

DESPERATE JOURNEYS

Refugees and migrants entering and crossing Europe via the Mediterranean and Western Balkans routes



On 24 November 2016, the Phoenix rescue vessel, belonging to Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) intercepted an inflatable vessel carrying 146 refugees and migrants who had travelled from West African countries to Libya, and attempted to cross the sea to Europe. Their boat was seriously overloaded and in danger of sinking, four hours into their dangerous sea voyage from the port of Sabratha, on Libya's northern coastline.

In spite of several measures to prevent irregular entries to Europe and irregular movement between European states,¹ refugees and migrants continue to enter the region as well as travel on irregularly from one European country to others, albeit at a significantly reduced scale. In addition, there is very limited access to safe and legal pathways to enter Europe, including for those seeking international protection, and because of challenging conditions in some EU countries where refugees first arrive and slow relocation efforts, and many see little alternative but to cross borders irregularly, despite the multiple risks this entails.

Compared to the first four months of 2016, it has become even more difficult to cross European borders with several European states having introduced additional measures and practices to prevent irregular entries, including of people seeking international protection. While this has resulted in a significant reduction in numbers crossing into Europe from Turkey to Greece by sea, it has also meant that people are now using more diverse (and often more dangerous) routes to enter or cross through Europe.

As a result of dangerous routes to and through Europe, high numbers of refugees and migrants continued to die at Europe's borders as well as on the way to Europe.² In the first four months of 2017, the number of estimated deaths in the Central Mediterranean increased 5 per cent compared to the same period last year with 1,019 refugees and migrants reported dead or missing at sea.³ A further 76 persons have also died at sea in the Eastern or Western Mediterranean in the same period.⁴ In addition, as states in the region have continued border restrictions,⁵ at least 26 ref-

ugees and migrants are known to have died since the start of the year while traveling to or crossing land borders in Europe. Of these, nine have died while trying to cross from Turkey to Greece or Bulgaria, seven while crossing through the Balkans and six while trying to cross from Italy to a neighbouring country.⁶ In addition, abuses by smugglers, criminal groups, as well as some state authorities continue to be reported at multiple points along the primary routes into and through Europe while women and children continue to face particular risks, including of sexual violence.

In the first four months of the year, the Central Mediterranean route has remained the primary entry point for most to Europe accounting for approximately 74 per cent of entries via one of the three Mediterranean routes. With sea arrivals to Greece having fallen drastically compared to the same period in 2016, increased sea arrivals to Spain have meant that arrivals via the Western Mediterranean now constitute a greater proportion of arrivals to Europe via the three Mediterranean routes.

Many of those using these dangerous routes to enter Europe are in need of international protection. Since the start of the year, most of those using the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey to Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus are likely to be in need of international protection and come from countries including Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. In Italy, the arrival point for those using the Central Mediterranean route from North Africa, 42 per cent of asylum applications processed so far in 2017 have resulted in applicants being granted some form of protection. Of these, 9 per cent were granted refugee status, another 9 per cent subsidiary protection and 24 per cent were granted humanitarian protection.

With very limited opportunities for resettlement and other complementary pathways, while those seeking to join family members who have already been granted protection in the EU face numerous obstacles to do so,⁷ many will continue to see little alternative but to enter Europe irregularly.

1 European Commission, *EU-Turkey Statement: Questions and Answers*, 19 March 2016, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-963_en.htm; Euronews, *Italy-Libya sign agreement to curb flow of migrants to Europe*, 2 February 2017, <http://www.euronews.com/2017/02/02/italy-libya-sign-agreement-to-curb-flow-of-migrants-to-europe>; The Telegraph, *Saharan tribal chiefs pledge to stop flow of migrants heading for Europe via Libya*, 4 April 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/04/04/tribal-chiefs-sahara-pledge-stop-flow-migrants-heading-europe/>; EU Observer, *EU funds for Sudan may worsen fate of refugees*, 10 April 2017, <https://euobserver.com/migration/137489>; The Guardian, *Balkan countries shut borders as attention turns to new refugee routes*, 9 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/09/balkans-refugee-route-closed-say-european-leaders>.

2 Some have suggested that the number of persons who die crossing the Sahara desert en route to Libya may be far higher. See Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, *Forgotten Fatalities: the number of migrant deaths before reaching the Mediterranean*, 27 June 2016, <http://regionalmms.org/index.php/component/spsimpleportfolio/item/18>.

3 The degree of increase was higher for the first three months of 2017 (135 per cent) compared to the same period in 2016 but was offset by the deaths of 500 people in a single incident in April 2016 en route from Egypt to Italy.

4 UNHCR, *Mediterranean: Dead and Missing at Sea*, April 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/56289>

5 UNHCR, *Border fences and internal border controls in Europe*, March 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/55249>

6 In addition, another seven refugees and migrants have died on land since the start of the year at reception centres or other sites around Europe but not specifically while travelling to or crossing borders.

7 UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2017*, June 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/575836267/unhcr-projected-global-resettlement-needs-2017.html>; European Migration Network, *Family Reunification of Third-Country Nationals in the EU plus Norway: National Practices*, April 2017, https://emnbelgium.be/sites/default/files/publications/FINAL_00_family_reunification_synthesis_report_final_en_print_ready.pdf; IRIN, *Hardening European Policies Keep Refugee Children apart from their Families*, 20 April 2017, <https://www.irinnews.org/feature/2017/04/20/hardening-european-policies-keep-refugee-children-apart-their-families>

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

Between January and April 2017, 5,164 refugees and migrants crossed the sea from Turkey to Greece with the average number of daily arrivals dropping to 39 in April from 45 in January. The numbers crossing in the first four months of 2017 are just a fraction of the over 155,000 refugees and migrants who crossed in the first four months of 2016 due to a combination of factors, including the closure of the so-called Western Balkan route, the introduction of additional visa restrictions, and the EU-Turkey Statement. In 2017 so far, Chios, Lesbos, Samos and Kastellorizo have been the primary arrival sites.

Syrians continue to be the largest group crossing the sea to Greece from Turkey and comprised 38 per cent of arrivals with Iraqis comprising 11 per cent. Syrians and Iraqis arriving in Greece consist mostly of family groups. In 2017 so far, there has been a greater diversity of nationalities crossing the sea to Greece and unlike in 2016, nationals of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Algeria (both 6 per cent) are among the main arrival groups with Palestinians (5 per cent) rounding out the top 5. Approximately half of arrivals by sea to Greece were male between January and April (49 per cent) with children comprising 29 per cent over the four months. Women comprised 22 per cent during this period.

In the same time period, the Turkish Coast Guard reported intercepting or rescuing 4,527 refugees and migrants at sea, of which 33 per cent have been in March and 34 per cent in April.⁸ In April, the number of persons intercepted/rescued by the Turkish Coast Guard was higher than the number of arrivals on Greek islands for the first time in 2017.

At the Greece-Turkey land border, 660 refugees and migrants have crossed from Turkey since the start of the year, a 54 per cent decrease from during the same period in 2016. Arrivals in April included a group of 64 that was left on a little island on the Greek side of the river to be later rescued by Greek authorities. While the numbers crossing to Greece via the land border have dropped compared to the same period in 2016, since the start of the year Turkish authorities have reported intercepting over 6,500 refugees and migrants attempting to cross the land border to Greece.

In the first four months of 2017, 1,097 unregistered refugees and migrants have been apprehended in Bulgaria with most being apprehended in the interior of the country rather than in border regions shortly after entry. So far, these numbers are 75 per cent lower than in the corresponding period in 2016. Most of those apprehended have been from Afghanistan (49 per cent), Syria (13 per cent) and Iraq (13 per cent). Of the 351 persons apprehended near the Turkish border in this period, 83 per cent have crossed the border in locations other than the official border crossing points and approximately 39 per cent have been Syrians. Bulgaria continues to deploy around 200 military personnel along with Border Police to its borders and in mid-March reported that the fence along its border was almost complete with a stretch of 12km in the Haskovo region due to be completed by the end of May and the final 12km of a 59km stretch near Burgas due to be completed by mid-May 2017.⁹

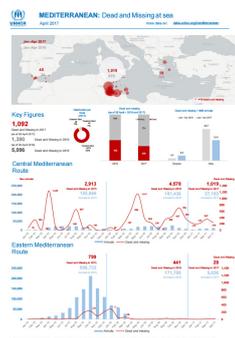
⁸ Turkish Coast Guard Command, *Irregular Migration Statistics*, http://www.sahilguvenlik.gov.tr/baskanliklar/harekat/faaliyet_istatistikleri/duzen-siz_goc_istatistikleri.html

⁹ Ministry of Interior, Вицепремиерът Стефан Янев: Имаме готовност да защитим държавната граница, 18 March 2017, http://press.mvr.bg/NEWS/news170318_03.htm

LAND AND SEA CROSSINGS FROM TURKEY - JAN TO APR 2017

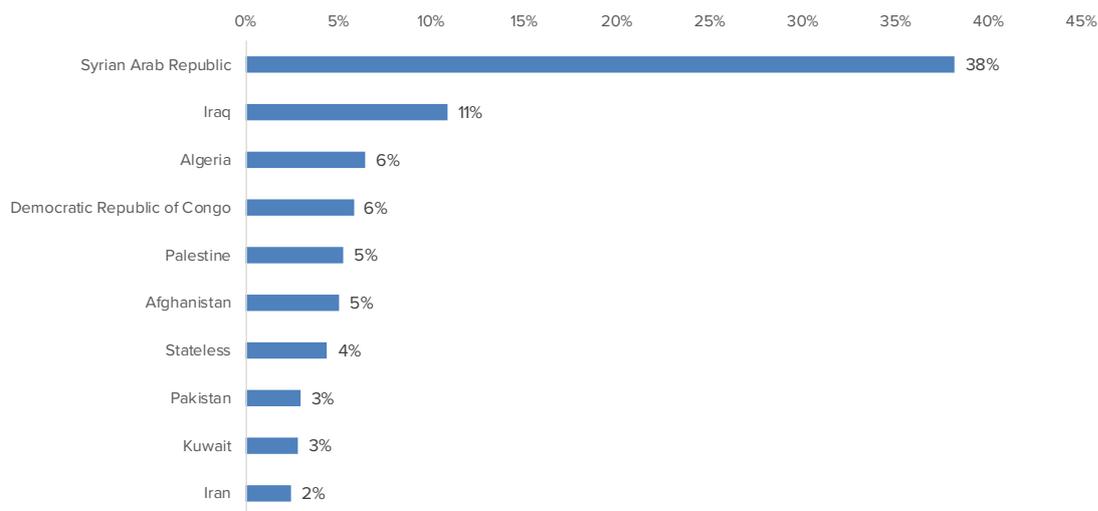


Read more on death and missing in the Mediterranean sea:



Sources: UNHCR, Hellenic Police and Ministry of Interior, Bulgaria https://www.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/9C36DA2C-4CCA-467A-B9EC-8FB42D67E8B4/0/Spravka_April_2017_Internet.pdf

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OF PRIMARY GROUPS ARRIVING BY SEA TO GREECE - JAN TO APR 2017



Since mid-2016, increased numbers of people have started to cross the sea from Turkey to Cyprus. Between January and April this year, 302 refugees, mostly from Syria, arrived by sea to Cyprus, including many children, compared to just 28 in a single boat in the same period in 2016. Many have reported coming from Idlib via Turkey and several of the arrivals have joined family members already on the island. In March, 13 unaccompanied children from Somalia were amongst the 157 arrivals. Others thought to have been headed to Cyprus have also been intercepted or rescued at sea by Turkish authorities, including a group of 30 Syrians rescued at the end of March after drifting for four days when their captain abandoned them after their boat ran out of fuel.

Refugees and migrants also continue to try to cross directly from Turkey to Italy with 539 persons recorded as having reached Italy from Turkey in 2017 as of the end of April. Most arrivals via this route have been from Iraq with smaller numbers of Pakistanis, Somalis, and Iranians. In addition, several more boats headed to Italy have been rescued off Greek islands or been intercepted by the Turkish Coast Guard, including a boat with 172 persons on board in March¹⁰ and another with 199 on board in April.¹¹

While significantly reduced from the 386 deaths between January and April 2016, 28 persons are known to have died or gone missing at sea in the Eastern Mediterranean in the first four months of 2017. This includes 11 Syrians who drowned while attempting to reach the Greek island of Samos on 24 March. Amongst this group were a Syrian woman and her two children attempting to join her husband in Germany.¹² On 24 April, another 16 people drowned off the coast of Lesbos. So far in 2017, this amounts to one death for every 185 persons who managed to cross by sea to Greece, a higher ratio than between January and April 2016 when the ra-

tio was one death for every 402 persons who were able to cross.

Of the nine refugees and migrants who have died since the start of the year trying to depart Turkey via its land borders, three died of exposure trying to cross to Bulgaria in freezing conditions. The other six died trying to cross to Greece with three drowning while crossing the Evros River, two are thought to have died of exposure in mid-winter, and one died in a car crash when a van driven by smugglers crashed while being pursued by police in northern Greece.¹³ This amounts to one death for every 110 persons that crossed by land to Greece, a higher rate of deaths than those crossing from Turkey to Greece by sea.

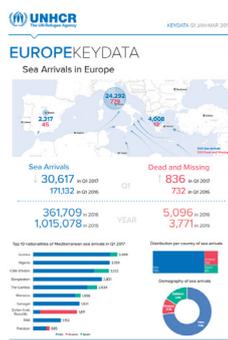
Push-backs continue to be reported from Greece at the land border with Turkey with refugees and migrants, including women and children, reporting being apprehended in Greece, detained in police stations for several hours then later returned informally across the Evros River without being allowed an opportunity to seek asylum. UNHCR has raised concerns regarding reports about the alleged push-backs and *refoulement* at the land border between Greece and Turkey.

UNHCR also continues to receive accounts of push-backs by Bulgarian authorities to Turkey while vigilante groups have also continued to patrol parts of the Bulgarian border at times, with concerning implications for any refugees and migrants they may apprehend.¹⁴

Onward Movement from Greece and Bulgaria

Refugees and migrants continue to try to move onwards from Greece and Bulgaria, including because of eligibility practices (in particular the extremely high rejection rate for Afghan asylum-seekers), and substandard living conditions in the reception centres in Bulgaria,¹⁵ limited integration prospects in

Read more:



¹⁰ Sahil Güvenlik Komutanlığı, *Güncel Faaliyetleri*, 24 March 2017, http://www.sahilguvenlik.gov.tr/haberdetay/2017/mart/24MART2017_MANAV-GAT.pdf

¹¹ Sahil Güvenlik Komutanlığı, *Güncel Faaliyetleri*, 14 April 2017, http://www.sahilguvenlik.gov.tr/haberdetay/2017/nisan/14NISAN2017_SI-GACIKYELKENLI.doc

¹² Daily Mail, *Syrian refugee discovers his wife, 24, and two young children have drowned in the Mediterranean while trying to reunite with him in Germany*, 7 April 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4390400/Syrian-refugee-discovers-wife-two-children-drowned.html>

¹³ Associated Press, *The Latest: Migrant dies in Greece after smugglers chased*, 24 April 2017, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/latest-migrant-boat-sinks-aegean-sea-16-dead-122707702.html>

¹⁴ NBC News, *Bulgarian Vigilantes Patrol Turkey Border to Keep Migrants Out*, 10 March 2017, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/eu-ropes-border-crisis/bulgarian-vigilantes-patrol-turkey-border-keep-migrants-out-n723481>

¹⁵ UNHCR Bureau for Europe, *Weekly Report*, 3 April 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/55248>

Greece,¹⁶ and limited access to or lengthy processes to reunite with family members in other EU States.¹⁷ Moreover, no effective integration programme is yet in place in Bulgaria, which limits refugees' access to schools, health care, and employment opportunities.

The rate of relocations under the EU's Emergency Relocation Mechanism since its inception in September 2015 remains limited,¹⁸ with just 12,646 asylum-seekers relocated from Greece as of 4 May – representing just 19 per cent of the initial target of 66,400 persons. In April, the European Commission called on EU Member States to “avoid overly restrictive preferences and delays and limit requirements causing delays in the transfer procedure” and to remove “operational and logistical bottlenecks” in the process, amongst other measures.¹⁹ As of the end of April, 82 per cent of applications in Greece for relocation were by Syrians.²⁰ Afghan nationals, the second largest group that arrived in Greece in 2016, have not been eligible for relocation under this programme.²¹ Many may therefore choose to move on irregularly from Greece. So far in 2017, 19,575 people have lodged new asylum applications in Greece compared to 9,281 by the end of April 2016, a 111 per

cent increase, with most new applications lodged by Syrians, Afghans, Pakistanis and Iraqis.

People intending to travel on irregularly require money to do so, including to pay smugglers, and several reports have highlighted the involvement of some refugees and migrants including children in survival sex in Athens, including to make money in order to travel onwards irregularly.²²

Refugees and migrants travelling irregularly through the region continue to face severe risks with several deaths reported since the start of the year and many reporting push-backs,²³ including the use of violence by state officials, despite UNHCR's public call in February for countries along the Western Balkans route to cease these practices.²⁴ UNHCR remains extremely concerned by such practices, including the alleged use of violence by state officials and denial of access to asylum procedures, as these often place the lives of refugees and migrants at heightened risk and violate their most fundamental rights. A joint NGO report issued in March noted that unaccompanied children crossing through the region face a “very high risk of violence, including

16 UNHCR, *Stronger Cooperation Crucial to Ensure Sustainable Refugee Response in Greece* – UNHCR, 27 March 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2017/3/58d8f15a4/stronger-cooperation-crucial-ensure-sustainable-refugee-response-greece.html>

17 In 2016, almost 5,000 refugees, including 700 unaccompanied children, in Greece applied to be reunified with family members elsewhere in the EU. Of these, only 1,107 had reached their destination country by the end of the year. See UNICEF, *Refugee and migrant children stranded in European transit countries suffer psychologically in the face of uncertain future* – UNICEF, 4 May 2017, https://www.unicef.org/media/media_95938.html

18 In September 2015, the EU agreed on a two-year plan to relocate asylum-seekers from Greece and Italy to other EU Member States. Under this plan, 66,400 asylum-seekers were foreseen to be relocated from Greece, and 39,600 from Italy.

19 European Commission, *Relocation and Resettlement: Steady Progress Made but more Efforts Needed to Meet Targets*, 12 April 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-908_en.htm

20 Greek Asylum Service, *Statistical Data of the Greek Asylum Service – Relocation Procedures*, 30 April 2017, http://asylo.gov.gr/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Relocation-procedures-up-to-30-04-17_en.pdf

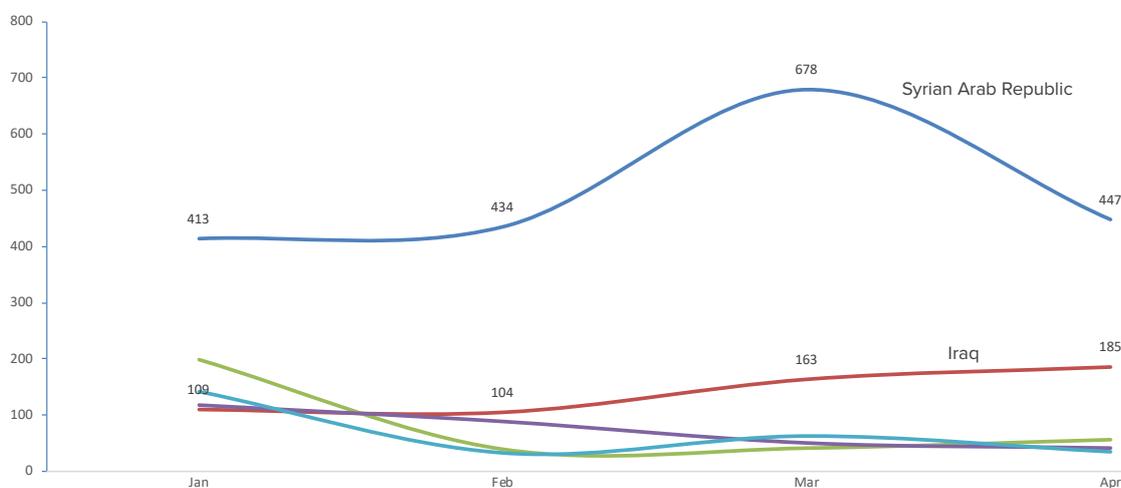
21 Nationalities that have at least a 75 per cent recognition rate at first instance across the EU (based on the latest Eurostat quarterly statistics) are eligible for relocation.

22 FXB Centre for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University, *Emergency within an Emergency: The Growing Epidemic of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Children in Greece*, April 2017, <https://cdn2.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/04/Emergency-Within-an-Emergency-FXB.pdf>; Al Jazeera, *Afghan asylum seekers resort to sex work in Athens*, 16 January 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/01/afghan-asylum-seekers-resort-sex-work-athens-170112082810485.html>

23 See also Medecins Sans Frontiers, *Serbia: MSF denounces the widespread violence on migrants and refugees at the Serbian/Hungarian border*, 9 March 2017 <http://www.msf.org/en/article/serbia-msf-denounces-widespread-violence-migrants-and-refugees-serbianhungarian-border>; Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Macedonian Young Layers Association and Oxfam, *A Dangerous 'Game': The pushback of migrants, including refugees, at Europe's borders*, April 2017, https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-dangerous-game-pushback-migrants-refugees-060417-en_0.pdf and Atina, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, CIM, Ideas, Info Park, International Rescue Committee, NSHC, Open Gate, PIN, Praxis, Save the Children, Terres des Hommes, *Out of Sight, Exploited and Alone*, March 2017, <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/1489/outofsightexploitedandaloneweb.pdf>

24 UNHCR, *Refugees and migrants face high risks in winter weather in Europe*, 13 January 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2017/1/58789f624/refugees-migrants-face-high-risks-winter-weather-europe.html>

MONTHLY SEA ARRIVALS IN GREECE BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN - JAN TO APR 2017



Country of Origin	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Syrian Arab Republic	413	434	678	447
Iraq	109	104	163	185
Algeria	198	39	41	56
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	118	89	51	42
Palestine	142	33	63	35

Arrival figures for Greece are provided by the Hellenic Coast Guard and Police. All figures are provisional and subject to change.

sexual and gender-based violence.”²⁵ This includes violence at the hands of smugglers or police.

Since the start of the year, seven refugees and migrants have died at different points while crossing through the Western Balkans. These have included a Pakistani man who died in the Serbian mountains in early February while crossing from Bulgaria after being abandoned by smugglers,²⁶ an Afghan boy trying to cross the frozen Tisza River on the Serbia-Hungary border who fell in and drowned when the ice cracked, as well as two decomposing bodies believed to be refugees or migrants found in the river by Serbian authorities at the same border on 8 March. Also in March, an Algerian man succumbed to his injuries after he and three others were badly hurt when they accidentally triggered an explosion on a train transporting fuel as they tried to irregularly cross from Serbia to Croatia. In addition, refugees continue to report abuses by smugglers and

criminal gangs at several points along their journey through the Western Balkans.

From Greece, most refugees and migrants who travel onwards irregularly do so by land, primarily via the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, to Serbia. However, the majority of those apprehended are pushed back to Greece. Between January and April, UNHCR was informed of over 1,300 refugees and migrants being pushed back from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to Greece. Refugees and migrants travelling through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have also reported several robberies by criminal groups at different points across the country with multiple incidents reported in March.

A less-commonly used route is from Greece to Albania and then either on through Montenegro or Kosovo (S/RES/1244(1999)),²⁷ mostly to Serbia (although several persons have been apprehended in Bosnia-Herzegovina since the start of the year after reportedly crossing from Montenegro and seeking

25 Atina et al, *Out of Sight, Exploited and Alone*, March 2017, <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/1489/outofsightexploitedandaloneweb.pdf>
26 UNHCR, *Serbia Update: 09-12 Feb 2017*, February 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53721>

27 Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

MOVEMENT OUT OF TURKEY AND ONWARD MOVEMENT FROM GREECE AND BULGARIA





Children play at a 'transit zone' where asylum-seekers are detained on Hungary's border with Serbia in April 2017

to travel on to Croatia). Most of those apprehended in Albania since the start of the year have been Syrians.

Others moving on from Greece have crossed the sea to Italy. Since the start of 2017, 223 persons, mostly from Iraq, are known to have travelled on this way. A further 181 persons mostly from Iraq are known to have been intercepted by the Hellenic Coast Guard in three incidents while attempting to cross the sea from Greece to Italy.

Onward movement from Bulgaria also continues and as of the end of April, Bulgarian border officials have apprehended 1,642 refugees and migrants, 59 per cent from Afghanistan, attempting to depart irregularly in 2017, primarily along the Bulgaria-Serbia border. These numbers have been swelled by some of the same individuals making multiple attempts to depart irregularly. Of the 1,642 however, only 154 (9 per cent) had not been previously registered by Bulgarian authorities, an 85 per cent decrease in the number of previously unregistered persons apprehended at exit points compared to the same period last year.

From the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Kosovo (S/RES/1244(1999)), and Montenegro, most hope to transit Serbia en route to re-entering the EU, primarily via Hungary. Since the start of the year, UNHCR and partners in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria have encountered several hundred refugees and migrants who have been pushed back from Serbia. Some of those encountered in the former Yugoslav Repub-

lic of Macedonia have reported being pushed back from Hungary and then subsequently pushed back from Serbia. Since the start of 2017, UNHCR and partners in Serbia have encountered over 2,000 new arrivals in the country. Most of those encountered reported crossing from Bulgaria with fewer reporting crossing from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The number of refugees and migrants in Serbia continued to increase to almost 8,000 at the end of March before dropping to 7,364 at the end of April. As of 30 April, the majority of refugees and migrants in Serbia were accommodated at Serbian government facilities across the country, but over 1,000 remained in extremely hazardous conditions including in disused warehouses in Belgrade after choosing not to move to government shelters. Over 900 unaccompanied or separated children were in Serbia at the end of April with 820 in government shelters but the remainder were still living in very concerning conditions. According to available data, of those in government shelters, 42 per cent were men, 15 per cent women, and 43 per cent children with 57 per cent from Afghanistan, 19 per cent from Iraq, 13 per cent from Pakistan, and 6 per cent from Syria. Between January and April 2017, 2,345 persons registered their intention to seek asylum in Serbia and 92 subsequently submitted asylum applications. So far in 2017, due in part to the lack of a review board until April, Serbian authorities have only processed one asylum application and have not yet granted refugee status or subsidiary protection to anyone.

Refugees and migrants in Serbia continue to report multiple risks, including at the hands of smugglers. In April, ten people from Afghanistan and Pakistan, including four unaccompanied children, were found in an abandoned vehicle near Nis. Four were already unconscious, and most required hospitalization due to the cramped and suffocating conditions they had been transported in.²⁸ Media reports suggest that some boys in Belgrade have become involved in survival sex in order to earn enough money to pay smugglers to take them elsewhere²⁹ but UNHCR and its partners have not been able to confirm this. UNHCR in Serbia has also received multiple reports of refugees and migrants being pushed back by neighbouring states, sometimes violently.

In late January, Hungary again reduced the number of asylum-seekers admitted each day via the two 'transit zones' on its border with Serbia to 10 (from 30 per day in mid-2016) so that only around 50 asylum-seekers are admitted each week. The selection of those to be admitted to the 'transit zones' each day is not transparent and UNHCR demarches to facilitate a tripartite dialogue have not yet been responded to. As of the end of April, those admitted to the 'transit zones' reported waiting up to eight months in Serbia to be admitted. Asylum-seekers admitted to Hungary since the start of the year have told UNHCR of the multiple hardships endured at different points on their journey so far. Some have reported surviving their boat capsizing between Greece and Turkey, being pushed back multiple times across borders (sometimes violently), and being packed so tightly with others into vehicles by smugglers it was difficult to breathe for a journey of several hours.

Since the start of the year, Hungarian authorities have admitted just 1,004 asylum-seekers and have constructed an additional fence to further reduce irregular entries.³⁰ At the end of March, Hungary implemented its new law providing for the detention of all asylum-seekers, including children, for the duration of the asylum procedures. UNHCR has stated publicly that this new law violates Hungary's obligations under international and EU law.³¹ UNHCR has also since called for EU Member States to temporarily suspend Dublin returns to Hungary due to the worsening situation for asylum-seekers in the country.³² The European Commission has subsequently moved forward on infringement procedures against Hungary over its asylum legislation.³³

Refugees and migrants continue to try to cross into Hungary irregularly and as of the end of April Hungarian police have reported preventing 4,595

persons from crossing from Serbia since January. In addition, Hungarian police have reported apprehending and returning to the other side of the border fence at the Serbian border a further 2,928 persons. Persons apprehended and returned this way are not provided with any form of individualized screening and are not granted access to asylum procedures. Since January, UNHCR has also received multiple reports in which refugees and migrants allege mistreatment including having cold water poured on them and having to remove warm clothing and shoes in the middle of winter, as well as the use of violence, which sometimes required medical attention.³⁴ Similar allegations have also been reported by humanitarian groups.³⁵

Smaller numbers of refugees and migrants continue to try to depart Serbia irregularly to Croatia, including at times in trains and trucks. Since January, UNHCR has received reports of hundreds of persons being pushed back from the Croatia-Serbia border or elsewhere in Croatia, including those that had expressed their intention to seek asylum but were still irregularly returned to Serbia, and some that alleged the use of violence.³⁶ In February, the Croatian Ministry of Interior pledged to investigate allegations of mistreatment by police at the Serbian border.³⁷

Following the new Hungarian regulations introducing mandatory detention for asylum-seekers as of the end of March, along with the additional border fence along the Hungary-Serbia border, irregular entries to Romania from Serbia have increased dramatically from nine in January and 41 in February to 333 in March and 609 in April, the highest recorded by Romanian border authorities in a single month since at least the start of 2016. Many of those apprehended were from Syria and Iraq. UNHCR has received several allegations of push-backs from Romania since the start of the year.

As a result of difficulties continuing onwards from Serbia, some refugees and migrants have also started to return from Serbia to Greece via the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. So far, the numbers known to be making this journey are small with many simply requesting assistance from border police to be informally returned to the other side of the border before then repeating this request at the next border until they reach Greece.

28 UNHCR, *Serbia Update: 24-30 April 2017*, April 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/56240>

29 Reuters, *Penniless and alone, migrant children in Serbia sell sex to survive*, 22 February 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-serbia-sex-idUSKBN15V1KH>

30 Reuters, *Hungary builds new high-tech border fence – with few migrants in sight*, 2 March 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-hungary-fence-idUSKBN1692MH>

31 UNHCR, *UNHCR deeply concerned by Hungary plans to detain all asylum seekers*, 7 March 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2017/3/58be80454/unhcr-deeply-concerned-hungary-plans-detain-asylum-seekers.html>

32 UNHCR, *UNHCR urges suspension of transfers of asylum-seekers to Hungary under Dublin*, 10 April 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2017/4/58eb7e454/unhcr-urges-suspension-transfers-asylum-seekers-hungary-under-dublin.html>

33 European Commission, *Commission follows up on infringement procedure against Hungary concerning its asylum law*, 17 May 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1285_en.htm

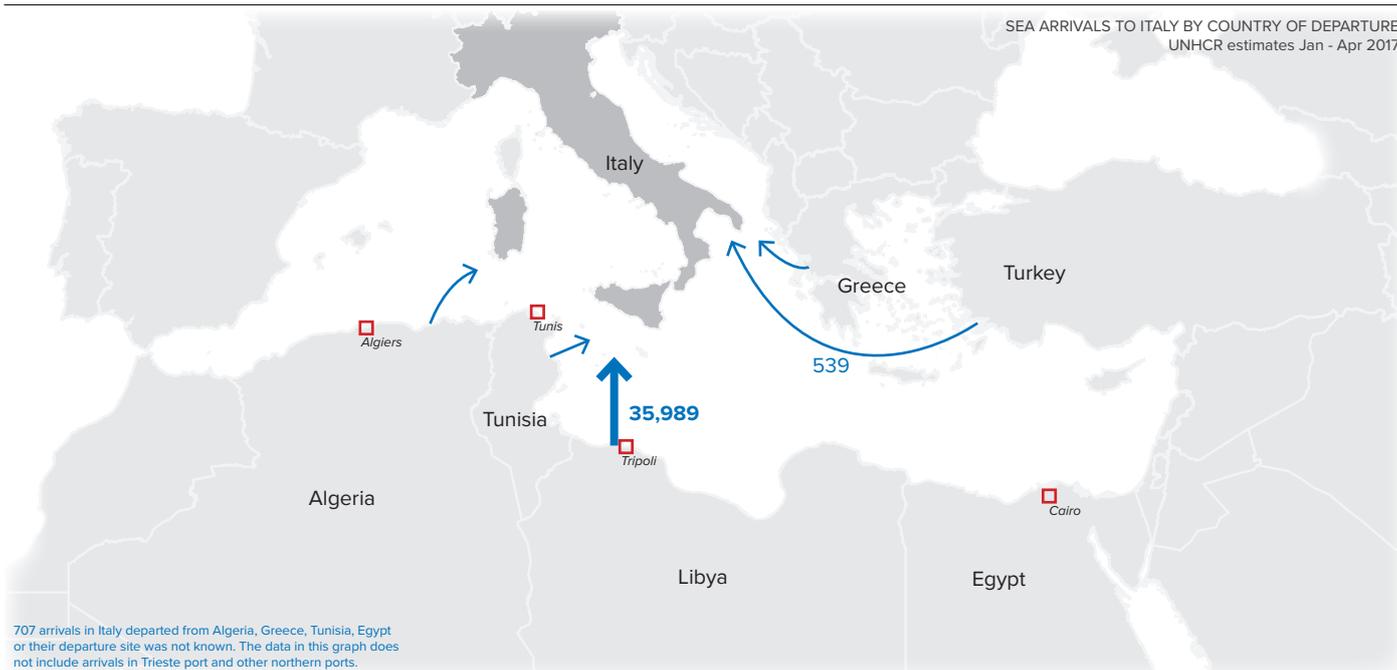
34 UNHCR, *Serbia Update: 06-08 March 2017*, March 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/54240>; UNHCR, *Serbia Update: 23-26 Feb 2017*, February 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53909>; UNHCR, *Serbia Update: 20-22 February 2017*, February 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53877>

35 Mediciens Sans Frontiers, *Serbia: MSF denounces the widespread violence on migrants and refugees at the Serbian/Hungarian border*, 9 March 2017, <http://www.msf.org/en/article/serbia-msf-denounces-wide-spread-violence-migrants-and-refugees-serbianhungarian-border>; Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Macedonian Young Layers Association and Oxfam, *A Dangerous 'Game': The pushback of migrants, including refugees, at Europe's borders*, April 2017, https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-dangerous-game-pushback-migrants-refugees-060417-en_0.pdf; Atina et al, *Out of Sight, Exploited and Alone*, March 2017, <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/1489/outofsightexploitedandaloneweb.pdf> and Fresh Response, *Violence at the Hungarian Border*, 11 March 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYxb2rtAohQ&t=138s>

36 UNHCR, *Serbia Update: 27 Feb-01 Mar 2017*, March 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/54003>; UNHCR, *Serbia Update: 16-19 Feb 2017*, February 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53816>; UNHCR, *Serbia Update: 06-08 Feb 2017*, February 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53657>

37 *Vecernji list, Orepic: Ako je netko prekoračio ovlasti, taj čovjek više neće biti policajac hrvatske policije*, 9 February 2017, <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/vlaho-orepic-ako-je-netko-prekoračio-ovlasti-taj-čovjek-više-neće-biti-policajac-hrvatske-policije-1148453>

CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE



The Central Mediterranean route from North Africa to Italy remains the primary entry point to Europe at present. In the first four months of 2017, 37,235 refugees and migrants have crossed the sea to Italy, a 33 per cent increase compared to the same period last year. Arrivals continue to fluctuate each month including due to factors such as sea and weather conditions, and conditions in Libya that impede or enable departures. So far in 2017, arrivals have increased gradually each month with a peak of 12,943 in April. This included over 8,000 people who required rescue over the Easter weekend.³⁸

Rescuers operating in international waters off the coast of Libya and often working in difficult conditions continue to save thousands of lives each month. In early May, UNHCR’s High Commissioner, Filippo Grandi, stated that saving lives must be the top priority for all and called for further efforts to

rescue people along this dangerous route. “This is a matter of life or death which appeals to our most basic sense of humanity and should not be called into question,” he urged.³⁹

So far in 2017, most rescues at sea have been conducted by the NGOs operating vessels off the Libyan coast as well as Italian authorities (primarily the Italian Coast Guard). Since the start of 2017, data provided by the Italian Coast Guard shows that NGOs have rescued 35 per cent of the 36,422 refugees and migrants rescued at sea, Italian authorities have rescued 34 per cent, commercial vessels 16 per cent, EUNAVFOR Med 9 per cent, and Frontex 7 per cent.⁴⁰

³⁸ UNHCR Regional Office of Southern Europe, *Italy Sea Arrivals Dashboard: January – April 2017*, April 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/56593>

³⁹ UNHCR, *News comment by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, on Mediterranean crossings over the weekend, 7 May 2017*, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2017/5/590f216a4/news-comment-united-nations-high-commissioner-refugees-filippo-grandi-mediterranean.html>

⁴⁰ This excludes Italian vessels co-financed by Frontex. See Italian Coast Guard, *Attività S.A.R. (Search and Rescue) nel Mediterraneo Centrale: Aprile 2017*, April 2017, <http://www.guardiacostiera.gov.it/attivita/Documents/attivita-sar-immigrazione-2017/Aprile%20ita.pdf>

“ Saving lives must be the top priority for all and, in light of the recent increase in arrivals, I urge further efforts to rescue people along this dangerous route. ”

[UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi, May 2017](#)

Between January and April 2017, the top five countries of origin of arrivals by sea to Italy have been Nigeria (14 per cent), Bangladesh (12 per cent), Guinea (11 per cent), Côte d'Ivoire (11 per cent), and Gambia (8 per cent). Since February, Bangladeshi arrivals have increased significantly with many reported to arrive in Libya by plane.⁴¹ Mitiga airport in Tripoli has since banned the entry of Bangladeshi nationals as well as nationals of Syria, Sudan, Egypt and Morocco.⁴²

Eritreans, the second largest group arriving in Italy in 2016, arrived in greater numbers in March and April and make up the ninth largest group to arrive by sea in Italy so far in 2017. However, arrival patterns of specific groups in Italy do not necessarily correspond with movement by such groups to Libya as many arrivals continue to report being held in detention, including by non-governmental actors for forced labour, for many months prior to being released and being able to cross to Italy.

In the first four months of the year, most arrivals

were men (75 per cent), with 10 per cent of arrivals adult women, 14 per cent unaccompanied or separated children (UASC), and 1 per cent accompanied children. As of the end of April, 5,190 UASC had reached Italy. Most were from Bangladesh, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and The Gambia. While UASC comprise a slightly lower proportion of arrivals (14 per cent) compared to the same period last year (16 per cent), their numbers have increased 14 per cent from 4,541 in the first four months of 2016. Of the 795 Bangladeshi UASC that arrived so far in 2017, 306 (38 per cent) arrived in April. The proportions of UASC have been particularly high amongst Iraqi arrivals (33 per cent) as well as Somali nationals (28 per cent).⁴³

In the first four months of the year, most women arriving by sea were from Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. They made up 30 per cent of Nigerian arrivals and 13 per cent of Ivoirian arrivals. In addition to Nigerians, the proportion of women amongst arrivals was also highest amongst arrivals from Cameroon (22 per cent), Somalia (21 per cent) and Eritrea, Syria, and Iraq (17 per cent each).⁴⁴ In 2016, IOM estimated that around 80 per cent of Nigerian women arriving

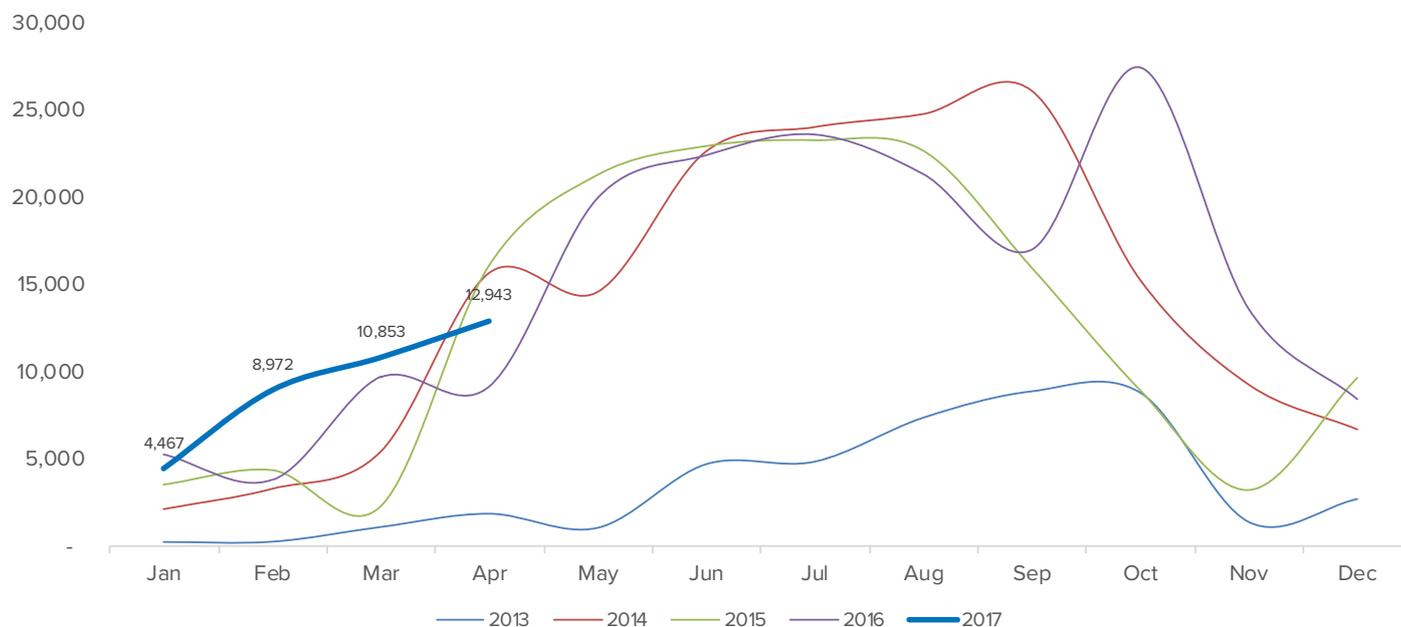
41 The Independent, *Bangladesh is now the single biggest country of origin for refugees on boats as new route to Europe emerges*, 5 May 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-migrants-bangladesh-libya-italy-numbers-smuggling-dhaka-dubai-turkey-detained-a7713911.html>

42 Libyan Express, *Mitiga airport authorities ban entries of five countries' nationals to Tripoli*, 8 May 2017, <http://www.libyanexpress.com/mitiga-airport-authorities-ban-entries-of-five-countries-to-tripoli/>

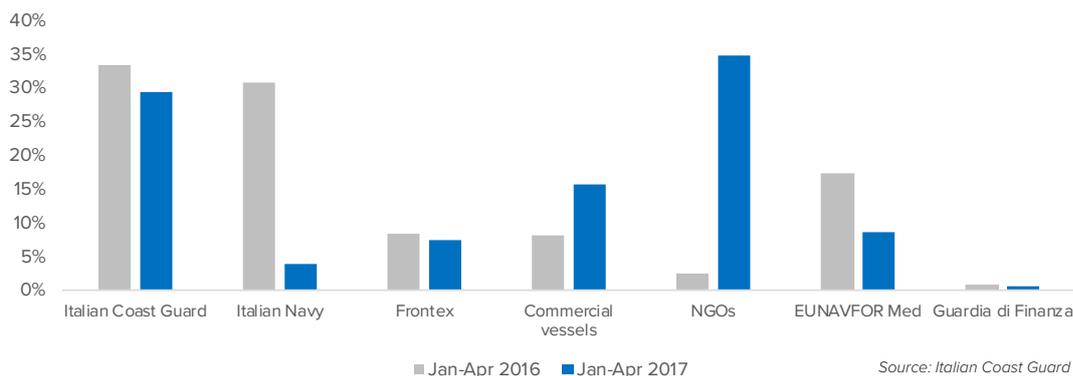
43 UNHCR Regional Office for Southern Europe, *Italy – Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) Dashboard*, April 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/56594>

44 UNHCR Regional Office for Southern Europe, *Italy Sea Arrivals Dashboard: January – April 2017*, April 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/56593>

MONTHLY SEA ARRIVALS TO ITALY 2013 - APR 2017



PERCENTAGE OF RESCUES CONDUCTED - JANUARY TO APRIL 2016 AND 2017

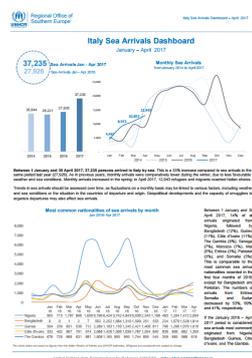


by sea in Italy may be victims of trafficking.⁴⁵ UNHCR also continues to hear accounts indicating that many women arriving in Italy have been victims of sexual violence at some point on their journey.

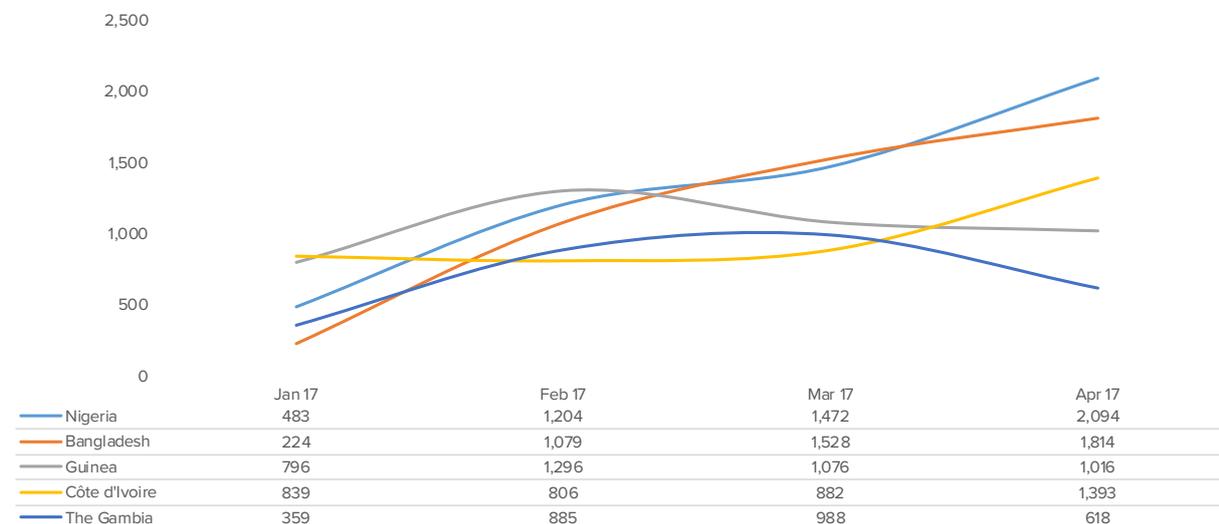
Libya continues to be the primary departure point for almost all with 97 per cent having left from there. The Libyan Coast Guard reported having intercepted and rescued 3,509 persons in the first four months of 2017.⁴⁶ Those intercepted and rescued are then sent back to detention centres. In recent months, smugglers appear to have been driving up business by reporting that departures are likely to become more restricted due to new agreements between Libya and the EU. At the same time, it has also been reported that prices for some have dropped and provided an incentive for people to attempt the crossing in adverse weather conditions. Some new arrivals also continue to report being forced onto boats at gunpoint while others have reported being intercepted at sea by rival smuggling groups. No large vessels have yet arrived from Egypt this year.

In the first four months of 2017, 1,019 persons have been reported dead or missing in the Central Mediterranean⁴⁷ compared to 970 in the same period last year. This amounts to one death for every 36 persons who reached Italy compared to one death for every 29 persons who crossed in the first four months of 2016. So far in 2017 there have been eight incidents in which 50 or more persons are thought to have died in a single incident. All but three of these appear to have occurred within Libyan waters. In the incident in which the most persons died, a group of an estimated 176 persons, mainly from Eritrea, are thought to have drowned on 14 January in international waters after the motors of the yacht they were on board broke several hours after departure and the boat sank trapping many on board. While some survived the initial sinking, they ultimately succumbed to exhaustion and the icy sea with just four survivors rescued 11 hours after the boat sank.

Read more about sea arrivals to Italy:



SEA ARRIVALS TO ITALY: TOP 5 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN - JAN - APR 2017



Factors contributing to the high number of deaths include overloading of boats, the longer sea journey compared to other routes, the poor quality of inflatable vessels used, low prices offered to encourage more to travel despite rough sea conditions, lack of means for many boats to communicate their positions when in distress, and detention and mistreatment in Libya resulting in some persons being critically ill prior to departure and later succumbing to their injuries or poor health. Children too continue to be amongst the casualties at sea, including two unaccompanied brothers of 8 and 5 who were trampled to death in January as other passengers on board the overcrowded boat panicked while awaiting rescue.

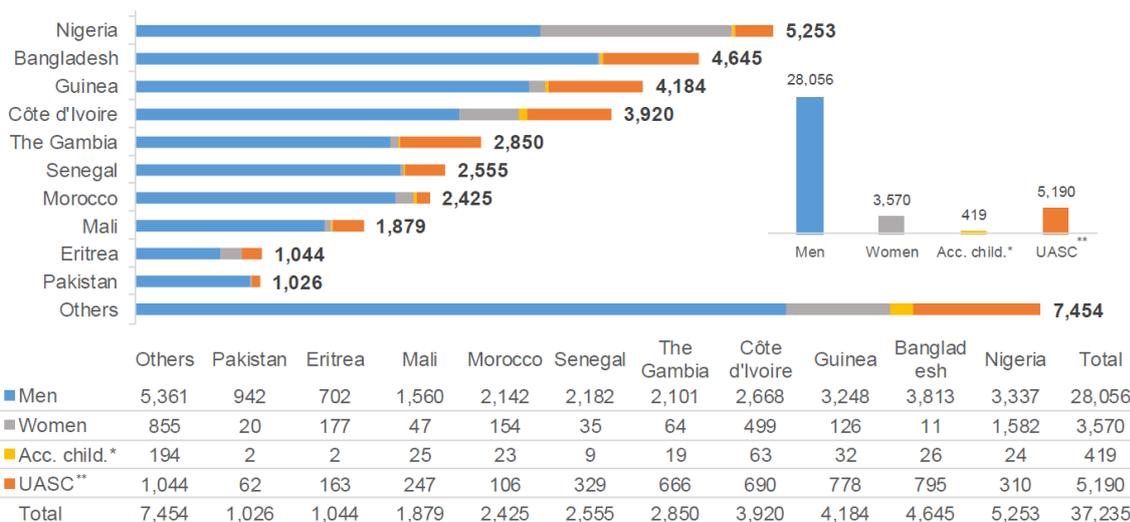
In 2017, the trend of more persons staying in Italy and seeking asylum has continued, including due to improvements to the Italian asylum system as well as tightened border controls by Italy's neighbours. As of the end of April, there were over 175,000 refugees and migrants accommodated at reception centres around the country. In addition, in the first four months of 2017, 47,456 persons applied for asylum compared to 30,290 who lodged applications in the first four months of 2016, a 57 per cent increase. Of the 23,106 applications determined during that period, 42 per cent were granted some form of protection with 18 per cent were granted international protection (9 per cent refugee status and 9 per cent subsidiary protection) while humanitarian protection was granted to 24 per cent of applicants.

A total of 5,363 asylum-seekers had been relocated under the EU's Emergency Relocation Mechanism as of the end of April after 19 months of the pro-

gramme. However, the majority of nationalities arriving by sea in Italy are ineligible for the programme. Following tighter border controls by Italy's neighbours to prevent onward movement since mid-2016, at least six refugees and migrants are known to have been killed trying to depart Italy since the start of the year, making a total of 12 killed since October 2016, the majority of which have been at the France-Italy border. In contrast, no deaths were recorded in the first four months of 2016.

Since the start of the year, at the France-Italy border, a Libyan man was knocked down by a vehicle in Ventimiglia on 4 January, while on 5 February an Algerian man was killed by a train as he walked towards the border along the train tracks near Ventimiglia. On 17 February, the body of a man believed to have been a refugee or migrant was found dead on top of a train at Cannes station that had arrived from Ventimiglia while on 21 March the body of a Sudanese man was recovered in France after he fell from a cliff while walking along a particularly dangerous route between Ventimiglia and the French town of Menton. Lastly, on 22 March, an Afghan man fell from the Ponte Sal Luigi bridge in Ventimiglia shortly after having been returned to Italy by French authorities. At the Switzerland-Italy border, a 20-year-old Malian national was electrocuted on a train on 27 February while another person was seriously injured in the same manner near Chiasso on 19 March. At the France-Italy and Switzerland-Italy borders, refugees and migrants attempting to depart from Italy continue to be sent back, including UASC, and so many resort to riskier ways to try to cross the border.

PRIMARY COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF SEA ARRIVALS TO ITALY BY GENDER AND AGE JAN - APR 2017



* Accompanied children ** Unaccompanied and Separated Children

Arrival figures for Italy are provided by the Italian Ministry of Interior. Figures are subject to future adjustment and should not be considered final.

Read more:

WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE



Sea crossings from North Africa to Spain continue to rise with 3,072 persons crossing to the Spanish mainland by sea in the first four months of 2017 compared to 1,102 in the same period in 2016 (a 179 per cent increase). Most people are presently crossing through the Alboran Sea with around 30-40 people in most boats (but sometimes up to 65). Most boats cross from Morocco and those coming from Algeria (a far smaller number) are usually carrying only Algerians. In the Straits of Gibraltar, the crossing appears to be more dangerous with people seeming to travel in bad weather conditions to avoid detection by Moroccan authorities. So far, most of the deaths in the Western Mediterranean have been in the Straits of Gibraltar. As of the end of April, 48 deaths had been recorded in the Western Mediterranean compared to 25 in the same period in 2016 (a 92 per cent increase) and amounting to one death for every 64 persons who were able to cross to the Spanish mainland, a lower rate than in the Central Mediterranean.

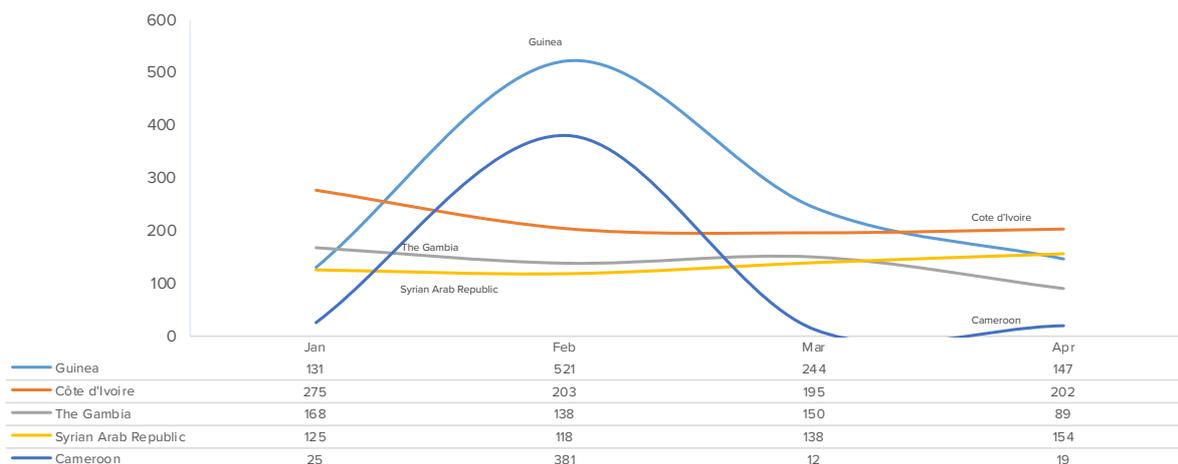
the enclaves irregularly in the same period in 2016. In February, 927 people entered Ceuta irregularly by land with hundreds crossing in two attempts in three days in mid-February compared to 84 in January, 63 in March, and 38 in April. Push-backs at the land borders continue to be recorded with at least 500 people estimated to have been pushed back in 2017.

Of the new arrivals in Spain, 21 per cent are from Guinea, 18 per cent from the Ivory Coast, 10 per cent from The Gambia, 10 per cent from Syria, and 10 per cent from Morocco. Persons from Sub-Saharan Africa crossing to Spain usually reported spending several months in Morocco before being able to cross. A number of UASC are arriving in Spain from Ivory Coast, The Gambia, Guinea and Morocco. Amongst the women arriving, there are concerns of high rates of sexual violence and suspicions that many may have been trafficked.

A further 2,314 people entered the two enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta since the start of 2017, an increase of 36 per cent from the 1,707 that entered

Between January and April 2017, 537 Syrians (plus 40 Palestinians) arrived in Spain (almost all via Melilla). Syrians continue to arrive mostly in family

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF ARRIVALS TO SPAIN - JAN TO APR 2017



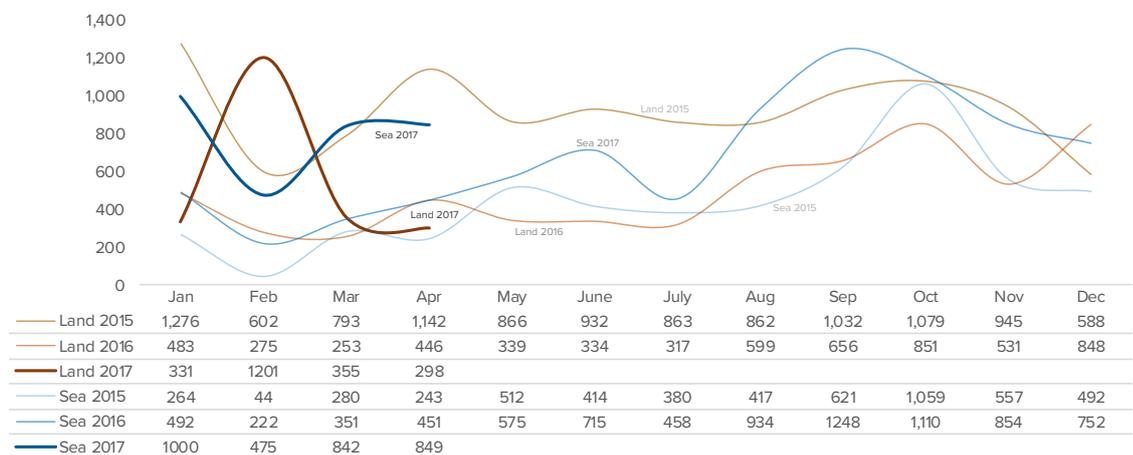
groups, an increase of 33 per cent compared to the same period last year. Of the 537 Syrian arrivals up to the end of April 2017, 28 per cent have been men, 25 per cent women, and 47 per cent children. While many of the newly-arrived Syrians have reported living in Algeria for some time, others have crossed to Spain as a means to try to reunify with family members already elsewhere in Europe. Those using this route for reunification purposes have reported using a diverse range of routes facing a series of risks, including during irregular border crossings, highlighting the need for greater access to family reunification as an alternative to families having to undertake such dangerous journeys. On 17 April, two groups of Syrians, including children, babies and two pregnant women, became stranded in dire conditions at the Algerian-Moroccan border after neither country would admit them.

As refugees and migrants wait to be transferred to the mainland from the enclaves, overcrowded re-

ception conditions in the enclaves continue to be of concern with over 1,000 waiting in the Ceuta reception centre, which has capacity for 510 persons, and 1,00 persons including 350 asylum-seekers and 250 women and children, waiting in the Melilla reception centre, which has capacity for 490 persons, as of the end of April. In April, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) asylum-seekers waiting in Ceuta for transfer to the mainland reported facing harassment at the reception centre from other residents.⁴⁸ Around 50 LGBTI others in Melilla, where the majority have been waiting for over a year for transfer to the mainland, have reported similar experiences.

48 Human Rights Watch, *Spain: LGBT asylum seekers abused in North African enclave*, 28 April 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/28/spain-lgbt-asylum-seekers-abused-north-african-enclave>

SEA AND LAND ARRIVALS TO SPAIN 2015 - 2017



Arrival figures for Spain are provided by Spanish Ministry of Interior and Spanish Police. Figures are subject to future adjustment and should not be considered final.

CONCLUSION

To prevent the continuing rates of loss of life at Europe's external borders, including of those seeking international protection, European States need to expand existing pathways as well as create credible complementary opportunities for safe and legal entry. This includes by increasing resettlement places, removing obstacles to family reunification,⁴⁹ and making available to refugees some of the mobility schemes foreseen in section 2 of the Valletta Summit action plan,⁵⁰ amongst other measures. UNHCR has called for specific steps towards such efforts including expanding the scope of family reunification and for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection to have access to family reunification under the same favourable rules as those with refugee status.⁵¹

In order to reduce irregular onward movement, European States need to enhance the quality of reception conditions, facilitate family reunion within the EU under the Dublin Regulation, increase funding for integration support as well as establish fair and efficient asylum determination procedures including

in countries of first arrival in Europe.⁵² In addition, EU Member States need to improve access to existing legal mechanisms for those eligible to move from one EU Member State to another, including through the Emergency Relocation Mechanism and family reunion. UNHCR has called for measures, including the consistent application of a broader definition of qualifying family links for family reunion purposes to also include families formed in transit, siblings, adult children and parents of an adult.

As European States increase support to third countries, including to strengthen their management of borders and migration flows, it is critical that such actions do not result in any further hindrance to the right to seek and enjoy international protection, including in Europe.

Lastly, UNHCR calls for European States to stop border practices that are not in accordance with international and European law, including push-backs, denial of access to asylum procedures, and use of violence by authorities, and instead ensure that those in need of protection are identified and assisted by border authorities.

49 UNHCR, *UNHCR Statement on the Senior Officials' Meeting on Migration in Valetta*, 10 February 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2017/2/589dddb54/unhcr-statement-senior-officials-meeting-migration-valetta.html>

50 2015 Valletta Summit on Migration Action Plan, 12 November 2015, <https://goo.gl/KAmyB7>

51 UNHCR, *Better Protecting Refugees in the EU and Globally*, December 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/58385d4e4.html>

52 See UNHCR, *Better Protecting Refugees in the EU and Globally*, December 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/58385d4e4.html> for detailed recommendations.