UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

Regional Bureau for Europe

MIXED MOVEMENTS ARRIVAL TRENDS: 2026 Q1

This report presents the latest trends and patterns in mixed movements towards Europe, based on UNHCR's monitoring across key routes. Behind the figures are people driven to move by conflict, persecution, insecurity and lack of opportunities, often undertaking dangerous journeys in search of safety and protection. By analysing data on arrivals, routes and profiles, the report sheds light on how movements are evolving over time, as well as the risks faced along the way. It is intended to support a better understanding of these dynamics and to inform timely, protection-sensitive responses.

Mediterranean + Western Africa Atlantic routes

18,602

South Eastern Europe[1]

2,284

AT A GLANCE

Mediterranean and Atlantic routes: Lowest quarterly arrivals since 2022. In Q1 2026 18,602 arrivals were recorded across the Mediterranean and Western Africa Atlantic routes, representing a 40% decrease compared to Q1 2025 (30,828) and the lowest quarterly total since 2022, continuing a multi-year downward trend since the peak of 217,672 arrivals recorded in 2023.

Western Africa Atlantic routes: Lower arrivals and shifting nationality profile. With 1,640 arrivals recorded in Q1 2026, arrivals remained well below the 2025 quarterly average (4,447) -The surge recorded in Q1 2025 (9,424) did not recur. The nationality profile also shifted markedly: Gambia and Senegal are emerging as the main nationalities; while arrivals from Mali, which drove nearly half of Q1 2025 movements, fell substantially, but still accounted for around 20 per cent of arrivals on this route.

Central and Eastern Mediterranean: Quietest Q1 in five years. The Central Med (6,118) and Eastern Med (6,266) are both recording arrivals well below half their 2025 quarterly averages. in Q1 2026, Afghans remained by far the leading nationality on the Eastern Med and were largely absent from the Central Med, while Bangladesh was the top nationality across the two routes combined. Somalia replaced Eritrea among the top five nationalities recorded on the Central Med.

Western Mediterranean: Consistent with the 2025 average. With 4,578 arrivals recorded in Q1 2026, the Western Mediterranean route was up around 79% on Q1 2025 (2,564), but remained broadly in line with the 2025 quarterly average and Q4 2025 levels. Algerian nationals accounted for nearly three in ten arrivals, making them the largest nationality group on the route.

South-Eastern Europe: Arrivals remain close to 2025 levels. Some 2,284 arrivals were recorded in Q1 2026, broadly in line with 2025 quarterly average, but 34% lower than in previous quarter. These arrivals were recorded entering the region through Albania, Bulgaria and North Macedonia as part of mixed refugee and migrant movements.[1]

Unaccompanied children: Increasing share of arrivals. Unaccompanied children (UASC) represented 14.5% of arrivals in Q1 2026 (excluding Spain), aslight increase compared to 2025 and the highest share observed in recent years.

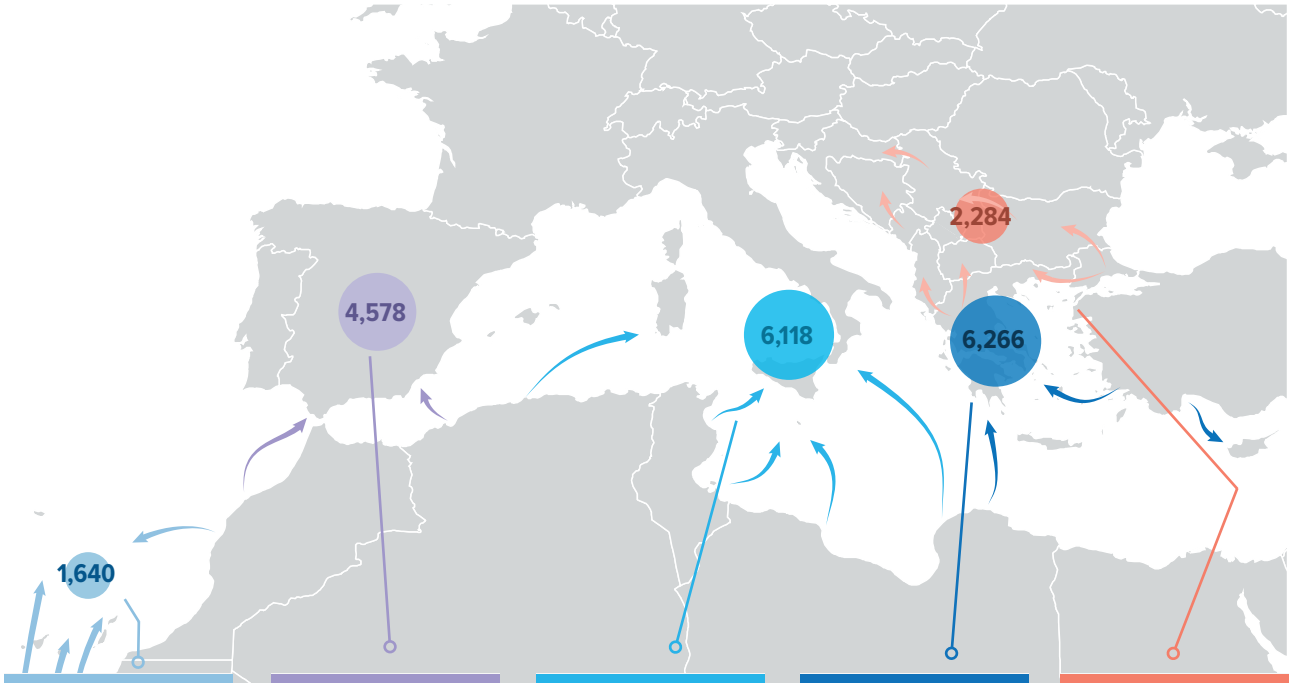
1,010 dead and missing persons[2] on Mediterranean and West Africa Atlantic routes in Q1 2026.

1 The region includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Kosovo. All references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

2 Source : IOM Missing Migrants Project – Q1 2026.

This report focuses on selected major mixed movement routes to Europe and does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of all routes or entry points.

ARRIVALS BY ROUTE



WEST AFRICA ATLANTIC[2]

Arrivals to Spain – Canary Islands; main departure points from Mauritania, Gambia, Morocco and Senegal.

WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Arrivals to Spain – Ceuta, Melilla, Balearic Islands and mainland; main departure points from Algeria and Morocco.

CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN

Arrivals to Italy or Malta; main departure points from Libya, Tunisia and Algeria.

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Arrivals to Cyprus or Greece; main departure points from Türkiye and Libya.

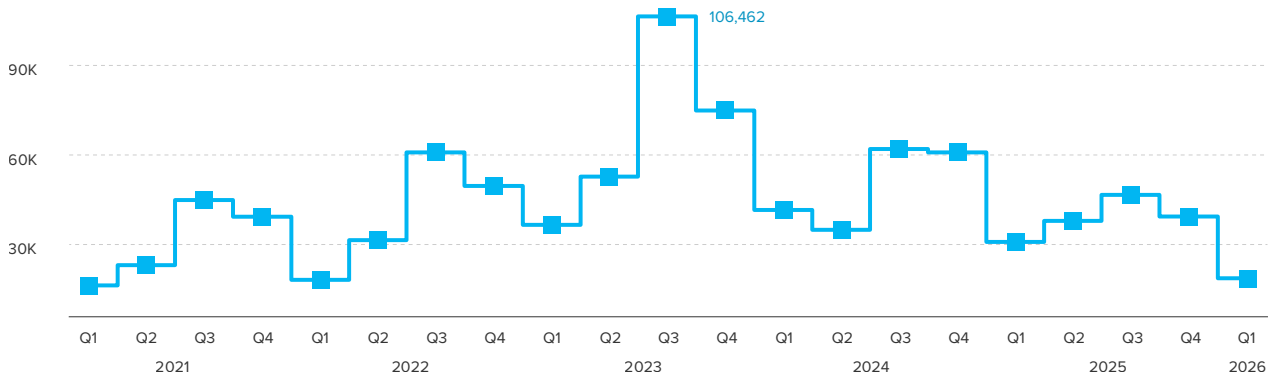
SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

Arrivals to Albania, Bulgaria and North Macedonia; main departure points from neighbouring countries.

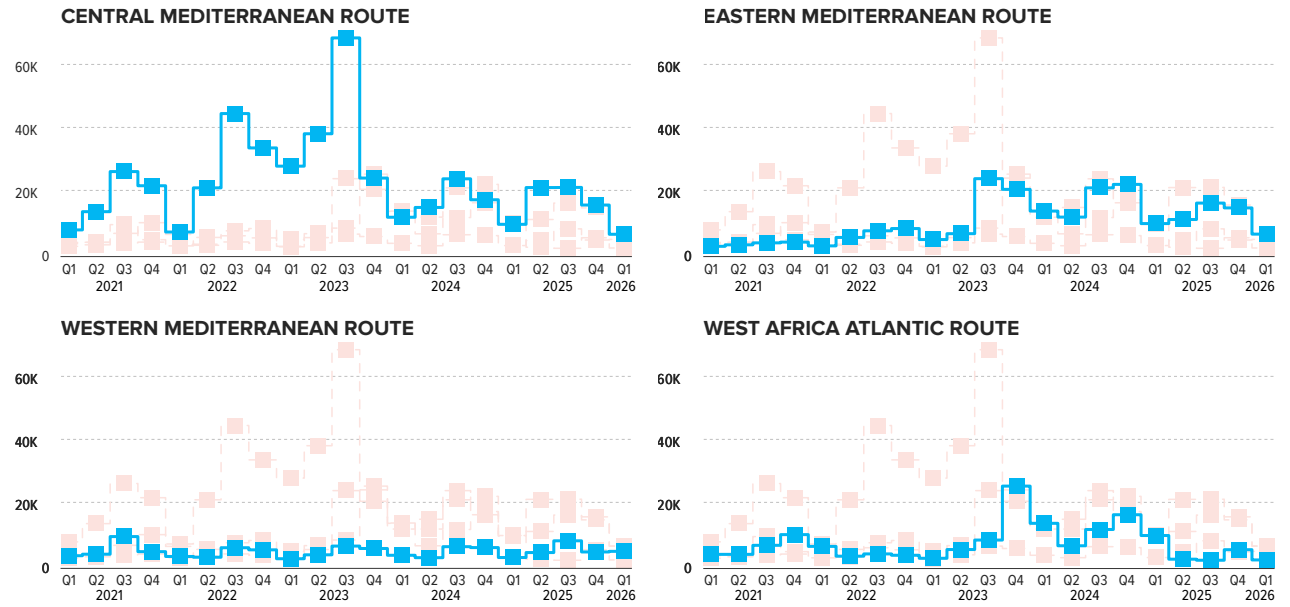
Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
*Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 [1999]).

TOTAL ARRIVALS BY QUARTER IN THE LAST 5 YEARS

Mediterranean and Western Africa Atlantic Routes



TOTAL ARRIVALS BY QUARTER AND ROUTE IN LAST 5 YEARS



What Q1 2026 is showing?

Arrivals in Q1 2026 (18,602) were significantly lower than in Q1 2025 (30,828), representing a 40 per cent decrease, and remained below the 2025 quarterly average (38,638). The decline was most evident on the Western Africa Atlantic route. Arrivals on both the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes were notably lower than in Q1 2025. The Western Mediterranean route was the main exception, with arrivals (4,578) broadly in line with 2025 averages, largely driven by movements from Algeria.

Although seasonal patterns differ across routes, with arrivals on the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes typically peaking during the summer months and those on the Western Africa Atlantic route tending to peak in winter, the low level of arrivals recorded in the first quarter suggests that total arrivals in 2026 are likely to remain below 2025 levels.

Who arrived on these routes in Q1 2026?

West Africa /Atlantic
1,274

Gambia	30%
Senegal	26%
Mali	20%
Guinea	13%
Morocco	5%

Western Mediterranean
3,062

Algeria	43%
Morocco	19%
Sudan	12%
Mali	8%
Guinea	6%

Central Mediterranean
6,118

Bangladesh	29%
Somalia	14%
Pakistan	11%
Sudan	10%
Egypt	8%

Eastern Mediterranean
6,266

Afghanistan	31%
Bangladesh	17%
Sudan	15%
Somalia	4%
Egypt	4%

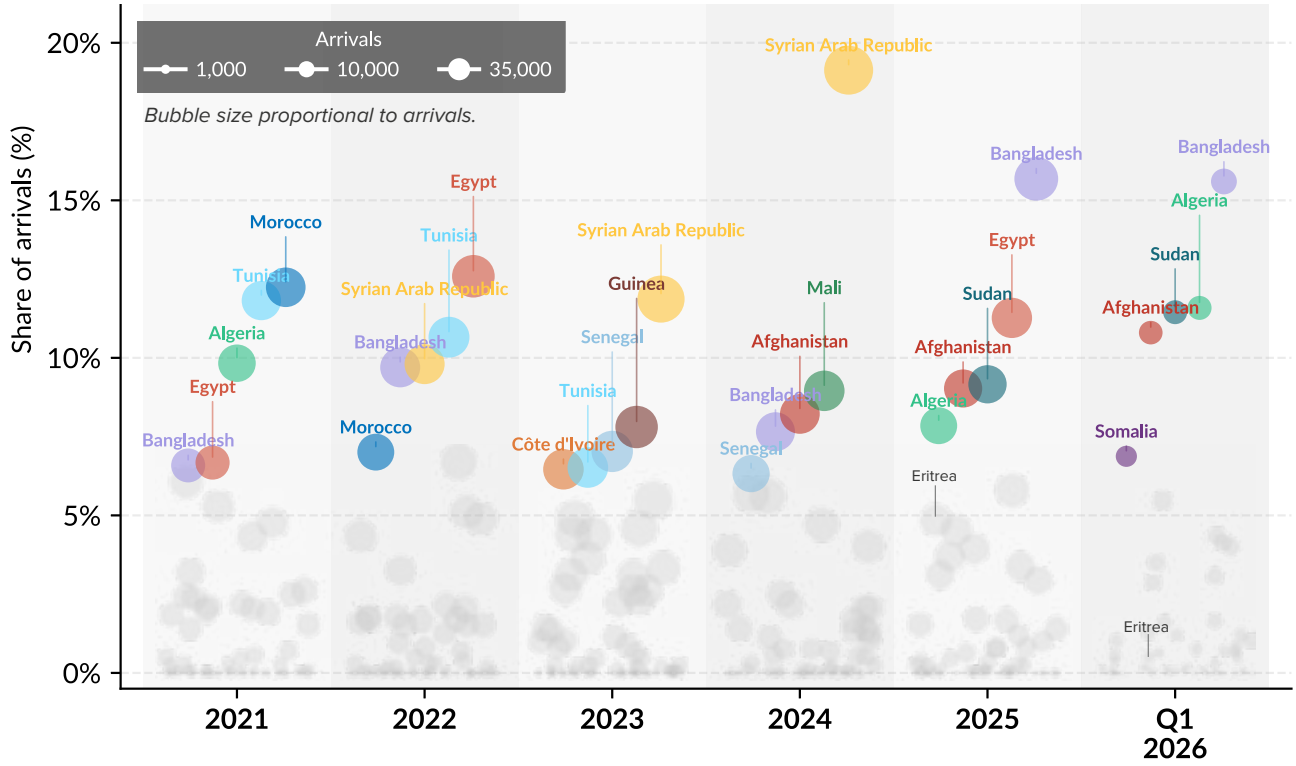
South Eastern Europe
2,284

Sudan	31%
Egypt	21%
Afghanistan	16%
Algeria	3%
Morocco	3%

Colored markers next to each nationality show how often people of that nationality were granted protection in 2025 globally: the share of asylum decisions that resulted in refugee status or another form of protection (UNHCR).
High: over 50% Medium: 20-50% Low: under 20%

Top 5 Arrivals by Nationality and Year

Mediterranean and West Africa/Atlantic Routes

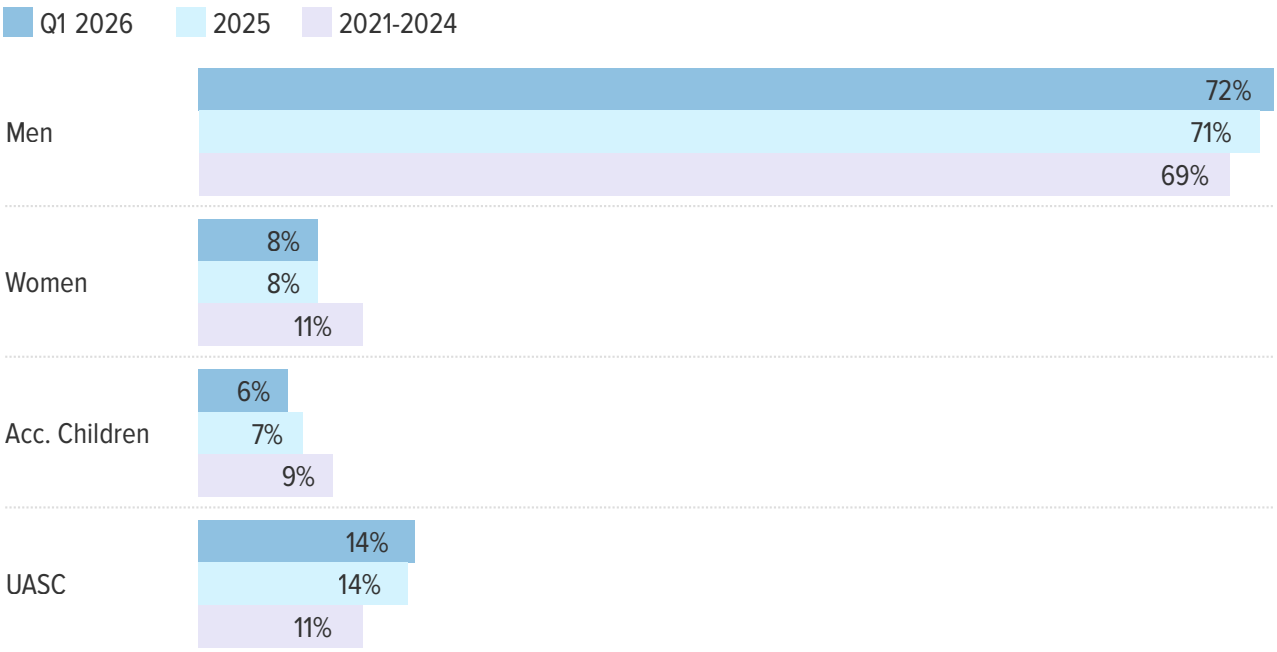


Key Nationalities Highlights

NATIONALITY	HIGHLIGHTS
Afghanistan	Remains the leading nationality on the Eastern Mediterranean route (31% in Q1 2026). The share of Afghans on this route has grown almost continuously since 2021, rising from around 10% in 2021–2022, to 19–22% in 2023–2024; to reach 31–42% in 2025–Q1 2026
Bangladesh	Remains the leading nationality overall. While Bangladeshi nationals continued to arrive primarily via the Central Mediterranean route, there has been a notable increase in arrivals along the Eastern Mediterranean route, from 2 per cent of arrivals in 2021 to 17 per cent in Q1 2026.
Eritrea	Arrivals declined sharply. Eritreans ranked third among nationalities on the Central Mediterranean route in 2025 (7,585 arrivals) but accounted for only 295 arrivals in Q1 2026.
Mali	Once the dominant nationality on the Western Africa Atlantic route in 2024 and 2025, Malians accounted for a much smaller share of arrivals in Q1 2026. Gambian nationals became the leading group, representing 30 per cent of arrivals on the route.

Somalia	Movements have shifted geographically, from being concentrated on the Eastern Mediterranean route during 2021–2023 to predominantly using the Central Mediterranean route in Q1 2026.
Sudan	With 1,943 arrivals in Q1 2026, Sudanese arrivals were nearly double the level recorded in Q1 2025, although lower than in each of the previous three quarters. Sudanese nationals were the only nationality that is significantly represented across the Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean routes. Their share of total arrivals increased sharply from1–3 per cent in 2021–2024, to 9-12 percent in 2025–Q1 2026.
Syria	Continued its long-term decline, accounting for just 2 per cent of disaggregated arrivals in Q1 2026, compared with around 12 per cent during 2021–2024.
Tunisia	Continued a sustained decline on the Central Mediterranean route, falling from the leading nationality in 2021 (23 per cent of arrivals) to just 3 per cent in Q1 2026.

AGE GENDER BREAKDWON



The demographic profile of arrivals in Q1 2026 remained broadly consistent with that observed in 2025, with adult men accounting for the majority of arrivals (72%). Women represented around 8 per cent of arrivals, in line with recent years. The share of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) increased to 14.5 per cent in Q1 2026, the highest level recorded in recent years and above the 2021–2025 average

Voices from the people on the move

> *I am thankful I am here; it is the first time I feel safe in years.*
>
> **A Sudanese refugee** newly arrived in Crete in November 2025

In Q1 2026, testimonies collected by UNHCR and partners continued to show that lower arrival numbers do not mean lower risks for people on the move. Across routes, people described journeys shaped by conflict, insecurity and lack of prospects at home, followed by long periods in transit marked by uncertainty, debt and repeated movement. Many reported abuse in transit countries, including detention, extortion, violence, document confiscation and pressure from smugglers, while others described dangerous sea crossings made in overcrowded or unseaworthy boats.

Testimonies also point to a strong onward-movement logic. Many people arriving in Europe said they were trying to reach places where they believed they could find safety, reunite with family, access asylum, or work and support relatives left behind. Children travelling alone remained especially exposed, where accounts referred to repeated pushbacks, loss of money or phones, and pressure to keep moving. Women's testimonies similarly underline exposure to exploitation and gender-based violence, as well as the difficulty of securing legal status, shelter and livelihoods. At the same time, qualitative evidence from South-Eastern Europe shows that when people obtain protection, documentation and access to work or services, the sense of instability can ease and intentions to remain become more realistic.

Photo: "Steps from darkness to light" is an award-winning poster, selected from UNHCR Greece's Annual Student Contest themed "Family Means Together". It was created by the students of the 4th Primary School of Tripoli, Greece.
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