EUROPE MONTHLY REPORT

© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

Maya Ghazal, 20, pictured before her first solo flight, at The Pilot Centre, in Denham, United Kingdom.

TRENDS AND KEY FIGURES

MEDITERRANEAN ROUTES[1]: 123,700 refugees and migrants arrived via the three Mediterranean routes in Europe in 2019. This represents a 13% decrease compared to the numbers in 2018 (141,500). In December 2019, 11,100 refugees and migrants arrived via these routes, which is a 21% decrease compared to November 2019.

GREECE: 74,600 refugees and migrants arrived in Greece in 2019. This is an increase of 48% compared to 2018 and of 151% compared to 2017. Arrivals in Greece peaked in September 2019 with 12,500 and have since then been declining. However, the monthly arrivals in the last quarter of 2019 were still significantly higher than the same period of the previous three years. In December 2019 alone, some 7,600 people arrived, (6,200) by sea and (1,400) by land. This is a 90% increase when compared to December 2018 and more than three times the arrivals in December 2017. In 2019, 40% of arrivals were from Afghanistan and 27% were from the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria).

At the end of 2019, UNHCR estimated the number of refugees and migrants in Greece at 112,300. The Greek islands hosted 41,100 refugees and migrants, of which 36,400 were living in the five Reception and Identification Centres (RICs). This is six times more than the centres' total capacity of 5,400 people. More details can be found in the UNHCR Greece December Factsheet.

SPAIN: In 2019, some 32,500 refugees and migrants arrived in Spain, a 50% decrease from 2018 (65,400). After a peak of 4,600 arrivals in January 2019, the highest number of arrivals this year was reported in October (4,000). In December, 2,800 people reached Spain. Arrivals

Mediterranean
123,700
arrivals in 2019

1,319
estimated dead/missing in 2019*

Greece	**Italy**
# 74,600	# 11,500

10,983	9,965	7,555		2,016	1,233	589
Oct	Nov	Dec		Oct	Nov	Dec

Spain	**Malta**
# 32,500	# 3,400

4,020	2,383	2,765		724	386	194
Oct	Nov	Dec		Oct	Nov	Dec

Cyprus
1,700

163	331	107
Oct	Nov	Dec

Data source: UNHCR Operational Portal data.unhcr.org/mediterranean as of 31 December 2019.

were from Morocco (25%), Guinea (16%) and Algeria (16%). More information on 2019 trends can be found in the UNHCR Spain dashboard on sea and land arrivals.

ITALY: In 2019, some 11,500 refugees and migrants arrived by sea in Italy. This is a 51% decrease from arrivals in 2018. In December only, 590 individuals reached Italian shores, compared to 1,230 in November 2019. However it is a 64% increase when compared to December 2018. Top countries of origin in 2019 were Tunisia (23%), Pakistan (10%) and Côte d'Ivoire (10%). More information is available in the UNHCR Italy December dashboard on sea arrivals.

MALTA: The number of arrivals in Malta has increased significantly as a result of disembarkations of people rescued in the Central Mediterranean after departing from Libya. In 2019, some 3,400 refugees and migrants arrived in Malta, more than twice the number recorded in 2018. Most people were from Sudan (39%), Eritrea (7%), and Nigeria (6%).

CYPRUS: In 2019, some 1,700 refugees and migrants arrived in Cyprus by sea, more than twice as many as in 2018 (766). Top countries of origin were Syria, Nigeria and Lebanon. Two boat arrivals in November with more than 120 persons each have put a strain on the first-line reception facility, surpassing its maximum capacity of 350 people and requiring temporary arrangements.

SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE[2]: Some 6,900 people are estimated to have arrived or transited on the way to other countries in December 2019, 42% less than in November. With these, some 121,000 individuals were estimated to have arrived or transited through this region in 2019, a 45% increase compared to 2018.

Data made available to UNHCR indicates that there were over 12,000 asylum applications submitted in the region in 2019. In comparison, over 10,000 applications were submitted in 2018.

UNHCR is working with countries in the region to strengthen their asylum systems, so that people in need of protection can apply for asylum. UNHCR and partners continue to carry out protection monitoring to identify and refer persons with specific needs, while providing counselling to those who wish to ask for asylum in their current location to avoid dangerous onward journeys.

Push-backs continue to be widely reported across the region, including with use of violence.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA continues to host the largest number of migrants and asylum-seekers among the countries in South Eastern Europe. At the end of 2019, these were estimated at 7,200, more than half the asylum-seekers and migrants in the entire region.

Search and rescue operations at sea: In December 2019, after departing from Libya, 607 people were disembarked after interception or rescue, of which 187 were brought back to Libya. In all of 2019, 17,036 persons were intercepted or rescued at sea upon departure from Libya, of which 54% were brought back to Libya. In 2019, NGOs have rescued one third of those disembarked in Europe.

Dead and missing*: In 2019, 1,319 people are believed to have died or gone missing in the Mediterranean, a 42% decrease compared to 2018. Of these, 750 people are believed to have died or gone missing in the Central Mediterranean. In December 2019, some 53 people were reported dead or missing along the Western Mediterranean route. Some 172 deaths have been reported along land routes in 2019. More information in this dashboard.

*Figures of dead and missing are compiled from a variety of sources, including governments and coast guard or navy vessels. Media and civil society are also important sources of information. In addition, UNHCR staff collect information from survivors and family members. Every effort has been made to ensure that all statistical information is verified, given the varying quality and reliability of the data. As a result, these figures represent conservative estimates. The actual number of dead and missing at sea could possibly be higher.

OTHER SITUATIONS IN EUROPE

Turkey **3.9 million**

Refugees and asylum-seekers[3]

Syrian Arab Republic	**3,576,000**
Afghanistan	**172,000**
Iraq	**143,000**
Other nationalities	**57,000**

[3] Source: UNHCR as of 31 December 2019

Ukraine **1.5 million**

Internally displaced[4] and conflict-affected persons[5]

Refugees[6]	**2,600**
Asylum-seekers[7]	**2,300**
Stateless persons[8]	**35,700**

[4] Residing more permanently in government-controlled areas (GCA).
[5] Estimated number of vulnerable, conflict-affected persons living along the 'contact line' in government-controlled areas (GCA) and non-government controlled areas (NGCA).
[4, 5] 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), UNHCR
[6] Refugees, including persons with complementary protection, UNHCR, State Migration Service of Ukraine as of 30/06/2019
[7] UNHCR as of 28/11/2019
[8] UNHCR, State Migration Service of Ukraine as of 30/06/2019

[2] Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Ukraine: Parliament adopted a law instituting a statelessness determination procedure on 5 December.

Luxemburg: 35 refugees arrived from Niger on 4 December, after having been evacuated from Libya through the Emergency Transit Mechanism.

4

6

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Authorities closed the camp in Vučjak and transferred hundreds of people to shelters near Sarajevo. UNHCR and other organizations provided protection support.

3

2

Albania: After a 6.4-magnitude earthquake in November, UNHCR donated relief items that reached 15,000 people.

Croatia: UNHCR expressed concerns about push-back allegations to the authorities and urges the Government of Croatia to investigate the claims.

1

Malta acceded to the 1954 Statelessness Convention.

5

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.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

1 **Albania:** In the aftermath of the 26 November earthquake and in response to a call by authorities, UNHCR donated relief items worth over USD 400,000 that were pre-positioned in the region and immediately available at the onset of the emergency. Items included winterized family-size tents, sleeping bags, tarpaulins and blankets. Some 15,000 affected individuals benefitted from UNHCR's donation. The winterized tents for 1,350 people were particularly needed and used for a variety of purposes, from fully functioning living areas to vital dry storage capacity.

2 **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** The Vučjak camp near the Croatian border, was closed in December. It had hosted hundreds of asylum-seekers and migrants over months, but with the winter weather, the difficult living conditions turned hazardous to the point of reaching a state of emergency. Authorities transfered some 700 people to safe temporary reception centres close to Sarajevo within a few days. UNHCR provided camp dwellers with information ahead of the transfer, and referred unaccompanied and separated children as well as persons with specific needs.

3 **Croatia:** After multiple reports by civil society and legal aid workers about push-backs by law enforcement agents at the border and possible denial of access to asylum procedures, UNHCR expressed its concerns about these allegations to authorities and called for the Government to urgently investigate and assess the claims of violent incidents, reiterating that effective border management is compatible with responding to the rights of asylum-seekers.

Cyprus: On 11 December, UNHCR held the first Refugee Integration Conference in Nicosia for 100 participants from the refugee community, civil society, authorities, and media. The central themes of the conference were the importance of early integration support and the participation and self-representation of refugees, reflected in the fact that half the speakers were refugees and half were women. Authorities presented programmes for 2020, which included consultations with the refugee community. Four thematic workshops resulted in four calls to action on Education and Language, Employment and Vocational Training, Housing and Social Benefits, and Social Inclusion and Discrimination.

Greece: The situation on the islands remains extremely grim for the over 41,000 people staying in the five Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) originally built for 5,400 people. The great majority lives in makeshift shelters and tents. On Lesvos alone, 14,500 people live in the fields surrounding the Moria centre. Risk of fire has increased on all islands, as people improvise heating. In Chios, heavy rains increased the risks of landslide. A cold spell over Greece further worsened the conditions and fuelled the pressure to transfer people from the islands to the mainland. Transfers, however,

are delayed, due to the lack of available housing on the mainland.

The situation is particularly worrisome for the 1,800 unaccompanied children living in the islands' reception centres, as well as the 1,045 children reported homeless or experiencing insecure housing conditions. The 2,035 places in shelters and age-appropriate housing in Greece can only host half of the 5,300 unaccompanied children currently in Greece.

UNHCR reiterated its call for the urgent improvement of living conditions and the decongestion of overcrowded reception centers on the islands, while it continues to support the Government in its refugee response.

In light of the challenges, some actors have announced support measures, like relocation of some asylum-seekers and donations of relief items. The Community of Sant' Egidio, partner in the Humanitarian Corridors initiative, relocated 33 asylum-seekers from Afghanistan, Cameroon and Togo from Lesvos to Rome.

© UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis

Small tents and shacks have been set up by asylum-seekers in what is known as the Olive Grove, an improvised camp adjacent to the Moria Reception and Identification centre on the Greek island of Lesvos.

Italy: Following disembarkations on 29 and 30 November, 285 people were hosted in the Lampedusa hotspot, which has the capacity to accommodate only 96. Reception and living conditions rapidly deteriorated to the extent that lawyers at ASGI (Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration) submitted a request for interim measures to the European Court of Human Rights.

④ **Luxembourg:** A first group of 35 refugees arrived in Luxembourg from Niger on 4 December as part of the country's resettlement pledge for 2018-2019. The refugees had been identified through UNHCR's Emergency Transit Mechanism, established in 2017 to evacuate the most vulnerable refugees who survived detention in Libya and facilitate their access to protection and durable solutions. Thirteen additional refugees are expected to arrive in early 2020.

⑤ **Malta** acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons on 11 December 2019, a decision welcomed by UNHCR as a historic mo-

ment. Malta's accession to the 1954 Statelessness Convention had been announced by the Government at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness during the Office's Executive Committee meeting in October 2019.

The Safi Detention Centre has a capacity for approximately 600 people and remains seriously overcrowded. It hosts over 1,000 migrants and refugees, which aggravates the hardship of persons in prolonged detention. It is estimated that up to 300 people live in a shared area in a courtyard. Limited access to medical care and a lack of access to potable water and communications further compound security risks. Some residents have been staging protests claiming their rights and demanding access to services, which led to incidents and damage to some structures. UNHCR has been raising concerns about security risks and the lack of appropriate living space over the past months.

Portugal: Speaking to an audience of private and public institutions at a roundtable on community sponsorship for resettlement, authorities committed to implement a community sponsorship model, as advocated for by UNHCR and the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative since 2018. The official announcement was made at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva in December.

Turkey: UNHCR supported the Council of Europe and the Istanbul Bar Association in launching the Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) refugee and migrant children course in Istanbul on 3 December. The course is tailored to Turkish legal professionals who wish to improve their knowledge about European and international child protection standards and their application in the Turkish legal context. HELP trainings are carried out by senior rapporteur judges, certified as tutors by the Council of Europe. On 9 December, HELP launched two further online courses in English and Turkish on the European Human Rights protection system in Ankara for 225 trainee judges and prosecutors from the Justice Academy of Turkey. The scope of the HELP online trainings is planned to expand in the future to reach more judges and prosecutors. Press release with further links.

United Kingdom: The Greater London Authority hosted a meeting for local authorities currently supporting refugees who were resettled through programmes for vulnerable persons. UNHCR presented the global resettlement needs in an effort to inspire local authorities to continue receiving refugees and to foster understanding of what a globally diverse programme means to hosting municipalities. UNHCR also engaged with Yorkshire and Humber authorities on 10 December, in a meeting hosted by the Leeds City Council and organised by "Migration Yorkshire".

⑥ **Ukraine:** On 5 December, Parliament adopted a law instituting a statelessness determination

procedure. UNHCR and legal NGO partners had continuously advocated for the adoption of this law, as it provides procedural guarantees and ensures the issuance of biometric identity documents to stateless persons, confirming their legal residence in Ukraine. The law also ensures simplified access to employment.

On 3 December, UNHCR, NGO partner "Right to Protection" and other international organizations discussed with authorities a draft law on facilitating access to pensions for residents of the non-government-controlled areas of Donetska and Luhanska oblasts. Nearly 400,000 people have lost access to their pensions since 2016 due to procedural obstacles. To receive pension payments, elderly persons need to cross from non-government-controlled areas to the government-controlled side every 60 days, facing numerous challenges and delays at entry-exit checkpoints. To ease the crossing for persons with specific needs, UNHCR and NGO partner Proliska set up a shuttle service in August 2019 with two electric cars at the newly repaired bridge at the entry-exit checkpoint in Stanytsia Luhanska. In December, the shuttle service transported 17,640 individuals.

In December, UNHCR and partner Donbas Development Centre completed repairs on 90 apartments inhabited by elderly people and women at risk, which had been damaged by the conflict in and around Donetsk city. Entire buildings now have better insulation to withstand cold winters. Displaced families were able to return to their apartments ahead of the New Year. About 286 apartments were repaired in 2019.

UNHCR Ukraine's Operational Update has more information. Further products are available here.

Shellfire-damaged windows in a building located in Svitlodarsk, Donetsk, Ukraine.

HIGHLIGHT

The Global Refugee Forum

The first Global Refugee Forum took place in December 2019 in Geneva, co-hosted by Switzerland and UNHCR.

© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell
UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi (front-centre, crouching) meets a group of 70 young refugees attending the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva.

Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Germany, Pakistan, and Turkey co-convened this historic event together with UNHCR. Preparing the Forum was a global effort, for which more than 200 States and other entities stepped up as 'co-sponsors' to drive progress in specific areas like burden and responsibility-sharing, education, livelihoods, energy, solutions and protection capacity. More than 3,000 people participated, including Heads of State or Government, the UN Secretary-General, more than 90 officials at the ministerial level or above, and representatives of 55 international organizations, 130 companies and foundations, and 250 civil society organizations, municipalities and academia.

Seventy refugees participated from 22 countries of origin and 30 host countries. The forum demonstrated the importance of keeping refugees at the centre in matters that relate to their lives and futures. A summary of the Forum outcomes and further links can be found here.

The Digital Platform for the Global Compact on Refugees offers stakeholders a space to exchange and showcase best practices.

© UNHCR/Mark Henley
Refugee footballers attending the Global Refugee Forum pose for photographs after a lunch attended by UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

REPORTS AND RESOURCES

Family reunification in the Netherlands

UNHCR launched the report "No family torn apart", calling for a more efficient implementation of family reunification policies.

©UNHCR/Humans of Amsterdam

NO FAMILY TORN APART

Challenges refugees face securing family reunification in the Netherlands and recommendations for improvements

UNHCR acknowledged that the Dutch policy on family reunification is in many aspects one of the more flexible and expansive in Europe. The report reveals, however, that a number of obstacles faced by refugees, their families and authorities constrain the efficiency and fairness of the procedure. More information and a summary of recommendations are available here. To illustrate the importance of effective family reunification policies, UNHCR also launched a new vlog, which shows the life of a Syrian family reunited in the Netherlands.

Employment in Malta

On 3 December, UNHCR launched its report "Working Together" on the employment of refugees and asylum-seekers in Malta. This report aims to assist employers, employees, policymakers, authorities, NGOs and other stakeholders by outlining challenges and opportunities related to refugees in the labour market and providing a number of recommendations, summarised here. The launch event featured a panel discussion with representatives from the Malta Employers Association, the public employment agency "Jobsplus", and the General Workers Union, as well as a protection beneficiary in Malta.

Media coverage of refugees and migrants in Italy

On 17 December, UNHCR's partner "Carta di Roma", an association promoting a Code of Conduct for journalists on refugee and migration issues since 2011, and the Pavia Observatory, an institute for research on mass communications and campaigns, presented their annual report on media coverage of refugee and migration issues in Italy. The report provides insightful findings with regards to the use of the terms "refugee", "migrant" and other related terminology. A brief summary of main findings in Italian is available here.

REFUGEE STORIES

First solo flight shows sky is the limit for refugees

Adapted from article by Matthew Mpoke Bigg in Uxbridge, UK
14 December 2019

Maya Ghazal fled Damascus in 2015, leaving behind her home and dreams of becoming a diplomat. In 2019, just 20 years old, she was about to make her first solo flight as a trainee pilot, a requirement to gain a pilot's license.

When she arrived in the United Kingdom, she and her family were safe but the world saw her as a refugee and several schools turned her down after her arrival. However, Maya persisted and, inspired by the planes taking off and landing at Heathrow, she decided to go for a new dream: study aviation engineering and train to be a commercial pilot.

© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

Maya Ghazal, 20, pictured after her first solo flight, at The Pilot Centre, in Denham, United Kingdom.

At the same time, she worked on developing her skills as a public speaker and began collaborating with UNHCR. Her speeches have impressed audiences in Britain and Europe, especially with her personal story of achievement in the face of adversity. At the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, speaking to an audience of ministers, businesspeople and faith leaders, she promoted the idea that education is a fundamental human right and should be accessible to all, including refugees. Her message is also for refugees: "I want to show people (refugees) what I've been through. I want to (...) tell others that it's going to get better."

Full story available here.

Refugees get traction in Germany's auto industry

Adapted from article by Josie Le Blond in Baunatal, Germany
12 December 2019

© UNHCR/Gordon Welters

Mastura Ekhlas stands in front of the Volkswagen plant where she works.

When Volkswagen offered Mastura Ekhlas a place on a programme that could lead to a permanent job, she knew it was the chance of a lifetime. She had arrived in Germany in 2013 as a refugee from Afghanistan, learnt German and found work in a shop, but she dreamed of a job that would offer her family stability.

In Germany, employers like Volkswagen have set up training programmes for refugees, which provide pay and a skill that can lead to a permanent position. Career prospects can mean more than just an income because the faster refugees find work, the faster they can provide for their families' basic needs and look forward to a future as productive members of society.

Volkswagen launched its programme in 2017 to offer refugees a path to a permanent job by coupling a traditional paid internship with language tuition to help newcomers find their feet in the German workplace. Volkswagen is also part of "Wir Zusammen" (We Together), a network of German companies with similar refugee employment schemes, which is an example of how comprehensive responses help fill gaps in the labour force, all while transforming the lives of refugees.

"It was so difficult at first, starting from zero," said Mastura. "But I knew in my heart that I just had to push on. I put all my strength into getting something more secure." Her determination speaks to the desire of refugees for a better future and illustrates their ability to integrate and contribute to the society they live in.

Full story available here.