

OVERVIEW

In the first half of 2021, some 13,000 refugees and migrants crossed the sea from Libya to Europe (Italy and Malta), a 140 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2020. As in previous years, many of those taking this route had international protection needs or other specific needs on account of their personal circumstances or experiences during the journey, including in Libya, due to being unaccompanied children or survivors of trafficking, gender-based violence, torture or shipwrecks.

In addition, some 14,700 refugees and migrants who departed from Libya by sea were also disembarked in Libya in the first half of 2021, mostly following interceptions or rescues by the Libyan Coast Guard.¹ UNHCR continues to advise against returns to Libya, which is not a safe place for disembarkation.²



13,000 refugees and migrants crossed the sea from Libya to Europe between January and June 2021 vs.

5,400 in the same period last year

ARRIVALS IN ITALY AND MALTA

Some 12,750 refugees and migrants have arrived in Italy from Libya so far in 2021, two and a half times the number who arrived in the same period last year. This includes 3,000 persons who arrived in June 2021. So far this year, 62 per cent of all sea arrivals in Italy had departed from Libya.³

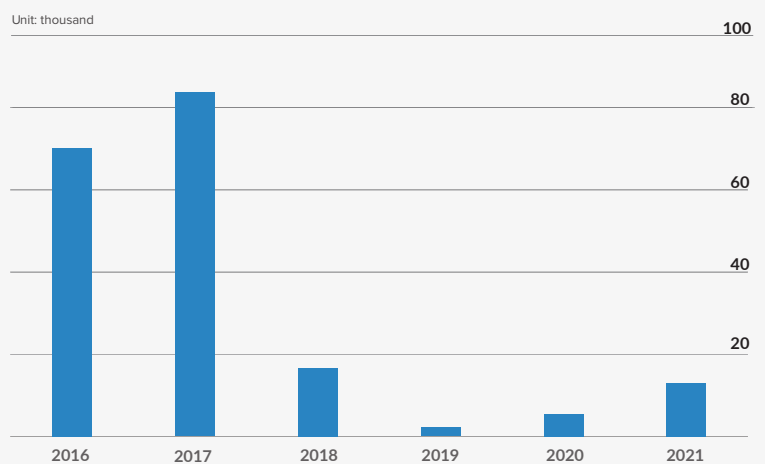
A further 250 refugees and migrants disembarked in Malta so far in 2021, an 86 per cent decrease compared to the same period last year. Most of these persons arrived between April and June this year (only 65 in February).

NATIONALITIES AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

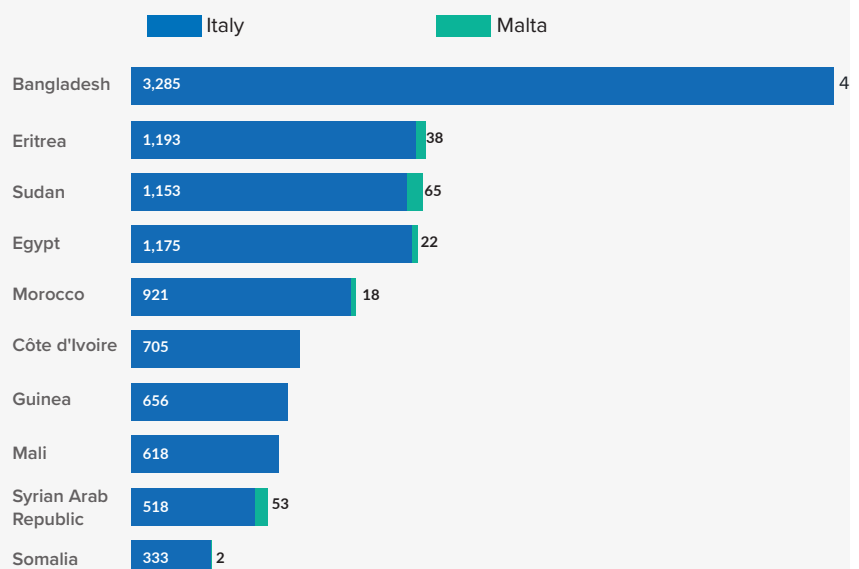
According to available information, Bangladeshis, Eritreans and Sudanese have been the primary nationality groups of arrivals in Italy and Malta from Libya so far in 2021. Some 72 per cent of all arrivals so far have been men, 24 per cent children (most of them unaccompanied) and 4 per cent women.

This, however, does not always accurately represent the primary nationalities departing from the Libyan coast, for instance, Sudanese, Bangladeshis and Malians have been the primary nationality groups disembarked in Libya so far this year.⁴

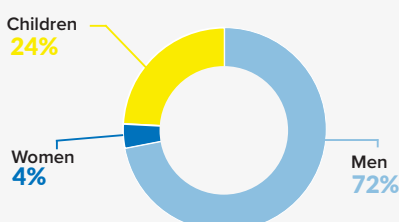
Arrivals by sea in Europe from Libya (January to June)



Most common nationalities arriving in Italy and Malta after departing from Libya (January to June 2021)



Demographic breakdown (January to June 2021)



RESCUE AT SEA

UNHCR remains concerned about the lack of search and rescue capacity off the Libyan coast. For example, in the Libyan Search and Rescue Region (SRR),⁵ the vast majority of interventions have been performed by the Libyan Coast Guard with few alternatives available. This means that most refugees and migrants rescued or intercepted in this region are disembarked in Libya and subsequently transferred to detention centres, including shipwreck survivors. The gaps in search and rescue capacity also entail risks that refugees and migrants may not be rescued and could potentially perish at sea.⁶

Of all persons rescued or intercepted in the Libyan SRR so far in 2021, 79 per cent have been rescued or intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard and General Administration for Coastal Security, resulting in their disembarkation in Libya. Only 18 per cent of those rescued in this region have been disembarked in a place of safety, mostly after interventions by NGOs.

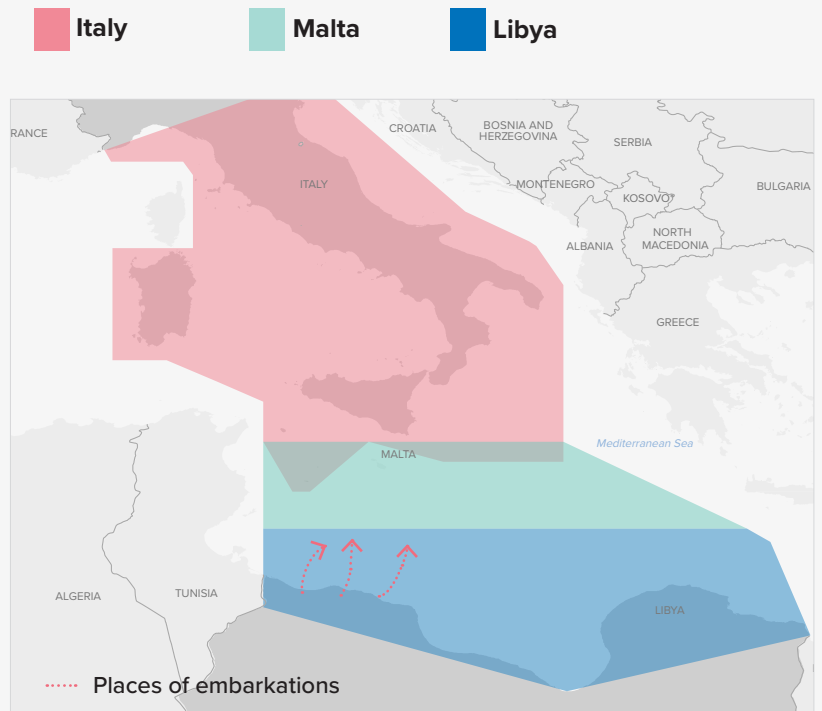
In 2021, in addition to those rescued by NGOs or merchant vessels in the Libyan SRR, 56 per cent of refugees and migrants who have reached Europe from Libya travelled some 140 nautical miles to reach the Italian SRR, compared to 28 per cent in the same period last year. This means that people are travelling much farther and spending more time at sea than in previous years when more search and rescue capacity was available in international waters off the Libyan coast.

DEAD AND MISSING AT SEA

So far this year, at least 527 refugees and migrants have died or gone missing at sea after departing from Libya, compared to 141 in the same period last year.⁷ Of these, the majority (74 per cent) were reported to have died or gone missing within the Libyan Search and Rescue Region.

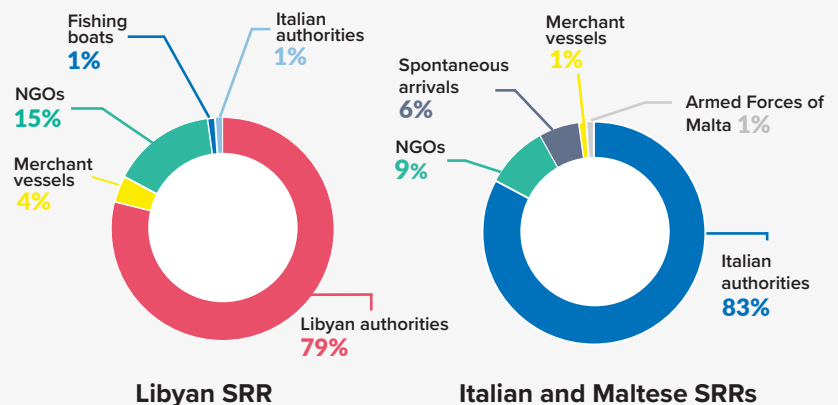
More needs to be done to save lives in the Central Mediterranean, including by enhancing search and rescue capacity, strengthening protection in countries along routes to Libya, addressing root causes of displacement and increasing access to safe and legal pathways.

Search and Rescue Regions



The search and rescue regions depicted are as per the coordinates listed by the International Maritime Organization – (<https://www.imo.org/>). Includes Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 [1999]). The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Rescues or interceptions in SRRs by type of actor (January to June 2021)



¹ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/87729>. In addition, some 1,500 refugees and migrants were disembarked in Tunisia after rescue by Tunisian authorities.

² <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5f1edee24.html>

³ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/87808>

⁴ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/87729>

⁵ The establishment of an SRR means that, in line with obligations arising from international maritime law, a State commits to coordinating search and rescue operations within the region and exercises primary responsibility when the rescue takes place within its SRR to ensure cooperation and coordination for disembarkation. However, international maritime law does not prescribe where persons rescued in that region must be disembarked as long as the port is safe and disembarkation is effected as soon as reasonably practicable.

⁶ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/1/600837294/iom-unhcr-shipwreck-libya-claims-40-lives.html>

⁷ Figures included as dead and missing are compiled from a variety of sources, of which the quality and reliability can vary. Every effort has been made to ensure that all statistical information is verified, and figures on dead and missing at sea represent conservative estimates of a number that could possibly be higher than reported. The numbers of dead and missing in the UNHCR data relate to the incidents for which UNHCR has received a sufficient level of detail.