their rights for fear that their employers will report them to the authorities and they will be sent back to Myanmar. Even those with proper documentation [do not have adequate access to remedy](#), as court cases can take upwards of 6 months to seek a resolution. There have been calls within Thailand to prevent migrant workers from benefiting from the increase in the minimum wage, on the argument that their remittances out of Myanmar will not help Thailand's GDP, which is the intention behind the wage increase.

Barriers to legal status: Thailand closes seven Certification of Identity offices

On 7 July, Thailand [closed seven government offices](#) where Myanmar migrant workers needed to go to obtain a Certification of Identity (CI), a document that is needed for them to live and work legally in Thailand. Without holding a CI, a Myanmar migrant worker runs the [risk of being caught without documentation](#), which can lead to imprisonment, heavy fines or deportation. Some without a CI have sought alternatives, such as using [unofficial "police cards"](#), whereby migrant workers pay a monthly fee to local police to avoid arrest. However, this is not a sustainable solution for migrant workers who have no freedom of movement with a CI.

Malaysia

Malaysia's support for Palestinian relief efforts amid domestic refugee challenges

[Malaysia pledged an additional USD 1 million](#) in July to support UNWRA's humanitarian relief for Palestinians. This brings Malaysia's financial contribution to UNWRA since November 2023 to USD 5.2 million. Further, Malaysia [brought 127 wounded Palestinians from Gaza](#) for medical treatment in Malaysia. While these solidarity gestures evidence concern for the welfare of a traumatised Palestinian population, [many Palestinian refugees already residing in Malaysia](#) face a much less welcoming environment. Despite being registered as refugees by the UNHCR, Malaysia does not recognise their rights as refugees, putting them at risk of facing harassment by law officials and discrimination in the job and housing markets.

Crackdown on human trafficking in Malaysia

Malaysian Authorities initiated multiple crackdowns on human trafficking and corruption activities in the quarter. In August, the Immigration Department reported that it had [disbanded an illegal syndicate](#) providing travel documents and work passes to foreigners. It seized 530 passports from different countries during raids on the syndicate. In August, police opened an investigation into allegations that a [former deputy minister had been involved in human trafficking](#) activities in Myanmar.

Investigations into corruption in Malaysia's migrant worker recruitment system

This quarter, the Bangladesh Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) [launched inquiries into four former Bangladesh parliament members](#) tied to a Malaysian recruitment network, investigating charges of overcharging, extortion, and money laundering in hiring for construction and plantation sectors. Reportedly, the [aim of ACC's investigations is to break up a network involving Bangladesh and Malaysian companies](#) that dominates the migrant worker recruitment sector.

Malaysia's Home Minister is leading a [separate campaign to reform Malaysia's migrant worker recruitment sector](#) and has directed ministry agencies to probe into corruption claims made by the Bangladesh authorities, focusing on potential connections to Malaysian officials and businesses engaged in labour recruitment. One of the companies allegedly at the centre of these investigations is Bestinet, whose proprietary platform, the "Foreign Workers Centralised Management System", has been the Malaysia Immigration Department's [sole source for migrant worker visa applications from 15 sending countries since 2013](#). The platform has been accused of facilitating the exploitation of migrant workers through inflated recruitment fees and related costs, which migrant workers often take out high-interest loans to cover. Efforts to replace the platform in Malaysia [this year were thwarted](#), allegedly because of Bestinet's political links both in Malaysia and Bangladesh.

Raids on migrant workers in Malaysia

The Immigration Department conducted multiple raids this quarter. In July, [69 migrant workers were arrested in Taman Bandar](#), while in August, [213 migrant workers were arrested](#) during a raid in a Kuala Lumpur nightclub. The migrant workers were arrested on various grounds, including lacking passports and valid travel documents and overstaying.

Mixed migration updates from Indonesia

Unpaid wages and inhumane conditions: Indonesian workers' victory at sea

Ten Indonesian migrant workers on a Taiwanese-flagged [distant water fishing vessel succeeded in their claim](#) in August for unpaid wages from their employer. The amounts owed to the migrant workers varied from 11 to 15 months of unpaid wages. The migrant workers claimed that the delay in unpaid wages caused [significant hardship for their families](#) who needed the salaries for basic necessities. In addition to the unpaid wages, the migrant workers spoke of inhumane conditions onboard, including a lack of food, being subjected to verbal abuse, and bed bugs. The migrant workers have asked that employers be mandated to cover additional costs incurred by their families, such as interest costs on loans, to meet the shortfall from not receiving the unpaid salaries on time.

Indonesia halts departures to Cambodia

In July, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Board (BP2MI) coordinated with Soekarno-Hatta International Airport Immigration to stop [two individuals from flying to Cambodia](#), where authorities suspected they were going to work without proper documentation. Another [14 individuals were stopped](#) from travelling to Cambodia and detained by Police at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in September. The authorities' rationale for halting their departures was on the grounds that Cambodia is not a typical destination country for Indonesian migrant workers. In August, the Indonesian Navy [intercepted 11 Indonesian migrant workers](#) returning from Malaysia, as part of an investigation into a suspected smuggling operation.

Suspension of UNHCR monthly subsistence allowance

In July, UNHCR announced that it had suspended its monthly subsistence allowance (MSA) program to asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia, due to budget restrictions affecting the global organisation. According to [a UNHCR protection brief](#) from April 2024, UNHCR was providing cash assistance of approximately 80 USD for single individuals, and up to 211 USD for families of six and above to 408 households comprised of 1199 individuals. The MSA suspension is likely to have a significant negative impact on the individuals who were receiving support, particularly as they were classified as those [‘most vulnerable’ by UNHCR](#). The cut comes as UNHCR reports that it has [only received 10% of its funding needs](#) of USD 2.3 million and warns that the response to boat arrivals in Indonesia remains critically underfunded.

UNHCR warns of upcoming boat arrivals to Indonesia

In September, UNCHR issued an [External Update on Rohingya boat arrivals](#), foreshadowing an influx of boat arrivals of Rohingya between November and March, when seas are calmer. It again highlighted the need for additional funding to provide humanitarian support to the anticipated new arrivals.

Mixed migration updates from Australia

Calls for urgent medical evacuations of asylum seekers and refugees in PNG

A [report by the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre \(ASRC\)](#) has warned the Australian government that one in five of the 47 refugees and asylum seekers still in Papua New Guinea (PNG), following their forcible relocation by Australia 11 years ago, require urgent medical care and immediate evacuation. Many of them also [face eviction](#) and homelessness, as their accommodation bills are in significant arrears, following the withdrawal of Australian funding.

New funding agreement between Australia and PNG amidst criticism

After Australia forcibly sent 75 refugees that it was detaining at a detention facility on Manus Island to PNG, it entered into an [agreement in 2021 with the PNG Government to provide funding to support the refugees](#). The agreement was terminated in December 2021 after all the funds were spent in the first six months.

The Australian Government is now [agreeing to a new funding deal](#) with Papua New Guinea (PNG) to support the remaining refugees and asylum seekers after PNG’s chief migration minister [threatened to return the refugees](#) to Australia. Both the 2021 and the new agreements require PNG not to send refugees and asylum seekers back to danger. However, the amount of funds provided under both agreements is confidential, which has been [criticised for a lack of transparency](#). Contrary to its obligations under international law, Australia has persistently maintained a position that it owes no responsibility

towards protecting the well-being of asylum seekers and refugees it has forcibly relocated to its offshore processing facilities.

Foreign nationals charged in asylum seeker smuggling case

In August, a trio of Chinese nationals were [charged with conspiring to collect and conceal a group of 15 asylum seekers](#) who landed in Western Australia in early April. If convicted, they could face up to 10 years in prison for the offences. Boat arrivals to Australia remain limited in number, however, the case has stoked comments from the leader of the opposition, Peter Dutton, who [criticised the Albanese government](#) for failing to support Operation Sovereign Borders and reducing the amount of funding allocated to maritime and aerial surveillance.

Thematic Focus:

Afghan migrants face despair as Iran intensifies deportations and anti-migrant sentiments grows

In September this quarter, Iranian authorities unveiled a controversial plan [to deport two million undocumented Afghan migrants](#) over a six-month period. This announcement, following the [expulsion of 750,000 undocumented Afghans](#) so far this year, has been framed as a necessary measure to ease the country's economic and security pressures. At risk of deportation are [former officials from the previous Western-backed government](#) and women and girls who face severe [restrictions and marginalisation, as well as high risk of poverty](#), if returned.

Within the region, Iran is not alone in this approach; Pakistan and Türkiye have also ramped up the deportation of Afghans in recent years, with devastating humanitarian implications. As millions face return to a country gripped by economic hardship and a deepening humanitarian crisis, the consequences are already reverberating across borders.

Iran's economic crisis and mounting anti-Afghan sentiment

Iran has been a longstanding refuge for Afghans fleeing decades of war, famine, and political instability, with deep historical and cultural ties fostering a tradition of cross-border movement. While there is no consensus on the number of Afghans in Iran, it is estimated that [Iran hosts more than six million Afghans](#) according to Iran's representative in the UN Security Council. While Iran's approach towards Afghans has been somewhat accommodating, Afghans have long faced the threat of arrest and deportation.

However, the current circumstances are deteriorating fast, with Iran's capacity and willingness to accommodate Afghans in steady decline. Crippling [international sanctions, runaway inflation, and high unemployment](#) have led to severe economic challenges in Iran. These challenges have been accompanied by national narratives that have increasingly portrayed Afghan migrants as contributing to [job scarcity, rising living costs, rising crime](#) and putting a strain on [public services such as healthcare and education](#). Anti-Afghan sentiment was further cemented during the 2024 presidential election in June, where candidates across the political spectrum [embraced increasingly hardline stances on immigration](#), blaming Afghans for the country's social and economic challenges.

Once in power, the new president capitalized on this sentiment, announcing plans [on his X account](#) to close the border to prevent further entry of Afghans, implement stricter regulations on their presence in the country, and negotiate with European states on Afghan migrants, promising to "put Iranians first". Following this, another Iranian official also announced a plan [to construct a four-meter-high concrete wall](#), along with barbed wire and fencing over a three-year period along its shared borders with Afghanistan. The election marked turning point in populism, with the government fostering an environment where

anti-Afghan sentiment was not only tolerated but encouraged. Social media further fuelled anti-Afghan rhetoric, with hashtags like '[Expulsion of Afghans, a national demand](#)' gaining traction and played a role in spreading hate speech by calling for deportations.

The Iranian government's recent announcement of plans to deport two million undocumented Afghans is the culmination of the increasing populist response to these economic grievances. Alongside the announcement of the plan, Iran's Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni has publicly stated that '[all the resources of the Islamic Republic are spent on immigrants](#)', emphasizing that the country can no longer sustain the Afghan migrant population, connecting mass deportation policy to promises of economic recovery and job opportunities for Iranians.

The daily reality of Afghan migrants in Iran

As a result of the government's hardline policies and increasing public hostility, Afghan migrants have faced increasing discrimination and violence. In the months leading up to and following the election, instances of [abuse and violence in public spaces](#) became increasingly more frequent, and [Afghan children were barred from attending schools](#) in some areas. In Bardsir city in Kerman province, [bakeries posted signs prohibiting the sale of bread to non-Iranians](#) – a measure not seen before.

[Public protests demanding the expulsion of Afghans](#) have become more common, and violence against Afghans—both verbal and physical—has escalated. In some provinces, officials publicly banned the [rental of rooms or houses to undocumented Afghans](#), and many Afghan workers, including those with legal status, have been [dismissed from jobs](#). Due to their irregular status, undocumented Afghans are often relegated to low-paying, labor-intensive jobs, while documented Afghans are legally restricted to working in just three job categories which give them [access to 37 job types](#), limiting their economic opportunities. Testimonies from deported Afghans in Afghanistan reveal a troubling pattern of human rights abuses, including [physical and verbal violence, extortion and denial of basic needs](#) such as food and water.

Broader regional patterns in Afghan deportations: Pakistan, Türkiye and beyond

Iran is not the only country pursuing mass deportations of Afghan migrants. Prior to Iran's recent announcement, Pakistan, which has historically hosted the largest number of Afghan migrants globally, has also taken steps to expel hundreds of thousands of Afghans, citing concerns over national security and economic strain. Following the crackdown in late 2023, [over 722,000 Afghans returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan](#) voluntarily or forcibly between 15 September 2023 and 16 September 2024. While Pakistan insists that the deportation policy is mainly designed to fight terrorism, [the deepening economic crisis in the country](#) has also [contributed to anti-migrant political sentiment](#), which has seen public support for deportations. The current economic crisis is one of the country's worst since its independence in which, [the rising prices of food, fuel and power](#) as well as [high inflation](#) are adding to public financial burden.

Similarly, Türkiye has intensified its efforts to deport Afghans in recent years. As a hosting country and also key transit country for Afghans seeking to enter Europe, Türkiye has faced its own political and social

tensions related to migration. In 2022, the Turkish government ramped up deportations of Afghans, [sending 55,000 Afghans back to Afghanistan in 2022](#) and continued to do so since. In the last quarter of 2023, Türkiye deported [more than 3,000 Afghan migrants](#) by plane. In August 2024, Türkiye's Interior Minister announced that the country had deported more than 160,000 'irregular [migrants](#)', comprising both Afghan and Syrian migrants. A [recent investigative report by Lighthouse Reports](#) alleges that the EU has provided Türkiye with 213 million in funding to construct and maintain approximately 30 removal centres in Türkiye. The investigation further claims that detainees in the removal centres are subjected to unsanitary and overcrowded conditions, abuse and torture. They face significant barriers accessing legal representation, and informants reported being coerced into signing voluntary return documents.

In Europe in August this year, [Germany deported 28 Afghan nationals](#) for the first time since the Taliban takeover in 2021. This controversial decision came amid concerns about rising crime rates some politicians have attributed to migrants and also part of broader debates over the country's migration policies. In parallel, [Germany signed an agreement with Uzbekistan](#) in September 2024 on migration issues, potentially opening a pathway for deporting Afghan rejected asylum seekers to third countries, further indication of their commitment to returns.

Afghan migrants face dire conditions upon return

Afghanistan is a country already grappling with severe economic and political instability. Since the takeover in August 2021, Afghanistan has been plunged into a deepening humanitarian crisis, with [international aid drastically reduced](#) and basic services such as [healthcare and education on the verge of collapse](#). The arrival of returnees, whether forcibly or voluntarily, in high numbers—many of whom have no homes, jobs, or support networks—will further challenge the country's fragile economy.

As has been seen by those already deported from Pakistan, returnees face unstable futures, grappling with [extreme poverty, limited access to livelihood, shelter and other necessities](#) as well as severe restriction against women. Many also [struggle with stress, anxiety and depression](#) upon return. Humanitarian organizations have already observed [exacerbating protection risks among returnees](#) as well as the increase pressure on wider communities.

Dire conditions in Afghanistan will likely lead returnees to consider remigration

Given migrants are returning to conflict, poverty, and economic instability - many have no choice but to consider re-migration, either back to their previous countries of migration or to new destinations. Data from the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) shows that, even before August 2021, returnees faced challenges such as finding decent work, violence, and limited access to support. In fact, [41% of Afghan returnees interviewed by MMC](#) before the Taliban takeover expressed plans to re-migrate due to economic insecurity. With further deteriorations felt since 2021, migration aspirations are likely only to grow despite the fact that regular migration options are extremely scarce and the [risks of irregular migration are increasingly high](#).

Regional cooperation and international support needed to facilitate durable solutions for Afghan migrants

The increased deportation of Afghans by Iran, Pakistan, and other regional countries is worsening Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis and fails to address the complex drivers of displacement—such as conflict, poverty, and lack of basic rights. To break the cycle of displacement, regional cooperation is crucial. Countries including Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey should engage more actively with platforms like the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), which promotes voluntary repatriation, local integration, and third-country resettlement. A focus on providing legal pathways, work permits, and access to basic services such as education and healthcare can empower Afghans to become more self-sufficient and reduce the need for re-migration.

While international organisations and UN agencies have already called for [an immediate halt to deportation plans](#) and advocated for more humane and sustainable responses, the international community must increase support for reintegration programs in Afghanistan and expand resettlement quotas for the most vulnerable populations, such as women and children. By aligning with commitments under the Global Compact on Refugees and responding to [calls from UNHCR for greater resettlement opportunities](#), the international community can help provide Afghans with long-term security and protection while easing pressure on neighbouring countries.

Highlighted New Research and Reports



[Research Brief - Durable Solutions Analysis, Jalalabad/Nangarhar](#)

Asia Displacement Solutions Platform, Samuel Hall | August 2024

The research brief focuses on the specific context of Jalalabad and surrounding areas in Nangarhar, which is home to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees, especially from Pakistan. Understanding city level data provides ways forward to fill in data gaps in support of durable solutions programming. The aim of this research brief is to go beyond data mapping on durable solutions to incorporate data sources from ADSP members, Samuel Hall, IOM and OCHA data, within a durable solutions analysis framework developed by the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) in the East and Horn of Africa.



[Asia & the Pacific Regional Trends – Forced Displacement and Statelessness 2023](#)

UNHCR | July 2024

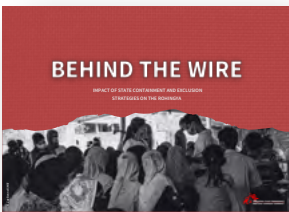
The Asia & the Pacific Regional Trends report provides an overview of forced displacement and statelessness in the region up to the end of 2023. Presenting an in-depth look into the Asia-Pacific region, it follows on from the release of UNHCR's flagship [Global Trends report published in June](#).



[Climate Change, Vulnerability and Migration: Impacts on Children and Youth in Southeast Asia](#)

SEI, World Vision | July 2024

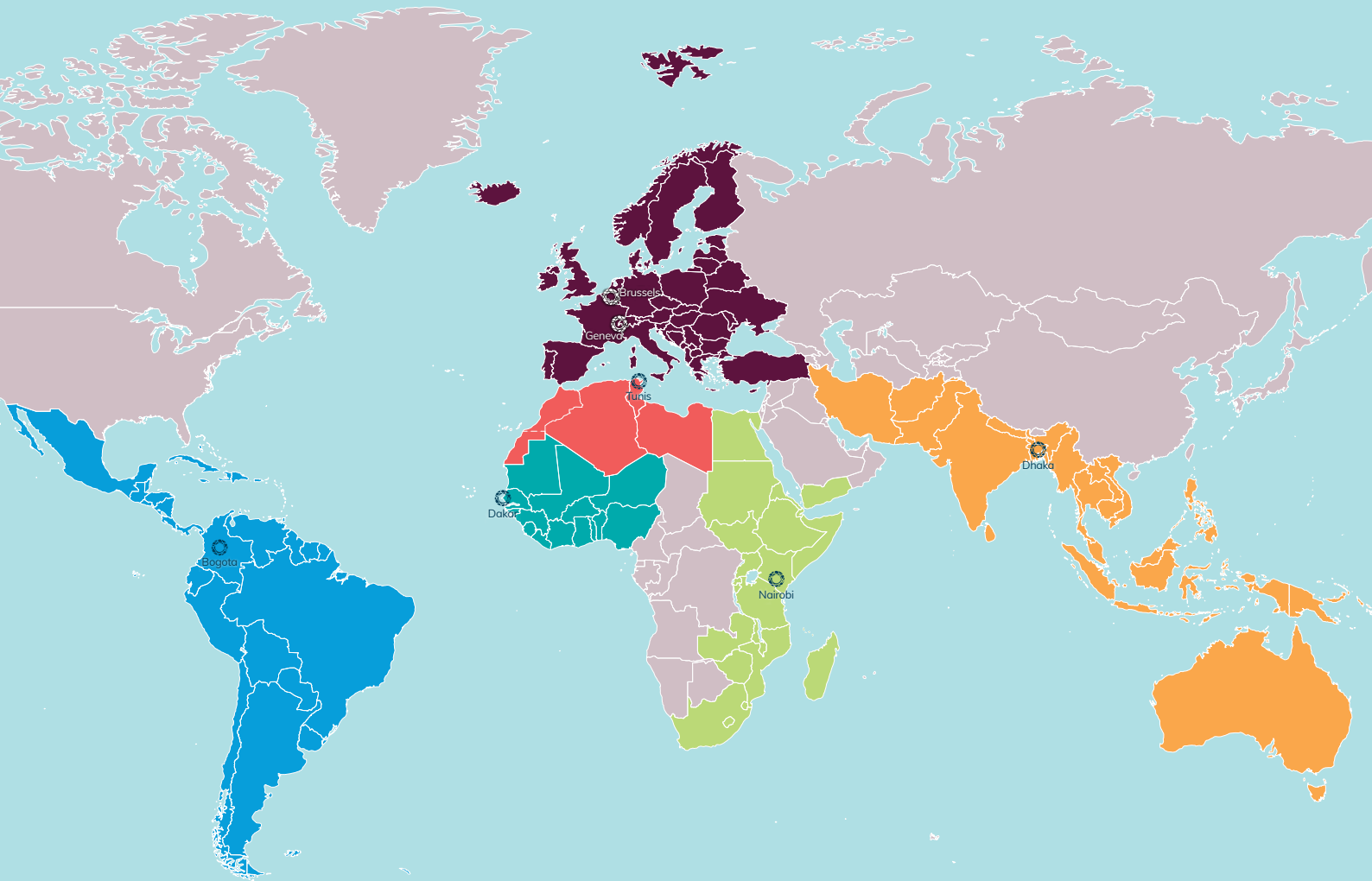
As the climate crisis deepens, its impacts on the most vulnerable are becoming heartbreakingly clear. This report reveals how environmental stressors and migration are profoundly altering the lives of young people in this region, and it clearly portrays the challenges and injustices of “life at the intersection of climate change, poverty and marginalisation”. The findings underscore the urgent and undeniable need for inclusive climate and migration approaches to address the root causes of distress migration and the deep social and emotional scars it leaves on vulnerable children and those who care for them.



[Behind the Wire – Impact of State Containment and Exclusion Strategies on the Rohingya](#)

Medecins Sans Frontieres | August 2024

There are approximately 2.8 million Rohingya people in the world today and the overwhelming majority— an estimated 99%—are contained or marginalized by harmful policies that deny them basic human rights and self-determination. An unacceptable 39% of all the Rohingya in the world live in fenced camps in Bangladesh and Myanmar with limited or no access to livelihoods, education, or healthcare, and with no proposed solutions. In Malaysia, where they are not contained in camps, even those registered as refugees have no right to employment or education. The fundamental containment and lack of freedom of the Rohingya profoundly impacts their physical and mental health and threatens their existence as a people.



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).

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

