



# DESPERATE JOURNEYS

JANUARY 2017 – MARCH 2018

## ARRIVALS IN 2017

### SPAIN

Arrivals increased 101% in 2017, mostly due to a large increase in sea arrivals.

**5,000** (3,385 Sea + 1,615 Land)  
Jan-Mar 2018\*

**28,349** (22,103 Sea + 6,246 Land)  
2017

**14,094**  
2016

**16,263**  
2015

Dead and missing

**77**  **212**  
2016 2017

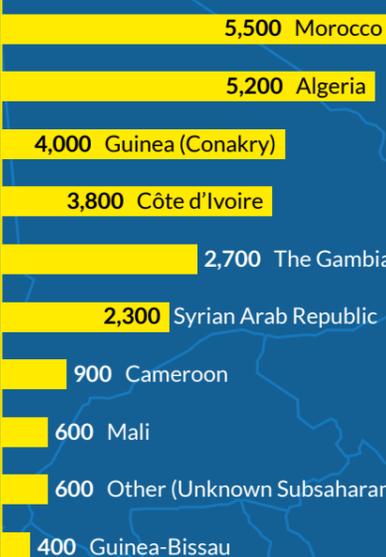
Demographic Breakdown\*\*

9% Women



UASC\*\*\*: Data not available.

Arrivals' most common Countries of Origin\*\*



### ITALY

The numbers of people arriving in Italy from Libya dropped significantly from July onwards.

**6,295**  
Jan-Mar 2018\*

**119,369** (Sea)  
2017

**181,436**  
2016

**153,842**  
2015

Dead and missing

**4,578**  **2,873**  
2016 2017

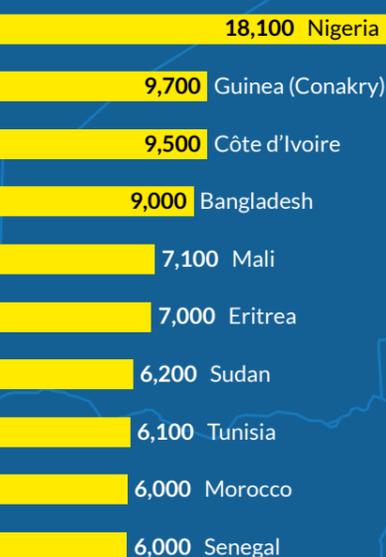
Demographic Breakdown\*\*

11% Women



UASC\*\*\*: 15,779 children (91% of all children that arrived in 2017).

Arrivals' most common Countries of Origin\*\*



### GREECE

Overall, sea arrivals decreased significantly compared to 2016.

**5,318**  
Jan-Mar 2018\*

**29,718** (Sea)  
2017

**173,450**  
2016

**856,723**  
2015

Dead and missing

**441**  **54**  
2016 2017

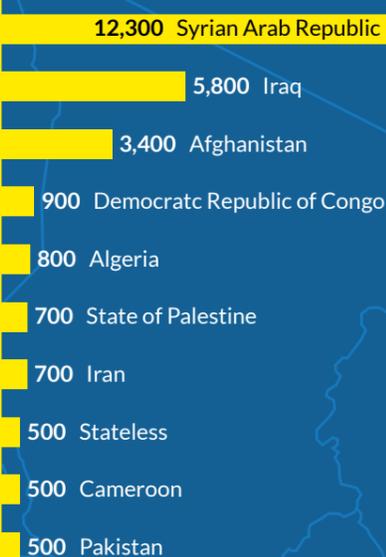
Demographic Breakdown\*\*

22% Women



UASC\*\*\*: 1,458 children (13% of all children that arrived in 2017).

Arrivals' most common Countries of Origin\*\*



\* For reference, arrivals in the first three months of 2017 and 2016 were: 4,313 and 841 to Spain, 24,292 and 18,777 to Italy and 4,008 and 151,452 to Greece respectively.

\*\* 2017 data.

\*\*\*Unaccompanied and separated children.

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Cover photo: A woman from Eritrea comforts her friend after they were part of a group of 162 refugees evacuated from Libya to Italy in December 2017. © UNHCR/ Alessandro Penso

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## ARRIVALS BY COUNTRY 2016-2017

### SPAIN

14,094 28,349  
2016 2017

### ITALY (Sea arrivals)

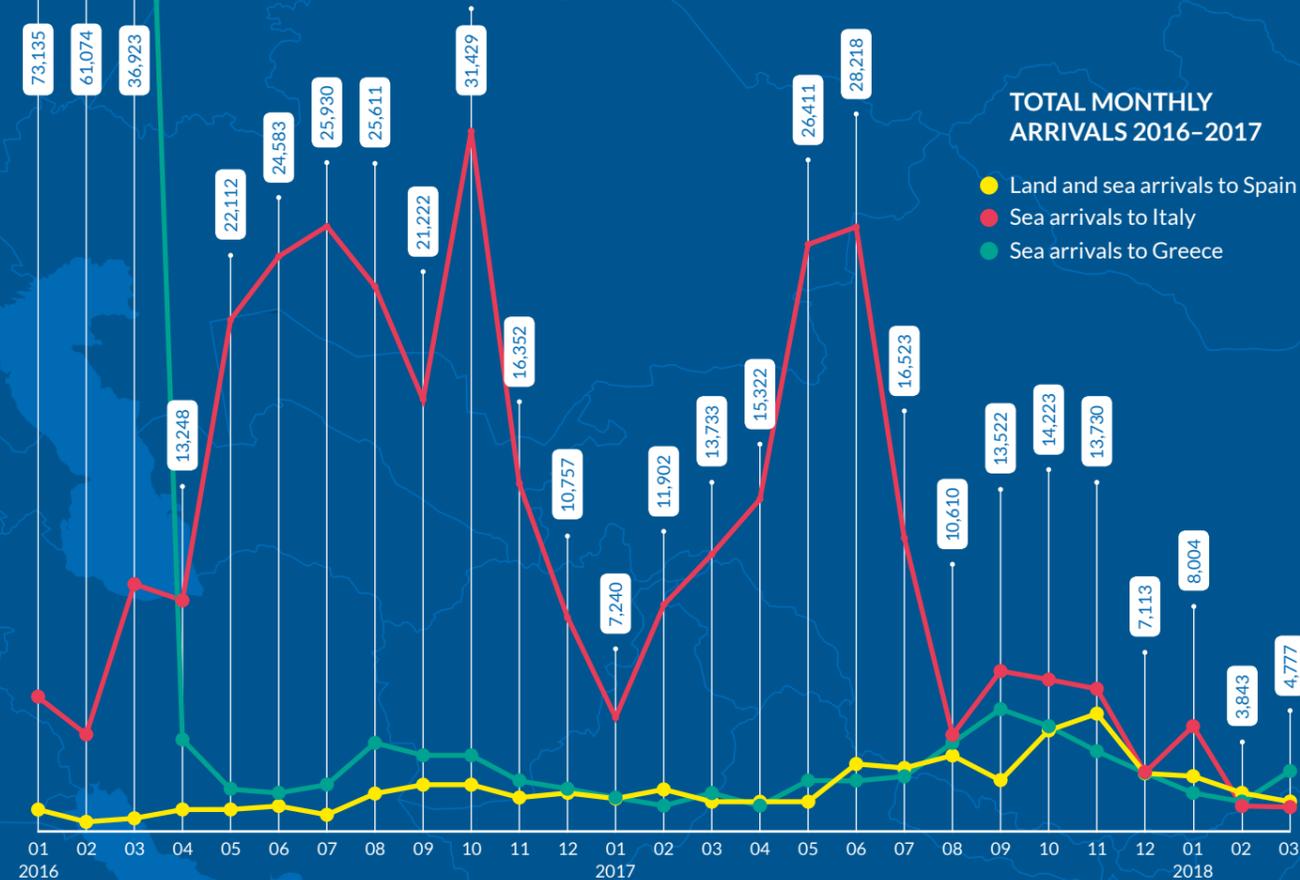
181,490 119,369  
2016 2017

### GREECE (Sea arrivals)

173,450 29,718  
2016 2017



Includes Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)).  
The boundaries and names shown and the designations on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



## INTRODUCTION

In 2017, thousands of people fled conflict zones or persecution seeking safety in Europe. Those seeking international protection travelled in the larger context of mixed migration movements, along with persons with different reasons for making the journey to Europe. As European States took increased steps to control access to their territories, those seeking international protection in Europe took even more dangerous journeys, sometimes with smugglers, or attempted alternative routes in order to reach their intended destinations. The most notable trends in 2017 were the significant reduction of arrivals to Italy from Libya as the number of refugees and migrants using this route decreased from July onwards, as well as the increase in sea arrivals to Spain.

In the first three months of 2018, arrivals to Italy remained significantly lower than in the first three months of 2017 (a 74% decrease), those to Greece increased 33% compared to last year, while arrivals to Spain increased 13%. So far 489 deaths have been reported at sea this year compared to 870 in the first

three months of last year. Amongst those crossing from Libya to Italy, the rate of deaths has more than doubled with one death recorded for every 14 persons who successfully crossed from Libya to Italy, compared to one death for every 29 persons in the first three months of 2017. In the first three months of 2018, there have already been three incidents each resulting in 60 deaths or more. The rate of deaths has almost doubled amongst those crossing from Morocco and Algeria to Spain, with one death recorded for every 27 persons who successfully crossed in the first three months of 2018 compared to one death for every 52 in the same period last year.

In 2017, asylum-seekers arriving by sea to Greece faced extended stays in overcrowded conditions on Greek islands. Those trying to cross the sea to Italy faced the increased prospect of interception or rescue at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard, which has scaled up its operations, and detention following disembarkation in Libya. Those trying to reach Spain mostly resorted to crossing the sea, often in flimsy inflatable boats, or attempting to scale the fences surrounding the two enclaves. For those crossing the Balkans, legal entry to Hungary was further reduced while push-backs (including collective expulsions), in which States

intercepted persons on their territory, denied them access to asylum procedures, and returned them to a neighbouring country, often using violence, were reported from multiple States.<sup>1</sup>

“

*Taking measures to reduce the number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe, without at the same time stepping up peace-making, development, and safe pathways is morally unacceptable. We can't afford to ignore abuses clearly taking place simply because they happen out of our sight.”*

Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees, [24 August, 2017](#)

In light of these conditions, refugees and migrants attempted different and often more dangerous routes to enter Europe, including more people crossing the sea from Turkey to Italy, Cyprus or Romania, and more people seeking alternatives routes onwards from Greece, including via Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the end of the year, as well as from Serbia. In addition to the over 3,100

who were believed to have died at sea in 2017,<sup>2</sup> at least 75 refugees and migrants died along land routes at Europe's borders or while moving onwards in Europe. Many others sustained serious injuries.

Several positive steps were taken by a number of States to provide greater access to safe and legal pathways to protection in Europe, including the establishment of new humanitarian corridor programmes for admission, a new scholarship programme in France, and evacuations directly from Libya to Italy. However, these steps remain insufficient to respond to the numbers of those in need. In addition, either legal or practical restrictions to reunification with immediate family members already in Europe leaves many with limited legal options to join them.

This report provides a brief overview of trends of movements by refugees and migrants to and through Europe in 2017, highlights some of the key protection challenges associated with these desperate journeys and concludes with recommendations.

<sup>1</sup> See also European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Migration to the EU: Five persistent challenges*, February 2018, <https://goo.gl/te8zXH>.

<sup>2</sup> Including 38 persons believed to have died in an incident in the Black Sea in September.



## Hundreds of children lose lives on desperate sea journeys

*"My middle daughter was sitting there. I asked her, 'Where is the other one?' But the emergency was for the baby that was not breathing. They took her on the big ship and tried to reanimate her but there was nothing to do. That's why I lost essential minutes where I could have searched for my eldest daughter, who was lost at sea. I told the rescue team another daughter was in the water. They went searching, but she had disappeared... When I decided to travel with my daughters, I had no other choice. I could not return to my home as my husband's enemies swore they would retaliate against his family. But I couldn't stay in Libya either. The place had become too dangerous for the kids in the last year."*

Having fled from Nigeria, kindergarten teacher Hope had been trying to join her husband who was already in Europe.

[Read more here.](#)

## CHANGING PATTERNS OF MOVEMENT

At the start of 2017, arrivals via the Mediterranean Sea to Italy, mostly from Libya, accounted for the majority of arrivals in Europe each month. In 2016, over 181,400 people crossed this way.<sup>3</sup> As of the end of June 2017, sea arrivals in Italy were on track to be even higher than in 2016 with arrivals in the first six months (83,700) 19% higher than those between January and June 2016 (70,100), including over 10,000 disembarked in Italy over three days at the end of June. In July, the European Commission announced an Action Plan to reduce irregular crossings to Italy while Italian authorities undertook a series of measures with a similar aim. Arrivals in Italy from Libya dropped from over 22,300 in May and 22,200 in June to less than 4,800 each month between August and December, including under 3,000 in October compared to over 26,000 in October 2016. However, in September and October, arrivals to Italy from all departure points increased slightly after the sizeable reduction in August. This increase was primarily due to more Tunisians crossing to Italy from Tunisia. Of those arriving to Italy by sea from Libya last year, many were seeking international protection including persons fleeing violence and persecution, and people who had experienced trafficking, torture, and other forms of abuse in Libya.

While numbers along the Central Mediterranean route decreased in the second half of 2017, arrivals to Europe via other routes, especially the sea routes to Greece and Spain, continued, though on a much smaller scale than what was observed along the Libya-Italy route earlier in the year.

### “

*Too often, measures pursued in relation to the Mediterranean routes have centred on how to control, deter and exclude. This can have a dehumanising effect – and more importantly, alone, it does not help refugees and migrants avoid exploitative, deeply harmful situations. A comprehensive set of political, security, humanitarian, human rights and development investments is needed.”*

Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees, [28 November 2017](#)

<sup>3</sup> Although 173,000 people arrived by sea in Greece in 2016, over 155,000 of them arrived between January and March 2016 after which fewer than 3,500 people arrived this way each month until the end of 2016.

In Greece, sea arrivals decreased significantly compared to 2016, from over 173,000 to just over 29,700. From May to December, the number of persons arriving by sea increased by 33% compared to the same period in 2016 with most arrivals originating from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Collectively, arrivals from these three countries accounted for 73% of all arrivals by sea to Greece in 2017. Amongst all three nationalities were a high number of families with children comprising between 41% and 46% of each of the three nationalities in the final six months of 2017. Information collected by UNHCR staff on the islands indicated that many of the arrivals from Syria and Iraq in the latter part of the year had recently departed their countries and briefly transited Turkey, with new arrivals recorded from conflict areas including Idlib, Deir ez-Zor, and Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq.

At the Greece-Turkey land border, the number of recorded arrivals in 2017 amounted to 5,677 or an increase of 50% despite Turkish authorities reporting the interception of over 28,400 persons attempting to cross to Greece via the land route, a significant increase from 2016.

In Bulgaria, an 84% reduction in arrivals was noted with just under 3,000 refugees and migrants apprehended across the country in 2017 compared to almost 19,000 in 2016, most of whom were believed to have crossed from Turkey. The majority of those apprehended in 2017 were from Afghanistan (38%), Syria (19%) and Iraq (18%) and most subsequently sought asylum.

In August, the first group to cross the Black Sea from Turkey to Romania since February 2015 was recorded as smugglers offered an alternative route, including for some trying to join family members already in Europe. In total, over 500 persons were disembarked in Romania following rescues or interceptions in the Black Sea in 2017. Other sea routes from Turkey included the arrival of 1,100 persons, mostly Syrians, to Cyprus, an increase of 195% from 2016, and 3,800 persons mostly from Iraq, Pakistan and Iran to Italy, an increase of 20% compared to 2016.

In Spain, more arrivals by sea, including of Moroccans and Algerians, was the primary reason for the 101% increase in all arrivals in 2017 (28,300) compared to 2016 (14,100). While arrivals of Moroccans and Algerians, the top two nationalities arriving by land or sea, collectively increased from under 3,800 to over 10,600, the number of others, primarily from Sub-

### Family torn apart by war in Syria find sanctuary in Greece

"The situation in Syria is not for living. Every day I looked at my sons' faces and they were frightened, scared of the bombs. Even now, every time we hear sounds like an aeroplane or like bombs they get very scared. It was difficult, but I knew I had to get out of Syria or die in the attempt. I'd do anything for my sons, to find better life for them... When I lost my son I was so afraid for the others. It's not for me I travel – I travel for my sons, to give them life."

After losing her husband and one son during the Syrian conflict, Falak, 40, fled to Greece with her other two sons aged 14 and 5 where she sought treatment for her youngest son injured in a rocket attack on their home.

[Read more here.](#)

Saharan African countries, also increased by 67%. At the land borders, where arrivals increased 5% from 5,900 to 6,200, including due to some large groups scaling the fences in 2017, the largest group of arrivals was Syrians (2,300) with their numbers increasing by 17% from 2016. Almost all Syrians arriving in Spain in 2017 entered via the border post at Melilla where they applied for asylum. Most Syrian arrivals were families and 48% of Syrian arrivals were children.

Of those crossing the Balkans where numbers of arrivals are difficult to record as most try to cross borders undetected, the implementation of new detention measures by Hungary combined with its existing border restrictions contributed to increased numbers of refugees and migrants resorting to different routes, for example crossing from Serbia to Romania. While many still tried to cross to Hungary, others sought to move on irregularly from Serbia via Croatia as well as at times through Bosnia-Herzegovina, or from Greece via Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina to Croatia in the latter part of the year. In addition, the movement of many persons from Serbia towards Greece was observed, including some who hoped to find an alternative way to other European Union (EU) Member States from Greece as well as smaller numbers planning to resume asylum procedures in Greece.

## ACCESS TO TERRITORY AND ASYLUM

In addition to measures and practices restricting access to territory and asylum procedures that were in place at the start of 2017, over the course of the year further measures were introduced that made it even more difficult for those in need of international protection to enter Europe.

At the EU's external borders with Turkey, UNHCR continued to receive, through direct testimonies, a number of reports of alleged push-backs which describe a similar pattern of treatment at the border.<sup>4</sup> While States have the right to control their borders, such procedures, which are not protection-sensitive, may indiscriminately affect various categories of people, including asylum-seekers who are thus prevented from exercising their right to seek asylum, as well as individuals with specific needs who might require special attention.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR deeply concerned at reports of informal forced returns from Greece to Turkey*, 8 June 2017, <https://goo.gl/7MYTLQ>.

At its border with Turkey, Bulgaria continued to fence new sections declaring work complete in October 2017.<sup>5</sup> In addition, UNHCR continued to receive some reports of push-backs from inside Bulgarian territory by border authorities.

As groups of refugees and migrants started to cross the Black Sea from Turkey in August, in two separate incidents on the night of 8-9 September, Romanian and Bulgarian authorities requested the Turkish Coast Guard to intercept vessels in Bulgaria's search and rescue zone, resulting in over 200 Syrian and Iraqi nationals being returned to Turkey.<sup>6</sup> In one incident, the Romanian Coast Guard reported blocking the vessel to prevent it reaching Romanian waters.<sup>7</sup>

In response to increased numbers entering Europe via Italy's maritime border in the first half of 2017, the European Commission and Italy announced a series of measures to reduce migration via Libya, including additional support for the Libyan Coast Guard and other Libyan authorities.<sup>8</sup> During the second half of 2017, the numbers crossing from Libya to Italy reduced dramatically while the proportion of persons intercepted or rescued at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard increased.<sup>9</sup> While in principle increased capacity to save lives at sea is welcome, it is a concern that the subsequent disembarkation in Libya is followed by the transfer to detention facilities of persons in need of international protection where there is presently no possibility of release, except in the context of evacuation or resettlement to third countries. In 2017, UNHCR was able to secure the release of over 1,000 asylum-seekers and refugees from detention in Libya.

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

<sup>5</sup> Novinite, *The Interior Minister declared the fence on the Bulgaria-Turkey border is 100% finished*, 20 October 2017, <http://goo.gl/V5MhFR>.

<sup>6</sup> Turkish Coast Guard Command, *Current Operations*, 9 September 2017, <http://goo.gl/Hkuqiv>.

<sup>7</sup> Poliția de frontieră, *Ambarcațiuni cu migranți, interceptate și blocate de polițiștii de frontieră români în Marea Neagră*, 9 September 2017, <https://goo.gl/GZKMTX>

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, European Commission, *Central Mediterranean Route: Commission proposes Action Plan to support Italy, reduce pressure and increase solidarity*, 4 July 2017, <https://goo.gl/WVrnHA>; Reuters, *Italy begins naval mission to help Libya curb migrant flows*, 2 August 2017, <https://goo.gl/M8A6T9>; The Guardian, *Italian minister defends methods that led to 87% drop in migrants from Libya*, 7 September 2017, <https://goo.gl/VgkRrPC>.

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR, *Libya: Activities at disembarkation, monthly update*, December 2017, <https://goo.gl/vLGkUV>.

## Syrian teen has a chance to dream again in Austria

"What I remember most about our journey is the rubber boat. It took five hours. The engine shut down a few times. We were so scared. It was midnight. We all were navigating on our phones. We went from Turkey to Greece. I mostly remember all the walking we did. I remember the mud, the cold and the constant rain. I did not eat much. When we finally arrived in Austria, I was so happy that I no longer had to walk."

Aspiring journalist Amr, 15, from Syria left home with his parents and two siblings along the long route via Greece before obtaining refugee status in Austria.

[Read more here.](#)

in the country, however, some still tried to move on irregularly in 2017. At the border between France and Italy, there have been reports that many persons, including unaccompanied children, have been summarily returned from France.<sup>10</sup> At least 16 refugees and migrants died along the route between the Italian border town of Ventimiglia and Nice between September 2016 and the end of 2017 with most being hit by vehicles or trains or else electrocuted while trying to cross the border hiding on a train. As a result of the difficulties of crossing the border near Ventimiglia, some refugees and migrants have started to take an even more dangerous route through the Alps from near Bardonecchia.<sup>11</sup>

As numbers crossing to Spain by land and sea increased, summary returns continued at Spain's land borders (the two enclaves), including following a ruling in October 2017 by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) that such actions were a violation of the prohibition on collective expulsions and the right to an effective remedy.<sup>12</sup> The case has been referred to the ECHR's Grand Chamber at Spain's request. In addition, persons crossing the sea to Spain face automatic detention for up to 72 hours following disembarkation without sufficient mechanisms for early identification of those who may have international protection needs or other specific needs.

As refugees and migrants crossed through the Western Balkans, with the intention to reach other countries in western or northern Europe, more States began returning persons to neighbouring countries, sometimes violently, often denying access to asylum procedures and without conducting any form of individualized screening. For those seeking to enter Hungary, further limitations were established for legal access via the 'transit zones'. Numbers allowed to enter were reduced progressively from up to 100 persons per week at the beginning of the year to 50 persons per week at the end of the year resulting in many waiting around 11 months or more in Serbia. In

February 2018, this number was further reduced to an average of two persons per day and thus granting entry to only around 10 persons per week.<sup>13</sup> At the end of March 2017, automatic detention was introduced for asylum-seekers in Hungary for the duration of their application procedures. Prior to this, UNHCR noted that the law under which these measures were introduced "violates Hungary's obligations under international and EU laws, and will have a terrible physical and psychological impact on women, children and men who have already greatly suffered."<sup>14</sup>

“

*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.”*

Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees,  
[12 September 2017](#)

Border management policies are not incompatible with protection-sensitive practices and can be consistent with States' responsibilities under national, EU and international law to protect asylum-seekers and refugees. During 2017, UNHCR continued to receive numerous reports of alleged push-backs including of asylum-seekers involving authorities of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain. For example, in Serbia, UNHCR and partners received testimonies indicating that thousands of people were pushed back mainly from Hungary, Croatia, and Romania. Many people reported being pushed back more than once. Amongst those pushed back to Serbia were some who reported that they entered the EU by air or other land routes without ever having transited through Serbia.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, IRIN News, *Purgatory on the Riviera*, 4 December 2017, <https://goo.gl/6JyU3T>; INTERSOS, *Unaccompanied and separated children along Italy's northern borders*, February 2018, <https://goo.gl/Kpv58s>; MSF, *Harmful borders*, February 2018, <https://goo.gl/8qup93>; <https://goo.gl/kmPiUe>.

<sup>11</sup> Reuters, *Migrants risk death crossing Alps to reach France*, 12 January 2018, <https://goo.gl/pT4Xwi>; News Deeply, *Dodging death along the Alpine migrant passage*, 25 January 2018, <https://goo.gl/PE8rch>.

<sup>12</sup> European Court of Human Rights, *Press release: The immediate return to Morocco of sub-Saharan migrants who were attempting to enter Spanish territory in Melilla amounted to a collective expulsion of foreign nationals, in breach of the Convention*, 3 October 2017, <https://goo.gl/tjWkxe>.

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR, *Hungary: UNHCR dismayed over further border restrictions and draft law targeting NGOs working with asylum-seekers and refugees*, 16 February 2018, <https://goo.gl/95qhmA>.

<sup>14</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR deeply concerned by Hungary plans to detain all asylum seekers*, 7 March 2017, <https://goo.gl/hWZLdd>; UNHCR, *On visit to Hungary, UNHCR Chief calls for end to detention and greater solidarity with refugees*, 12 September 2017, <https://goo.gl/Yr8rJV>.

## Deadly trade through Niger snares refugees and migrants

"When we reached Libya, the driver told us we had to pay another 1,500 dinars (US\$1,100) per person, so 4,500 dinars for all three. We didn't have any more money. We tried to explain the situation, but they didn't want to hear it. We were tortured, kept in a compound where other passengers were allowed to go out, but not us since they thought we might escape... I've met other people here who want to go to Libya. I told them about what I've gone through. I don't know if they've gone anyway or not. That's up to them. But I know that I've done my part as a Christian – warning them about what happens out there."

Daniel, 26, had left Cameroon in early 2017 with his brother and uncle heading for Libya then Europe before ending up in Niger.

[Read more here.](#)

## RISKS TO REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS TRAVELING TO AND THROUGH EUROPE

Journeys to and through Europe for refugees and migrants remained fraught with danger in 2017. Close to 3,200 people are believed to have lost their lives at sea last year while traveling to Europe, most while trying to cross to Italy despite the efforts of rescuers working off the coast of Libya. According to data from the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, NGOs were able to rescue 46,600 (or 41%) of the 114,300 persons rescued at sea, the largest contribution to search and rescue in the central Mediterranean. Collectively, the Italian Coast Guard, Italian Navy and other Italian authorities rescued 29,200 persons (26%), vessels deployed to Frontex's Operation Triton (including Italian vessels) rescued 15,000 (13%), commercial vessels 11,400 (10%), and EUNAVFOR Med vessels 10,700 (9%).<sup>15</sup> In addition, the Libyan Coast Guard reported rescuing or intercepting just under 15,400 persons in 2017.<sup>16</sup>

“

*Search and rescue is a humanitarian imperative and must remain a top priority. If human beings are in distress at sea, the question is not about their status, but rather saving lives.”*

Volker Türk, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, [06 July 2017](#)

Further, at least 75 refugees and migrants, including six children, died along land routes at Europe's external borders or while traveling on through Europe. Most deaths occurred as refugees and migrants moved onwards from Greece or Bulgaria via the Western Balkans, tried to cross from Turkey to Greece or Bulgaria by land, or tried to move on irregularly from Italy. Most deaths were the result of people hit by trains while walking along railway tracks, electrocuted while hiding on trains, or hit by vehicles while walking along roads, while a further 13% drowned and 12% died as a result of exposure and winter weather conditions. In addition to those who died, others were seriously injured, including some who lost limbs. Many more are thought to have died in Libya as well as along

<sup>15</sup> Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre Rome, *Attività SAR Nel Mediterraneo Centrale*, March 2018, <http://goo.gl/2xbtwv>.

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR, *Libya: Activities at disembarkation, monthly update*, December 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/61535>

routes to Libya, including while crossing through the desert from Niger or Sudan.

In 2017, many refugees and migrants reported suffering abuses at the hands of traffickers, smugglers or armed groups along various routes to Europe. Of those travelling to Europe via Libya, many had been detained for several months, often in inhumane conditions, tortured to extract a ransom, experienced sexual violence, sometimes repeatedly, or been a victim of forced labour. Amongst those traveling from Turkey and through the Balkans, there were several reports of groups being held against their will and mistreated by smugglers seeking additional fees above what was previously agreed.

Women and girls, as well as some men and boys, faced particular risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) along routes to Europe as well as in some locations within Europe. Along routes to Greece, the risk of SGBV during the journey was relatively high, especially for women travelling on their own and unaccompanied children. While SGBV is in general highly under-reported, more than 300 SGBV incidents that occurred during the journey from their country of origin were reported to UNHCR Greece in 2017, including a high rate of rape, sexual assault and trafficking.<sup>17</sup> UNHCR has also called for further measures to be taken to prevent SGBV on the Greek islands.<sup>18</sup> Along routes to Italy, the majority of women and girls are believed to face serious risks of SGBV<sup>19</sup> and many persons disembarking in Italy have reported incidents at different points along the routes, including incidents in which men and boys have also been victims.

“

*We need to provide meaningful and viable alternatives to these movements or the deaths and the suffering will continue to mount.”*

Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR's Special Envoy to the Central Mediterranean Situation, [18 July 2017](#)

In addition, many refugees and migrants at different points across Europe told UNHCR and partners about mistreatment at the hands of some border police

<sup>17</sup> This is based only on reported cases and does not represent the total incidence or prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence along routes to Greece.

<sup>18</sup> UNHCR, *Refugee women and children face heightened risk of sexual violence amid tensions and overcrowding at reception facilities on Greek islands*, 9 February 2018, <https://goo.gl/g47tq8>.

<sup>19</sup> UNHCR, IMPACT and Altai Consulting, *Mixed migration trends in Libya: Changing dynamics and protection challenges*, July 2017, <https://goo.gl/A2SfW6>.

## Refugees face desperate journeys to reach loved ones in Europe

"We got sold in the Sahara then again in Libya where we stayed for seven months. It was very difficult, very difficult. You give up on your life. They made us pay a lot of money. One buys you then sells you, then another one sells you... There were 900 people on the boat. We took off at night at about six or seven. It was difficult – the sea was rough, people were fighting, people died, some from anxiety and some from the fighting. Many people died. It was scary but what can you do when you don't have a choice? You cannot be scared because sooner or later you have to cross."

Solomon\* was just 10 years old when he was forced to flee his home in Eritrea before crossing the Sahara to Libya and then the sea to Italy where he was placed in a community centre for unaccompanied children. Although he was finally safe, Solomon still hopes to be reunited with his aunt in the Netherlands.

[Read more here.](#)



officials or other security personnel during measures to prevent or deter entries. In winter in early 2017, UNHCR received many accounts of border authorities taking warm clothing from refugees and migrants, sometimes pouring water on them, or making them stand barefoot in the snow.<sup>20</sup> Others recounted violence included beatings with batons, sometimes by masked police, or having dogs set on them.

## CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

In 2017, over 30,000 refugee and migrant children arrived in Europe via the three Mediterranean routes. Of those, over 17,000 were unaccompanied, mostly from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia and Eritrea.<sup>21</sup> High numbers of unaccompanied children from Mali, Somalia and Syria were also amongst sea arrivals to Italy and 13% of all sea arrivals to Italy in 2017 were unaccompanied children. As children traveled to and through Europe, many experienced the dangers outlined above. For example, IOM surveys of over 4,700 refugees and migrants in Italy, including 725 children, most of whom had traveled from North Africa, between February and August 2017 showed that 77% of children reported being held against their will by groups other than government authorities, mostly due to kidnap for ransom or detention by armed groups and mostly in Libya (91%); and 88% of children between 14 and 17 reported experiencing physical violence, primarily in Libya (82%).<sup>22</sup>

A report released by UNICEF and REACH in June noted multiple difficulties faced by children following arrival in Europe, including lengthy waiting periods for asylum applications to be determined, slow family reunification processes and limited access to the EU relocation mechanism. In addition, those outside of reception facilities were exposed to specific risks, including cases of sexual exploitation, as well as limited access to alternative care in Greece.<sup>23</sup> In Italy, despite welcome new legal provisions introduced in

2017,<sup>24</sup> implementation still remains limited, including regarding timely transfers and age assessments, and guardianship, and the Italian reception system for children remains under strain and disharmonised. As a result, many children ended up being hosted either with adults or at emergency facilities. In addition, the Dublin family reunion scheme and the EU relocation mechanism are not meeting the needs of unaccompanied and separated children and their actual implementation remains limited and lengthy.

“

*Many of these children have experienced terrible violence, sexual abuse, trafficking and emotional and psychological pressure not only during their journey but in Europe itself. They deserve better protection and care from Europe. All actions and decisions must have the child's best interests at heart. We can all make this happen and the Roadmap shows us how,”*

Diane Goodman, Deputy Director of UNHCR's Europe Bureau, [10 July 2017](#)

In April, the European Commission announced new policy guidance<sup>25</sup> to enhance the protection of refugee and migrant children, including a focus on protecting children along migratory routes, improving identification and protection once in Europe, providing adequate reception conditions, and ensuring access to status determination procedures, a measure UNHCR welcomed jointly with UNICEF.<sup>26</sup> In July, UNHCR, UNICEF and the International Rescue Committee issued a 'Roadmap' for action to improve conditions for unaccompanied and separated children with recommendations on better identification measures, harmonized age assessments, improved guardianship procedures, improved best interest determination, and safe accommodation.<sup>27</sup> Pilot projects to implement the Roadmap are being carried out in some countries in Europe.

<sup>20</sup> UNHCR, *Refugees and migrants face high risks in winter weather in Europe*, 13 January 2017, <https://goo.gl/3DZcZt>.

<sup>21</sup> UNHCR, *Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2017*, February 2018, <https://goo.gl/1v5umt>; UNHCR, *Italy: Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) dashboard*, December 2017, <https://goo.gl/VMyCgn>.

<sup>22</sup> IOM, *Flow monitoring surveys: The human trafficking and other exploitative practices indication survey*, November 2017, <https://goo.gl/gm6og9>.

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF and REACH, *Children on the move in Italy and Greece*, June 2017, <https://goo.gl/XnJ7hV>.

<sup>24</sup> See Law 47/2017.

<sup>25</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: The protection of children in migration*, 12 April 2017, <https://goo.gl/eUaTR7>.

<sup>26</sup> UNHCR and UNICEF, *UNICEF and UNHCR welcome EU policy to protect migrant and refugee children*, 12 April 2017, <https://goo.gl/Sshjye>.

<sup>27</sup> UNHCR, *Europe: new Roadmap to improve the situation of unaccompanied and separated refugee and migrant children*, 10 July 2017, <https://goo.gl/Emj4ww>.



## Eritrean finds home in Italy after trauma in Libya

*"It is difficult to describe the conditions we were kept in. Try to imagine 1,500 people living, eating, sleeping and defecating in one large room... Two of my friends did not survive, I watched them die in the warehouse. This for me is very difficult to talk about – I still cannot sleep at night because of this. I would like for my friends' names to be written down. Ibra and Tesfalem were their names, they would be 28 today. It is only because I survived that their families were able to find out what happened to their sons. So many people are unaccounted for. The families still call me today, as they could not get the bodies back."*

Asmorom, 28, a refugee from Eritrea made his way to Italy via Libya.

[Read more here.](#)

## ACCESS TO SAFE AND LEGAL PATHWAYS AND DURABLE SOLUTIONS

In 2017, some progress was noted in terms of providing more persons in need of international protection with access to safe and legal pathways to Europe. Last year, over 26,400 refugees were resettled to Europe,<sup>28</sup> an increase of 54% from 2016. Most were resettled from Turkey (38%), Lebanon (37%) and Jordan (8%) and the largest groups were Syrians (84%), Congolese (DRC – 4%) and Eritreans (2%). The United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany were the countries in Europe that received the largest number of resettled refugees.

In a parallel development, in November, UNHCR evacuated the first group of vulnerable refugees from detention centres in Libya to Niger.<sup>29</sup> As of the end of March, 1,342 vulnerable refugees had been evacuated to Italy,<sup>30</sup> or else to Niger for possible resettlement.<sup>31</sup> In response to UNHCR's appeal for 40,000 resettlement places from countries along the Central Mediterranean route,<sup>32</sup> as of the end of March 2018, European States have pledged 7,190 places, along with a further 450 places for resettlement directly out of Libya.

### “

*UNHCR continues to call for greater access to safe and legal pathways, such as resettlement and family reunification, to Europe. It is also key to ensure that people can have access to asylum in European countries.”*

Pascale Moreau, Director of UNHCR's Europe Bureau, 23 November 2017

<sup>28</sup> These figures refer to those who departed for resettlement in 2017. In many cases, the resettlement process is lengthy and can take a year or more from the time a person is put forward for resettlement to a resettlement country until the time when they actually depart. As such, many of those resettled in 2017 have likely been awaiting resettlement since 2015 or 2016.

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR, *News Comment by Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR's Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean Situation, on the first evacuation of refugees from Libya to Niger*, 11 November 2017, <https://goo.gl/YHfiuE>.

<sup>30</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR: First evacuation of 162 vulnerable refugees from Libya to Italy*, 22 December 2017, <https://goo.gl/PL1XVK>; UNHCR, *Over 1,000 refugees evacuated out of Libya by UNHCR*, 15 February 2018, <https://goo.gl/CDTnGN>.

<sup>31</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR seeking 1,300 urgent resettlement places for vulnerable refugees in Libya*, 11 December 2017, <https://goo.gl/G98iPr>. Ten persons have also been evacuated to the Emergency Transit Centre in Romania.

<sup>32</sup> UNHCR, *Central Mediterranean situation: UNHCR calls for an additional 40,000 resettlement places*, 11 September 2017, <http://goo.gl/qZumpD>.

While family reunification remains a critical avenue for safe and legal admission to Europe, many of those eligible face significant barriers in the process. For instance, in 2017, five EU Member States<sup>33</sup> still had mandatory waiting periods in place requiring beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, including many Syrians, to wait two or three years before they could begin the family reunification process or else had temporarily suspended their right to apply for family reunification for a set period.

On a positive note, new 'humanitarian corridors' for admission established and funded by religious organizations and working in partnership with the respective governments were announced in Italy, Belgium and France and enabled a number of refugees to reach Europe safely from Lebanon and Ethiopia.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, in France, 19 Syrian refugees arrived from Jordan to further their education as part of a pioneering scholarship programme offered by the council of the Occitanie/Pyrénées-Méditerranée region,<sup>35</sup> a good practice example for others to replicate.

Of those who had already entered Europe, support for Greece and Italy in the form of relocations was a mixed experience with some countries meeting their quotas and others being referred by the European Commission to the Court of Justice for non-compliance.<sup>36</sup> As of 26 March, nearly 22,000 asylum-seekers had been relocated from Greece (33% of the originally foreseen total), along with over 12,300 from Italy (31% of the originally foreseen total).<sup>37</sup>

In addition, many were able to join their family members in another EU Member States, in accordance with the Dublin III Regulation. For example, statistics provided by the Greek Asylum Service note that over 7,200 requests for transfers to other EU Member States were accepted in 2017 with most requests being made to Germany, the United Kingdom and

<sup>33</sup> Austria, Denmark, Germany, Latvia, and Sweden.

<sup>34</sup> UNHCR, *Italian project offers path to hope for vulnerable refugees in Ethiopia*, 8 December 2017, <https://goo.gl/gujQBo>.

<sup>35</sup> UNHCR, *French scholarship scheme gives hope to Syrian refugees*, 7 February 2018, <https://goo.gl/bhqtqh>.

<sup>36</sup> European Commission, *Relocation: Commission refers the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to the Court of Justice*, 7 December 2017, <https://goo.gl/KVbdBC>.

<sup>37</sup> European Commission, *Member States' Support to Emergency Relocation Mechanism*, 26 March 2018, <https://goo.gl/HfbF8H>.

## Syrian children fleeing war alone find welcome in Spain

Unaccompanied children relocated from Greece to Spain have now settled in Motril.

All the children interviewed said they had, in different ways, come to like their new lives. “At first I didn’t like anything, I didn’t want to live here,” says Mahmud. “I didn’t like the house, I didn’t like anyone, but now everything is perfect.”

For Tareq, a thoughtful, precisely spoken young man, relocation to Motril has “changed everything”. “Here in Spain, we have a daily routine to follow. We have to go to school, we have to sit down together to eat, to go to work.”

He pauses, then for a moment, the child inside the self-possessed young man shows through. “It’s important because we are still children.”

[Read more here.](#)

Sweden.<sup>38</sup> However, a study released by UNHCR in August highlighted continued obstacles in the process due to way in which the Dublin III Regulation is implemented by different States.<sup>39</sup>

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

UNHCR and its partners continue to advocate with and support governmental counterparts in efforts to strengthen protection across the region in 2018. Amongst other measures, UNHCR continues to call on States across the region and EU institutions, where relevant, to:

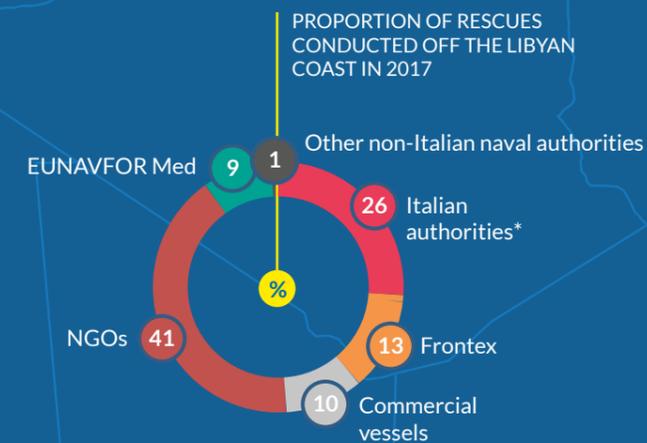
- Ensure access to territory for people seeking international protection, implement protection-sensitive border practices that enable border officials to identify persons with international or humanitarian protection needs; and grant access to swift and efficient asylum procedures;
- Enhance the quality of reception, fair and efficient asylum procedures, and other services where needed, with particular attention to those with specific needs, including unaccompanied and separated children and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence;
- Strengthen protection mechanisms for children;
- Increase solidarity and responsibility-sharing, including by supporting States at primary arrival points through relocations and fostering the establishment of an intra-EU solidarity mechanism as part of the reform of the Dublin Regulation, as well as providing support to increase the availability of protection in countries of first asylum and countries of transit; and
- Enhance access to safe and legal pathways for those in need of international protection, including by increasing resettlement commitments and removing obstacles to family reunification.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Greek Asylum Service, *Statistical data of the Greek Dublin Unit*, January 2018, <https://goo.gl/y9fopi>.

<sup>39</sup> UNHCR, *Left in Limbo: UNHCR Study on the Implementation of the Dublin III Regulation*, August 2017, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/59d5dcb64.html>.

<sup>40</sup> For further details, please see UNHCR, *UNHCR’s recommendations to Bulgaria for its Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) – A time for solidarity – January – June 2018*, December 2017, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5a33c40f4.html>.

## DEAD AND MISSING ALONG LAND AND SEA ROUTES IN 2017



Based on Italian Coast Guard data.

\* Includes rescues by the Italian Coast Guard, the Italian Navy, Guardia di Finanza, and Carabinieri.

Includes Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)).

The boundaries and names shown and the designations on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

