

MMC Asia and the Pacific

QUARTER 4 2022



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, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, The Philippines, Türkiye, Australia, and New Zealand. 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 hosted in Danish Refugee Council (DRC) regional offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across 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 refugees and migrants traveling along similar routes, using similar means of travel – often traveling irregularly, and wholly or partially, assisted by migrant smugglers.

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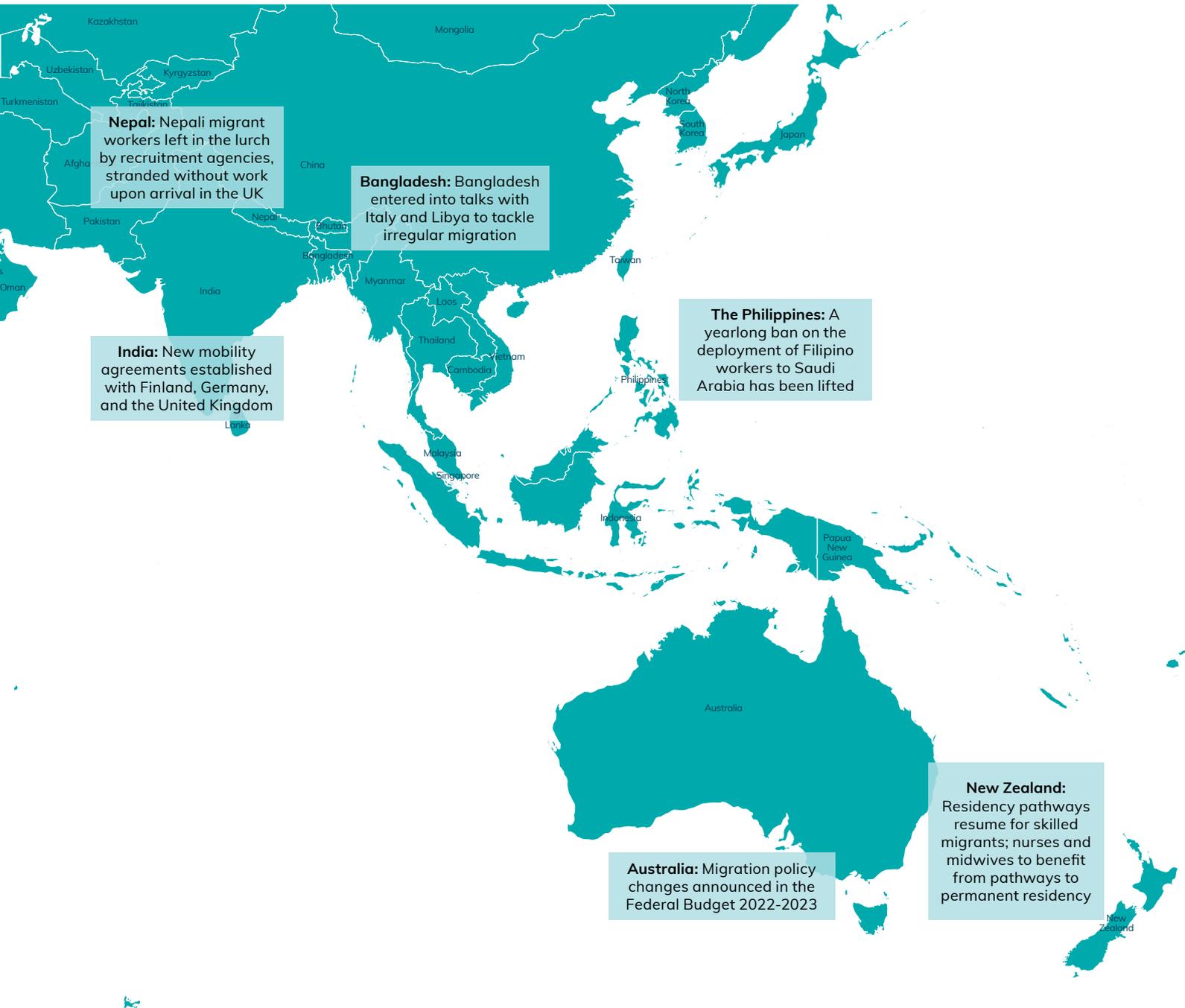
Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia and the Pacific

Quarter 4 - 2022

Key Updates

- **Migration options for Afghans are shrinking:** Migration and resettlement pathways for Afghans have been constrained by multiple challenges, including [restricted mobility](#) within and across Afghan borders, increased [crackdowns in Pakistan](#), the [reception crisis in Belgium](#), and the [Canadian sponsorship quota](#) system, among others.
- **Andaman Sea crossings rise sixfold in 2022 when compared to 2021:** UNHCR has drawn attention to a “[dramatic increase](#)” in the number of people - predominantly Rohingya - attempting dangerous Andaman Sea crossings in 2022. [Several hundred](#) are feared dead or missing.
- **New pathways in the pipeline for Bangladeshi migrant workers:** The Bangladesh government has entered into talks with the [European Union](#), [Libya](#), and [Russia](#) towards establishing potential pathways for Bangladeshi migrant workers.
- **There is a need for better policy and responses to climate-induced human mobility:** The increased intensity and frequency of natural disasters driven by climate change has uprooted millions in [Bangladesh](#) and [Pakistan](#), yet [little progress](#) has been made to address the issue.
- **Anti-Torture Act passed and National Screening Mechanism criteria outlined in Thailand:** While [many remain sceptical](#) over aspects of implementation, the passage of the Anti-Torture Act and the establishment of criteria for the National Screening Mechanism signify positive progress in instituting protection frameworks for refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand.
- **Detention conditions in Australia remain dire:** [Criticism](#) of a new agreement between the Australian government and the Management and Training Corporation - a US based private prison operator - have increased as the government moved to [block the UN](#) from accessing detention facilities, particularly sections that provide mental healthcare assistance.

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

Mixed migration from Asia and the Pacific

Afghan refugees and migrants see shrinking number of resettlement pathways

Despite promises in the immediate aftermath of the Taliban take-over in Afghanistan, Western nations have not succeeded in advancing comprehensive resettlement programs for at-risk Afghans. The need remains critical as growing number of Afghans are unable to seek protection.

In 2022, Afghans were the [second most common nationality](#) among refugee and migrant arrivals by sea in Greece, and the [fifth most common nationality](#) on the route to Italy via Libya. While protection risks continue to exacerbate in Afghanistan, especially with [increasing restrictions on women's rights](#), Afghans continue to live in a state of legal limbo as pathways for international protection remain limited.

In October 2022, [Germany announced a new resettlement program](#) for at-risk Afghans residing in Afghanistan, people involved with women's rights and broader human rights, politics, justice, and other fields, as well as people at-risk of persecution due to their religious or gender identity, and sexual orientation. Germany will rely on civil society organisations present in Afghanistan to help decide which applicants meet the criteria of the new relocation program. However, the [implementation of the program faces several challenges](#). Afghans who meet the criteria will be unable to fly out of Afghanistan under the Taliban administration if they do not possess passports or belong to groups at-risk. In October 2022, refugee advocates [urged the Canadian government to remove the cap](#) on the number of Afghan refugees who could be privately sponsored by Canadian individuals and organisations, and to not include rejected applications in the set total quota of 3,000 applications, so as to only recognise accepted applications. In the upcoming year, around [5,000 Afghan asylum seekers are likely to face rejections](#) amid the reception crisis in Belgium.

In November 2022, authorities in Pakistan [began a crackdown on migrants](#) - including Afghans - living without documentation in Pakistan. The government declared foreigners living without documentation could either choose to exit Pakistan or extend their visas without having to pay a penalty [until 31 December 2022](#). However, a failure to do so post the deadline will result in foreigners being sentenced up to three years in prison under the Foreigners' Act 1946. Afghans in Pakistan, including those [awaiting resettlement](#) to Canada, are increasingly concerned about the rise in arrest and detention of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers. In November 2022, around [1,500 Afghans were arrested](#) in Sindh province, which has recorded [the highest number of arrests](#) thus far. Reports emerged of [139 Afghan women and 165 children being detained](#) in a high-security prison in Karachi, the provincial capital of Sindh. Among detained Afghan women, 56 were sentenced and 83 were undergoing trial for entering Pakistan "illegally" according to the Foreigner Act 1946. Similarly, among detained Afghan children, 92 were sentenced and 19 were undergoing trial. In both cases, those detained had access to legal aid. While [public pressure has led to the release](#) of more than 500 Afghans from prison in January, they now face the risk of being deported to Afghanistan.

Nepal's migrant workers left in the lurch by recruitment agencies

In December 2022, a number of Nepali civil society organisations published an [open letter](#) to the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) raising concern regarding the wellbeing of migrant workers in Qatar and the lack of protection against exploitation. This includes the [inadequate financial compensation mechanism](#) set up by the authorities to compensate for abuses faced by migrant workers in Qatar. The letter also addressed the inability of families to access compensation if the death of a worker is pending investigation.

Meanwhile, in the UK, Nepali migrant workers found themselves in a difficult situation under the British government's seasonal worker scheme. Workers who arrived in the UK as [seasonal fruit pickers were forced to return home in less than two months](#) as they were reportedly no longer needed, even though they were offered work for six months. This left workers in debt as they had quit jobs in Nepal and incurred loans to pay recruitment agent fees, with no option but to return to Nepal or be blacklisted by recruitment agencies. Cases such as this, and the abuse of migrant workers in Qatar, have refocused attention on the [exploitative conditions](#) under which Nepali migrant workers enlist themselves at recruitment agencies to work abroad.

India enters into mobility agreements with Finland, Germany, and the United Kingdom

India entered into mobility agreements with a number of countries in the last quarter of 2022. These agreements are meant to facilitate the emigration of high skilled Indians out of the region. In November 2022, [India and the UK](#) announced a deal to grant up to 3,000 visas to degree-educated Indian nationals, aged between 18 to 30, to work in the UK for up to two years. The following month, [India signed an immigration pact with Germany](#), to make way for Indian skilled workers to access the German labour market and for students to participate in research and dual degree programs in Germany. India also entered into a [migration agreement with Finland](#) to foster research, innovation, and investment between the two countries and combat irregular migration. [50 percent of student visa applications made by Indians to Australia were declined](#) in 2022 however, following concerns of non-'genuine' entry raised by visa authorities during the vetting process.

Bangladesh entered into talks with Italy, Libya, and Russia to create new pathways for migrant workers

Bangladesh remained central to mixed migration movements in the last quarter of 2022, as both a country of origin and a country of destination in the region. In 2022, Bangladeshis were the [third most common nationality \(14.9 percent\)](#) of sea arrivals in Italy, via Libya. In November 2022, Bangladesh engaged in [talks with Libya](#) on tackling irregular migration by instead facilitating the movement of Bangladeshi doctors, nurses, technicians, and agro-entrepreneurs to Libya. The following month, Bangladesh [entered into talks with Italy](#) to promote safe migration, and with the European Union on launching a [Talent Partnership program](#) to create regular pathways for Bangladeshi migrant workers. Bangladesh is not widely considered a 'risk' country, making it challenging for Bangladeshi asylum seekers to receive international protection, although

many do. As a consequence, Bangladeshi asylum seekers report spending [up to 10 years in detention](#) in countries like Australia, having arrived by boat, before they are released on temporary protection. In November 2022, 3,900 Bangladeshis filed asylum applications in the EU – the third most common nationality from the Asia and the Pacific region to file asylum claims in the EU after Afghans and Turks.

Bangladesh has also taken measures to boost emigration of its skilled workforce and grow incoming remittances. In November 2022, Bangladesh signed [an agreement with Russia](#) to send skilled labourers to work in the shipbuilding industry. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment also declared Bangladesh would assess and set [a minimum wage](#) for every country that Bangladeshi migrant workers emigrate to, in order to ensure that the migrant workforce is treated fairly. With a [one billion USD drop in remittance flows](#) to Bangladesh, attributed to migrants' use of [informal channels](#) of currency exchange and money transfer, the government has introduced a range of incentives to improve these flows. This includes a [savings scheme](#) to add a stipulated amount to the worker's remittances in a savings account, the total sum of which will be returned to the migrant worker with interest upon their return to the country.

The Philippines resumes sending migrant workers to Saudi Arabia and tackles mass emigration of nurses

In November 2022, the Philippines [resumed the deployment](#) of Filipino workers to Saudi Arabia. Both countries agreed to streamline employment procedures and take measures to protect migrant workers' rights. Under these measures, new employment contracts will be issued to workers, which will include insurance coverage for unpaid wages, coverage of airfare and recruitment costs in case of termination of contract. The new agreement between the two countries addresses issues which led to the Philippines [imposing a year-long ban](#) on the recruitment of domestic workers to Saudi Arabia in 2021.

Simultaneously, the Philippines continued to grapple with the [issue of an exodus of nurses](#), as countries such as New Zealand announced direct pathways to residency for migrant healthcare workers. The departure of nurses to work in countries offering higher wages and pathways to long-term immigration has worsened labour shortages in the health sector in the Philippines.

Türkiye steps up deportations amid rising xenophobia and upcoming elections

Anti-refugee sentiment in Türkiye has grown as refugee issues are being [politicised amid the approaching 2023 elections](#). The governing and opposition political parties have taken a tough stance against migrants and refugees, with some promising to [deport all Syrian refugees](#) should they win the election. While many remain sceptical over the feasibility of mass expulsion, a significant shift in migration policy is clear, as the government halted the ["open-door policy"](#) and imposed much stricter [border control measures](#) to prevent the entry of irregular migrants. In October 2022, Greek and Turkish authorities traded accusations over human rights violations as [92 asylum seekers were mistreated](#) and found naked at the Greece-Türkiye border. In addition, according to an [official press release](#) from October, Turkish authorities increased crackdowns on irregular migrants in the country.

In 2022, 119,817 irregular migrants were deported from Türkiye. Syrians remain increasingly concerned about [rising arbitrary arrests and detentions](#) by the Turkish authorities. Escalating tension between local communities and refugees and migrants has also led to an [uptick in hate crimes](#) towards refugees and migrants in the country.

Mixed migration within Asia and the Pacific

Sri Lankan asylum seekers fear deportation from the UK, and Sri Lankan government seeks to protect potential migrant workers from harm abroad.

Sri Lankans fleeing ethnic persecution and an economic crisis in the country continue to remain at risk of deportation and forced return. In October 2022, the UK Government informed Sri Lankan [asylum seekers on the Chagos Islands](#) in the Indian Ocean that if they do not return to Sri Lanka, they will be deported to an undisclosed country, in a plan similar to the UK's agreement with Rwanda. The 1951 Refugee Convention [does not apply to the Chagos Islands](#), despite its status as a British territory. In November 2022, the UK government reported that three Sri Lankan asylum seekers were [to be sent to Rwanda](#) for medical treatment, in what is feared could be a precursor to removing the remaining 100 Sri Lankan asylum seekers from the Chagos Islands.

On 8 November 2022, approximately [300 Sri Lankans were rescued](#) in distress in the waters between the Philippines and Vietnam, around 250 nautical miles off Vung Tau, en route to Canada. While Vietnam sought to repatriate those rescued to Sri Lanka, the [asylum seekers pleaded not to be sent back](#) to the country. On 27 December 2022, [152 asylum seekers were repatriated](#) to Sri Lanka on a chartered flight from Vietnam, by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

In November 2022, Sri Lanka reported that 90 migrant domestic workers were [stranded in Oman](#), having been tricked by unregistered agents into arriving on a visit or tourist visa with the hope of converting these to work visas. The Sri Lankan government is being urged to create a [centralised digital platform](#) for overseas recruitment. A platform such as this, which would be controlled by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, would help keep a check on unlicensed recruitment agencies. Sri Lankan public-private institutions have also [launched loan schemes tailored to cover costs](#) for migrant workers who are registered with the government's foreign employment bureau and who wish to seek employment in South Korea, Japan, Israel, Romania, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman. Loans are available from USD 1,350 up to USD 8,000 (LKR 500,000 – 3,000,000).

Surge in Andaman Sea crossings by Rohingya refugees bound for Southeast Asia

Between January and November 2022, [close to 2,000 people](#) attempted to cross the Andaman Sea, a journey often facilitated by sophisticated [smuggling and trafficking networks](#). This represents a sixfold increase when compared with 2021. It also corresponds with the findings of an [MMC study](#) with the

Rohingya in Indonesia which found that almost all respondents interviewed by MMC's 4Mi programme engaged at least one smuggler during their journey, and many were exposed to grave risks en route. An estimated [several hundred people died or went missing](#) at sea in 2022. One of the cases involved at least [180 people reportedly adrift on a boat](#) which set sail from Bangladesh end of November 2022. Everyone onboard was [presumed dead](#) according to the United Nations after weeks of losing contact with the boat.

Rohingya are forced to take the dangerous journey against the background of [renewed clashes](#) in Rakhine State and deteriorating camp conditions in Cox' Bazaar in Bangladesh. The number is likely to rise in the coming months, given the [calmer waters](#) following the end of the monsoon season. Two boats carrying a total of [230 Rohingya reached Aceh](#), Indonesia, in mid-November. While the refugees were allowed to disembark in Aceh, Indonesian authorities [pressured international organisations](#) - particularly IOM and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - into taking full responsibility for providing assistance and protection to the refugees amid rising discontent among the Acehnese community.

Rohingya fleeing Myanmar also face the risk of arrest and detention by the de facto Myanmar authorities. [More than 110 Rohingya](#) were arrested near the Ayeyarwady region in December 2022 while attempting to flee refugee camps in Bangladesh and Rakhine state in Myanmar. They were sentenced to two to five years in prison for travelling without documentation. Further concern has been voiced regarding [154 Rohingya refugees found adrift](#) in Thai waters by a Vietnamese vessel in December who were handed to Myanmar authorities.

Financial support to Bangladesh for Rohingya refugees continues to [decline every year](#), and there is limited scope for, and progress made in terms of, repatriation. However, the [UK](#) and [Italy](#) have committed to increased humanitarian assistance to Bangladesh, and in December 2022, the US committed to [resettle 62 Rohingya refugees](#) from Bangladesh.

Malaysia threatens to shut down UNHCR in increasingly hostile refugee policy environment

A recent proposal by Malaysia's National Security Council chief to [shut down UNHCR's office](#), which has been operating in the country since 1975, raised concerns among rights groups. This follows an allegation that UNHCR is [interfering in internal affairs](#) through 'arbitrary' issuance of UNHCR cards. The agency has not been allowed to access immigration detention centres and assist detainees in need of international protection [since 2019](#). A government plan to take over the agency's role in managing refugee populations in Malaysia is reportedly in the pipeline. One indicator of this, was the roll-out of the [Tracking Refugees Information System](#) (TRIS) in July 2022 under the Home Ministry, which promises to provide refugees with access to public services and job opportunities. However, scepticism remains given the [lack of clarity](#) on its implementation.

Human Rights Watch reported that Malaysia has [returned more than 2,000 Myanmar nationals](#) - including asylum seekers - between April and October 2022, in clear violation of the non-refoulement principle. Deportations are likely to continue and worsen following [cooperation established](#) between Malaysian immigration officials and the de facto authorities from Myanmar's embassy in Malaysia. In December 2022, a Malaysian [court lifted a temporary stay](#) on the deportation of 1,200 Myanmar nationals imposed

in February 2021, exposing 114 asylum seekers, including children, to harm should they be returned to Myanmar.

New Zealand reopens pathways to residency for skilled migrants, nurses, and midwives

In October 2022, under the new [Immigration Rebalance](#) plan, New Zealand announced it would [resume accepting applications](#) for the Skilled Migrant Category Resident Visa, which had been closed to new applications since April 2020. Under the points-based selection system where points are accumulated based on various criteria such as qualifications, age, and work experience, the points threshold for selection was increased from 160 to 180. New Zealand also restarted another pathway – the Parent Resident Visa – [reducing requirements](#) in terms of median wage for the sponsors. Under the same plan, in December 2022 the government announced that [nurses and mid-wives](#) would become eligible for the Straight to Residence Green List pathway, only available to doctors in the health sector thus far. From February 2023, the [median wage for migrant workers will be increased](#) in all sectors except in tourism and hospitality. Policy changes of this sort are being implemented to make New Zealand an attractive destination for highly skilled migrants looking to settle long-term, in order to address the [mass emigration of its younger population](#), [burnout among the country's workforce](#) and [workforce shortages in the health sector](#).

Changes in the [immigration policy have been critiqued](#) for using migrant workers to fill workforce shortages, while at the same time forcing them to stick to a single employer for three years to meet residency conditions. Given that residency conditions are subject to constant change, migrant workers risk being asked to leave the country at the end of three years if they do not manage to secure residency.

Australia seeks to attract skilled migrants and transform existing visa categories for refugees, while continuing to engage in inhumane detention practices

In October 2022, [Australia's Migration Program 2022-2023](#) benefitted from an increase in funding through the release of its Federal Budget 2022-2023. This action is in line with Australia's focus on balancing skills shortages in the labour market and providing partners and family members of Australian citizens a pathway to residency. The government also declared its intention to [abolish the Temporary Protection Visa and Safe Haven Enterprise Visa categories in 2023](#). This suggests that over 19,000 refugees currently under temporary protection may be able to apply for Permanent Protection Visas and benefit from social welfare services, the right to work, free education, freedom to travel out of Australia, and apply for family reunification.

In November 2022, the government of Australia declared that [Myanmar nationals who seek refuge having fled the military coup will be prioritised](#) in the onshore humanitarian visa program, in addition to committing [AUD 135 million in humanitarian aid](#) to the crisis in Myanmar.

Australian policy towards refugees and asylum seekers continues to invite critique. As per an [agreement made between Australia and New Zealand](#) in May 2022, New Zealand was to resettle up to 450 refugees who are currently in Australia. However, as of September 2022, only [36 refugees accepted an offer](#) to be resettled in New Zealand. The United Nations (UN) blamed the low number on Australia's asylum system, which has left many asylum seekers traumatised after long years of waiting in detention camps. The [UN further accused Australia of breaching its obligations](#) under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, after Australia blocked the UN from accessing detention facilities in New South Wales, particularly the mental health wards in Queensland.

In October 2022, Australia was criticised for its agreement with [Management and Training Corporation](#) (MTC), a US-based private prison operator, to oversee the operation of Nauru Regional Processing Centre, an offshore immigration detention facility infamous for [poor living conditions and high instances of mistreatment and self-harm](#) among detainees. In an instance that sheds light on the Australian government's practice of using alternative places of detention (Apods), in December 2022, researchers released a coast-to-coast interactive map of [dozens of hotels in Australia that double up as detention centres](#). As Apods are not officially recognised, the living conditions in the facilities and the length of time detainees spend there remain unknown.

Thailand promotes medical tourism and progresses protection measures for asylum seekers at risk of persecution

In October 2022, Thailand passed the Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act 2022, also known as the [Anti-Torture Act](#), to prevent the forced return of asylum seekers from the country. Expected to come into force in February 2023, the law will protect people at risk from expulsion, deportation, or extradition to countries where they are in danger of persecution. The cabinet also [approved](#) the criteria set for asylum seekers seeking protection under the [National Screening Mechanism](#). However, [human rights groups remain sceptical over the implementation](#) of the mechanism. Asylum seekers risk being rejected for "unspecified national security reasons," or if they are currently identified as migrant workers from Cambodia or Myanmar, even though they originally fled a home country under fear of persecution.

In November 2022, Thailand [introduced a visa category for medical treatments](#), to tentatively come into force in 2023. The one-year visa will be granted to medical tourists who can provide proof of medical appointments, health insurance with a minimum coverage of USD 100,000 (THB 3 million) and adequate funding for treatments covering at least USD 22,800 (THB 800,000). The new category is a part of the government's effort to promote wellness and medical tourism to Thailand among financially well-off foreigners.

Climate-induced displacement in South Asia warrants action

While Pakistan is [still recovering](#) from an unprecedented flood earlier this year, which displaced [32 million people](#), Cyclone Sitrang [hit Bangladesh](#) in October and damaged 10,000 houses. The delta country is also subject to frequent flooding, rising sea levels, eroding coastlines, and increasing soil salinity, which has [uprooted an average of a million people](#) each year. This has contributed to [internal migration](#) from affected areas to Dhaka, the country's capital.

Climate change is also likely to [affect labour migration](#) from Nepal. The rise in climate-induced hazards, particularly extreme heat, is likely to scale down labour migration to key destinations like India and Gulf Countries, consequently reducing the remittances - a major contributor to the country's foreign exchange and economic growth.

While the [establishment of a loss and damage fund](#) for climate vulnerable countries as agreed at COP 27 signifies a significant breakthrough, [limited progress](#) is observed in policy responses to address climate-induced human mobility in the region. On the bright side, Australia introduced the Australia-Pacific Engagement Visa, a new visa scheme to allow 3,000 workers from the Pacific Islands to come to Australia annually. Starting in 2023, the pathway could potentially become Australia's first attempt at offering a [climate change humanitarian visa](#) by [prioritising applicants impacted by climate change](#).

Thematic Focus:

Australia's immigration policies bid for migrant labour while side-lining refugees living under temporary protection

Australia has sought to address its workforce shortages through the Federal Budget for 2022-2023. It has increased skilled migrant intake numbers and created new pathways for seasonal workers to come to work in Australia. Refugees and asylum seekers do not benefit from similar policy changes, however, as pathways to protection in Australia remain extremely limited, with little evidence of political will towards expansion. Australia can benefit from expanding these policies.

In 2023, the government of Anthony Albanese could consider creating complementary pathways and labour mobility agreements for refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced people. In the process, it can fill a deficit in the workforce while demonstrating its commitment to regional leadership by offering permanent protection solutions to those in need, as per international and Australian law.

Increased intake under the Permanent Migration Program

In October 2022, the Albanese government delivered the Federal Budget for 2022-2023, increasing funding and intake numbers under the [Permanent Migration Program 2022-2023](#). Under the proposed changes, the Migration Program would offer a total of 195,000 visa places in 2022-2023, an increase from 160,000 in 2021-2022. Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2022-2023 did not benefit from a similar increase in funding or intake increase, however. The number of places reserved under the program [remain unchanged at 13,750](#).

Australia is bidding for skilled migrants from the world over to address [shortages in the workforce](#). The Migration Program 2022-2023 aims to address these shortages and facilitate Australia's economic recovery post-Covid 19. Australia increased the number of visas available under the Skilled Stream of the program, and dedicated AUD 42.2 million to accelerate visa processing, reduce backlogs, and promote the skilled migrant program. Australia also recalibrated its visa processing system, delivering decisions on [visa applications for nurses and teachers](#) in under three days.

New bilateral agreements and visa schemes for migrant workers from Southeast Asia and the Pacific

Australia created multiple pathways to facilitate the immigration of migrant workers from within the region. The [Pacific Australia Labour Mobility](#) (PALM) scheme was introduced to bring in 29,000 seasonal workers from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. These workers will be issued visas for durations ranging from nine months to four years.

Following the announcement of the Federal Budget 2022-23, Australia introduced the [Pacific Engagement Visa](#), which offers a pathway to permanent residency for 3,000 migrant workers from Pacific countries and Timor-Leste.

In Southeast Asia, Australia created a migration pathway for skilled and low-skilled workers from Vietnam to fill shortages in the horticulture, agriculture, dairy, wool and fishing industries through the [Australian Agricultural Visa Program](#). Seasonal workers will be issued visas for a duration of one to four years under this program. In an [agreement with Indonesia](#), Australia started a pilot project to recruit 200 skilled Indonesian workers annually for six-month periods in the financial and insurance services, mining, engineering, and information media and telecom services.

Permanent protection remains non-viable for refugees who arrived through irregular means

Meanwhile, the approach towards refugees in Australia presents a sharp contrast. Refugees who arrived “unlawfully” by sea were deprioritised in the migration policy changes rolled out in 2022. Currently, those who arrived in Australia by irregular means are issued one of two types of visas: the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV, renewable every three years), or the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV, renewable every five years). As of September 2022, there were [20,000 refugees living with TPV and SHEV](#) in Australia. Refugees live under several restrictions, despite possessing protection visas. Under the TPV and the SHEV, refugees have the right to attend integration courses, access subsidised vocational training programs, study, and work. In reality, TPV and SHEV holders [have to pay full fees](#) for pursuing an education as they are not recognised as permanent residents. [Employment opportunities are restricted](#) to menial jobs, often on farms or in restaurant kitchens. They also have limited access to welfare benefits and housing support, and access to state-funded medical care is restricted to cases of emergencies. TPV and SHEV holders are also subject to travel restrictions, and must seek approval from the Minister for Home Affairs before travelling. Travelling to the country from where they seek protection results in the cancellation of the protection status for TPV and SHEV holders. Furthermore, they are prohibited from applying for [family reunification](#). Under both visa categories, refugees are [ineligible to apply for a Permanent Protection Visa](#) which would allow them to establish permanent residence in Australia despite having lived in the country for years.

On the other hand, [refugee category visas](#) (subclass 200, 201, 203, and 204) granted to people at risk of persecution who apply for asylum in Australia, prior to their arrival, impose fewer restrictions. Refugees can live and work in Australia permanently, apply for family reunification, travel to and from Australia for five years, and if eligible, apply for permanent residence and eventually Australian citizenship.

While it is commendable that Australia has created multiple pathways for skilled migrants and seasonal workers, it has failed to sufficiently address the rights of refugees and asylum seekers from the region. Nevertheless, Australia included refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Myanmar in its humanitarian program in 2022. An [additional 4,125 places](#) were created for Afghan asylum seekers to receive temporary protection per year, for the next four years. It also reserved 5,000 places under the ‘family’ stream of the [Migration Program for Afghans](#), and another 10,000 places for Afghans who apply for a humanitarian visa prior to arriving in Australia. In the case of Myanmar, Australia declared that [nationals from Myanmar](#) who arrived “lawfully” in Australia, fleeing the threat of persecution following the military

coup, would be granted humanitarian visas. These actions do not, however, respond adequately to the needs of asylum seekers, who arrived in Australia by irregular means due to a lack of viable alternatives.

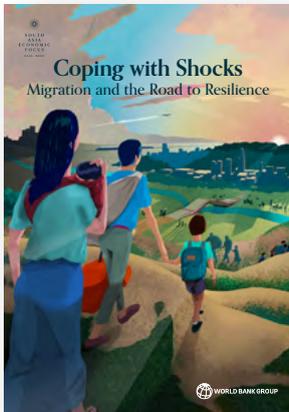
A need for increased legal protection and complementary pathways for refugees and asylum seekers

At a time when mobility within Asia and the Pacific is fuelled by combinations of multiple humanitarian crises, political volatilities, and climate-induced displacement, Australia should focus on unblocking bottlenecks created by short-term temporary forms of protection. One clear option would be to ensure all refugees can secure permanent protection visas, regardless of means of arrival. In December 2022, the Albanese government took a step in this direction, announcing its intention to allow all TVP and SHEV holders to apply for Permanent Protection Visas in 2023. However, the government is yet to announce a formal plan to move forward with.

Australia could also focus on introducing complementary pathways for incoming refugees such as the [Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement](#), a two-year pilot program started in 2021. Under the program, 200 skilled refugees of up to 50 years of age could be employed on a permanent or temporary basis in Australian businesses and benefit from a pathway to permanent residency after three to four years of employment. Currently, the program offers refugees concessions to qualify for 683 listed occupations - waivers on skill assessments, minimum requirements for work experience, functional knowledge of English and flexibility on police checks. As the pilot nears an end in 2023, the Albanese government could extend its timeline and scope in terms of the sectors it covers, as well as expand the intake numbers. By doing so, Australia can set regional leadership precedent and establish best practices in creating labour mobility pathways for refugees. Asylum seekers who are outside Australia and possess skills that match the needs and requirements of the country's labour market can arrive on protection visas sponsored by employers. Not only does this enable refugees to work and establish permanent residence in the country, but it also creates pathways for family reunification.

Australia's [workforce shortage](#) is expected to continue in 2023 and become all the more acute by 2050, [particularly in the care sector](#). In addition to attracting skilled migrants and seasonal workers, Australia could consider harnessing skills that displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers possess to fill a deficit in the workforce while staying committed to offering permanent protection to those in need as per international law.

Highlighted New Research and Reports



[Coping with Shocks: Migration and the Road to Resilience](#)

World Bank Group | October 2022

The report sheds light on a series of shocks that affect South Asia. Chapter Three, in particular, provides a deep dive into COVID-19 and migration. Migrant workers and remittances flows are important for South Asia as sources of income and means to smooth local income shocks for households, and as an important source of foreign reserves for the country. The pandemic changed the flows of migration, as some migrants had to return home and some had to stay in foreign countries due to COVID-related restrictions. The chapter studies the long-run trend of migration in the region, how COVID-19 impacted migration and remittance inflows, whether migration has (or has not) recovered, and proposes policies to address underlying problems.



[Seasonal worker schemes in the Pacific through the lens of international human rights and labour standards: A summary report](#)

International Labour Organization | December 2022

This summary report reviews Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme and New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme through the lens of international human rights and labour standards. Within this scope, the report also includes recommendations on promoting the participation of women and marginalised groups. The objective of the summary report is to provide an overview of how seasonal worker schemes in Australia and New Zealand align with international labour standards – both binding and nonbinding – and to provide constructive recommendations for areas where the schemes could be more consistent with these standards.

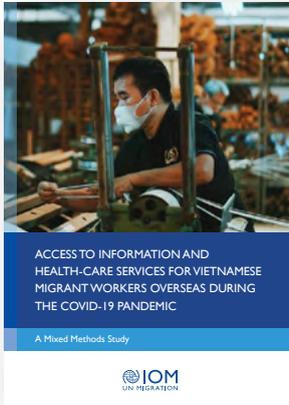


[Collecting data in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar: What works based on five years of collective experience](#)

Assessment Capacities Project, International Organization for Migration, Needs and Population Monitoring | December 2022

Data collection in humanitarian response is based on established standards, guidelines, and good practices that have evolved over time. While these practices give a general structure for data collection processes, they need to be adaptable to any specific response context. This learning document highlights

the lessons learnt from five years of data collection in the Rohingya camps in the form of assessments, monitoring, and evaluation activities whether rapid or comprehensive, sectoral or multisectoral, joint or standalone, and other types of studies.



[Access to Information and Health care Services for Vietnamese Migrant Workers Overseas During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

International Organization for Migration | December 2022

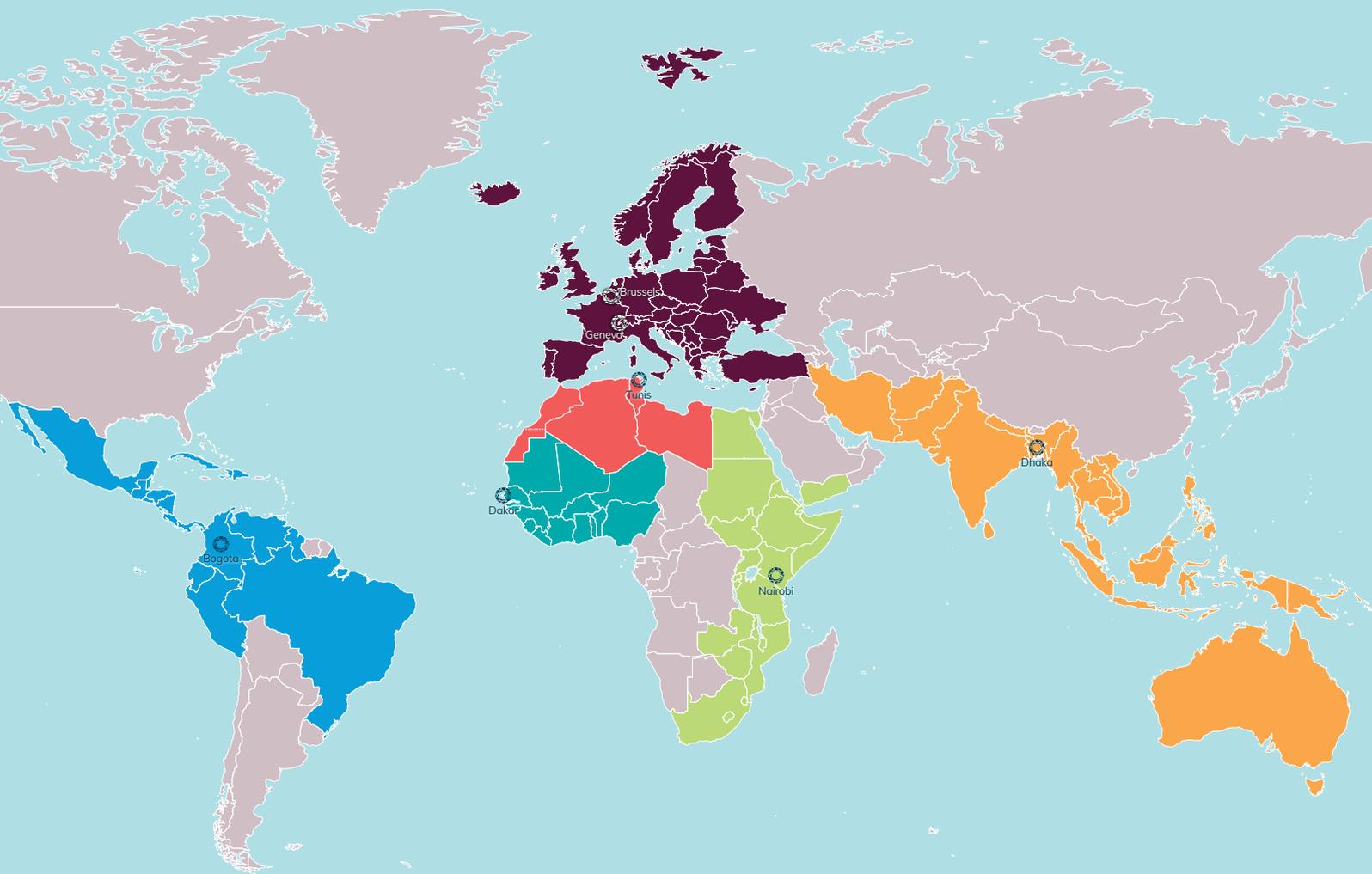
In 2019, more than 147,000 Vietnamese migrant workers left the country to work overseas under contract. Despite the government's efforts to provide consular services and support its citizens overseas during the pandemic, little was known about the health and healthcare access experienced by the vast majority of Vietnamese migrants in host countries, especially the three largest destinations. Host governments might overlook migrants in health response plans, which could lead to failures in provision of adequate support. Thus, sending governments need to ensure their nationals are equipped with the means to protect themselves in a public health crisis. In response, this study aims to better understand Vietnamese migrant workers' experiences overseas in accessing accurate health-related information as well as health care during public health emergencies.



[Refugee protection, human smuggling, and trafficking in Bangladesh and Southeast Asia](#)

ADSP, DRC, Geutanyoë Foundation, HOST International, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Indonesia, Mixed Migration Centre | December 2022

The purpose of this research is to support PRRiA project partners and other actors with identifying, understanding, and addressing protection risks and needs of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Southeast Asia. The research explores Bangladesh and Myanmar as origin countries and examines the drivers, risks, and routes of Rohingya movement to Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The overall aim of the research is to critically assess the risks and needs of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Southeast Asia across three thematic domains, with particular focus on the national contexts of Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The three domains are: protection; human trafficking; and human smuggling.



MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs hosted in DRC regional offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across 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 protection 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)

