

# SPAIN

## UNHCR COUNTRY UPDATE #1

October 2015

### KEY FIGURES

**3,590**

Sea arrivals on Mediterranean shores in 2015.

**640**

Sea arrivals on the Canary Islands in 2015.

**9,450**

Land border crossings to Ceuta and Melilla in 2015.

**13,680**

Total sea and land arrivals in 2015.

**9,850**

Asylum applications up to September 2015.

**1,060**

Total sea arrivals in October 2015.

**6,910**

Syrians and Palestinians arrived in 2015.

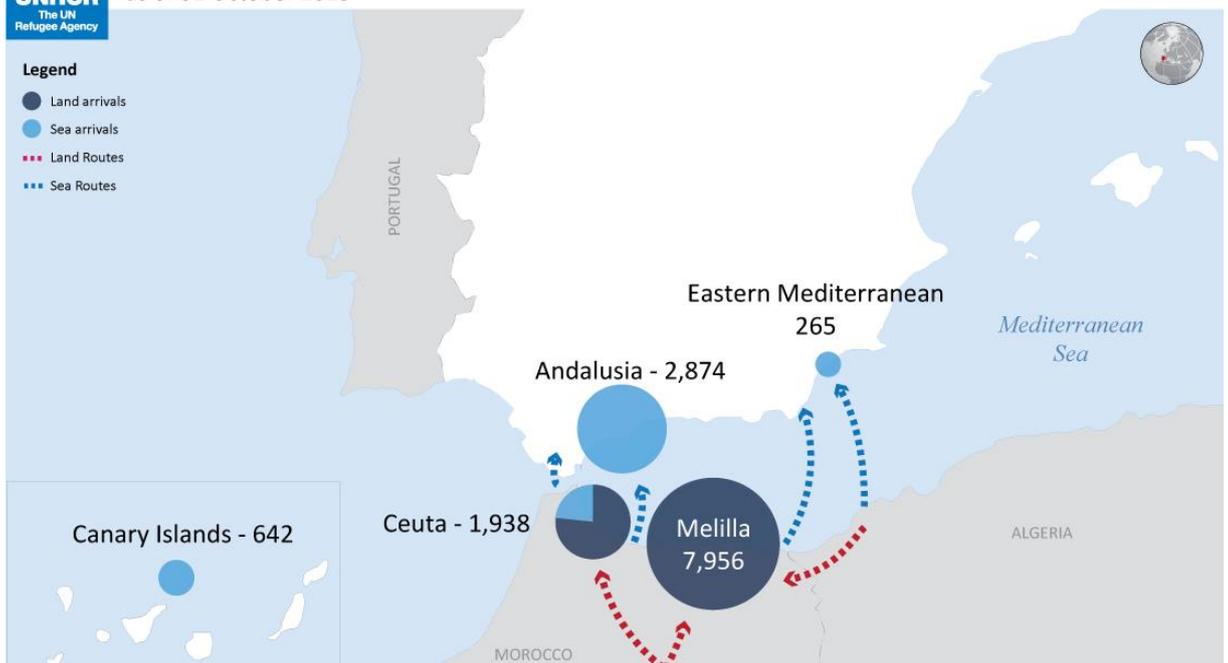
**4,340**

Syrians applied for asylum up to September 2015.

### HIGHLIGHTS

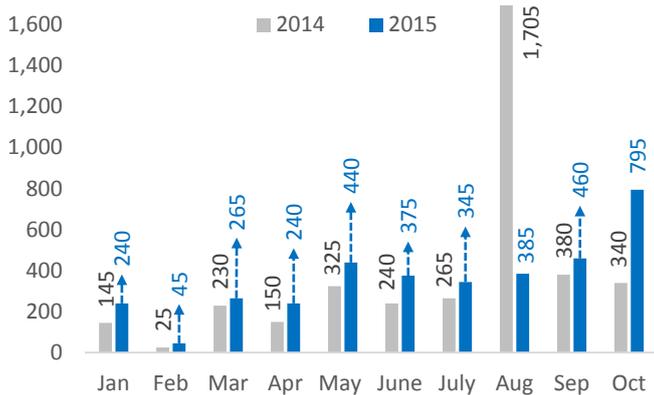
- Over the weekend of 3 October, Maritime Forces rescued over 300 people from 12 rickety boats heading to the mainland – the largest sea arrival in 2015 to date.
- The number of asylum applications up to September doubled compared to the same period in 2014, with Melilla becoming the main asylum border post, primarily for Syrians.
- The largest attempt to enter Ceuta irregularly since February 2014 took place on 3 October, when 200-300 nationals of sub-Saharan countries attempted to enter the enclave by climbing the fence or swimming.
- UNHCR, political parties and human rights organizations, expressed concern over the permanently overwhelmed and inadequate reception conditions at the Temporary Reception Centre (CETI) in Melilla with capacity for 480 person, currently hosting around 2,000 people.
- Spain witnessed an impressive wave of public solidarity towards refugees, including an enormous amount of support initiatives and street protests to seek higher refugee reception quotas by Spain.
- The government announced the acceptance of around 16,230 asylum-seekers over the next two years under the EU relocation scheme, as well as an increased budget for asylum-seeker and refugee programmes. Additionally, around 1,450 persons are projected to be resettled to Spain.

### SPAIN: Sea and Land Arrivals as of 31 October 2015

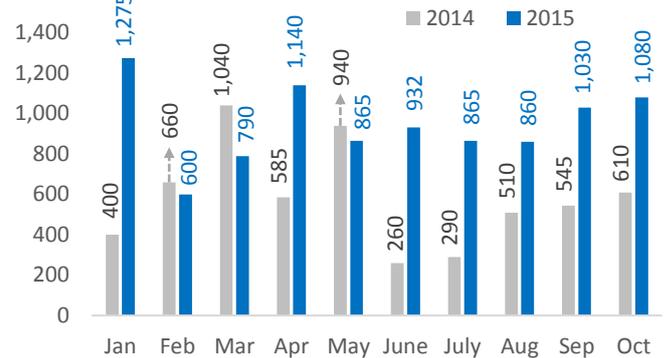


# ARRIVALS TO SPAIN

**Figure 1. Monthly sea arrivals to the Mediterranean Coast Jan – Oct 2015**

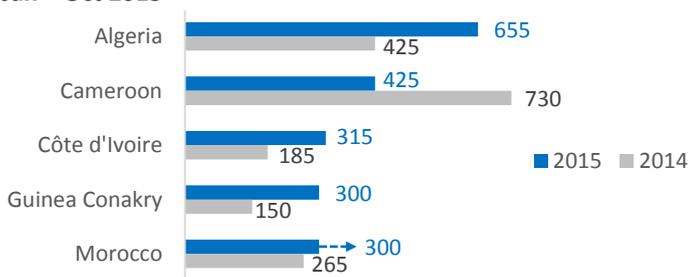


**Figure 2. Monthly land border crossing to Ceuta and Melilla enclaves | Jan – Oct 2015**



The majority of refugees and migrants arriving by sea, disembark in Almería, Cádiz and Murcia and usually depart from Morocco. Recorded figures only include persons intercepted by Search and Rescue (SAR) operations. Given the vast stretches of Spanish coast line, it is expected that more arrivals occur undetected. **October observed the highest number of Mediterranean Sea arrivals since August 2014.** Over the weekend of 3 October, Maritime Forces rescued over 300 people from 12 rickety boats heading to the mainland – the largest sea arrival in 2015 to date. Additionally around 260 refugees and migrants arrived by sea to the Canary Islands – part of the trend of **considerable increase of arrivals to the Canary Islands.** UNHCR has strengthened its monitoring activities along the Andalusian coast and renewed its focus on the Canary Islands.

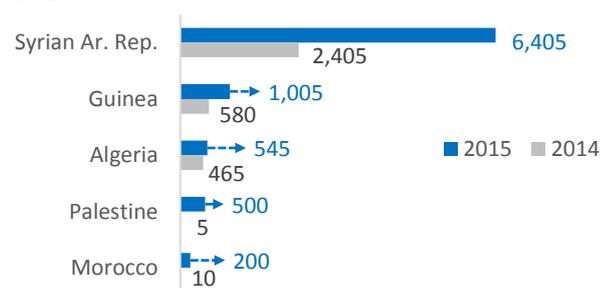
**Figure 3. Top 5 nationalities of Mediterranean Sea arrivals Jan – Oct 2015**



**The majority of sea arrivals are nationals of sub-Saharan countries, mainly originating from Western Africa.** The sealing off of the Ceuta and Melilla fences coupled with the limitations for nationals of sub-Saharan countries to access asylum border posts in the enclaves (see below), is pushing them to find alternative sea routes. Since August a particular increase of sea arrivals of nationals from Guinea Conakry and Morocco has been observed. In October, ten nationals of the Central African Republic arrived, in addition to some twenty by land. Whilst these numbers remain small, this is unusual trend compared to almost non-existing arrivals before.

The Ceuta and Melilla enclaves bordering Morocco form the EU's only external land border with Africa and are sealed off by high razor wired fences. In September 2014 authorities opened asylum border posts in Ceuta and Melilla. However, **difficulties to access the enclaves have been reported** related to the practice of 'rejections at borders' (see below). Attempts to irregularly access the enclaves by swimming, climbing the fence or trying to cross the border in car boots continue. On 3 October, 200-300 nationals of sub-Saharan countries attempted to enter Ceuta by climbing the fence or swimming - representing the **largest attempt to enter Ceuta irregularly since February 2014.** Over 85 persons managed to enter Spanish territory, whilst the majority was impeded access (by Moroccan forces). During the weekend of 10 October, 30 nationals of sub-Saharan countries managed to climb the Melilla fence. Reportedly, an additional 100 persons also made an attempt but were stopped by Moroccan forces.

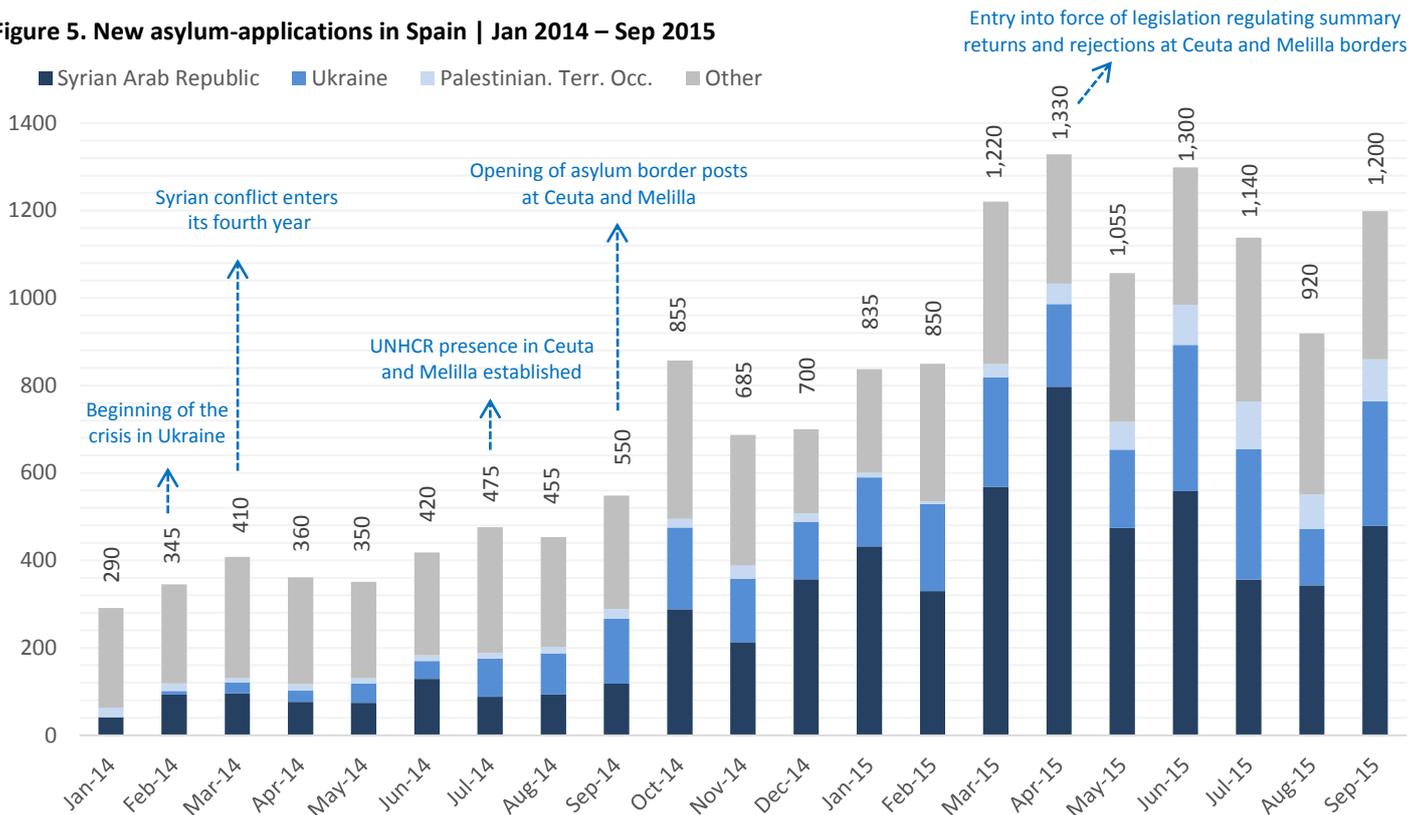
**Figure 4. Top 5 nationalities of land arrivals to Ceuta and Melilla Jan – Oct 2015**



**Syrians represent almost 70% of all arrivals to Ceuta and Melilla.** Most of the Moroccan nationals are members of mixed Syrian-Moroccan marriages. A recent growing trend is the **increase in arrivals to Melilla of Palestinian origin fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic.** In the past months, around 500 Palestinians arrived to Melilla - mainly from Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus - seeking asylum. UNHCR continues to be concerned by the inability of non-Syrians, particularly nationals of sub-Saharan countries, to approach and lodge asylum claims at the border posts in the enclaves.

# ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN SPAIN

Figure 5. New asylum-applications in Spain | Jan 2014 – Sep 2015



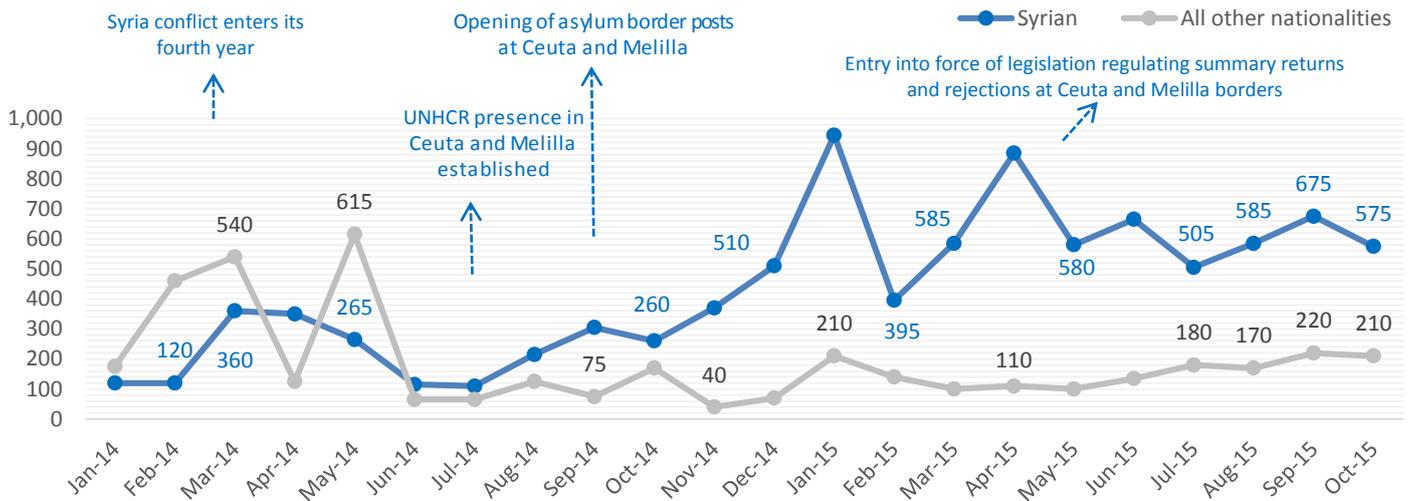
The number of **asylum applications up to September doubled compared to the same period in 2014**, with Melilla becoming the main asylum border post. Since the opening of the asylum border posts in Ceuta (Tarajal) and Melilla (Beni Enzar) in November last year, the average asylum applications per month in Spain went from almost 500 in 2014 to 1,100 in 2015. Of the asylum claims submitted up to September 2015, **over 50% were registered in Melilla, where the overall number of applications went from 500 in the entire year of 2014 to 5,000 in September 2015 alone.**

**Almost half of the asylum-seekers in Spain are Syrians** (45%, around 3,520), followed by 20% Ukrainians (around 1,610). 5% of asylum applications originate from Palestinian nationals, indicating an increase over recent months. Syrians, Ukrainians and Palestinians together account for 70% of the total applications in 2015. The number of asylum applications from other nationalities did not vary significantly over the past 19 months, with an average of around 320 applications per month.

In April 2015, the amended Aliens Act entered into force which seeks to **legalize summary returns or ‘push backs’ in Ceuta and Melilla**, and introduced a new legal concept of ‘rejections at the border’. The amendment provides that third country nationals, who are detected while trying to cross the border irregularly, may be rejected in order to prevent their illegal entry to Spain. The regulation foresees compliance with international law, including the possibility to apply for asylum for those in need of international protection. An additional protocol to regulate related actions by police confronted with irregular arrivals, is still pending. UNHCR is concerned that ‘rejections at the border’ may not be undertaken in compliance with international human rights standards, as procedures allowing for the fair and efficient identification of persons in need of international protection are absent. UNHCR strongly advocates for the implementation of a protection sensitive protocol for border guards, following the legal amendments. UNHCR has a permanent presence in Ceuta and Melilla since July 2014 engaging in protection monitoring to promote access to territory and identify persons with specific needs. UNHCR provides weekly information sessions on international protection and asylum procedures to the residents of the CETI in Melilla. UNHCR also regularly facilitates training sessions for border police and CETI personnel to strengthen protection sensitive border management.

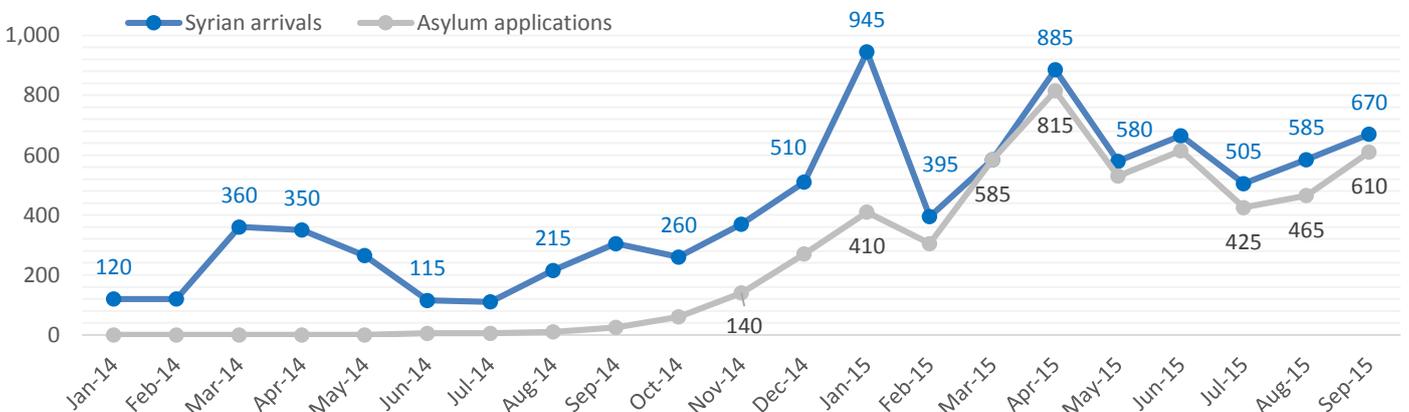
# SYRIAN ARRIVALS IN MELILLA

**Figure 6. Syrian monthly arrivals compared to other nationalities in Melilla | Jan 2014 – Oct 2015**



The rate of arrivals of Syrians to the enclaves up to October has increased almost threefold, compared to the same period last year. Arrivals in Melilla are particularly high compared to Ceuta, likely due to a mixture of geographic and historic factors. Currently **80% of the arrivals to Melilla are of Syrian origin. 60% of all arrivals in Melilla are women and children**, compared to 18% of the persons arriving by sea. The CETI in Melilla, with an official capacity of 480, hosts around 1,900 persons awaiting their transfer to the mainland. 80% of its population are Syrian families, including around 500 minors. The majority are asylum-seekers. Conditions at the CETI of Melilla, are of growing concern to UNHCR. While some extra resources have been put in place by the authorities, access to basic services such as hot water, blankets, medical assistance, interpretation and legal aid remains limited. Deteriorating accommodation conditions are leading to growing tensions.

**Figure 7. Syrians arrivals to Melilla per total number of asylum applications in Melilla | Jan 2014 – Sep 2015\***



\*Source: Office of Asylum and Refugees (AOR), figures are subject to change and may present small discrepancies with final asylum figures.

**Out of the around 5,800 Syrian arrivals in Melilla as of September, around 80% applied for asylum at the border.** After claiming asylum, many Syrians continue onwards to other European countries. Onwards travel trends are likely be related to Spain’s limited reception capacity (around 1,500 on the mainland), expectations of better integration opportunities and diaspora communities elsewhere. **Around 60% of asylum claims submitted in Melilla’s border post are made by women and children.** During October, sporadic closure of the land border between Morocco and Melilla was reported.

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**Links:** [Regional portal](#) [UNHCR Spain webpage](#) [Twitter @ACNURspain](#) [Facebook UNHCR Spain](#)

**Sources:** UNHCR, Ministry of Interior, EUROSTAT, AOR - unless indicated otherwise, figures included reflect the period up to 31 October. All figures in this document are rounded, provisional and can be subject to change.

## Legend

- Main landing points
- Main land border crossing points
- Aliens Internment Centers (CIE)\*
- Temporary Reception Centers (CETI)\*
- Reception Centers for asylum-seekers run by the Government (CAR)\*
- Training missions undertaken by UNHCR staff
- Support missions undertaken by UNHCR staff
- Monitoring missions undertaken by UNHCR staff

UNHCR office	
	1 Protection Officer 2 Protection Associates 1 Protection Assistant
	3 RSD Associates
	1 ER/Communication Officer 1 Senior Communication Assistant

Ceuta	
	1 Protection Advisor

## Canary Islands



\*This is only a partial representation of the reception landscape in Spain, which also includes many other reception facilities run by NGOs

## UNHCR role and activities in Spain

UNHCR advises key governmental counterparts on policy formulations and legislative developments on refugee issues. UNHCR ensures the correct application of international refugee law, undertakes capacity building activities with counterparts and works with NGOs and various entities to improve asylum space in the country. UNHCR advocates for access to territory and to quality and efficient asylum procedures.

### Access to Territory/protection

UNHCR regularly undertakes monitoring and support missions to key land/sea entry points and reception facilities, to promote access to territory and asylum procedures and to support the identification of persons with specific needs. In Ceuta and Melilla, UNHCR has a permanent presence since July 2014, where it monitors reception conditions and supports authorities with the provision of information on international protection and asylum.

### Support to asylum procedures

UNHCR actively monitors all aspects of the asylum procedure and fulfils an advisory role, as provided by law. UNHCR reviews asylum applications lodged at borders and Aliens Internment Centers and facilitates legal counselling and referral to specialised services of individual cases when required. UNHCR has an observer capacity in the national Eligibility Commission.

### Monitoring and training

UNHCR facilitates regular training sessions for authorities, lawyers and NGOs on topics related to protection, such as the identification of persons with specific needs and persons in need of international protection, child protection, interviewing techniques etc.

### Public Information

UNHCR carries out public awareness activities in support of UNHCR operations, increasing the visibility of the plight of refugees and advocating for protection of asylum-seekers and refugees in Spain and worldwide.

**5,555** sea and land arrivals benefitted from information sessions on international protection and asylum up to October 2015

**17** monitoring and support missions at key arrival points conducted up to October 2015

**192** monitoring visits to reception facilities and Internment Centres conducted up to October 2015

**470** persons with specific needs assisted up to October 2015

**27** training sessions facilitated for authorities, lawyers and NGOs up to October 2015

**400** interviews given to national and international newsmedia up to October 2015