

# DESPERATE JOURNEYS

Movement patterns of refugees and migrants to Europe shifted in the third quarter of 2017. Sea arrivals to Italy from Libya decreased from July onwards. While arrivals via the Central Mediterranean route remained higher than those of the other routes for the three month period, in both August and September the Eastern Mediterranean was the primary entry point to Europe, primarily due to increased sea arrivals to Greece. While arrivals to Spain have increased in 2017, these peaked in August at over 3,000, thus averaging just under 100 refugees and migrants arriving in Spain per day that month. Refugees and migrants continued to diversify their routes to Europe with over 470 people arriving in Romania from Turkey via the Black Sea in August and September.

Many of those arriving in Europe have been forced to flee their homes, including Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans. During the past three months, as a result of the decreased numbers crossing to Italy, the three most common nationalities arriving in Europe via the three Mediterranean routes have been Syrians, Moroccans, and Nigerians while the three most common nationalities arriving in Europe via the three routes since the start of the year are Nigerians, Syrians and Guineans. In addition, over 14,500 unaccompanied and separated children have entered Europe so far this year (mostly via the sea route to Italy), while concerns remain high that many women and girls arriving in Europe are victims of trafficking.

UNHCR remains extremely concerned about the dangers many people in need of international protection face while attempting



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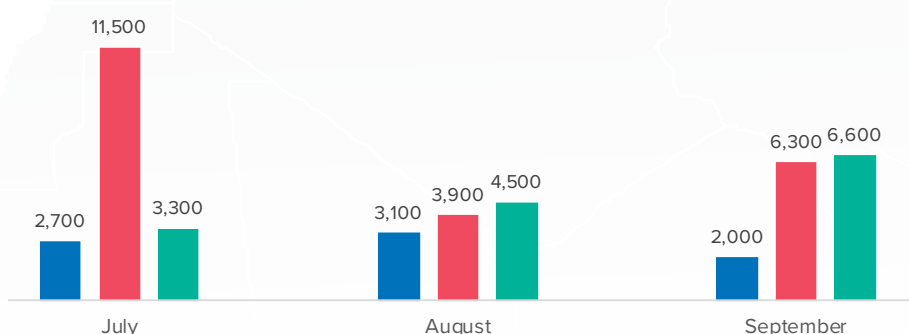
Syrian refugee families board a ship taking them from the island of Chios to a new facility on the Greek mainland.

to seek safety in Europe. As of the end of September, it is estimated that almost 2,700 refugees and migrants have died at sea en route to Europe while at least another 55 are known to have died along land routes in Europe or at Europe's borders in 2017.

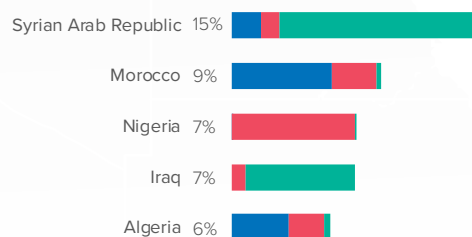
UNHCR continues to call for access to territory and protection for those who arrive to Europe, in addition greater access to safe and legal pathways is also needed, including via resettlement and family reunification.

Arrivals to Europe via the three Mediterranean routes  
 July to September 2017 (Q3)\*

	Western Med	Central Med	Eastern Med	Total
2017	17,200	105,000	26,000	148,200
Q3 2017	7,800	21,700	14,400	43,900



Top five nationalities arriving by all three Mediterranean routes  
 July to September 2017 by route\*\*



Note: All figures are rounded. \*Sources: Government, UNHCR, includes estimated numbers for Greece-Turkey land border. \*\*Excludes arrivals to Bulgaria and to Greece via the land border for which a nationality breakdown is not yet available

# EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND BLACK SEA ROUTES

In September, 4,900 refugees and migrants arrived by sea to Greece, the highest in a single month since March 2016 when the EU-Turkey Statement was implemented and the so-called 'Balkan' route was closed. Whilst the number of arrivals was higher than those in September last year, it was still much less than those in September 2015 and September 2014. As of the end of September, some 70% of arrivals by sea to Greece this year have been from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, a proportion that increased to 83% over the past three months, during which most arrivals from these three countries were comprised of families.

At the land borders, an estimated 2,000 refugees and migrants are thought to have crossed to Greece from Turkey over the past three months, including over 1,000 in September.<sup>1</sup> In the first nine months of the year, an estimated 3,500 refugees and migrants have arrived in Greece via this route compared to approximately 2,400 in the same period last year. Turkish authorities have reported intercepting almost 20,700 people attempting to cross to Greece via the land border since the start of the year compared to almost 7,500 reported for the same period last year. UNHCR continues to receive reports of push-backs from Greece to Turkey via the land border.

In Bulgaria, fewer than 400 previously unregistered refugees or migrants have been apprehended or intercepted each month over the past three months contributing to a total of 2,500 since the start of the year, an 84% decrease compared to last year when over 15,100 people had been apprehended in the same period. Most have been from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, with mostly Syrians and Iraqis detained over the past two months. Bulgarian authorities have continued to fence much of the border with Turkey in 2017,<sup>2</sup> a measure that may prevent people, including those in need of international protection, from being able to access Bulgarian territory and asylum procedures, while a number of push-backs from Bulgaria have also been reported this year.

In addition to those crossing by sea to Greece, another 860 people have crossed to Cyprus since the start of the year. Almost all have been Syrians with many joining family on the island. Only 113 people had crossed the sea to Cyprus in the same period last year.

The number of people crossing by sea from Turkey to Italy has also increased with over 3,250 reaching Italy this way (compared to 1,450 last year as of September) including over 1,300 over the past three months. Most arrivals have been from Iraq, Pakistan, Iran and Somalia.

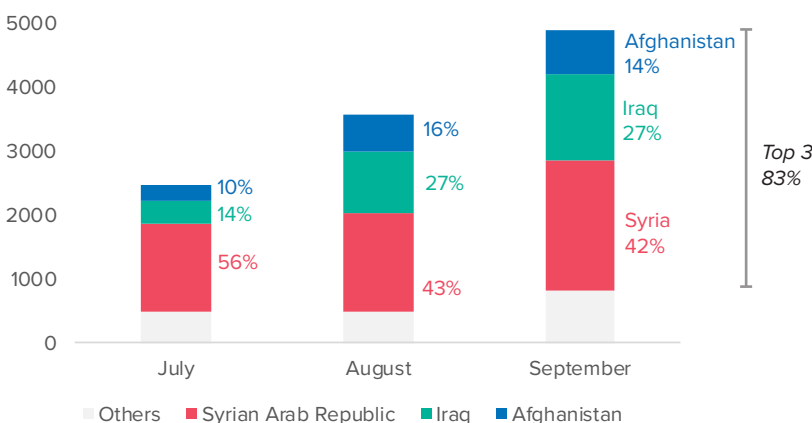
In August and September, five boats with a total of 476 persons (excluding the alleged smugglers) arrived in Romania from Turkey via the Black Sea. All arrivals were from Iraq and Iran. Aside from one person crossing this way in 2016, the previous boat using this route was in February 2015 and this year's arrivals are now higher than the 433 that crossed in 2014. In addition to those who reached Romania through this route, over 900 others attempted to cross and were intercepted or rescued by the Turkish Coast Guard. On 8 September an incident took place in which Romanian Coast Guard vessels are reported to have blocked a vessel off the coast of Bulgaria preventing it from reaching Romanian territorial waters and requested the intervention of the Turkish Coast Guard to intercept and return the group to Turkey.<sup>3</sup> The Turkish Coast Guard subsequently reported disembarking 149 Syrian nationals from the vessel. On the same night, Bulgarian authorities reported a second boat east of its coast and requested the Turkish Coast Guard to intervene. A further 68 Syrians and two Iraqis were subsequently disembarked in Turkey.<sup>4</sup>

Several more deaths occurred along the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea routes over the past three months. On 22 September, 24 people are believed to have drowned and another 14 were missing when their boat capsized off the Turkish coast en route to Romania. This is believed to be the biggest loss of life along this route since November 2014 when a boat capsized near Istanbul.<sup>5</sup> Off the Greek coast, two women and five children died when their boat sank en route to Chios on 27 July while on 28 September, a nine-year-old Syrian girl drowned near Kastellorizo when the boat she was on sank during stormy weather. Two people believed to have been refugees or migrants died when hit by a train near the Greece-Turkey land border on 27 August.<sup>6</sup>

1 The EU-Turkey Statement does not apply to arrivals in Greece via the land borders  
 2 IBNA, *Bulgarian government gives further 1.2m leva for new section of fence at Turkish border*, 30 August 2017, <http://www.balkan.eu.com/bulgarian-government-gives-further-1-2m-leva-for-new-section-of-fence-at-turkish-border/>.

3 Poliția de frontieră, *Ambarcațiuni cu migranți, interceptate și blocate de polițiștii de frontieră români în Marea Neagră*, 9 September 2017, <https://www.politheadefrontiera.ro/ro/garda-de-coasta/i-ambarcatiuni-cu-migranti-interceptate-si-blocate-de-politistii-de-frontiera-romani-in-marea-neagra-10364.html>.  
 4 Turkish Coast Guard Command, *Current Operations*, 9 September 2017, [http://www.sahilguvenlik.gov.tr/haberdetay/2017/eylul/08\\_EYLUL%202017\\_kKARADENIZeng.pdf](http://www.sahilguvenlik.gov.tr/haberdetay/2017/eylul/08_EYLUL%202017_kKARADENIZeng.pdf).  
 5 The Guardian, *Migrant boat capsizes off Istanbul*, 3 November 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/03/migrant-boat-capsizes-istanbul-turkey>.  
 6 Ekathimerini, *Two men, believed migrants, killed in Greece*, 28 August 2017, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/221181/article/ekathimerini/news/two-men-believed-migrants-killed-in-greece>.

Top 3 countries of origin of sea arrivals to Greece  
 July to September 2017



Read more on Greece:



# CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

Since July, the number of arrivals from Libya to Italy has dropped. Over the past three months, 21,666 refugees and migrants have crossed the sea to Italy, the lowest number for this period over the last four years. In August, fewer than 4,000 refugees and migrants arrived by sea to Italy (compared to almost 21,300 last August) with approximately 2,900 thought to have departed from Libya. As departures from Libya dropped, a larger proportion of arrivals by sea to Italy was from Tunisia, Turkey and Algeria including over 1,000 people arriving from Tunisia in September, constituting 32% of all sea arrivals to Italy in September. As of the end of September, those crossing from Tunisia were almost exclusively Tunisian nationals indicating that the increased numbers crossing to Italy from Tunisia was not the result of people changing departure points from Libya because of the increased difficulties in crossing from there.

In July, the European Commission announced an Action Plan<sup>7</sup> to reduce irregular crossings to Italy while Italian authorities undertook a series of meetings with Libyan authorities with a similar aim. Reports surfaced in July and August of armed groups preventing refugee and migrant boats from departing the Libyan coast.<sup>8</sup> In early August, Italy started to deploy Navy vessels in Libyan waters at the invitation of Libya's Government of National Accord.<sup>9</sup> At sea, in August a number of NGOs announced the suspension of their activities (some later resumed) citing security and other concerns<sup>10</sup> following an announcement by the Libyan Coast Guard prohibiting foreign vessels from operating in Libya's declared search and rescue zone without authorisation.<sup>11</sup> Following the Libyan Coast Guard announcement, there were reports of two incidents between Libyan Coast Guard vessels and those of NGOs outside of Libyan territorial waters in which shots were

allegedly fired and the NGOs were warned away from the Libyan coast.<sup>12</sup> The number of persons intercepted or rescued by the Libyan Coast Guard increased in August and September to 1,741 and 1,780, respectively, compared to 686 in July.<sup>13</sup>

Over the past three months, most arrivals by sea to Italy have been from Nigeria, Tunisia, and Mali with a significant increase in the numbers of Tunisians crossing to Italy, especially in September. However, since the start of the year, most arrivals by sea as of the end of September have been from Nigeria, Guinea, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali. The majority of arrivals have been men, but higher proportions of women have been recorded amongst Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, and Eritrean arrivals. The number of unaccompanied and separated children has now reached 13,867, approximately 13% of all arrivals. Most are from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Bangladesh and Nigeria. Of the ten most common nationalities arriving by sea in Italy this year as of September, the average protection rate by nationality in the EU+ region was approximately 33% with 16% granted refugee status, 6% subsidiary protection, and 11% granted humanitarian status.<sup>14</sup>

Improved registration upon arrival and increased controls at land borders in northern Italy have contributed to the majority of sea arrivals registering their asylum applications in Italy and remaining in the country. As of the end of September, over 106,000 people had applied for asylum in Italy in 2017, an increase of approximately 25% compared to the same period last year. In September, Italian authorities approved the country's first National Integration Plan for beneficiaries of international protection with provisions on language training, housing, healthcare, and employment, amongst others.

As of the end of September, 2,496 refugees and migrants are estimated to have died at sea along the Central Mediterranean route amounting to one death for every 42 persons crossing, a similar rate to that experienced during the same period in 2016. In the past two months, despite the lower number of departures from Libya, at least three boats are believed to have capsized resulting in the majority of passengers losing their lives. In one incident, a boat drifted undetected at sea for several days after running out of fuel before capsizing.

<sup>7</sup> European Commission, *Central Mediterranean Route: Commission proposes Action Plan to support Italy, reduce pressure and increase solidarity*, 4 July 2017, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-17-1882\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1882_en.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Reuters, *Exclusive: Armed group stopping migrant boats leaving Libya*, 21 August 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-libya-italy-exclusive-idUSKCN1B11XC>; Middle East Eye, *Italy accused of bribing Libyan militias to stop migrants reaching Europe*, 26 August 2017, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libyan-militias-being-bribed-stop-migrants-crossing-europe-2107168893>; Associated Press, *Backed by Italy, Libya enlists militias to stop migrants*, 29 August 2017, <http://abcnews.go.com/amp/International/wireStory/backed-italy-libya-enlists-militias-stop-migrants-49484692>.

<sup>9</sup> Reuters, *Italy aims to deploy ships in Libyan waters by end-August*, 27 July 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-italy-navy-idUSKBN1AC1PA>.

<sup>10</sup> MSF, *Hindrance of humanitarian assistance will create a deadly gap in the Mediterranean Sea*, 12 August 2017, <http://www.msf.org/en/article/hindrance-humanitarian-assistance-will-create-deadly-gap-mediterranean-sea>; Save the Children, *Save the Children's Search and Rescue vessel to dock in Malta, as Libyan Navy assume control of international waters*, 13 August 2017, <https://www.savethechildren.net/article/save-children-s-search-and-rescue-vessel-dock-malta-libyan-navy-assume-control-international-WZAdqtX8itk>; twitter; Sea Eye, 13 August 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/seaeyeorg/posts/1375870869208096>.

<sup>11</sup> AFP, *Libya navy bars foreign ships from migrant 'search and rescue' zone*, 10 August 2017, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/libya-navy-bars-foreign-ships-migrant-search-rescue-165315163.html>.

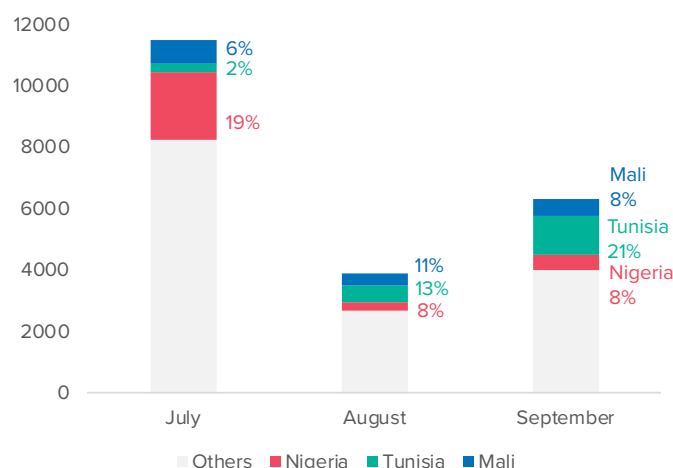
<sup>12</sup> Reuters, *Spanish migrant rescue ship threatened by Libyan coastguard – witness*, 15 August 2017, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-migrants-libya-ngo-idUKKCN1AV20M>; Reuters, *Rescue ship says Libyan coast guard shot at and boarded it, seeking migrants*, 26 September 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-libya-ngo/rescue-ship-says-libyan-coast-guard-shot-at-and-boarded-it-seeking-migrants-idUSKCN1C12I4>.

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR, *Libya: Activities at disembarkation, monthly update*, September 2017, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/2017\\_09\\_lby\\_unhcr\\_disembarkation.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/2017_09_lby_unhcr_disembarkation.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> According to Eurostat Q1 and Q2 data.

## Top 3 countries of origin of sea arrivals to Italy

July to September 2017



Read more on death and missing in the Mediterranean sea:



## WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

The increased number of arrivals to Spain continued over the past three months with 5,924 arriving by sea and 1,792 by land compared to 2,460 and 1,572 in the same period last year, respectively. As of the end of September, 12,435 people have arrived by sea and 4,782 by land, amounting to a total of 17,217. Most arrivals in 2017 have been from Morocco (20%), Côte d'Ivoire (15%) and Guinea (12%). Almost all Syrians use land routes and enter Spain via the enclave of Melilla. Since June, the number of Moroccans crossing the sea to the Spanish mainland has increased significantly with Moroccan nationals using a variety of methods to reach Spain including jet skis, windsurfers, inflatable boats, and wooden boats, some carrying over 60 persons.

On 31 August, seven women died in an incident in which they were part of a group of around 40 trying to enter Melilla by boat. As of the end of September, 122 people are believed to have died trying to enter Spain by sea compared to 48 in the same period last year.

Over 1,500 Syrians have arrived in Spain since the start of the year, almost all via Melilla. Syrians continue to report using diverse and dangerous routes to reach Spain, including for family reunification purposes.

## ONWARD MOVEMENT FROM EU COUNTRIES OF ARRIVAL

Refugees and migrants continue to move through the Balkans while attempting to travel onwards. Since July, UNHCR staff and partners in Serbia encountered increased numbers of new arrivals, including over 650 people in September, almost half of whom were Yazidi families from Iraq along with nearly 100 unaccompanied and separated children. Irregular onward movement to Croatia, Hungary and Romania continues with some new arrivals in Serbia heading straight to the borders. Hungary continues to admit around 10 asylum-seekers per day (week days only) via the two "transit zones" so those seeking admission to Hungary wait for many months in Serbia. In September, UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi visited the Roszke "transit zone" and urged Hungary to ease constraints on its asylum system. "When I was standing at the border fence today, I felt the entire system is designed to keep people, many of whom are fleeing war and persecution, out of the country and preventing many from making a legitimate asylum claim," he said.<sup>15</sup>

Over the past three months, push-backs were reported in additional states in the Balkans as well as elsewhere in the region, often denying access to asylum procedures. Push-backs were recorded from Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia. UNHCR and partners in Serbia have encountered a number of persons who

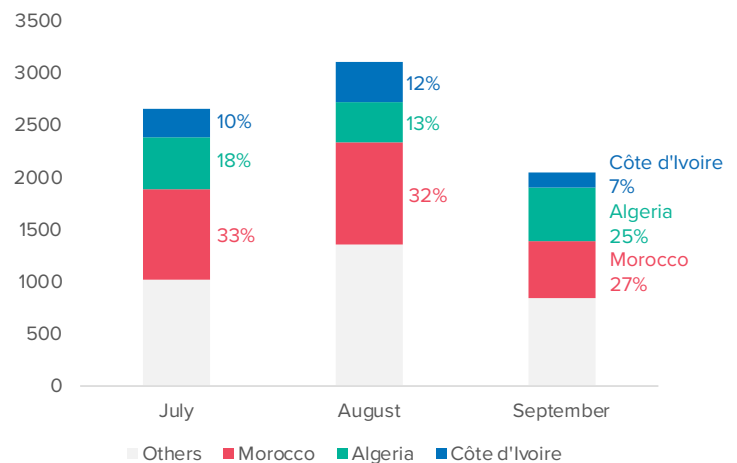
<sup>15</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR Chief visits Hungary, calls for greater access to asylum, end to detention and more solidarity with refugees*, 12 September 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2017/9/59b809d24/unhcr-chief-visits-hungary-calls-greater-access-asylum-end-detention-solidarity.html>.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the introduction of additional measures to reduce the movement of refugees and migrants to Europe over the past three months and the resulting drop in numbers crossing via the Central Mediterranean route, thousands continue to attempt these desperate and dangerous journeys each month, including in search of international protection and/or to join family members in Europe. More needs to be done to respond to the continued movement by those in need of international protection to Europe, including ensuring access to asylum and assistance rights in countries of first asylum, and introducing protection-sensitive border policies so that border officials are better able to identify those with international or other needs. In parallel, increased efforts are required to both expand existing legal pathways and create new legal pathways of admission to Europe. Enhanced access to family reunification represents one such measure.

In September, UNHCR issued a global call for 40,000 resettlement places to be made available for refugees located in 15 countries along the Central Mediterranean route, with the inaugural meeting of the Core Group for Enhanced Resettlement and Complementary Pathways along the Central Mediterranean Route tak-

Top 3 countries of origin of sea arrivals to Spain  
July to September 2017



reported being removed to the outside of the Hungarian fence on the Serbia border by Hungarian authorities despite them having entered Hungary from Croatia, Romania or Ukraine. Abuses by smugglers continued to be reported including a situation of unaccompanied children being held hostage by smugglers seeking to extort additional payments from them. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNHCR and partners have encountered several hundred persons attempting to return irregularly from Serbia to Greece although according to testimonies gathered very few planned to stay in Greece but rather hoped to find other ways to move onwards.

Since the start of the year, at least 38 refugees and migrants have died while attempting to move onwards, including via the Balkans. Over the past three months, of those moving on from Greece or Bulgaria, three more know deaths have occurred, one in Greece<sup>16</sup> and two in Serbia at the borders with Croatia<sup>17</sup> and Romania,<sup>18</sup> respectively. Since the start of the year, nine refugees and migrants have died while attempting to cross from Italy to France, a total of 15 over the past year. Another two have died this year attempting to cross to Austria or Switzerland.

<sup>16</sup> *Ekathimerini*, *Κατέρρευσε στέγατρο στο παλιό λιμάνι της Πάτρας - 25χρονος Αλγερινός ο νεκρός*, 4 August 2017, <http://www.kathimerini.gr/921537/article/epikairothta/ellada/katerreyse-stegastro-sto-palio-limani-ths-patras--25xronos-algerinos-o-nekros>.

<sup>17</sup> UNHCR, *Serbia update, 4-10 September 2017*, September 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/59000>.

<sup>18</sup> UNHCR, *Serbia update: 25 Sep - 1 Oct 2017*, October 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/60103>.

ing place on 11 September in Geneva, chaired by France.<sup>19</sup> More support and solidarity is still needed to help States receiving refugees in Europe, including through intra-EU responsibility-sharing mechanisms and through efficient and speedy procedures under the Dublin Regulation, especially for family reunion.<sup>20</sup> This would also reduce irregular onward movement within Europe. A more comprehensive approach is needed, including efforts to address the root causes of displacement, more support to help States receiving and hosting refugees to provide protection and solutions, as well as further steps to address trafficking and abuses by smugglers. Persons rescued at sea need to be disembarked in a place of safety in accordance with international law and push-back practices at land borders must be investigated and eliminated so that those seeking access to asylum procedures are not denied this right.

<sup>19</sup> UNHCR, *Central Mediterranean situation: UNHCR calls for an additional 40,000 resettlement places*, 11 September 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2017/9/59b6a5134/central-mediterranean-situation-unhcr-calls-additional-40000-resettlement.html>.

<sup>20</sup> For more information on the obstacles to swift family reunion see UNHCR, *Left in Limbo: UNHCR Study on the Implementation of the Dublin III Regulation*, August 2017, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/59d5dcb64.html>.