

MMC Asia and the Pacific

QUARTER 1 2025



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, 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 and the quarterly updates from other regions, visit mixedmigration.org and subscribe to the [MMC newsletter](#) to receive our latest research. Follow us on Bluesky [@mixedmigration.org](#), on X [@Mixed_Migration](#) and LinkedIn [@mixedmigration-centre](#).

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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Many Afghan families travel to Pakistan through the "Zero Point" of Spin Boldak. Spin Boldak District, Afghanistan, 2023.

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Key Updates

- Implications of US funding terminations:** A January [executive order](#) blocked resettlement for [1,660 Afghans](#) and could suspend the relocation of up to [200,000 others](#). Meanwhile, WFP has warned that monthly food rations in Cox's Bazar may be cut from [US\\$ 12.50 to US\\$ 6.00](#) per person from the next quarter, while IOM announced the cessation of [healthcare and cash assistance for 925 refugees](#) in Indonesia from 5 March onwards. Myanmar refugees in Thailand, including those whose [resettlement was halted](#), also face worsening conditions from aid termination.
- Poor conditions cause mass departures from Bhasan Char:** [Thousands of Rohingya refugees fled Bhasan Char](#) in January with a lack of livelihoods opportunities, delays in family visits and official harassment by authorities cited as key drivers.
- Increased maritime patrols and intensified raids on refugees in Malaysia:** Malaysian authorities [detained 196 Rohingya refugees](#) who landed in Kedah and [pushed back two](#) other boats with an estimated 300 Rohingya refugees. Meanwhile, 630 undocumented individuals, including 530 Rohingya refugees were [arrested during a raid](#) in Selangor.
- Renewed deportation plans in Pakistan:** In January, the Pakistani government announced [a three-phase plan](#) to deport all Afghans without valid visas, including [those with ACCs and Proof of Registration \(PoR\) cards](#). This continues the [2023 mass deportation campaign](#), whereby hundreds of thousands of Afghans were forced to return, whereupon they faced [threats of persecution, rights abuse, and economic hardship](#).
- Efforts to combat human trafficking linked to cyber scams along the Myanmar-Thailand border intensifies:** Over [6,000 victims, including 3,900 Chinese nationals](#), are believed to be held captive in scam compounds in Myanmar. Since October 2023, Myanmar has deported [over 53,000 individuals linked to scams](#) to China, and Thailand identified [258 trafficking victims from 19 countries](#) in February.
- Thailand's violation of non-refoulement principle:** On February 27, Thailand deported Uyghur detainees held since 2014 to China, despite risks of persecution. This decision has raised concerns about Thailand's [compliance with non-refoulement obligations](#). In March, the [US imposed visa sanctions](#) on Thai officials involved in the deportations, and a [diplomatic visit to China](#) by Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister to follow up on the deportees' well-being has been met with scepticism from rights groups.

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

Recent US policy shifts leave Afghans in limbo

The Trump administration's recent policy shifts have left thousands of Afghan refugees in limbo. An [executive order](#) signed on January 20 halted refugee admissions, on the grounds of security concerns and a need for realignment within the United States' refugee programme. This move blocked thousands of Afghans – many of whom were already approved for resettlement – from entering the country, directly cancelling the flights of [1,660 individuals](#) bound for resettlement. Additionally, the [Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts \(CARE\) is set to be permanently shut down](#) in the next quarter, potentially affecting up to 200,000 Afghans who are currently in different stages of the relocation process. Meanwhile, as of March 7, the United States (US) has [deported 299 migrants to Panama](#), including [Afghans](#). Further restricting pathways to safety, the US administration is reportedly considering a [sweeping travel ban](#) targeting certain nationalities, including Afghans, raising further concerns about shrinking avenues for protection.

Beyond migration policies, the termination in aid programmes is expected to have severe humanitarian consequences to Afghan populations. Given that US funding accounted for [44% of Afghanistan's aid in 2024](#), the cuts will likely impact millions, affecting essential services such as healthcare, food security, shelter and education. In Oman, [82 Afghan women now face possible deportation](#) after their US-funded scholarships were terminated. These developments come amid growing restrictions on women in Afghanistan. In the final quarter of 2024, the Taliban [announced new measures forcing NGOs employing Afghan women](#) to shut down, further eroding space for women's participation in society. With resettlement pathways shrinking, disrupted humanitarian assistance, and conditions inside Afghanistan worsening, many – particularly women – are left with no viable routes to safety.

Pakistani government's three-phase deportation plan targets all Afghans without valid visas

The situation for Afghan nationals in Pakistan continues to deteriorate, with escalating crackdowns and forced deportations. This quarter, the authorities have stepped up arrests, with raids becoming increasingly common. Many, [including children](#), have been arrested during these crackdowns. Additionally, movement restrictions have also tightened, as Afghan nationals, including those with documentation, were given an ultimatum to either [relocate from Islamabad and Rawalpindi by February 28](#) or face deportation.

In January, the Pakistani government announced [a three-phase plan](#) to deport all Afghans without valid visas. This includes [documented individuals holding Afghan Citizen Card \(ACCs\) and Proof of Registration \(PoR\) cards](#), which will expire after June 30. This policy extends the [mass deportation campaign that began in late 2023](#), which has already forced hundreds of thousands of Afghans to return, where many face the [threat of persecution, rights abuses and economic hardship](#). Additionally, the government has expressed [no intention to extend the validity of PoR cards](#), meaning all PoR cardholders will also be expected to leave by June 30. With the termination of the US resettlement programme, many Afghans who have been awaiting relocation to the US [now face heightened risks of arrests and deportations](#). While small-scale resettlement programmes continue – such as those offered by Germany, [which relocated 287 Afghans](#) on two flights this quarter – the broader situation remains dire for most Afghans.

New restrictions in Iran leave Afghan refugees vulnerable to loss of essential services

Afghans in Iran continue to face increasing restrictions following the government's announcement in the [third quarter of 2024](#) of its plan to deport 2 million Afghan by early 2025. In line with this, a new policy [announced on 9 March, set to take effect on 20 March](#), imposes stricter documentation requirements, pushing many undocumented Afghans into greater precarity or even forced return. Under these new regulations, Afghans [who do not fall under the six recognised categories will be classified as "illegal"](#) and denied access to healthcare, housing and other essential services. These changes further worsen the already fragile situation for Afghans in Iran, many of whom sought refuge due to the crisis in Afghanistan.

Thailand's deportation of Uyghurs to China draws widespread concerns

Thailand's handling of Uyghur asylum seekers has [drawn significant criticism](#), particularly over its controversial decision to deport them to China, where there are well-documented risks of persecution. On 27 February, after more than a decade of detention, [at least 40 Uyghur asylum seekers were forcibly returned to China](#), raising concerns about their safety and the Thai government's compliance with non-refoulement obligations. While reports indicate that [40 out of the 48 Uyghur detainees](#) have been deported, the exact numbers remain unclear.

The deportations took place in spite of a Thai court decision on 18 February which saw merit in [a petition](#) seeking their release and ordered that Thailand's Immigration Bureau Commissioner or a representative appear before the court on 27 March. The Thai authorities also declined offers to resettle the Uyghurs from both [Canada and the US](#).

In March, the [US imposed visa sanctions on Thai officials](#) involved in the deportation decision. In response to mounting international pressure, a delegation led by the Deputy Thai Prime Minister made a [three-day diplomatic visit to China](#) to follow up on the well-being of Uyghur deportees. However, this visit has been met with [scepticism from rights groups](#), who remain concerned about the broader context of ongoing repression faced by Uyghur Muslims in China.

Myanmar hit by 7.7 and 6.4 magnitude earthquakes

On 28 March two 7.7 and 6.4 magnitude earthquakes struck Myanmar, severely impacting six regions: Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, Bago, Shan and Naypyidaw. While the impact of the earthquake is still to be determined, early reports by the de facto authorities indicate a [death toll of more than 2,000 people](#).

The earthquakes have [exacerbated an already dire humanitarian crisis](#), with more than 20 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and over 3 million people displaced due to internal fighting. The areas worst hit by the earthquake are also where [many internally displaced people have been seeking refuge](#). Efforts to provide relief have been significantly hindered due to extensive damage to infrastructure such as roads, bridges and hospitals, along with power outages, fuel shortages and unreliable communication networks.

Myanmar and Thailand strengthen efforts to tackle cyber scam trafficking networks

Recent reports highlight intensified efforts to combat human trafficking linked to cyber scam operations along the Myanmar-Thailand border. While the issue of trafficking for forced criminality has been rising [since 2022](#), regional coordination remains weak in tackling these transnational networks. This quarter, [both Myanmar and Thailand](#) have ramped up their crackdowns on trafficking networks. These efforts come amid [growing pressure from China](#), which has seen [a surge in the number of citizens trafficked](#) into Myanmar, with one particularly high-profile case involving [a Chinese actor](#). According to the Civil Society Network for Victim Assistance in Human Trafficking, more than [6,000 victims from 21 countries](#) – 3,900 of whom are Chinese nationals – are reportedly being held in scam compounds in Myanmar.

As of January, Myanmar de facto authorities claim to have deported over [53,000 individuals linked to scam operations to China](#) since October 2023. In early February, Thailand took further measures by [cutting electricity supplies](#) to five locations in Myanmar where these scam compounds operate, reportedly leading to [a 30% drop in cases related to cyber scams within one month](#). Thailand has also played a key role in receiving and identifying trafficking victims, screening [260 individuals from 19 countries across Asia, Africa and South America](#), who were rescued in February. Of these, 258 were identified as victims of trafficking and are set for repatriation to their respective countries.

Increasing insecurity and food ration cuts deepen the crisis for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

The situation for the Rohingya in Bangladesh continued to deteriorate this quarter, with rising displacement amid escalating violence in Rakhine state, compounded by humanitarian challenges, and increasing insecurity within the camps. In January, a trawler carrying [36 Rohingya](#) attempting to cross into Bangladesh was detained and returned to Myanmar. This incident is part of a broader trend, which has seen [around 80,000 Rohingya arriving in Bangladesh](#) since August 2024, driven by renewed conflicts in Rakhine state.

Compounding the crisis, the [World Food Programme announced in early March that it may cut monthly food rations](#) for Rohingya refugees by more than half, from [US\\$12.50 to just US\\$6.00](#) per person starting 1 April 2025. If implemented, this reduction – driven by funding shortfalls – [raises serious concerns](#) about worsening malnutrition and instability in the camps. At the same time, a new report highlights the extreme risks faced by Rohingya in Bangladesh, including [threats of violence, abuses, killing and abductions](#) perpetrated by Rohingya militant groups within the camps.

In addition, in January [thousands of Rohingya fled Bhasan Char](#) – an [isolated and poorly serviced island settlement](#) that was controversially established as a refugee settlement during the Covid-19 pandemic – citing deteriorating living conditions, including lack of livelihoods opportunities, delays in family visits and official harassment by authorities as key factors.

Growing hostility and funding cuts leave Rohingya refugees in Indonesia increasingly vulnerable

The situation for Rohingya refugees in Indonesia has become increasingly dire, marked by local resistance to new arrivals and a reduction in international support. In late January, [a boat carrying 76 Rohingya refugees](#) landed on a beach in Aceh after being stranded at sea for hours due to protests from local communities. This resistance reflects a broader trend of growing hostility toward asylum seekers in the region, likely fuelled by rising concerns over the capacity to support the increasing number of Rohingya arrivals in Indonesia. Earlier in January, [two boats carrying 267 Rohingya refugees](#) arrived in East Aceh, adding to the six boats with [over 800 individuals that landed in the last quarter](#).

Compounding the crisis, the United Nations has been forced to [terminate healthcare and cash assistance for 925 Rohingya refugees in Indonesia](#) following reductions in US funding, further straining already limited resources. With dwindling support, the growing pressure on local systems risks exacerbating frustrations and fuelling greater hostility toward asylum seekers – an issue that has [intensified since 2024](#).

Crackdowns heighten risks for refugees in India

The combination of deportation risks and intensifying conflicts in Myanmar continues to leave refugees in India in an extremely precarious situation. The ad hoc nature of India's refugee policy, influenced by political considerations, often results in inconsistent treatment and precarity, leaving refugees vulnerable to arbitrary arrests and deportations. In January, India deported [26 individuals from Myanmar](#) who had been detained in Manipur state since 2022, handing them over to the Myanmar de facto authorities. This follows the [deportation of 77 individuals](#) last year. Human rights organisations have raised concerns over these deportations, as returnees face serious risks, including persecution, imprisonment or forced conscription by the military. Meanwhile, escalating conflicts between the Tatmadaw and resistance groups in Myanmar's Sagaing region in January has [displaced more than 3,000 individuals](#) to areas along the India-Myanmar border. Authorities in Jaipur also [detained 394 Rohingya refugees](#), including individuals holding UNHCR cards, during a city-wide crackdown in January.

Myanmar's forced conscription strains migration pathways

This quarter, Myanmar's de facto authorities have intensified their forced conscription campaign, targeting students youth, and returned migrants. Reports indicate that authorities are [abducting youth](#) from homes and public spaces, as well as targeting [students](#), forcing many into military service against their will. In late January, [a new law was introduced, imposing sweeping travel restrictions](#) on individuals summoned for conscription, barring them from leaving the country without permission from the Central Military Service Organization. As of March, the travel ban has disrupted existing migration pathways, affecting [more than 40,000 individuals](#) who were set to migrate for work. Employers in Singapore are reportedly being urged to [avoid hiring workers from Myanmar](#) due to uncertainties surrounding their travel due to the new ban, further limiting opportunities for prospective migrants seeking to migrate.

Returnees and deportees from Thailand are particularly vulnerable, with many at risk of [immediate conscription upon return](#). Between July 2024 and January 2025, about [300 Myanmar nationals](#) deported from Ranong, Thailand, are believed to have been conscripted upon return. Meanwhile, [steep costs and a lengthy amnesty programme process](#) creates time pressure and financial strain for undocumented migrants, primarily Myanmar nationals, trying to obtain regular status. As Myanmar's conscription efforts intensify, the country's youth who fall within the conscription age are left with few options, often resorting to [irregular migration routes](#).

Uncertainty for Myanmar refugees in Thailand amid US aid termination and resettlement halt

Myanmar refugees in Thailand are facing increasing uncertainty as US aid and resettlement opportunities have been suspended. This includes [26 Myanmar refugees who were scheduled to resettle in the US in January](#). With the sudden suspension of their resettlement, they now find themselves in a state of limbo, struggling to reintegrate and rebuild their lives after being forced to return to the camps. The aid suspension has exacerbated already dire conditions faced by the refugee population in Thailand. In particular, [healthcare services in refugee camps](#), which had been heavily reliant on US support, are now at risk. The termination of aid has left medical facilities within refugee camps grappling with shortages of medical supplies, staff and funds. While the local health office in Tak has stepped in, deploying medical teams from local hospitals to support the camps, the local healthcare system – already stretched by its own challenges – is [struggling to absorb the additional burden](#) caused by the suspension of aid.

Malaysia considers work rights for refugees amid ongoing crackdowns

In January, the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) intensified patrols to intercept boats attempting to reach its shores, following the disembarkation of [196 Rohingya in Kedah](#) on 3 January. The group, [which included 71 children](#), was sent to immigration detention. On the same day, authorities [pushed back two other boats](#), believed to be carrying around 300 Rohingya refugees. This hardline approach to irregular migration continued in February, when [630 undocumented individuals – 530 of whom were Rohingya refugees](#), including UNHCR cardholders – were arrested during a raid at a wholesale market in Selangor, a common site where refugees seek informal work.

Meanwhile, Malaysia is [refining MKN Directive No 23](#), a framework for addressing the issues of refugees and asylum seekers. One of the key areas of focus is granting work rights to refugees registered with the UNHCR. This shift aligns with the [growing demand in sectors such as the restaurant industry](#) to employ Rohingya refugees in response to labour shortages. While this move is seen as positive, the Human Rights Commissions of Malaysia has [raised concerns about the lack of transparency](#) around the directive, given it has remained confidential following its approval in June 2023.

Fatal shooting of Indonesian irregular migrants escalates into diplomatic tensions

In a separate incident involving the MMEA, five Indonesians attempting to leave Malaysia irregularly via Selangor were shot by the maritime enforcement authorities on 24 January. The incident resulted in the [deaths of two individuals](#) and has since sparked national outrage, escalating [diplomatic tensions](#) between Malaysia and Indonesia. This tragic event also highlights longstanding issues related to [human smuggling and the protection of Indonesian migrant workers \(or lack thereof\)](#), which have been ongoing concerns for both countries.

Sri Lankan communities show solidarity with Rohingya refugees in the face of deportation plans

In Sri Lanka, [survivors of the Sri Lankan civil war](#) were among the first to assist over 100 Rohingya refugees found on a boat off Indian Ocean [last quarter](#). However, the government's response to the arrival of these refugees has been marked by a policy of criminalisation, owing to their perception of the situation as an issue of illegal immigration. The Minister of Public Security even expressed concerns [over the potential arrival of over 100,000 individuals](#). In response, the government plans to deport the refugees back to Myanmar, where their safety remains uncertain. This has sparked [local protests and advocacy efforts](#), with calls for the protection of these vulnerable individuals in line with the non-refoulement principle.

Deceptive recruitment schemes put South Asian migrants at risk abroad

In Malaysia, authorities recently [detained 15 Bangladeshi men](#) at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, who attempted to enter the country posing as cricket players with falsified documents. Similar patterns have been reported elsewhere, with South Asian migrants from India and Nepal reportedly [trafficked into fighting in Russia's war in Ukraine](#) under false promises of employment and legal status. These incidents highlight the persistent demand for better economic opportunities abroad, the risks of fraudulent recruitment networks, and the consequences of restrictive migration policies that fail to provide accessible, safe and regular pathways.

Investigations into trafficking of Thai and Kazakh women in Georgia underway

In February, authorities in Georgia and Thailand launched [investigations into a human trafficking ring](#) allegedly linked to Georgia's surrogacy industry. This follows the rescue of [three Thai women](#) coerced into egg harvesting and confinement under false promises of surrogacy jobs. Further investigations revealed that while some women voluntarily worked as surrogacy mothers, there were also claims of exploitation, including from several surrogates from Kazakhstan [who were not compensated as promised](#). According to a Thai-based NGO, approximately [100 trafficked Thai women](#) remain in Georgia, living under concerning conditions.

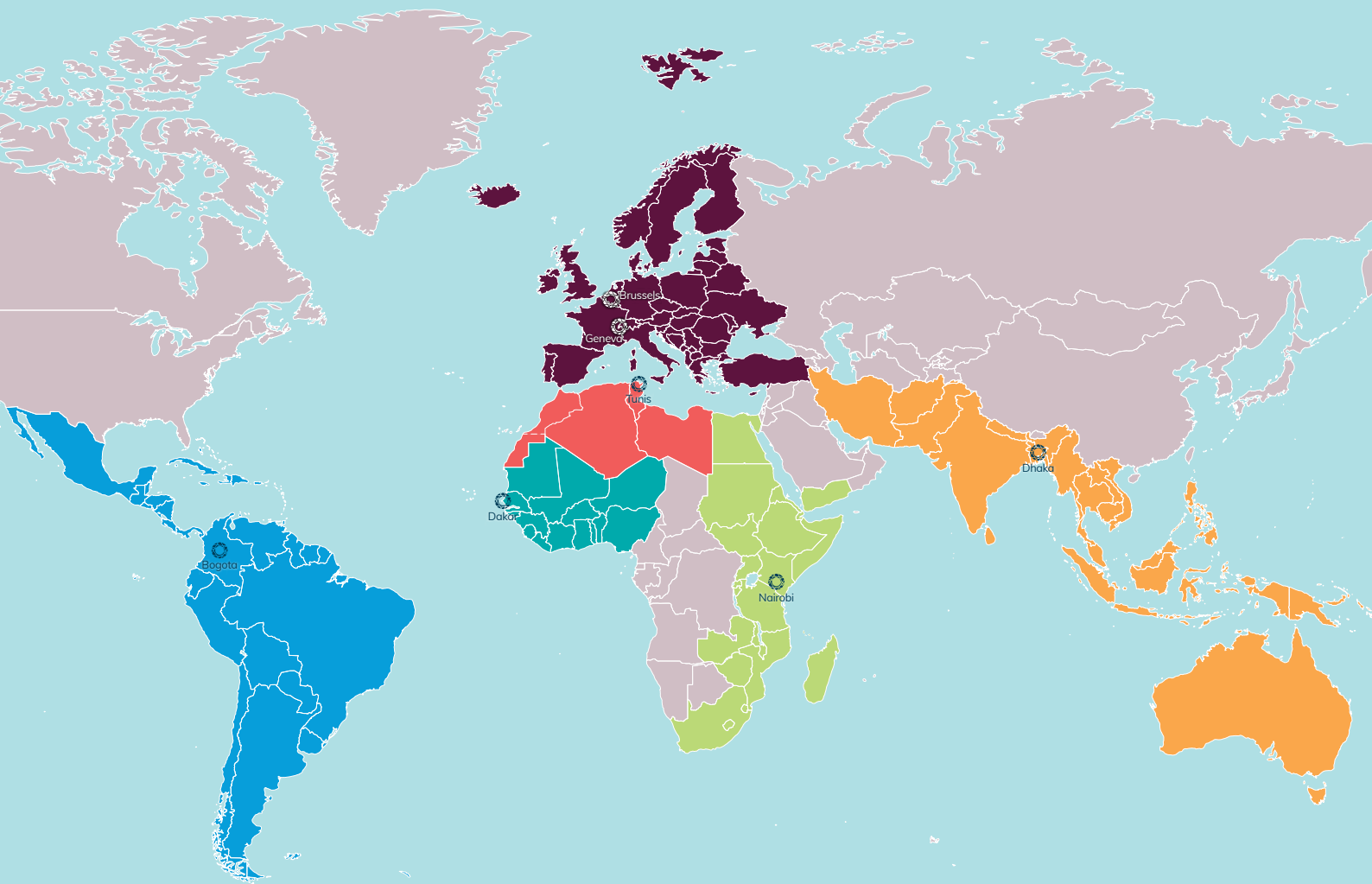
South Korea's Yeongyang County faces mixed reactions to refugee resettlement proposal

Yeongyang County in South Korea is planning to offer resettlement to refugees from Myanmar as part of efforts to [address its dwindling population](#), driven by aging demographics and a low birth rate. Local authorities have proposed a programme to resettle [10 families from the Karen ethnic group of Myanmar](#), with plans to begin as early as the third quarter of 2025. While the initiative is viewed as a potential solution to local demographic challenges, it has faced opposition from some local communities and political groups. Critics have raised concerns about the [potential for social and cultural integration issues](#), fearing that the arrival of refugees might lead to tensions within local communities.

Growing pressure on Australia's offshore policies

Australia's offshore policies remain a contentious issue, balancing legal challenges, international criticism and limited reforms. In January, the [United Nations Human Rights Committee condemned Australia's offshore detention](#) practices, citing concerns over arbitrary detention, prolonged stays, poor living conditions and limited access to legal recourse for detainees. These decisions add to the mounting international pressure on Australia to reform its offshore approach. In February, [an asylum seeker scheduled for deportation to Nauru](#) had their deportation postponed due to a legal challenge before Australia's High Court.

Amid these ongoing challenges, a small but notable sign of progress in the country's resettlement programme points to a potential shift towards a more inclusive humanitarian approach in Australia. The [Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot \(CRISP\)](#), a community sponsorship programme designed to help refugees resettle by providing housing, education and integration support, has transitioned from a pilot phase to a permanent initiative. Starting in 2026, the programme will resettle 200 refugees annually.



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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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