

# EUROPE MONTHLY REPORT



An asylum seeker from Iraq, studies in his apartment provided by UNHCR, on the Greek island of Kos. He came to Kos with his mother, from Baghdad via Turkey. He says: "It changes everything to go to public school".

## TRENDS AND KEY FIGURES

Just over 13,400 refugees and migrants arrived in Europe via the three Mediterranean routes in August 2019. In the first eight months of the year, the number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe by these three routes dropped by 31% from 87,300 in 2018 to 60,600 in 2019. The primary changes compared to last year include further reduced arrivals to Europe from Libya following the limitations in access by Italian ports for disembarkation of rescued persons as of June 2018; the formalization of the Libyan Search and Rescue Region, resulting in more of those rescued or intercepted off the Libyan coast being disembarked in Libya; as well as reduced arrivals to Spain due to increased measures by Morocco to prevent departures by sea and increased cooperation between Spain and Morocco on search and rescue. As of the end of August, most refugees and migrants entering Europe via the Mediterranean routes did so via Greece.

**Greece:** In August, some 9,300 people arrived by sea and land. This is the highest number of arrivals since the Turkey-EU Statement was introduced in March 2016. The Turkish Coast Guard reported intercepting or rescuing over 8,300 people in the Aegean in August (roughly 52% of those trying to cross). One reason for the increase was a larger number of Afghans and Syrians crossing the sea from Turkey compared to July. In the first eight months of 2019, some 33,600 refugees and migrants arrived in Greece by land and sea, a slight increase (6%) compared to the same period in 2018 (31,600). Some 39% of those who have arrived by sea in Greece so far have been from Afghanistan, along with 21% from the Syrian Arab Republic and 9% from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Many people have arrived in family groups and so far 40% of

Mediterranean  
**60,600**  
arrivals in 2019<sup>1</sup>

**913**  
estimated dead/missing in 2019<sup>1</sup>

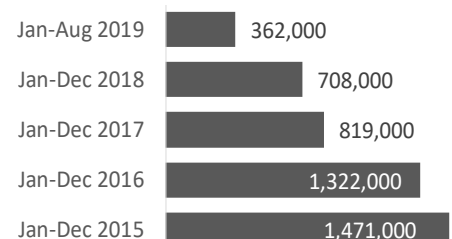
**Greece<sup>2</sup>**  
**33,600**  
4,059 5,842 9,334  
Jun Jul Aug

**Italy**  
**5,100**  
1,218 1,088 1,268  
Jun Jul Aug

**Spain<sup>2</sup>**  
**19,600**  
2,823 3,434 2,854  
Jun Jul Aug

**Cyprus**  
**1,300**  
475 - -  
Jun Jul Jul

### New asylum applications in Europe<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> [data.unhcr.org/mediterranean](https://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean) as of 31 August 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Arrivals include Cyprus, Italy, Malta; Greece and Spain both include sea and land arrivals; Spain includes sea arrivals in the Mediterranean and to the Canary Islands.

<sup>3</sup> Sources: Eurostats for EU+ countries (Only partial data for May, June and July 2019. All data is provisional and last updated 06 August 2019); UNHCR for Eastern Europe and Turkey (as of 31 December 2018) and South Eastern Europe (as of 30 June 2019).

arrivals have been men, 24% women, and 36% children.

**Spain:** In the first eight months of 2019, some 19,600 refugees and migrants arrived in Spain, 44% less than the same period in 2018 (34,700). Sea arrivals (48% less) have decreased more than arrivals at the enclaves (15% less). The reduction in numbers of arrivals follow increased cooperation between Spain and Morocco on search and rescue as well as further measures to prevent departures from North Africa. In the first eight months of 2019, most people arriving in Spain were from Morocco (30%), Mali (14%), Guinea (13%), Côte d'Ivoire (11%) and Senegal (8%).

**Italy:** Some 5,100 refugees and migrants arrived by sea in Italy in the first eight months of 2019, a 75% decrease from 20,100 in the same period of 2018. In addition to the decrease in sea arrivals from Libya, the number of people crossing from Tunisia (mostly Tunisians) has also dropped by 67% to 1,300 in the first eight months of 2019 from some 3,900 in the same period during 2018. While in previous years the vast majority of people arriving by sea to Italy had departed from Libya, in the eight months of 2019 around 26% of people who reached Italy by sea departed from Libya, 36% from Tunisia, 21% from Turkey, 10% from Algeria and 7% from Greece. As a result, the primary nationalities arriving in Italy were Tunisians (26%), Pakistanis (16%), Ivoirians (10%) and Algerians (10%). The primary nationalities arriving in Italy from Libya in this period were Bangladeshis, Sudanese and Ivoirians.

**Malta:** While the number of sea arrivals from Libya to Italy had decreased in the first eight months of 2019, those arriving to Malta had increased as more regular disembarkation of people rescued after departing from Libya continued. So far this year, some 2,200 refugees and migrants have arrived in Malta by sea after departing from Libya (compared to 850 during the same period of 2018). Some 69% of sea arrivals to Malta in 2019 were rescued in the Maltese Search and Rescue Region, almost all by the Armed Forces of Malta. Most people who were disembarked in Malta after departing from Libya were from Sudan (48%), Eritrea (8%), and Nigeria (5%).

**Western Balkans:** In North Macedonia, a daily average of 135 new arrivals (4,200 individuals) was observed

# 1,907

**Returns EU-Turkey statement**<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Source: [Ministry of Citizen Protection](#), Greece as of 31 August 2019.

by UNHCR and partners during August (17% less than the average of 164 per day in July), primarily arriving from Greece and most people reported coming from Pakistan, Afghanistan or Bangladesh. Some 17,300 people have been recorded as having arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina irregularly this year, a 45% increase compared to the same period last year. Most people reported coming from Pakistan, Afghanistan or Iraq and smaller percentages from Iran, Syria, Algeria or Bangladesh and already having transited through other countries in the region, often for a long period of time. In Serbia, UNHCR and partners observed some 16,400 new arrivals in 2019, including some 2,200 unaccompanied or separated children. The primary nationalities have been Pakistanis and Afghans, followed by Bangladeshis.

At the end of August approximately 7,000 refugees and migrants were estimated to be in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Push-backs continue to be widely reported across the region, including the use of violence, while at least 20 people are known to have died along the route so far this year, including while trying to hide in vehicles to cross borders and drowning in border rivers.

**Dead and missing:** In the first eight months of 2019, 913 people are believed to have died or gone missing in the Mediterranean sea on their way to Europe. The majority of deaths took place in the Central Mediterranean where 644 people were believed to have died, 68 of which occurred in August. A further 212 people are believed to have died at sea between North Africa and Spain, and 57 people along the short route between Turkey and Greece.

Some 63 deaths have been reported along land routes so far in 2019 with 32 of these occurring around the Greece-Turkey land border, of which 11 have drowned in the Evros River.

## OTHER SITUATIONS IN EUROPE

Turkey **4.0 million**

**Refugees and asylum seekers**<sup>5</sup>

Syrian Arab Republic	<b>3,658,000</b>
Afghanistan	<b>172,000</b>
Iraq	<b>143,000</b>
Other nationalities	<b>57,000</b>

<sup>5</sup> Source: UNHCR as of 31 August 2019

Ukraine **1.5 million**

**Internally Displaced Persons**<sup>6</sup> and **Conflict Affected Persons**<sup>7</sup>

Refugees:	<b>2,627</b>
Asylum seekers:	<b>2,174</b>
Stateless persons:	<b>35,650</b>

<sup>6</sup> Residing more permanently in government-controlled areas (GCA).

<sup>7</sup> Estimated number of vulnerable, conflict-affected persons living along the 'contact line' in government-controlled areas (GCA) and non-government controlled areas (NGCA).

<sup>8</sup> 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), UNHCR

<sup>9</sup> Refugees, including persons with complementary protection, UNHCR, State Migration Service of Ukraine as of 30/06/2019

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR as of 13/08/2019

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR, State Migration Service of Ukraine as of 30/06/2019

# KEY DEVELOPMENTS



**Search and rescue in the central Mediterranean:** In August, over 2,300 people were disembarked after departing from Libya by sea. Of them, 59% were disembarked in Libya following interventions by the Libyan Coast Guard, and less commonly by fishing boats. UNHCR repeatedly reiterated that due to intense fighting, as well as widespread reports of human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, Libya cannot be considered a safe port, and no one should be returned there.

Over 950 others were disembarked in Malta and Italy in August (33% in Malta, 67% in Italy). 69% of those disembarked in Malta were rescued in Malta's Search and Rescue Region. As of the end of August, 55% of all arrivals in Italy from Libya were rescued in either the Italian or Maltese SRRs.

**Austria:** On 29 August, in the run-up to the upcoming elections on 29 September, UNHCR has [shared](#) its recommendations with all political parties running for Parliament specifying in which areas and how refugee protection may be strengthened in and by Austria. Moreover, UNHCR calls on the political parties to deal with refugee and asylum related matters in a responsible way and to lead public debates with the necessary caution and not at the expense of refugees.

**Belgium:** In the first seven months of 2019, over 15,300 asylum applications were submitted, 20% more than for the same period last year, according to a CGRS statistical

report. The additional workload is expected to increase the processing time for new applicants. The requests are mainly from Afghans (1,780), Syrians (1,700) and Palestinians (1,700). The protection rate has fallen from 49% last year to 41% this year, mainly because of the large number of Syrians who have already received protection in other EU countries and are thus rejected by Belgium and returned to the relevant EU country under the Dublin framework.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina:** UNHCR, DRC and legal aid partner Vaša prava BiH, continue to monitor and register protection incident allegations of persons attempting onward movement from BiH to the European Union. To date, in 2019, partners registered 110 such reports relating to 890 persons.

Overall protection space in BiH, but mostly in Una-Sana Canton, continues to be challenged by restrictions on movement of asylum-seekers and migrants by the local police, lack of sufficient reception capacity, and continuing onward-movement towards Croatia and subsequent push-backs. Asylum seekers and migrants continue to have limited freedom of movement and lack of access to services.

**Croatia:** The Croatian Border Police has recorded some 9,500 irregular movements in the period of January – July 2019, an almost 200% rise compared to the same period last year. Most people apprehended in Croatia come from

Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

**Czech Republic:** A regional court [overturned decisions](#) on the detention of three Afghan unaccompanied children who were detained pending asylum proceedings. The court criticized the administrative authorities for having insufficiently assessed the age of the applicants and held that the medical age assessment based on the wrist X-ray is only one type of possible evidence.

**Estonia:** UNHCR [published](#) a study on legal aid in Estonia, in cooperation with the Estonian Human Rights Centre and experts and officials in Estonia. It provides an overview of the state legal aid system and provides recommendations for improvement.

**France:** On 23 August, in accordance with the recent discussion towards improving mechanisms for the sharing of responsibilities on disembarkations in the Mediterranean Sea between the European Union states members, France announced that it will receive 190 persons from two of the NGO rescue ships currently operating in the Mediterranean, Open Arms and Ocean Viking.

**Germany:** The [Institute for Employment Research](#) (IAB) <sup>2</sup> has revealed that approximately 400,000 refugees will be employed before the end of the year. Herbert Brücker, head of International Labor Market Research at the IAB, explained that about 36% of refugees between the ages of 15 and 64 are currently working and he expects that figure to rise to 40% during 2019. While about 50% of the refugee with jobs are working in a skilled profession, many are employed as temporary workers and on relatively low wages in industries including catering, security, cleaning and construction.

**Greece:** The situation on the islands has worsened since July, with the population on the islands continuing to increase, reaching a new peak with 25,250 people (as of 31 August); the highest number since March 2016. Arrivals to the islands during August averaged nearly 250 people per day. The five Reception and Identification Centers (RICs)

host 20,500 of which 5,200 are children (1,180 unaccompanied). The recent increase of arrivals and limited departures has taken a toll on reception and living conditions on the islands, especially Lesbos and Samos. Thousands have few options but to stay outside the boundaries of the site in rickety tents with inadequate access to sanitation. Transfers from the islands to the mainland have increased with 2,500 in August, but remain too modest to have a meaningful impact on the overcrowding on the islands. UNHCR estimates that, as of 26 August, there are approximately 10,000 people on Lesbos only, most commonly from Afghanistan (71%). In Moria RIC on Lesbos a 15-year-old Afghan boy was killed and two other teenage boys injured after a violent fight broke out on 24 August. UNHCR [reiterated its call](#) for urgent measures to ensure

that unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) are transferred to safe shelters and to end overcrowding.

**Italy:** On 5 August, a confidence vote in the Senate ensured the final approval of the law conversion of the Security Law Decree bis, which foresees the tightening of rules on rescue operations. The decree needed the green light by both Chambers of Parliament before 13 August in order to become law. The approved text widens the powers of the authorities to ban the entry, transit or stay of vessels in Italian territorial waters. In the event of a violation of the above ban, the law introduces fines between €150,000 and 1,000,000 and impoundment of the vessels.

Originally set up to €50,000, the maximum fine was increased during the discussion of the decree before the Chamber of Deputies. The President signed the law on 8 August, but in a letter to the Presidents of the Senate, the Chamber of Deputies and the Council of Ministers made reference to the fact that the provisions of the decree were widely modified during the conversion by the Parliament and shared some legal concerns on the proportionality between sanctions and conduct and the duty to render assistance as foreseen by the international obligations.

**The Netherlands:** On 26 August 2019 it was [announced](#) that a new policy framework will come into effect on 01 October 2019 whereby children [placed under supervision](#) may qualify for a temporary residence permit on humanitarian grounds if the child protection measures in place in the Netherlands cannot be put into effect in the country of origin.

**North Macedonia:** The new Law on Primary Education was adopted by Parliament on 30 July. The new Law introduces a set of measures for inclusion of refugee and asylum-seeking children into formal education, which is a significant step towards creating an inclusive environment, for which UNICEF and UNHCR jointly advocated.

**Portugal:** On 20 August, the Portuguese Government adopted a National Plan for the Implementation of the Global Compact on Migration. In agreement with UNHCR, Government commitments regarding statelessness were integrated in the National Plan. Other relevant provisions include improved and simplified processes of recognition of professional skills and education, with a special focus on vulnerable migrants, better access of migrants to Portuguese language classes, health services and affordable housing.

**Russian Federation:** On 9 August, 2019, a new Administrative Regulation of the Ministry of Interior entered into force, describing how the state service should consider applications for refugee status and temporary asylum. The new regulation includes improvements on the previous process including waiving the requirement to be

legally staying in Russia to be eligible to apply for asylum and waiving the reason to reject the application for asylum if the applicant has a spouse who is a Russian citizen. The new regulation did not waive UNHCR's concern on the need to have a valid ID document and undergo an identification procedure to initiate asylum applications.

**Slovenia:** The Slovenian Border Police has recorded significant increase in arrivals, with some 9,800 in the first eight months of 2019. Most people apprehended in Slovenia are from Pakistan, Algeria and Afghanistan.

The government has started building an additional 40 km **3** of wire fencing along its southern border with Croatia between the villages of Zilje and Zunici. There are currently 179 km of temporary technical barriers along that border, 116 km of barbed wire fencing and 63 km of panel fencing. A new set of leaflets on access to territory and asylum procedures developed with the support of UNHCR in 13 different languages was delivered to the border police.

**Spain:** Between 1 January and 31 July, Spain received **4** 65,527 asylum applications, more than double the same period last year, when 31,050 asylum applications were submitted. Most asylum-seekers in 2019 so far originate from Venezuela (23,102), followed by Colombia (14,503) and Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador (10,347) according to the Office of Asylum and Refugees (OAR) in Spain.

**Ukraine:** the first week of August saw the intensification of ceasefire violations, including the killing of four Ukrainian soldiers on 06 August in the Donetsk oblast.

On 14 August, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted **5** a resolution relating to the social protection of internally displaced persons. The resolution provides for the payment of financial assistance to persons

with disabilities and those considered unable to care for themselves.

In August, UNHCR assisted the residents of two small villages close to Donetsk airport by providing cash and some additional materials for light and medium repair by the end of winter. These two villages had remained inaccessible for humanitarian delivery due to security concerns since the beginning of the conflict in 2014.

On 12 August, UNHCR produced a [video](#) dedicated to International Youth Day with a focus on how young people perceive refugees and IDPs.



**United Kingdom:** On August 29 British Home Secretary Priti Patel met her French counterpart Christophe Castaner in Paris amid rising numbers of refugees and migrants attempting to cross to the UK from France. The two sides promised more joint action to prevent crossings. According to the Home Office, in 2019 so far there have been 1,150 attempts by individuals to cross, of whom approximately 725 have arrived in the UK and 425 were intercepted in France. Last year there were 539 attempted crossings.

## REFUGEE STORIES

### [Hellish journey over for young woman rescued from the Mediterranean](#)

By Marco Rotunno | 23 August 2019

Feven\* kept looking at her feet. The 18-year-old's voice was a whisper amid dozens of asylum seekers at a reception center on the Italian island of Sicily. Memories of her ordeal are still fresh.

"We were sharing two toilets for 130 people. We were sleeping all together on the boat's deck: some areas had shade, others not. We had to take turns," she said.

"We were malnourished, though not from the days on the boat. That was a consequence of the long time we had spent in the traffickers' hangars in Libya," she said.

She was rescued on 1 August by the Open Arms rescue vessel and evacuated from the ship with 13 others to Lampedusa for medical reasons on 15 August. One hundred others, also rescued from international UNHCR had appealed to European governments to allow the Open Arms to disembark the passengers.

Her ordeal began in early 2017 when she left Eritrea as a 15-year-old. No family members accompanied her. She declined to talk about her journey to Libya or her experience during the 18 months spent there in a hangar run by traffickers. Many women in the centres have experienced violence, rape and torture for the purpose of extorting money from family members back home. Some have been killed.

Traffickers imprison migrants and asylum seekers in Libya for months before transporting them towards Europe by boat. Feven said the vessel she was on held 52 Africans

including 15 women and two children. The journey was a nightmare.

“The wooden boat was stranded at sea off Libya for two days. The engine broke. There was water leaking inside the boat. The waves were so strong. We were terrified but we were coming from hell. We were not afraid to die. Then Open Arms saved us,” she said.

Then a new kind of ordeal began. It was different from staring death in the face on a rickety boat, but no less bewildering. Unable to understand what was going on, she waited as first the hours and then the days dragged by. All the time, her anxiety rose.

“We got a sense of the problem from the other people’s faces. We were not allowed to leave the ship because Europe didn’t want us. Then we started fearing we could be sent back to hell: Libya.”

Rescue at sea, a humanitarian imperative and a legal obligation under international law, has been increasingly hampered in the last years.

UNHCR says increased search and rescue capacity on the Central Mediterranean is needed and NGO boats should be supported as they save lives.

\*Eveven asked that her real name not be used for security reasons.

## [Social media helps former refugee thank man who gave her a childhood bicycle](#)

By Matthew Mpoke Bigg in London | 15 August 2019

Nearly a quarter of a century ago, five-year-old Mevan Babakar was living with her mother at a holding centre for refugees in the Dutch town of Bergen aan Zee.

Mevan’s life had been hard. Her parents fled northern Iraq in 1991 as refugees journeyed through Turkey, Azerbaijan and Russia before reaching the Netherlands, where they lived at a camp in the town of Zwolle. While there, they

got to know a Dutch aid worker called Egbert who worked there.

After they left Zwolle for Bergen aan Zee, Egbert made a journey of over 150 kilometres and arrived at their new home with a gift for Mevan of a brand-new bicycle and one for her mother too. He came out of the blue and for Mevan the gift was life-changing.

“I remember my heart just exploded with joy ... I couldn’t believe it was mine,” she recalled. “When someone gives you something better than you deserve, you have to start to reassess what you’re worth.”

Soon afterwards, the family moved to London. But the gift and the story of her early years never left her, and recently she embarked on a trip to learn more about her past and the experiences and culture that shaped her early life.

She was determined to track down the anonymous benefactor. That’s where social media came in. Her tweet began: “Hi Internet, this is a long shot, but I was a refugee.” Then she explained her story. Within minutes, it had been retweeted – first hundreds and then thousands of times. People piled in with suggestions on how she could track him down.

Within an hour, Mevan was invited to the office of a local journalist. They recorded an interview for social media. By the end of the day, she had tracked the man down and on Tuesday she and the journalist went to visit Egbert at his home in Germany.

“It was wonderful. It was like seeing a relative that you hadn’t seen in a very long time,” she said. Other refugees chimed in with stories of acts of kindness that people had shown to them and what a difference those acts had made.

The story shows the power of an act of kindness to change a person’s life. “It wasn’t really about the bike. The gift of the bike and those feelings eventually became the value of my own self-worth,” she said.

