

# Central Mediterranean Route: Working on alternatives to dangerous journeys

UNHCR Central Mediterranean Risk Mitigation Strategy  
(CMRMS)

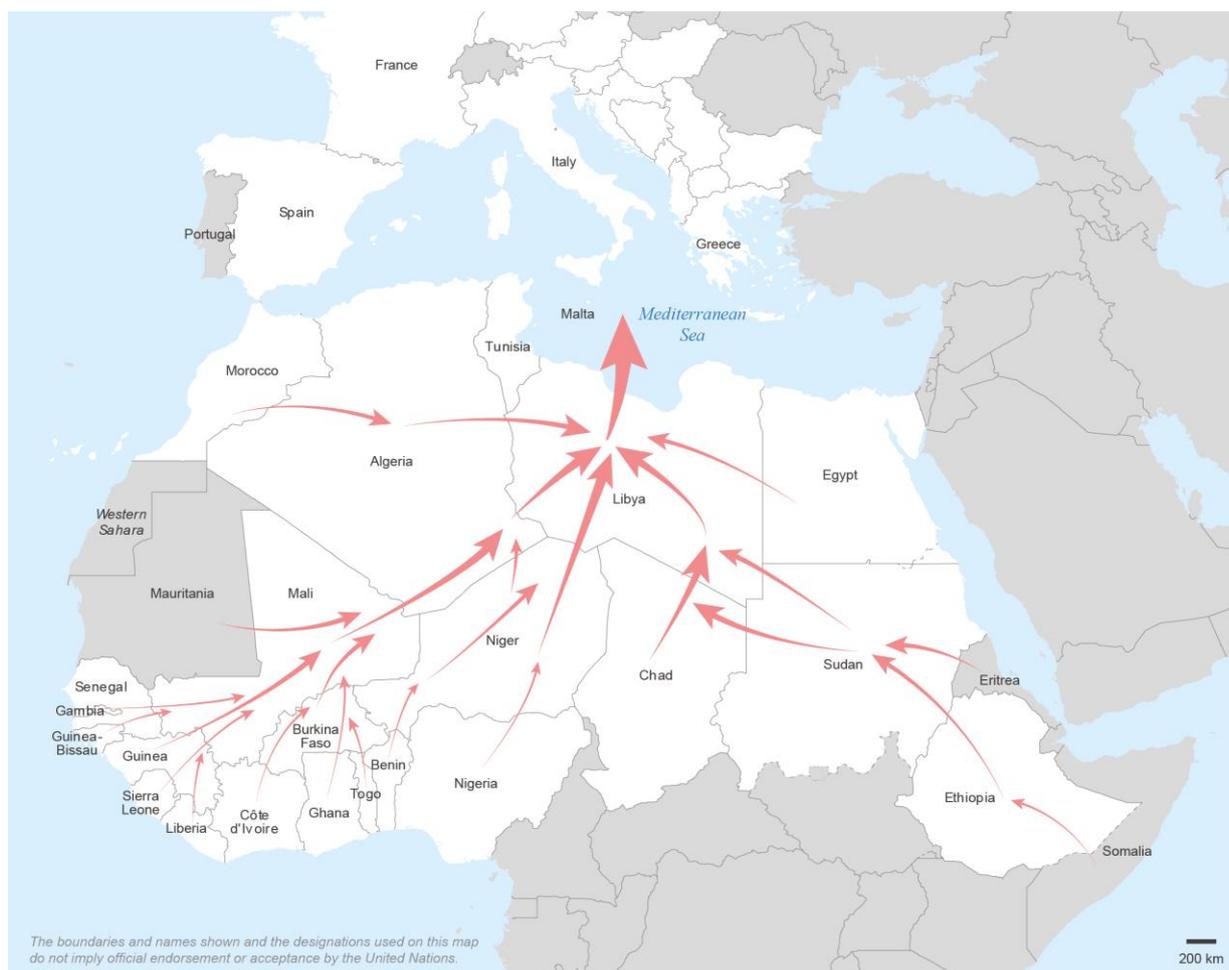


**Front cover :**  
Agadez, Niger  
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The movement of refugees and migrants across the Sahara and the central Mediterranean Sea towards Europe continues to have a devastating toll on human life. Between January and August 2017, an estimated 2,270 refugees and migrants died at sea in the central Mediterranean. It is estimated that many others died on their way across the desert and in detention centres. Other serious risks along the route include extra judicial killings, being left to die in the desert, extortion, torture including to extract ransoms, sexual violence and exploitation, forced labour and other human rights abuses.

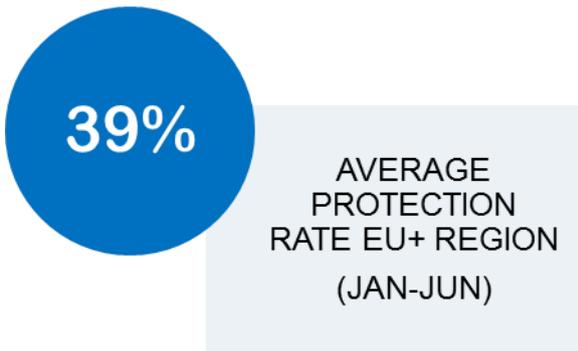
Most of the top 10 nationalities arriving in Italy are from sub-Saharan African countries. In 2016, 40,889 persons or 23% of the arrivals by sea in Italy were from the East/Horn of Africa region and 109,645 or approximately 60% were from West Africa. This percentage dropped to 14% for East/Horn of Africa between January and August 2017 and remained 60% for West Africa.

## CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE



People travelling from West Africa as well as from the Horn of Africa across Libya to Italy have a diverse range of reasons for making this journey. Some are fleeing persecution and human rights violations, others are seeking better employment opportunities, including providing support to family members at home, and some are trafficked to Europe, while some did not intend to undertake the journey to Libya or Europe when they initially left their country of origin.

Factors such as lack of UNHCR access due to insecurity and limited resources to establish an adequate protection response with a functioning referral mechanism render persons on the move with protection needs largely undetected and exposed on a regular basis to unspeakable human rights abuses.



39%

AVERAGE  
PROTECTION  
RATE EU+ REGION  
(JAN-JUN)

For the top 10 Sub-Saharan African nationalities that arrived by sea in Italy between January and August this year, the average protection rate by nationality in the EU+ region<sup>1</sup> was approximately 39 per cent: 18 per cent received refugee status, 9 per cent subsidiary protection, and 13 per cent were granted humanitarian status<sup>2</sup>. Amongst the seven West African nationalities in the top 10, the average protection rate by nationality was 24 per cent and amongst the three East/Horn of Africa nationalities, the average protection rate by nationality was 74 per cent.

This amounted to almost 46,000 nationals of these countries being granted protection in the EU+ region in the first half of 2017, including over 35,300 granted refugee status or subsidiary protection. Those granted protection in Europe include among others those fleeing conflict and human rights abuses, torture, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), persecution including due to religion, political activities.

In Europe, UNHCR works with asylum-seekers, refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), including those who may not fall under the former categories. Subsidiary protection is one of the two forms of international protection, together with refugee status, regulated under European Union law. It is granted to persons who face a real risk of suffering serious harm, as defined in European Union law, in their country of origin. Following successive UN General Assembly resolutions since the elaboration of UNHCR's mandate in its 1950 Statute, persons who may not necessarily be 1951 convention refugees but who nevertheless need international protection fall under UNHCR's wider competence.<sup>3</sup>

A recent UNHCR note sets out in some detail what it means to be in need of international protection and the scope of the General Assembly has given UNHCR to provide international protection.<sup>4</sup> In addition, humanitarian status in Europe is determined by national legislation. It includes persons not eligible for international protection but who are protected against removal often on account of human rights violations they have suffered in transit countries.<sup>5</sup> Persons granted humanitarian status in Europe after crossing from Libya include among others victims of trafficking not eligible for refugee status, unaccompanied children, and persons who have suffered severe abuses in Libya or elsewhere on their journey.

Refugees and asylum-seekers from West Africa and the Horn of Africa represent an important feature of the mixed population flows crossing Libya to Europe, hence UNHCR's increased engagement. In addition, in the public discourse regarding movement from Libya to Italy, the rights and protection needs of refugees using this route tend to be overlooked. In general, persons of concern to UNHCR tend to be invisible in

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<sup>1</sup> Calculations for the average protection rate are based on Eurostat data by nationality for the first half of 2017, regardless of where and how individuals have reached European territory.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that humanitarian status is not always granted for protection reasons; depending on national legislation it may also be granted for compassionate or practical reasons such as medical grounds or integration purposes.

<sup>3</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Complementary Forms of Protection: Their Nature and Relationship to the International Refugee Protection Regime*, p.3, 9 June 2000, EC/50/SC/CRP.18, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/47fd91a.html>.

<sup>4</sup> It illustrates the broad coverage provided by the international protection regime stemming from the 1951 Convention, regional and other instruments. It also describes situations where individuals may not qualify as refugees per se, yet may in certain circumstances require international protection, on a temporary or longer-term basis. See UNHCR, *Persons in Need of International Protection*, June 2017, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/596787734.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Eurostat, *EU Member States Granted Protection to More than 700,000 Asylum-Seekers in 2016*, 26 April 2017, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/8001715/3-26042017-AP-EN.pdf/05e315db-1fe3-49d1-94ff-06f7e995580e>.

these mixed flows until they arrive in Italy. They have crossed several countries often together with migrants, not being aware, able or willing to avail themselves of the existing refugee status determination options and protection services along the route.

The context within Libya does not yet permit a significant and rapid expansion of the protection environment for both refugees and migrants. Many persons of concern are currently out of reach, held in official or informal detention centres, or in warehouses or 'connection houses' run by smugglers or traffickers. Others are living with host communities and enjoy limited freedom of movement owing to the security situation prevailing there.

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At present, UNHCR protection interventions are limited to securing the release refugees and asylum-seekers from detention, providing basic assistance in detention facilities and disembarkation points and seeking to expand the network of safe houses and put in place adequate reception conditions. A limited number of cases undergo refugee status determination to assess eligibility for resettlement. In UNHCR's view, persons of concern may be exposed to significant levels of human rights abuses, hence its call to redouble efforts to deliver protection and find solutions before they reach Libya.

In Europe, Italy saw a 19% increase in the number of arrivals by sea in the first six months of 2017, compared to the same period last year before numbers dropped considerably in July and August, including following steps taken by Italy in cooperation with Libya. As of the end of August this year, more than 99,100 people had disembarked on Italy's shores, a 14% decrease from arrivals between January and August 2016. With considerable stress on its reception system, the large-scale arrivals coupled with the backlog from 2016 have further strained the processing of applications made by those disembarked (e.g. slow identification for relocation, lengthy refugee status determination, delayed appointment of guardians for minors). In addition, onward movements from Italy have significantly reduced, including due to improvements in Italy's asylum system as well as the restoration of controls at borders with neighbouring countries. Italy has requested UNHCR to step up its support to the competent authorities to attend these multiple challenges.

The proposed cross-regional strategy is 3-pronged, with broad objectives and selected activities in countries of origin and transit, in Libya and in destination countries of Europe. In terms of target populations, in addition to persons originating from refugee producing countries, it draws information from groups and persons eventually recognized as in need of international protection at destination points, including victims of trafficking and unaccompanied children who are at heightened risk all along their way to Europe. The strategy takes due account of the lack of protection space in Libya, as well as the challenges these mixed migratory flows pose to the asylum systems throughout the journeys and in destination countries.

This strategy builds upon many existing action plans in the West and East Africa region, such as the Regional Protection Strategic Framework for responding to the Lake Chad Basin crisis, the Abuja Action Statement of the Regional Protection Dialogue on the Lake Chad Basin, the Nairobi Declaration on Protection and Durable Solutions for Somali refugees and its related Plan of Action. It also falls within the scope of the 2015 Valetta Declaration and Plan of Action, existing European Commission Migration Compacts, relevant Regional Development and Protection Programmes to mention a few.

It seeks to support the operationalization of relevant bilateral or multilateral agreements such as the 21 May 2017 agreement of the Ministers of Interior of Chad, Italy, Libya and Niger in areas of relevance to UNHCR's Mandate, the recommendations made by the Central Mediterranean Contact Group, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Regional Consultative Process on Migration which is aimed at guiding States in the development of legislation and policies to protect the rights of migrants and refugees, the African Union and East African Community work related to free movement of persons, the Africa-EU Migration, Mobility and Employment Partnership launched during the second Africa-EU Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2014.

The strategy also factors in lessons learnt from UNHCR's former Central Mediterranean Sea Initiative (CMSI) of December 2014, including good practices in operationalizing UNHCR's guiding framework for protection interventions in a mixed migration context, i.e. UNHCR's 10 Points Plan to address mixed migration movements.<sup>6</sup>

This strategy is grounded in the Central Mediterranean Route: Working on Alternatives to Dangerous Journeys Appeal. It is complemented with prevention and response activities for people rescued and disembarked outlined in the Appeal launched by UNHCR for the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe<sup>7</sup> as well as the Supplementary Appeal for Libya.<sup>8</sup> It seeks also to reinforce activities implemented by other organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNICEF and several NGOs for migrants & refugees using the same route.

## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Research indicates that for persons of concern to UNHCR, reasons for undertaking these dangerous journeys include lack of effective protection in countries of first asylum and transit in the region, poor reception conditions, lengthy refugee status determination procedures, lack of livelihood support, and limited access to solutions such as resettlement and family reunification within and outside the continent.<sup>9</sup> The absence of security, livelihood and educational opportunities are also important elements.

Many of those attempting the dangerous journey through Libya would not risk their lives had they better understood the extent of the risks involved, at different stages of their journeys, or been aware of the protection and assistance services available along with the presence of alternative safe pathways. A surge of targeted activities along the routes leading from West and Horn of Africa to Libya that offer effective and credible alternatives to the dangerous journeys is therefore called for.

UNHCR's overall strategy aims at providing ways and means to support the engagement of all stakeholders in the protection of persons of concern to UNHCR in order to give them meaningful alternatives to risking their lives through:

- Mitigating identified protection risks along the way and strengthening the protection space available in transit countries, including through community-based protection;
- Identifying effective solutions in countries of asylum, origin and transit, thereby reducing life-threatening movements to and through Libya and the central Mediterranean,
- Raising awareness of risks and improving communication with communities of people on the move or likely to move, as well as those who have reached their destination;
- Strengthening partnerships and coordination with States and others, including through targeted capacity-building activities;
- Strengthening data collection and analysis to best inform policies and planned activities.

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<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, *The Central Mediterranean Route: Working on the alternatives to dangerous journeys*, Supplementary Appeal January – December 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/596f4c4a7.pdf>; UNHCR, *Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration, a 10 Point Plan of Action*, January 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/4742a30b4.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, *Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe – Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans Route*, January to December 2016 (Revision May 2016), available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/577220cf7.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR, *Expanded Response in Libya 2017*, Supplementary Appeal January – December 2017, May 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/593e9ed47.pdf>; UNHCR, *The Central Mediterranean Route: Working on the alternatives to dangerous journeys*, Supplementary Appeal January – December 2017 <http://www.unhcr.org/596f4c4a7.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR, IMPACT, Altai Consulting, *Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges*, July 2017, <http://www.altaiconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/LIB-HCR-MAS-Final-Report.pdf>; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2017: Libya*, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/libya>.

Future actions should also support sustainable economic development and good governance in affected countries. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides the critical framework for understanding and organizing efforts that would minimize the drivers of irregular migration. Further, the implementation of targets such as reducing all forms of violence, non-discrimination, ending financial abuse, exploitation, trafficking, promoting the rule of law, ensuring equal access to justice for all and combatting all forms of organized crime will help address the root causes of forced displacement.

UNHCR is committed to working in partnership with concerned States, civil society, donors, IOM, development actors and other stakeholders in this regard, in full compliance with relevant applicable international legal norms.

## 1. SELECTED ACTIVITIES IN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

### • Protection dialogue with selected countries of origin

Engagement with countries of origin in preventive and responsive actions is mainly occurring through bilateral and multi-lateral forums which may not always be conducive to open and frank discussions over the issues at stake.

With a view to facilitating pragmatic approaches to selected issues, away from diverging political agendas, UNHCR plans to organize, under the Chatham House rule and with relevant partners, a focused dialogue with selected countries of origin and relevant partners to examine ways and means by which:

- Their capacity to provide consular protection to persons not in need of international protection in various countries along the route to Libya and in Libya could be strengthened. Consular protection would include nationality assessment, determination of statelessness and country of former habitual residence, provision of identification documents/travel documents, assisted return for stranded citizens, improved family tracing, assessments of children's best interests and where appropriate, family reunification, particularly for UASC who face heightened protection risks;
- Their understanding of the diaspora potential is enhanced for strategic leverage, including the relationship between remittances and mixed migration dynamics. Partners such as the World Bank and the African Institute on Remittances will be associated to the dialogue;
- The option of establishing jointly with partners such as ICRC, IOM or others a regional information centre to collect and disseminate information related to missing persons, building upon and complementing current national initiatives is given due consideration; and
- The prospect of trans-national protection programmes for female victims of sex trafficking as well as unaccompanied children (excluding persons of concern) whose exploitation starts in countries of origin is endorsed.

In addition, UNHCR will pursue its ongoing protection dialogue with Eritrea, a source country of large numbers of persons granted international protection in many parts of the world. In addition to focusing on the protection and family reunification needs of UASC, UNHCR will advocate for effective changes to its national military service, along with a possible subsequent amnesty for draft evaders.

### • Reinforcing national capacity to provide continuous civil status registration, along with secure and easily accessible identification and travel documents

A joint study by UNHCR and IOM on migration and nationality in West Africa clearly reveals that migrants, both voluntary and forced, nomadic populations and victims of trafficking, face a particularly high risk of

statelessness.<sup>10</sup> Under its mandate to prevent and reduce statelessness, UNHCR has considerably invested in recent years in supporting the capacity of states in West and the Horn of Africa to develop modern civil registration systems and facilitate service provision, family reunification, taxation of remittances, consular protection and mobility within or outside regional spaces, etc. West African States have under ECOWAS and UNHCR auspices committed to the May 2017 Banjul Action Plan on Statelessness.<sup>11</sup>

The present strategy proposes to further develop, in coordination with other stakeholders, the civil registration capacity of selected States such as The Gambia, Niger and Burkina Faso to attend to needs related to people on the move, including consular services and prevention of statelessness. In parallel, UNHCR will advocate for the full implementation of the Banjul Plan of Action of ECOWAS on the Eradication of Statelessness.

At the same time, West African refugees and migrants moving within the ECOWAS region at times face particular risks due to being undocumented. Such risks include demands for bribes by some officials, something that may subsequently contribute to refugees and migrants becoming additionally vulnerable to trafficking or other forms of exploitation due to being stranded in another country with less money than planned. Lack of access to travel documents also encourages some refugees and migrants to cross borders away from official border crossings which may expose them to security risks and undermines border integrity. To counter this, UNHCR will advocate for easier access to travel documents for citizens, including in the ECOWAS region.

### • Increased advocacy to address the drivers of migration

Research shows that often it is particular nationals or groups from a specific region that are likely to embark on these dangerous journeys. However, such research is rarely followed by targeted development interventions in these areas. Indeed, UN Country Teams (UNCT) and key development actors have in most affected source countries not yet included in their strategies, such as the UN Development assistance Framework (UNDAF)<sup>12</sup>, any programming to address risks resulting in irregular migration.<sup>13</sup>

Building on the data and analysis available, UNHCR will seek to mobilize greater UNCT engagement on this specific front and support the development of targeted programming through advocacy and advice.

### • Supporting voluntary repatriation and reintegration

While UNHCR increases its outreach and interventions along the routes, and jointly with relevant partners establishes referral mechanisms to attend to the specific needs of persons of concern on the move, it will identify cases for whom voluntary repatriation is the best option, including through best interest determination for UASC. UNHCR will also actively support their reintegration, including through facilitated access to labour markets and social systems as well as peace and coexistence projects.

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<sup>10</sup> UNHCR and IOM, *La nationalité, la migration et l'apatridie en Afrique de l'Ouest*, June 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/ecowas2015/Nationalite-Migration-Apatridie-en-Afrique-Ouest.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> ECOWAS, Banjul Plan of Action of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) on the Eradication of Statelessness 2017-2024, May 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/statelessness/591c385b7/statelessness-conference-2017-banjul-plan-action-french.html>

<sup>12</sup> Global Migration Group, Guidance Note Integrating Migration and Displacement in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, July 2017.

<sup>13</sup> UNDP, *Eritrea Newsletter*, May 2017, [http://www.er.undp.org/content/dam/eritrea/img/research-and-publications/UNDP\\_ER%20Special%20Edition%20Newsletter%202017\\_\\_Low%20Res%20fa.pdf?download](http://www.er.undp.org/content/dam/eritrea/img/research-and-publications/UNDP_ER%20Special%20Edition%20Newsletter%202017__Low%20Res%20fa.pdf?download)

## 2. ACTIVITIES IN COUNTRIES OF FIRST ASYLUM AND TRANSIT

As noted above, persons of concern to UNHCR undertake these dangerous journeys due to a lack of effective protection in countries of first asylum and transit in the region, including poor reception conditions, lengthy refugee status determination procedures, and limited access to solutions such as resettlement and family reunification within and outside the continent. The absence of security, livelihood and educational opportunities are also important factors.

- **Capacity building and other measures to strengthen protection in the region**

Countries of first asylum and transit countries should be encouraged and supported in their efforts to fulfil their obligations under international law, in line with the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.<sup>14</sup> UNHCR will endeavour to reinforce the protection services provided by States to persons in need of international protection. Interventions in such countries will include:

- Efficient and decentralized capacity to ensure access to asylum, registration, documentation and status determination, including for statelessness;
- Harmonized and timely issuance of biometric identity documents and UN Convention Travel Documents;
- Establishment of safe and adequate reception facilities with relevant assistance in all transit countries, including community services;
- Counselling side-by-side with IOM, in Migrant Response Centres as well as through outreach at key points along the routes to Libya, including bus stations, neighbourhoods where refugees and migrants stay in transit, and urban centres to identify and provide immediate assistance where possible to persons who may be in need of protection and refer them to appropriate services;
- Strengthening the IOM-UNHCR referral system model of Niger and expansion where needed, with engagement of the concerned Government through a Memorandum of Understanding;
- Increased protection monitoring, including at borders, to identify and mitigate some of the risks refugees and migrants face and ensure adequate referral;
- Establishment of small Evacuation Transit Mechanisms out of Libya for persons of concern with a view to facilitate their access to protection and solutions, including resettlement, access to complementary pathways to a third country (through family reunification, labour mobility schemes, scholarships and education programmes, and regional mobility schemes), readmission to a third country, eventual local integration (through formal education, vocational training and livelihood support), and voluntary repatriation;
- Coordination with government authorities and other key actors, including IOM, to strengthen search and rescue efforts or other measures aimed at reducing deaths along land routes towards Libya, including during desert crossings;
- Contributions to ongoing coordination efforts to identify and prosecute persons involved in trafficking with due consideration being given to data protection;
- Rolling out the 2017 IOM-UNHCR guidance on Developing Standard Operating Procedures to facilitate the Protection of Trafficked Persons;<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*, 19 September 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants>.

<sup>15</sup> IOM and UNHCR, *Framework Document: Developing Standard Operating Procedures to Facilitate the Protection of Trafficked Persons*, December 2009, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/57fde2bd4.pdf>.

- Increasing efforts and resources to strengthen the inclusion of children on the move into national child protection systems. In partnership with UNICEF, IOM and relevant NGOs strengthen central and local child protection capacities, particularly in areas prone to high mobility and roll-out wherever possible the 'Blue Dot' inter-agency project used along the Western Balkan route in Europe in 2015-2017<sup>16</sup> or similar projects adapted to the current situation;
- Providing adequate advice and support for border management in a protection-sensitive manner, including identification and referral to fast, fair and efficient procedures for processing individuals in need of international protection and identification of persons with specific needs (such as SGBV survivors, UASC and other categories of children at risk, victims of torture and victims of trafficking);
- Supporting States' efforts to facilitate timely return, in safety and dignity, of those found not to be in need of international protection or with no compelling humanitarian needs following a fair and efficient procedure. Practical cooperation with European funding could facilitate these returns and complement existing Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes operated by IOM. This calibrated support from UNHCR will be in line with its Executive Committee Conclusion on the return of persons found not to be in need of international protection.<sup>17</sup> It will build upon opportunities drawn from regional instruments such as the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons.

## • Supporting relief and development programmes to create more opportunities in countries of transit and countries of asylum

Migratory routes often cross border areas where refugee camps and settlements are located with risks that greater numbers of persons of concern might consider joining the flow. In addition, urban centres constitute important places for smugglers to operate, as well as for refugees and migrants to work in the informal sector to secure funding for the onward journey. Continued investment is therefore needed in humanitarian and development aid programmes in the countries and regions impacted by onward movement.

UNHCR and partners are investing in pilot Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework countries to better align all streams of funding to comprehensively address the needs of persons of concern, including their host communities. The EU, Member States and other European countries' significant investment in programmes aimed at improving humanitarian and socio-economic conditions, stability and development in countries of origin in Africa needs however to be strengthened.

## • Establishing and expanding opportunities for safe and legal admission to third countries, in addition to resettlement

In addition to resettlement, access to safe and regulated pathways of admission in particular family reunification to third countries could reduce for a significant portion of refugees the incentives for people to embark on dangerous irregular travel. It would also reduce the onward movements of Nigerian, Eritrean, Somali, and Malian refugees in particular from their first countries of asylum such as Niger, Ethiopia, and Sudan.

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, UNHCR, UNHCR, UNICEF launch Blue Dot hubs to boost protection for children and families on the move across Europe, 26 February 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2016/2/56d011e79/unhcr-unicef-launch-blue-dot-hubs-boost-protection-children-families-move.html>.

<sup>17</sup> UNHCR Executive Committee, *Conclusion on the return of persons found not to be in need of international protection*, No. 96 (LIV) – 2003, 10 October 2003, <http://www.unhcr.org/excom/exconc/3f93b1ca4/conclusion-return-persons-found-need-international-protection.html>.

UNHCR estimates that 115,446 refugees along the East and Horn of Africa route, 130,498 refugees along the West African route and 17,920 refugees in North Africa are in need of resettlement in 2017, totalling 263,864 across all three regions. Resettlement response to these countries has so far been very limited: as of early September, just over 6,700 refugees have benefited from resettlement, representing 3% of total needs. Likewise, resettlement efforts in 2016 were also insufficient, with 19,326 refugees having benefited from resettlement from these three regions altogether, only 6% of cross-regional needs.

Although it should not be seen as the only solution to the current crisis, resettlement is considered a vital tool to helping the most vulnerable refugees along the Central Mediterranean route. Based on the figures presented above and a 10,000 increase in resettlement needs predicted for 2018, UNHCR is advocating for 40,000 resettlement places, primarily from countries of transit/first asylum and Libya. The additional places will complement already existing commitments and constitute a comprehensive cross-regional approach to reduce onward movement to Libya and Europe, saving the lives of refugees and avoiding the creation of pull factors to some countries. A core group of resettlement countries interested by this situation was created in September 2017 and is chaired by France.

Beyond traditional resettlement countries, the current situation requires exceptional and innovative approaches to solutions that will contribute to the reduction of dangerous irregular movements such as humanitarian visas and private and/or community sponsorship programmes, for instance, as well as other complementary pathways of admission. These pathways may include opportunities for family reunification, labour mobility schemes, scholarships and education programmes, as well as regional mobility schemes.

Building on the Joint Labour Migration Programme adopted at the African Union Summit in January 2015 and other initiatives developed by ECOWAS, IGAD and the EU, UNHCR will explore pilot labour mobility schemes for skilled refugees in Europe, in ECOWAS/IGAD regions, as well as in other countries/regions where such schemes exist, with the support of partners such as the International Labour Organization and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Too few refugees currently benefit from family reunification mechanisms mainly due to practical obstacles (including lack of documentation, and heavy administrative, legal or financial requirements). Through the deployment of trained case workers and the establishment of a regional revolving fund, UNHCR will assist those with family links to comply with the required procedures, with the support of partners such as IOM, UNICEF, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

UNHCR will also seek to promote the inclusion of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the mobility programmes between Europe and Africa for students, researchers and entrepreneurs, in line with section 2 of the Valetta Action Plan of 2015. UNHCR will in particular seek to identify and assist refugee/IDP students to participate in the Erasmus+ Exchange Programme, with EU-facilitated issuance of travel documents.

- **Increased information campaigns highlighting the extent of the dangers along routes to Libya and Europe**

Research indicates that persons of concern have very different levels of knowledge about the risks inherent to the various legs of the journeys, the possible outcome of their movements should they reach Europe and protection options where they are. A credible alternative narrative to what smugglers and the diaspora promote must be made available taking due account of the specific cross-cultural, religious and linguistic environments.

UNHCR will, in cooperation with other concerned organizations, increase targeted mass information programmes to inform people of the extent of risks associated with irregular movements to Libya and Europe as well as provide information on alternatives available *sur place* through local and social media (where applicable). Indeed, as was evident in Ethiopia and Sudan, information campaigns alone will not

help achieve the set objectives if not accompanied with programmatic interventions targeting the youth and others susceptible to embark on these journeys. These programmes will run in selected countries of origin and along transit routes. These activities will build upon the 2014 *Live, Learn and Play Safe* initiative and other relevant programmes<sup>18</sup> and will seek to complement campaigns undertaken by other actors, including IOM.

Building on the lessons learnt and the significant impact in terms of reduction of dangerous journeys to/through Sudan and to Libya of the project *Telling the Real Story*<sup>19</sup> developed for Eritrean and Somali refugees in Sudan and Ethiopia, and acknowledging that certain groups face particularly high protection risks, UNHCR will undertake structured and informal dialogues, including with community-based diaspora organizations and relevant NGOs/community-based organizations in selected European countries and along the route, targeting groups at high risk of trafficking and exploitation as well as UASC of concern to the Office.

These campaigns will, in addition to sensitizing them about the risks, provide very useful information related to the migration triggers for onward movement which UNHCR, in cooperation with relevant partners, will strive to attend. They will include the dissemination of accurate and recent testimonies of risks encountered and share information related to protection services available *en route*. The campaigns will seek to mobilize the diaspora, religious leaders, elders and others to help combat trafficking and smuggling in persons and encourage referrals of persons in need for protection and solutions to the relevant services.

- **Reinforced research, collation, analysis and sharing of data**

There remain gaps in understanding, in a timely manner, the dynamics and forms onward movements take in countries of origin, first asylum and transit and UNHCR often ends up relying on others' analysis which may not always relate to the Office's protection objectives fit and could otherwise not always be reliable.

Building on IOM and other actors' related work, including the Dakar and Nairobi-based Regional Mixed Migration Secretariats and its Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) which is aimed at increasing specific research of routes, triggers and nationality/gender/age profiles, UNHCR will firstly seek to strengthen its own research and analysis at national and regional level, including through increased engagement with refugee and migrant community contacts, to best inform its programming and strengthen UNHCR positioning as a relevant actor on mixed migration.

Once the above mentioned objective has been reached, UNHCR will advocate for harmonization of indicators and tools used by different agencies, in order to support data quality and consistency for future assessments. UNHCR will strive to achieve harmonization by engaging agencies to participate in coordinated discussion fora, where parameters will be agreed upon.

## LIBYA AND NORTH AFRICA

In Libya, UNHCR identifies, registers and documents people in need of international protection via its two community development centres in Tripoli and through outreach visits conducted by partners who also provide support to people of concern with specific needs, including UASC and victims of trafficking, as well as newly-released refugees and asylum-seekers with compelling protection needs. While currently limited to registering those who come from seven countries as specified by the Libyan authorities, efforts

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<sup>18</sup> UNHCR, *Live, Learn and Play Safe, Regional Initiative 2014-2016*, 2014, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/53bbc6314.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> UNHCR, *Telling the Real Story*, <http://tellingtherealstory.org>.

are underway to expand the list to allow UNHCR to reach all those in need of international protection, irrespective of their nationality or lack of one.

UNHCR advocates with Libyan authorities for the establishment of adequate reception conditions to find alternatives to detention and to ensure that basic humanitarian needs are met inside detention centres as a lifesaving measure. UNHCR also encourages authorities to adopt protection-sensitive approaches, including following rescues at sea and through provision of emergency assistance upon disembarkation to survivors. Overall, UNHCR reinforces national capacities in Libya by reaching out to key officials, civil society and other actors with training on core protection principles and refugee law. Key priorities for UNHCR's work in Libya are the following:

- To ensure broad outreach and early identification of the most vulnerable people for timely protection delivery in Libya, UNHCR will seek to expand its presence in key strategic locations, security conditions permitting. At present in the south, UNHCR is focusing on IDP assistance through international and local partners, including distribution of core relief items, cash assistance and quick impact projects; the set-up of referral mechanisms; and the roll-out of information campaigns for transiting refugees.
- To facilitate protection monitoring at disembarkation points and in close liaison with IOM, UNHCR will scale up its presence at the main 12 disembarkation points with a permanent presence in at least six. Activities will include permanent and mobile medical assistance and distribution of core relief items and protection monitoring. Targeted age and gender-specific interventions, including on SGBV and trafficking, will be included as well as strengthening protection capacities of the Libyan Coast Guard, through training and provision of light equipment for registration and adequate reception at disembarkation points.
- Through increased access to official detention centres across the country along additional capacity building, UNHCR will strive to provide life-saving assistance and advocate for enhanced screening of persons with specific needs, identification and registration. The Office will promote alternatives to detention and seek the immediate release of UASC as well as other vulnerable individuals, along with working in collaboration with relevant partners such as UNICEF and IOM, on care arrangements for children and facilitating family tracing and possible family reunification with family members in third countries or their countries of origin in line with the best interest of the child. The planned open reception centre in Tripoli as well as evacuation transit mechanisms to third countries will help increase the delivery of protection as well as the reach of solutions for those in critical needs.
- In line with the Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plan for Libya for 2017, UNHCR will strengthen support to conflict-affected populations, including host communities. To maximise impact, a mapping of institutions and actors along with targeted guidance and support in programming will help strengthen local partners' capacities to intervene and broaden UNHCR's base of partners. In addition, capacity building initiatives for Libyan authorities both in Libya and in Tunis will be pursued to ensure the sustainability of the humanitarian response and foster ownership, including of refugee protection.
- Advocacy and increased outreach to civil society and communities, including through information-sharing mechanisms and mass information campaigns will underline the challenging protection environment of Libya and the risks associated with the journey along the Central Mediterranean route and provide information on assistance options, including for those wishing to return home. Engagement on social media, focus group discussions and joint participatory assessments will form the basis for programming on further communication with local communities.
- With regard to solutions, UNHCR will increase resettlement submissions, along with advocacy for increased, predictable resettlement quotas, and assist in voluntary repatriation. It will also advocate for the establishment of complementary pathways for legal admission to third countries

through facilitated family reunification, labour mobility schemes, scholarships and education programmes, as well as regional mobility schemes. Along with partners, UNHCR is also exploring temporary evacuation options to third countries to process persons of concern in urgent need of solutions.

In North African countries neighbouring Libya, UNHCR will also strengthen protection and assistance mechanisms. In Egypt, UNHCR's interventions will focus on preserving the protection space, developing better mechanisms to identify persons in need of international protection, enhancing access to asylum, preventing *refoulement* and ensuring effective protection in Egypt, including through advocacy for the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers of all nationalities in the public health and education systems. In Tunisia, UNHCR in cooperation with IOM has developed standard operating procedures to strengthen reception and assistance for persons rescued at sea. In Algeria, UNHCR aims to strengthen the existing response mechanism for asylum-seekers and refugees, including through capacity building and advocacy, and to strengthen its partnership with the Ministry of National Solidarity with the aim of integrating people of concern in existing national programmes.

## EUROPE

In Western and Northern Europe, numbers of asylum seekers increased dramatically in 2017, with the doubling or tripling of asylum applications in some countries. The reception capacity in Italy is under severe strain due to the current pace of arrivals up to July. At the end of June, the Government of Italy announced that it was considering suspending the disembarkation of people rescued by non-Italian unless other European nations show more solidarity. Italy further called for more funding to be provided from the EU-Africa Trust Fund in support of projects in Libya. Libya is by far the most common embarkation point for refugees and migrants from Africa to Europe.

### ARRIVALS TO ITALY BY SEA

| TOP 10 NATIONALITIES<br>(January-August 2017) |     |            |    |
|---|-----|------------|----|
| Nigeria                                       | 17% | Eritrea    | 6% |
| Guinea  | 9%  | The Gambia | 6% |
| Bangladesh                                    | 9%  | Senegal    | 6% |
| Côte d'Ivoire                                 | 9%  | Sudan      | 5% |
| Mali  | 6%  | Morocco    | 5% |

#### • Pursue the implementation of the Central Mediterranean Sea Initiative

Building upon the Central Mediterranean Sea Initiative (CMSI), which remains the guiding tool for UNHCR's engagement on mixed migration in Europe, the following targeted activities are suggested:

- Support existing government capacity, national and local, to ensure effective and safe access to asylum, protection and solutions for those in need of international protection and manage migration in an orderly and dignified manner;
- Support all stakeholders through the production of surveys reflecting key characteristics of the people crossing the central Mediterranean sea;
- Ensure that refugees and migrants have access to basic services in a participatory manner and with due attention to specific needs and vulnerabilities, in particular sexual and gender-based

violence (SGBV) survivors, unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), people and children with disabilities and victims of trafficking;

- Increase safe and regulated access to longer-term solutions for refugees, in particular through resettlement, complementary pathways of admission (i.e. family reunification, labour mobility schemes, scholarships and education programs); On resettlement, due consideration will be given to the use of Emergency Transit Centres in Romania and Slovakia to facilitate access to solutions out of Libya and
- Systematically inform refugees and migrants in an age, gender and diversity sensitive manner and through a participatory dialogue on their rights and obligations.

## EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

### • Maintaining and strengthening Search and Rescue capacity

The central Mediterranean Sea remains a key priority for UNHCR given its underlying humanitarian imperatives. The vital importance of rescue at sea operations undertaken by all actors involved, including the Italian Coastguard, NGOs and merchant ships is undisputed in light of the continued hazards confronting refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean.

Private commercial ships, as well as rescue vessels operated by NGOs also play an important role in current SAR efforts. Disembarkation to only one country in the central Mediterranean is not sustainable nor fair, and improved coordination among all those involved in rescue operations is required.



UNHCR will seek to reinforce its activities aimed at:

- Strengthen collective engagement and response to search and rescue operations targeting private operators and other relevant actors, including through legal and technical advice and advocacy
- Contributing to the training of concerned Coast Guards forces or private merchant ships (in coordination with the International Chamber of Shipping and the IMO with whom UNHCR has a regular dialogue) on fundamental rights, good practice at disembarkation point, post-disembarkation screening and effective use of referral mechanism;
- Improving current disembarkation procedures with a view to better identify people in need of international protection and those with specific needs (i.e. unaccompanied children and victims of trafficking) and provide adequate treatment to all those rescued;
- Under IMO leadership, contributing to the development of accountability mechanisms for ship owners disconnecting their automated identification equipment/transponders (AFIS) with a view to avoid participating in SAR operations; and
- Promoting through a Roundtable discussion among the Mediterranean countries the concept of a shared and more predictable responsibility for SAR and disembarkation de-linked from the responsibility for differentiated solutions for those disembarked.

## ACROSS ALL REGIONS

Human trafficking rings as well as groups trading in weapons, drugs and terrorism actively operate on the Central Mediterranean route, notably through exchanges in intelligence and resources. UNHCR consistently advocated vis-a-vis the EU for a strong law enforcement component in tackling these illegal activities and dismantling the business model of smugglers and traffickers. At the same time, protection for victims of trafficking as well as those at risk of trafficking needs to be strengthened along routes to Libya, in Libya, as well as once in the EU.

UNHCR advocates for priority to be urgently given to:

- Measures to strengthen protection for victims of trafficking and those at risk, including through enhanced identification efforts at borders, in detention or at disembarkation, greater access to safety mechanisms such as safe shelter and witness protection as required, and better provision of information to new arrivals in Italy on the assistance available for victims of trafficking;
- Ending the supply of unseaworthy boats to Libya smugglers and traffickers;
- Engaging non-state actors in discussions on addressing trafficking and smuggling, including Toubou, Tuareg, Rashaida and Beduin leaders, and considering alternative ways to capitalize on human mobility and nurture cross-border trade rather than people smuggling and trafficking;
- Ending the smuggling of oil or other goods that facilitate the work of those smuggling and trafficking in persons;
- Strengthening sharing of information and sharing good practices between relevant law enforcement agencies, including those outside the EU, on known traffickers, as well as developing effective transnational cooperation with various organizations such as Afripol, Europol, Interpol, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, as well UN missions and EU civilian missions in accordance with their respective mandates;
- Using proactively the existing Sanctions Committee on Libya in relation to individuals and companies facilitating trafficking to and through Libya;
- Developing a specific law enforcement and protection strategy to combat the ongoing transnational criminal activities related to the sexual exploitation of Nigerian and other girls and women trafficked via the Mediterranean Sea, including within EU Member States;
- Establishing or strengthening, where relevant, national and regional anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking legislation and action plans to ensure adherence and implementation of applicable standards;
- Maximizing opportunities through processes like the Khartoum Process as well as the Horn of Africa Initiative which provide a solid platform for collectively addressing the issue from a prevention and response perspective<sup>20</sup>;
- Increasing field research and inquiries on current dynamics of smuggling markets along the Central Mediterranean route; and
- Supporting cross-regional, regional and national law enforcement mechanisms for addressing trafficking and smuggling through inter-agency mechanisms and related protection tools for victims of trafficking.

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<sup>20</sup> In 2012, UNHCR launched its *Strategy and Regional Plan of Action: Smuggling and Trafficking from the East and Horn of Africa*, which included recommendations to address the protection needs of persons of concern affected by smuggling and trafficking in the region at regional and country levels. At regional level, through the Horn of Africa initiative and the Khartoum Process, renewed commitments by concerned States, along with new programmes and activities were made, including programmes and activities devised to reinforce prevention and response. In spite of these efforts, the approach remains, however, far too fragmented to produce better results.

**CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE:  
WORKING ON ALTERNATIVES TO DANGEROUS  
JOURNEYS**

UNHCR Central Mediterranean Risk Mitigation Strategy  
(CMRMS)

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