

When Do “Closed Camps” Become Prisons by Another Name?



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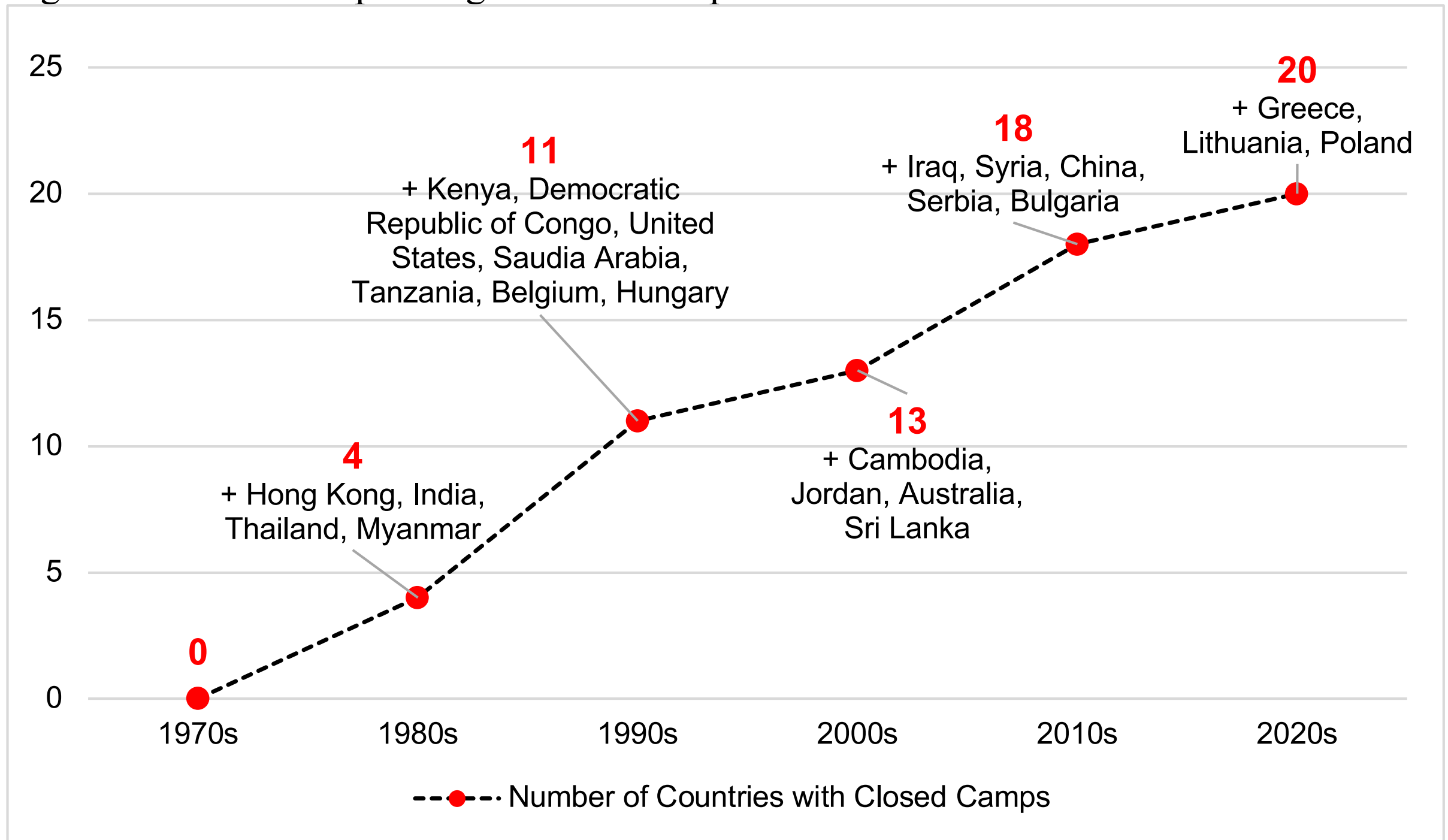
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Overview

- **There is an inherent tension between the fundamental human right to freedom of movement and the widespread practice of establishing camps** to provide temporary housing and humanitarian assistance to migrants
- International law allows states to **restrict freedom of movement** for a narrow set of lawful purposes subject to important limitations: restrictions must be **proportional, non-discriminatory, and time-limited**
- But in practice, states are increasingly violating these requirements by establishing “**closed camps**” that in some cases resemble open-air prisons in all but name

The Increase in Closed Camps Over Time

Figure 1. Countries Operating “Closed Camps” Over Time¹⁷



Factors Contributing to the Rise of Closed Camps

- **Increased frequency of subnational conflicts** since the end of the Cold War, which tend to result in **high levels of displacement**
- **Increased securitization of systems and policies for managing large transnational flows of “mixed migrants,”** a term used to describe diverse populations that may include asylum seekers, economic migrants, victims of human trafficking, and (potentially) criminals.

Conclusions

- Some residents of Al-Hol may have committed crimes for which they should be held accountable, but **the collective confinement of large populations of mixed migrants over security concerns about some individuals is inconsistent with international law**
- **Closed camps may worsen the security risks that they seek to contain** by creating new grievances with unmet basic needs and violations of dignity and human rights
- **Closed camps were intended to serve as temporary transit sites for screening and verifying the identities of migrants in preparation for onward movement but are becoming increasingly permanent sites for containing or “warehousing” migrants** who have nowhere else to go