

EUROPE MONTHLY REPORT



UKRAINE - In Chasiv Yar, Donetsk, Nadiya and her stepdaughters open Christmas presents from UNHCR. Nadiya and her husband Osman have raised 15 adopted children and their own daughter. For those affected by the violence, winter is especially difficult, with temperatures plummeting to -10 °C. "In Zhovanka, there was shelling every day. The house was damaged, our dogs were killed, windows were broken, our roof leaked and we struggled to keep warm."

TRENDS AND KEY FIGURES

In 2018, the number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe via the three Mediterranean routes dropped by 24%. This was largely due to a further reduction in people arriving via the Central Mediterranean route, although this was partially offset by an increase in arrivals to Spain via the Western Mediterranean route.

Of particular significance in 2018 were [changing practices](#) regarding rescue at sea in the central Mediterranean in response to boats departing from Libya. While in recent years, persons rescued by European State vessels, NGOs or merchant vessels off the coast of Libya were disembarked in Italy, in June Italy announced an end to this. This, alongside increased interventions by the Libyan Coast Guard with European support in the newly-established Libyan Search and Rescue Region, resulted in a situation in which the majority of people departing from Libya were disembarked in Libya, despite [UNHCR's advisory against returns](#). As a consequence, boats tried traveling further from the Libyan coast bringing people to Italy and Malta's Search and Rescue Regions or at times directly to Italy and Malta. On numerous occasions in the latter half of the year, refugees and migrants rescued by NGOs off the Libyan coast had to remain at sea for several days while waiting for a safe port for disembarkation to be allocated. As of the start of 2019, no consistent and predictable system of response to rescues in the central Mediterranean has yet been established.

GREECE: in 2018, the number of people arriving by sea to Greece only increased by 9%, while arrivals by land almost tripled. Those arriving

Mediterranean
141,475
arrivals in 2018¹

2,277
estimated dead/missing in 2018¹

Greece²	Italy
50,511	23,370
6,048 3,203 3,970	1,007 980 359
Oct Nov Dec	Oct Nov Dec

Spain²	Cyprus
65,383	766
10,912 5,666 5,558	67 83 224
Oct Nov Dec	Oct Nov Dec

New asylum applications in Europe³

Jan-Dec 2018:	675,000
Jan-Dec 2017:	819,000
Jan-Dec 2016:	1,322,000
Jan-Dec 2015:	1,471,000

¹ data.unhcr.org/mediterranean as of 31 December 2018.

² Greece and Spain both include sea and land arrivals; Spain includes sea arrivals in the Mediterranean and to the Canary Islands.

³ Sources: Eurostats for EU+ countries (Only partial data for December 2018. All data is provisional and last updated 26 February 2019); UNHCR for Eastern Europe (as of 30 June 2018), Turkey (as of 30 September 2018) and South Eastern Europe (as of 31 December 2018).

34,705

Relocated in total ⁴
⁴Source: [European Commission](#), as of 30 October 2018.

 from **Greece**

21,999

(33% of 66,400)

 from **Italy**

12,706

(32% of 39,600)

1,806

Returns EU-Turkey statement ¹²
¹²Source: [Ministry of Citizen Protection](#), Greece as of 31 December 2018.

by sea were primarily from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. As in 2017, children comprised a sizeable proportion of arrivals by sea (37%) and 16% of these children were unaccompanied or separated. In December, more than 2,900 made the journey by sea to Greece despite the winter conditions, an increase from the 2,100 that had arrived in November. More than 120 people are believed to have died at sea while trying to cross to Greece in 2018, while some 73 people are reported to have died during attempts to cross the Turkey-Greece land border. Of those who died on the land route, 27 people were believed to have drowned in the Evros River and a further 29 people killed in vehicle accidents along the road towards Thessaloniki.

ITALY: the number of arrivals by sea dropped by 80% from almost 119,400 to 23,400. Although arrivals from Libya comprised 70% of those reaching Italy by sea in the first half of 2018, the limited number of arrivals from Libya in the latter half of the year (1,600) saw the overall proportion drop to 56%. Following Italy's announcement in June impacting on disembarkations in Italy of people rescued off the Libyan coast, in the latter half of the year just under 200 people were disembarked in Italy after rescue off the Libyan coast. A further 1,400 people who departed from Libya either reached Italy directly or were rescued in Italy or Malta's Search and Rescue Regions after passing beyond the Libyan Search and Rescue Region and were disembarked in Italy. Some 1,400 that departed Libya in 2018 arrived in Malta, either as a result of disembarkations following rescue off the Libyan coast or after rescue by Maltese authorities in Malta's Search and Rescue Region. More than 15,200 people were disembarked in Libya in 2018. In the latter half of the year, those disembarked in Libya amounted to some 85% of those rescued or intercepted off

the Libyan coast and included some who had been rescued by merchant vessels. Some 1,311 people are believed to have died while trying to cross the central Mediterranean Sea in 2018. While this represents a 54% decrease in the number of deaths at sea, it also reflects a significant increase in the rate of deaths in relation to arrivals with one death for every 14 arrivals in Europe from Libya in 2018 compared to one death for every 38 arrivals in 2017.

SPAIN: some 65,400 refugees and migrants arrived by land and sea, an increase of 131% compared to 2017. While the number of people arriving by land only increased by 10%, the largest increase was amongst those crossing the sea. The largest groups arriving in Spain were from Morocco, Guinea and Mali. The increase in Malians was particularly notable with some 10,000 people arriving in 2018 compared to just over 500 in 2017. In December, some 5,600 people arrived in Spain compared to 2,400 the previous December. Some 784 people are believed to have died while trying to cross the sea to Spain in 2018, almost four times as many as in 2017 when 202 people were believed to have died.

WESTERN BALKANS: a sizeable increase in the number of refugees and migrants arriving was noted in Bosnia and Herzegovina with some 24,100 arrivals. This appeared to be primarily due to shifting routes within the region as more people also travelled onwards from Greece via Albania and Montenegro to other EU Member States while others who had reached Serbia decided to try to move onwards also via Bosnia and Herzegovina.

OTHER SITUATIONS IN EUROPE

 Turkey **4.0 million**
Refugees and asylum seekers ⁵

Syrian Arab Republic	3,637,000
Afghanistan	172,000
Iraq	143,000
Other nationalities	57,000

⁵ Source: UNHCR as of 28 February 2019

 Ukraine **1.6 million**
Internally Displaced Persons ⁶ and **Conflict Affected Persons** ⁷

Refugees:	3,225
Asylum seekers:	6,152
Stateless persons:	35,574

⁶ Residing more permanently in government-controlled areas (GCA).

⁷ Estimated number of conflict-affected people living along the line of contact in government-controlled areas (GCA) and non-government controlled areas (NGCA).

⁸ UNHCR, State Migration Service of Ukraine as of 01/07/2018

⁹ UNHCR as of 30/11/2018

¹⁰ State Migration Service of Ukraine as of 01/01/2019

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Ireland: In December, 227 Syrian refugees, including 109 children, were resettled from Lebanon.

4

EU: In preparation for Romania assuming the presidency of the Council of the European Union from January, UNHCR [released](#) its recommendations

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France: Following President Macron's pledge to bring to France 100 Yazidi women victims from Iraq, a first group arrived in France on 20 December and were welcomed at the airport by the Minister of Interior.

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Portugal: In mid-December, 33 refugees from South Sudan and Syria were resettled from Egypt, the first of expected 1,010 refugees that Portugal will resettle from Egypt and Turkey by October 2019.

Italy: The refugee status determination reform was implemented in Italy, with a new system becoming operational in July.

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.

Rescue at sea: In December, there were several more rescues by NGOs in the Libyan Search and Rescue Region. In the absence of a coordinated and predictable regional response to rescue at sea, there were again significant delays before a safe port for disembarkation was authorised. In early December, 11 persons rescued by a Spanish fishing vessel in November were finally permitted to disembark in Malta, a decision [welcomed](#) by UNHCR, and subsequently transferred to Spain. Maltese authorities also rescued a further 249 people from three different boats south of Malta that had departed from Libya. The largest groups were from Eritrea and Bangladesh. UNHCR staff attended the disembarkations and subsequently supported the authorities in the initial processing, including coordinating provision of interpreters. In Spain, 308 people rescued by the NGO Proactiva Open Arms were disembarked at the end of the month in Algeciras. The group was predominantly from Somalia, Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan and included 138 children. UNHCR and partner organization CEAR attended disembarkation procedures and carried out regular information provision activities. Many of those disembarking were observed to have protection needs. All new arrivals were transferred to second-line reception facilities and UNHCR has been following up there.

As of the end of December, two groups totaling 49 people who had been rescued in separate incidents by the NGOs Sea Watch and Sea Eye off the Libyan coast had still [not been allocated](#) a safe port for disembarkation.

Denmark: At the end of November, the Danish government introduced several changes in Denmark's immigration policy, including a shift from a focus on integration to returns, with any granted status to be labeled as temporary. Furthermore, the asylum authorities must deny extension of a permit or cease a permit, unless Denmark's international obligations so hinders, e.g. when a situation in the home country has improved although still unstable and fragile. Finally, the benefits given to refugees shall be lowered with DKK 2,000 per month after a three year stay in Denmark.

European Union: In preparation for Romania assuming the **1** presidency of the Council of the European Union from January, UNHCR [released](#) its recommendations calling for Romania to "use its upcoming Presidency to mobilize the EU around the stronger and fairer response for forcibly displaced people that is at the heart of the Global Compact on Refugees." The [recommendations](#) include calls for expanding resettlement and complementary pathways of admission, advancing efforts to establish predictable disembarkation and processing mechanisms in the Central Mediterranean area, ensuring European border guards provide effective access to territory and asylum procedures for people seeking international protection, and providing sufficient support for integration.

France: Following President Macron's pledge to bring to **2** France 100 Yazidi women victims from Iraq, a first group (20 women and their relatives, amounting to 80 persons in total) arrived in France on 20 December and

were welcomed at the airport by the Minister of Interior. A further 80 women and their families are expected in 2019. In addition, on 13 December, UNHCR France launched its [report](#) of the survey on unaccompanied and separated children and their protection in France. UNHCR called for better policies and practices in particular to identify and refer children at the border and in the country as well as for welfare care centres adapted to their specific needs and the need for legal representatives for effective access to protection and durable solutions.

Germany: In December, the German government agreed on two priority groups for the remaining resettlement/humanitarian admission places for 2018/2019 of the quota of 10,200. Humanitarian admissions of Syrians from Turkey will continue with up to 500 individuals per month. In addition, it is planned to resettle refugees stranded in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Ethiopia and potentially Niger. In addition, up to 500 individuals will be resettled in the context of the newly established pilot programme on 'community sponsorship', and the state of Schleswig-Holstein will implement an admission scheme for another 500 people over the course of the next three years, in cooperation with UNHCR.

Greece: As winter bites, UNHCR [helps](#) the Greek government move vulnerable asylum-seekers from reception centres on the Aegean Islands to shelter on the mainland. Since early September, with the support of UNHCR, the Greek government moved more than 11,500 people from Moria and other RICs on the Greek Aegean Islands. to reception sites, hotels, and apartments on the mainland. UNHCR, with funding from the European Commission, assists in the transfers by bussing people to and from sea ports and organizing ferry tickets. UNHCR's ESTIA programme this month provided 27,000 places in apartments across Greece for asylum-seekers - the highest number of places since the programme started in 2015. UNHCR also provided cash assistance to 63,000 people this month.

Italy: The refugee status determination reform was implemented in Italy, with a new system becoming operational in July. The Ministry of the Interior recruited 250 caseworkers in the Territorial Commissions across Italy, tasked with interviewing asylum-seekers and assessing individual cases. The UNHCR staff no longer conducts interviews with asylum-seekers, while is part of the decision-making panel together with a Deputy Prefect and two government caseworkers, fostering the Commission's capacity in relation to interviewing techniques, country of origin information research, and decision drafting.

On 19 December, 103 people, in majority from Somalia and Eritrea, arrived in Italy after being evacuated directly from Libya. The majority of the group had initially been hosted at the Gathering and Departure Facility, which [opened](#) earlier in the month in Tripoli to provide an alternative to detention. The group included families survivors of sexual

and gender-based violence. After initial procedures upon arrival, the group was transferred to reception facilities to undergo refugee status determination in Italy. UNHCR provided initial support and information upon arrival at the airport and will follow up on the progress of members of the group. This was the third evacuation of persons of concern from Libya to Italy, after 162 and 150 individuals arrived in Italy in December 2017 and February 2018, respectively. Furthermore, on 14 November, 51 asylum-seekers and refugees, including women, children and vulnerable individuals, arrived from Niger to Italy following an evacuation from Libya to Niger.

Ireland: In December, 227 Syrian refugees, including 109 children, were resettled from Lebanon. The families ⁴ will reside in an Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre while awaiting permanent housing in communities across the country. In addition, in early December, the first Syrian family arrived from Lebanon as part of a pilot phase of a new community sponsorship programme.

Montenegro: With support of UNHCR, two teenage girls from Ghana were able to reunify with their mother in Montenegro where she had been granted international protection. The mother and her daughters had been apart for five years. UNHCR Montenegro organized and funded their journey from Ghana to Montenegro, which took place on 30 November, and has continued to assist the family in their integration process in the country.

Portugal: In mid-December, 33 refugees from South Sudan and Syria were resettled from Egypt, the first of ⁵ expected 1,010 refugees that Portugal will resettle from Egypt and Turkey by October 2019. The resettled refugees will receive support from municipal authorities and NGOs as they settle. UNHCR welcomed their arrival with a [press release](#).

Switzerland: On 20 December, High Commissioner Filippo Grandi held talks with Swiss Federal Councillors in Bern about cooperation between Switzerland and UNHCR, the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees, conditions in Libya, as well as the situation of Syrian refugees.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2018

- January** ○ **NORWAY:** On 10 January, the Parliament decided that the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) must follow the Convention of the Rights of the Child when processing asylum applications of unaccompanied and separated children. UDI must follow the convention's requirements for a thorough, comprehensive and individual assessment of the best interest of the child in each individual case.
- February** ○ **FRANCE:** A [new immigration and asylum bill](#) was presented to the National Assembly on 21 February. UNHCR issued a [press release](#) with its [recommendations](#) on the new bill, welcoming the introduction of a four-year residence permit for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and stateless persons, as well as the plan to extend family reunification. However, UNHCR emphasizes the need to ensure a fair and equitable asylum system, including for accelerated procedures, by providing legal, social and medical support throughout the asylum process. The draft law has generated criticism, including by French prominent institutions such as the State Council, "The Defender of Rights" and the National Court of Asylum, which have been on strike, with immigration lawyers also raising concerns over aspects of the draft law. Some workers at the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People (OFPRA) equally protested on 21 February against what they consider "a departure from France's tradition of asylum"
- March** ○ **SERBIA:** On 22 March, the Serbian Parliament adopted a new Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, as well as new laws on Foreigners and on the Protection of State Borders. All three new laws will be relevant for managing the refugee and migration situation. The new Asylum Law, for example, aligns Serbian legislation to international and EU standards by including an improved refugee definition and enhanced provisions for unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking children. UNHCR welcomed the entering into effect of the Laws through a [press release](#).
- April** ○ **GERMANY:** On 16 April, in a [press release](#) regarding ongoing reforms to a Common European Asylum System (CEAS), UNHCR warned against outsourcing responsibility for refugee protection. "This does not help the refugees or Europe," said Dominik Bartsch, UNHCR representative in Germany. "We welcome that Europe is seeking a collaborative, functioning asylum concept," says Bartsch. "The federal government should not make the mistake of restricting protection and outsourcing to third countries. This may save costs in the short term, but in the long run it is the most expensive, least secure and most inhuman solution."
- May** ○ **HUNGARY:** UNHCR [urged](#) the Government of Hungary to withdraw a package of laws to be introduced in the Hungarian Parliament that would significantly restrict the ability of NGOs and individuals to support asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR is seriously concerned that these proposals, if passed, would deprive people who are forced to flee their homes of critical aid and services, and further inflame tense public discourse and rising xenophobic attitudes. "UNHCR appeals to Hungary to remain committed to protecting refugees and asylum-seekers, including by facilitating the essential role and efforts of qualified civil society organizations," said Pascale Moreau, Director of UNHCR's Europe Bureau. "Without their work, many refugees and asylum-seekers will inevitably suffer serious hardship as they would be deprived of important services such as medical and psycho-social care, housing, education, employment, access to information and legal aid."
- June** ○ **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:** As a result of the increased number of refugees and migrants arriving in the country as well as many trying to move back and forth and trying to move onwards, the humanitarian situation in Una Sana Canton in the north of the country, was particularly challenging. Over 3,800 refugees and migrants were estimated to be in the canton, with informal settlements being established in Bihać and outside Velika Kladuša, in the immediate vicinity of the Croatian border. Living and sanitary conditions in the informal sites were poor and some security incidents took place, including a Moroccan national stabbed to death. With few people successful in moving on to Croatia, and with more people arriving to the area, the numbers in these sites increased and reached 24,100 at year end.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2018 CONTINUED

- July** ○ **THE NETHERLANDS:** On 2 July the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment introduced the new integration policy to be fully implemented by 2020. Unlike the current policy where refugees choose their own civic integration course, municipalities will oversee and assist with the integration process, by setting up a personal integration plan for refugees, which includes language courses, rent and costs for insurance. Dutch language requirements were raised from A2 (advanced beginners) to B1 (early intermediate level), in order to increase employment opportunities.
- August** ○ **GREECE:** The situation on Lesbos' Moria, where 7,000 people were living in dreadful conditions at a RIC intended for 2,000, created serious concern. A quarter of them are children. Media reported on the physical and mental health effects of Moria's conditions on refugees, and on children attempting suicide. UNHCR [urged](#) Greece to address overcrowded reception centres on Aegean islands by transferring those eligible to the mainland, by increasing capacity in the mainland to host them and by improving reception centres and providing alternative accommodation for the most vulnerable. UNHCR also urged the Government to strengthen efforts to overcome administrative and logistical delays and deliver previous commitments to decongest the RICs on the islands, and to consider extraordinary measures including by working closely with civil society and non-governmental organizations in certain areas such as delivering health care.
- September** ○ **SPAIN:** UNHCR [applauded](#) Spain and Haiti's landmark decisions to join international agreements to address statelessness, a situation faced by millions of people deprived of basic rights because they are not considered as nationals by any State. Spain, which was already party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, adhered to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness on 25 September. The country also established a national statelessness status determination procedure in 2001 and has amended its legislation to help avoid new statelessness cases.
- October** ○ **ITALY:** On 04 October, the President of the Republic signed a new law decree on migration and security in Italy. The new decree came into force the following day and was subsequently converted into law. UNHCR [expressed](#) concerns that the decree concurrently deals with asylum and security, and the fact that some provisions of the decree appear in contrast with international refugee law and risk weakening protection guarantees especially for people with specific needs. The new decree also introduced specific grounds for special protection but repealed humanitarian protection.
- November** ○ **UKRAINE:** UNHCR launched its winterization activities, targeting with coal and cash distribution 3,247 of the most vulnerable displaced and other conflict-affected households in areas near the 'contact line' in eastern Ukraine. To celebrating four years since the launch of the global campaign to eradicate statelessness, on 5 November UNHCR gathered representatives of the Ukrainian Government, Members of Parliament, partner NGOs, civil society activists and Embassies in an event entitled Eradicating Statelessness in Ukraine: Achievements and Challenge. The highlight of the conference was discussion of a draft law to establish a Stateless Determination Procedure for Ukraine (draft law #9123). In east Ukraine, UNHCR continued protection monitoring visits in Khutir Vilnyi of Zolote4, which saw the escalation of military activities with six shelters damaged and one destroyed by shelling. Through the NGO partner Proliska, the affected households received individual protection assistance in the form of cash, winterization support and distribution of various non-food items, including shelter emergency kits.
- December** ○ **RESCUE AT SEA:** on last day of 2018, UNHCR [urged](#) rapid solution for refugees stranded on Mediterranean Sea. In 2019, there is a critical need to end the current boat-by-boat approach, and for States to implement a regional arrangement that provides shipmasters with clarity and predictability on where to disembark refugees and migrants rescued on the Mediterranean.

REFUGEE STORIES

Syrian refugee baker rises to the challenge in Germany

By Josie Le Blond in Eberswalde



Mohamad Hamza Alemam had never tasted German bread until he set foot in Björn Wiese's bakery. From that moment on he was hooked. Now a trainee sales assistant, the 23-year-old Syrian hopes to learn the secrets of German breadmaking and one day take them home with him.

"I love that there are so many different types of bread here," says Mohamad, during a break at the Privatbäckerei Wiese bakery in Eberswalde, in north-eastern Germany. "When I go back to Syria one day, I hope to take a little bit of this German culture, this German bread, with me. Maybe I'll open a German bakery there."

It was two years ago when master baker Björn first hit upon the idea of training and employing newcomers in his chain of three bakeries. "We wanted to bring people together through food," says Björn, 46, who belongs to the third generation of bakers in his family. "Of course, employing people from different culture to your own can be hard work sometimes, but it's doable." Now a full-time member of the team, Mohamad is learning how to run the shop and cafe, as well as the basics of breadmaking in Björn's on-site bakery.

"This traineeship means I can build a life here," says Mohamad. "It means so much to me to have a secure future."

For Björn, seeing the difference he can make in the lives of employees like Mohamad makes all the hard work worth it. It is a message he would like to pass on to other business owners.

It is the commitment of business owners like Björn Wiese – as well as mayors, volunteers and other community leaders – that helps to promote integration in many parts of Germany.

