

# DESPERATE JOURNEYS

Refugees and migrants entering and crossing Europe via the Mediterranean and Western Balkans routes



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Refugees and migrants from a triple-decker wooden boat await rescue after the vessel carrying over 700 people tipped throwing hundreds into the water. Over 600 people, almost all from Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan, and including 150 unaccompanied children and 10 pregnant women, were rescued by MOAS in the incident, which took place around 30 miles off the Libyan coast on 24 May 2017. Rescuers had to break open the hold to free persons locked below deck. At least 33 people, including children, died in the incident. For more, see [here](#).

Far fewer refugees and migrants entered Europe via the Mediterranean routes than in the first half of 2016, largely due to a drastic decrease in numbers crossing the sea to Greece. The first six months of 2017 saw an increase in the number of refugees and migrants entering Europe via the Central Mediterranean route to Italy, with 83,752 arrivals. However, due to lower arrival levels in July, numbers have remained at a similar level to last year. Arrivals also increased via the Western Mediterranean route to Spain (by 93%) compared to the same period last year. Between January and June 2017, 6,524 entered Spain by sea along with 2,983 by land, amounting to 9,507 arrivals, an average of just over 1,500 per month. Numbers of those arriving in Greece from Turkey by sea (9,286) are 94% lower than in the first half of 2016, in particular compared to the first three months of last year when over 150,000 refugees and migrants arrived by sea in Greece. Overall, the number of refugees and migrants who arrived via the Eastern Mediterranean route (including Bulgaria, Cyprus and the Greek land border with Turkey) in the first six months was 92% lower than in the same period in 2016. With the arrival of the summer season, numbers along all three routes increased in May and June.

Refugees and migrants continue to face grave dangers during their journeys to Europe as well as while travelling through Europe. In recent months, refugees and migrants arriving in Italy have described surviving the deadly desert crossing from Niger,<sup>4</sup> kidnappings, torture and detention in Libya,<sup>5</sup> and the dangerous sea journey, in which 2,171 people are estimated

## KEY FIGURES

January to June 2017

Arrivals:

Eastern Mediterranean route to Greece<sup>1</sup>, Bulgaria and Cyprus **12,549**

Central Mediterranean route to Italy **83,752**

Western Mediterranean route to Spain<sup>2</sup> **9,507**

Most common nationalities<sup>3</sup> **Nigeria: 15%**

**Guinea: 10%**

**Côte d'Ivoire: 9%**

**Bangladesh: 9%**

**Syrian Arab Rep.: 7%**

Dead and missing at sea (estimated)<sup>3</sup> **2,253**

Dead along land routes (reported)<sup>3</sup> **40**

source: [data.unhcr.org/mediterranean](http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean)

<sup>1</sup> Includes estimated arrivals in Greece via the land border with Turkey in June as data for that month was not yet available at the time of publication.

<sup>2</sup> Includes land arrivals as well as arrivals to the Canary Islands.

<sup>3</sup> Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, News comment: [UNHCR shocked at deaths in Sahara desert](#), 2 June 2017; BBC, [Niger army rescues 92 migrants in Sahara Desert](#), 14 June 2017; BBC, [Niger migrants: 52 die during desert crossing](#), 26 June 2017.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, IMPACT and Altai Consulting, [Mixed migration trends in Libya: Changing dynamics and protection challenges](#), July 2017.

to have already died this year along that route compared to 2,470 in the same period last year. Those crossing from Turkey to Greece or Bulgaria have described terrifying night journeys across the short stretch of sea to Greece in which more than 1,200 people have drowned since the start of 2015, being held captive for extortion or else abandoned by smugglers, and being sent back across borders at night by masked police. Many of those arriving in Spain reported hardships during their journeys such as crossing the sea in flimsy inflatable boats or suffering violence while trying to cross the fences at the land border.

These risks do not end once in Europe. Those moving onwards irregularly from Greece and Bulgaria have reported abuses at the hands of smugglers, as well as being beaten, set upon by police dogs and pushed back by some border authorities. Of the 40 reported deaths along land routes in the first six months of 2017, 29 (or 73%) have occurred as refugees and migrants have tried to travel onwards from one European Union (EU) Member State to another. At least three of the deaths were of unaccompanied or separated children (UASC). In February and March this year, unaccompanied and separated children, including those trying to join family members elsewhere in Europe, described to UNICEF and REACH the many dangers they faced during multiple attempts to try to cross from Italy to France,<sup>6</sup> a border region where six people have died since the start of the year, while 20 people have died in eleven separate incidents so far this year while trying to travel onwards irregularly from Greece and Bulgaria.

These desperate journeys show that a different and more comprehensive response is required. This must include

efforts to address the root causes of displacement, and more support to help States receiving and hosting refugees to provide protection and solutions.

Despite some progress in increasing the number of persons able to access safe pathways to Europe, these opportunities are far too few to offer a feasible alternative to risky irregular journeys for people in need of international protection. More needs to be done to enable more refugees to enter legally, including for those trying to join family members already in the EU, rather than having to resort to irregular and dangerous journeys.

With so many lives at risk in the central Mediterranean, enhanced rescue at sea operations undertaken by all actors, including the Italian coastguard, NGOs, Frontex and crews of merchant ships must remain a priority. In 2017, fewer people have died in mass drownings in the first six months than in the same period in 2016 thanks to the quick response of rescuers, including to larger boats carrying up to 700 people at a time, amongst other factors. Those rescued at sea need to be provided with adequate reception facilities and services, including swift access to asylum procedures. Particular measures are also needed to identify and assist those with specific needs, including unaccompanied children and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

More solidarity is needed within the EU to ensure protection and assistance to those arriving in Europe, including through the speeding up, and extension of the relocation scheme, as well as efficient and speedy family reunion and implementation of the humanitarian and discretionary clauses under Dublin.

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF and REACH, [Situation Overview: Unaccompanied and Separated Children in Transit in Ventimiglia](#), February 2017.

## ONE FAMILY'S JOURNEY TO EUROPE

By: *Mirjana Milenkovski*

Abdul\* was a renowned artist in Kabul. In spring 2016, after his work attracted threats from many sides, Abdul, his wife Rukiya and two small daughters decided to leave. It was to be the start of a lengthy journey.

Relying on smugglers to cross borders, they crossed into Iran and then Turkey. There smugglers promised them an easy journey through Bulgaria but it was to be one of the hardest parts of the journey. To cross the border, they walked for nine hours, along slippery back roads in the pouring rain and hiding from anyone they saw, exhausted and with crying children. Rukiya slipped and sprained her ankle but there was no choice but to continue walking.

At last, they reached a house in a village where the smuggler told them to rest, warning them against leaving the house. At this point, the smuggler started to increase his demands for more money, threatening Abdul and his family if they did not comply and pay him \$2,000.

**“They told me that they would take my daughters and we’d never see them again if we fail to pay,”** Abdul recounts while his wife, sitting next to him, breaks down in tears. “I was terrified, beside myself with worry and grief! I hid my tears, so that the



Abdul and one of his daughters speak to UNHCR staff at a reception facility in Serbia. Abdul requested that their faces not be shown to protect their identities.

\* Names changed for protection reasons

children would not realise that something was wrong. And I kept telling myself they should see only determination and courage in their parents.”

Fearing for their safety, the family decided to make their own way onwards. They contacted a ‘guide’ who promised to take them to Serbia, this time demanding €2,500. “The smugglers are ruthless, they size you up and decide on the spot how much they will charge you,” Rukiya says.

In the autumn of 2016, after five nights trying to cross the border irregularly, Abdul’s family and 15 other refugees crossed into Serbia. Traumatized by the journey thus far, their youngest child begged them to stop. So they registered with Serbian authorities and have been accommodated and assisted in a reception facility in Serbia since.

# EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

Syrians and Iraqis comprise around half of arrivals by sea to Greece.

The number of refugees and migrants who travelled via the Eastern Mediterranean route in the first six months was 92% lower than in the same period in 2016.

Over 1,900 refugees and migrants, mostly from Iraq, have crossed by boat from Turkey to Italy since the start of 2017.

Allegations of push-backs and human rights violations in border areas have continued in 2017.

Refugees and migrants continued to travel onwards irregularly, facing multiple dangers, including robberies at the hands of criminal gangs, abuses by smugglers and some state authorities, as well as the risk of death while trying to avoid detection.

In the first six months of 2017, 9,286 refugees and migrants crossed the sea from Turkey to Greece with many in need of international protection. Amongst arrivals during this period, Syrian nationals continued to be the largest group comprising 37%, followed by nationals of Iraqi (13%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (7%), Afghanistan (6%) and Algeria (6%). While the number of crossings between January and April this year was vastly lower (97%) than during the same period in 2016, the number of arrivals in May and June this year was 26% higher than in the same two-month period last year. In the past two months, the number of Syrian and Iraqi arrivals has been higher than for the same two months last year,<sup>7</sup> however at a much lower level than was observed in 2015 and early 2016, while the number of Afghans has dropped. Most arrivals in the first six months of 2017 have been to Chios (33%), followed by Lesbos (29%), Samos (18%), and the South Dodecanese islands (16%).

As of the end of June, 46% of arrivals by sea were male, with 22% women and 32% children. Many Syrians and Iraqis continue to arrive in family groups and 40% of Syrian arrivals since the start of the year have been children, along with 35% men and 25% women. Based on individual interviews conducted by UNHCR and partners, it appears that a number of women, particularly from Africa, crossing to Greece by sea are survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, either in their country of origin or during their journey, and there are concerns that some may be victims of trafficking.

Since the start of the year, 30 refugees and migrants have been reported to have drowned while crossing the sea from Turkey to Greece with most deaths occurring in two incidents.<sup>8</sup> No further deaths were reported in May and June.

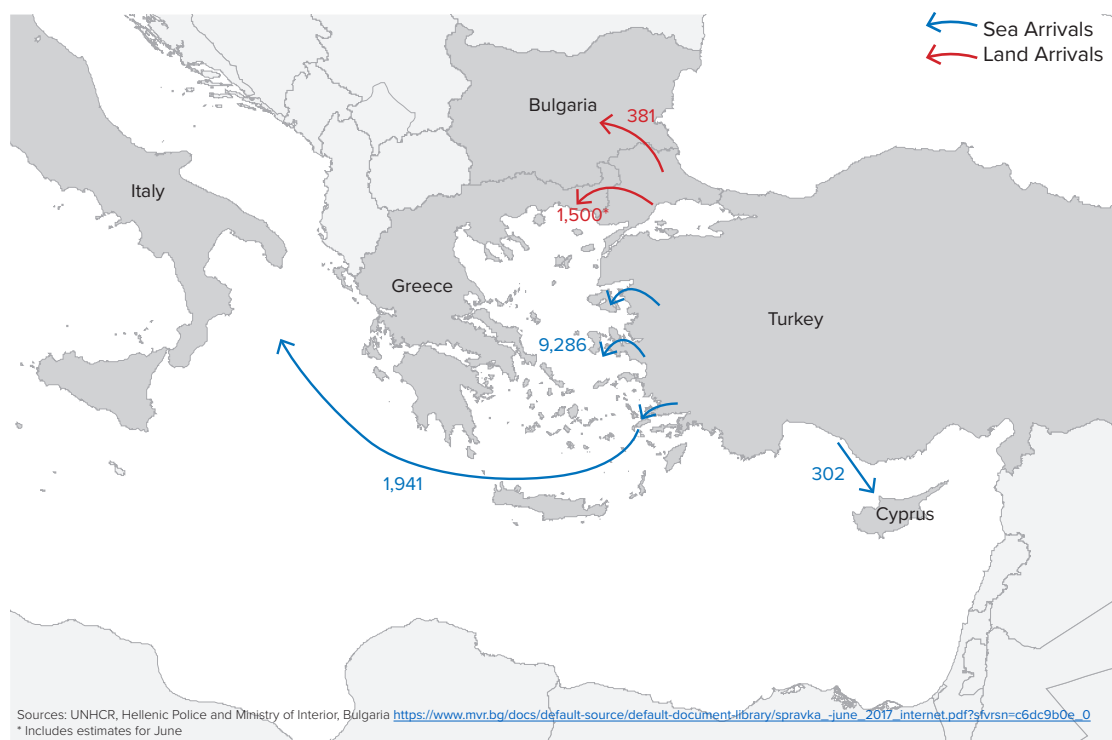
In the first six months of 2017, the Turkish Coast Guard reported intercepting or rescuing 7,651 refugees and migrants.<sup>9</sup> As with arrivals on the

<sup>7</sup> Syrian arrivals have increased 82% to 1,416 in May and June 2017 compared to May and June 2016 and Iraqi arrivals have increased 128% to 687 in May and June 2017 compared to the same period last year.

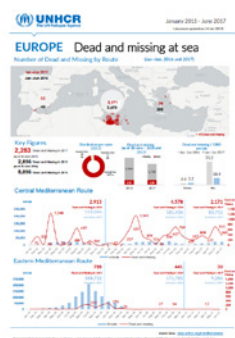
<sup>8</sup> UNHCR, *Desperate Journeys: January to April 2017*, June 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Turkish Coast Guard Command, *Irregular Migration Statistics*, July 2017.

## LAND AND SEA CROSSINGS FROM TURKEY - JAN TO JUN 2017

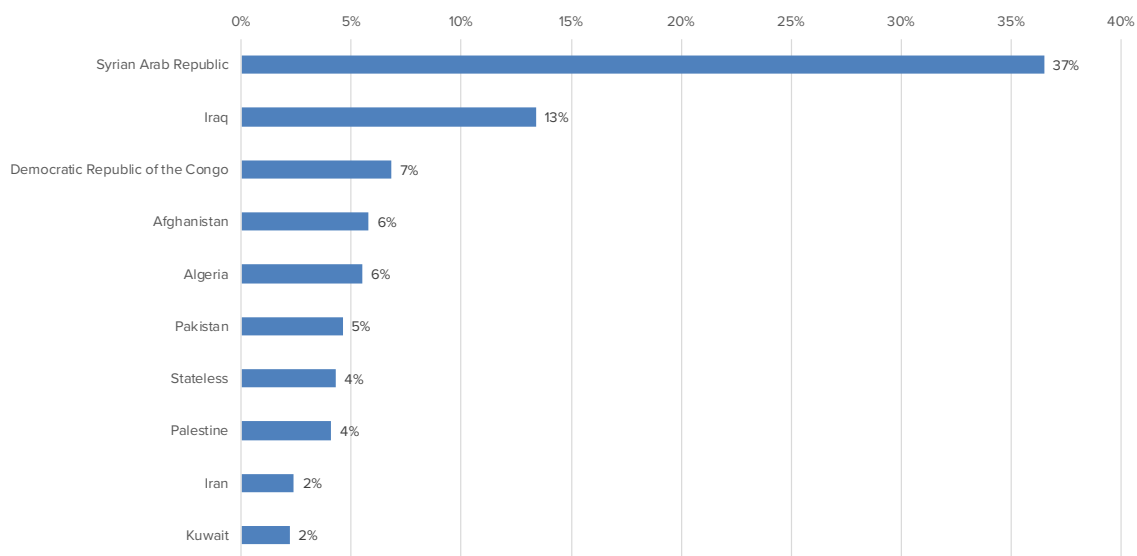


Read more on death and missing in the Mediterranean sea:





## COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OF PRIMARY GROUPS ARRIVING BY SEA TO GREECE - JAN TO JUN 2017



Greek islands in May and June this year, the number of interceptions or rescues by the Turkish Coast Guard in these two months this year has been higher than in the same period last year.

In May and June, more than 1,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Italy by boat from Turkey, a total of 1,941 for the year.<sup>10</sup> So far, the majority of arrivals using this route have been from Iraq with some having indicated arranging their travel whilst in Iraq. Of the 2,323 Iraqis arriving in Europe by sea from Turkey in 2017 by the end of June, 46% arrived in Italy. A group arriving at the end of June reported having departed Iraq just over two weeks prior to arriving in Italy. Many reported paying up to \$6,000 for the journey, far more than the fees paid to cross from Turkey to Greece. Pakistani and Somali nationals comprise the next two largest groups arriving in Italy directly from Turkey and for both, the numbers reaching Italy by sea from Turkey are higher than those reaching Greece by sea from Turkey by the end of June this year. Several Somali nationals have reported traveling to Sudan, then Iran, then Turkey in order to reach Italy, a lengthy, risky and expensive journey. In June, an Iranian man died during the journey from Turkey to Italy after becoming very sick and distressed due to the dire conditions during the six-day voyage.

Additional vessels headed from Turkey to Italy have been intercepted by the Turkish Coast Guard or else have required rescue off the coast of Greece. Some 450 refugees and migrants believed to have been headed to Italy from Turkey have been rescued off the coast of Greece in separate occasions since the start of the year.<sup>11</sup>

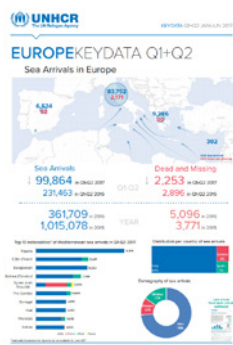
Others departing Turkey by sea continue to cross to Cyprus. While 302 persons mostly from Syria had crossed to Cyprus from Turkey in the first four months of 2017, no further arrivals were recorded in May or June. However, others continued to be intercepted by the Turkish Coast Guard while attempting the crossing including a group of 100

Syrians, of which 35 were children, on 27 June.<sup>12</sup> Many Syrians arriving in Cyprus report crossing irregularly from Turkey to join family members already granted protection in Cyprus, including husbands and fathers. Many Syrians in Cyprus are granted subsidiary protection rather than refugee status and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Cyprus are not eligible for family reunification.

At Turkey's land borders with Europe, the number of refugees and migrants apprehended in Bulgaria has fallen drastically in the past six months with just 192 previously unregistered persons apprehended or intercepted at entry or exit points or in the interior of the country in May and 172 in June. These contributed to a total of 1,461 persons apprehended for being undocumented in Bulgaria in the first six months of 2017, an 80% decrease compared to the same time period last year. Most of those apprehended in Bulgaria since the start of the year have been from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. The reduced apprehensions occurred in a period in which Bulgaria has fenced an extended area of the border. In mid-June, it was reported that only 5km of the intended fenced area are still to be completed.<sup>13</sup> Several push-backs from Bulgaria have also been reported since the start of the year.

In contrast and likely in part due to the increased Bulgarian restrictions, thousands continue to try to cross the land border between Turkey and Greece. Between January and the end of June, the Turkish Land Forces reported intercepting 10,382 persons, amounting to an average of 57 per day. According to Hellenic Police figures, 841 refugees and migrants had crossed from Turkey to Greece irregularly as of the end of May.<sup>14</sup> In June, high numbers of arrivals in Greece's Evros region were reported with around 500 refugees and migrants, mostly from Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, and Afghanistan, arriving in the space of four days. They contributed to an estimated total of 1,500 arrivals via the Turkey-Greece land border

Read more:



<sup>10</sup> UNHCR, [Italy: Sea arrivals dashboard: January to June 2017](#), July 2017.  
<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Ekathimerini, [Italy-bound migrants land on Crete](#), 1 July 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Turkish Coast Guard Command, [Current activities](#), 27 June 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Interior, [https://press.mvr.bg/NEWS/news170617\\_04.htm](https://press.mvr.bg/NEWS/news170617_04.htm), 17 June 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Hellenic Police, [Συλληφθέντες μη νόμιμοι αλλοδαποί, για παράνομη είσοδο & παραμονή, από αστυνομικές και λιμενικές Αρχές](#), June 2017.

in the first six months of 2017. Of those referred to the Evros Reception and Identification Centre since the start of the year, most have been from Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, amongst arrivals since the start of the year, a steady increase has been noted in the number of unaccompanied and separated children from Pakistan with most between the ages of 15 and 17.

In addition to the high number of interceptions by Turkish authorities at the Greece-Turkey land border, UNHCR continues to receive testimonies of people seeking international protection who have been irregularly returned to Turkey. In June, UNHCR issued a statement calling for a thorough investigation by Greek authorities into the allegations of push-backs.<sup>15</sup> Investigations are now proceeding.<sup>16</sup>

No further deaths have been reported during attempts to cross Turkey's land borders in May and June so the number of deaths during border crossings here since the start of the year remains nine, most of whom died during winter.<sup>17</sup>

### Onward Movement from Greece and Bulgaria

Refugees and migrants continued to travel onwards irregularly towards other EU Member States from Greece and Bulgaria in the first six months of 2017, including in efforts to reunify with family members elsewhere in the EU. Those moving on irregularly from Greece and Bulgaria face multiple dangers as they travel towards other EU Member States, including robberies at the hands of criminal gangs, abuses by smugglers and some state authorities, as well as the risk of death while trying to avoid detection. Since the start of the year, 20 of the 40

refugees and migrants reported killed along land routes during attempts to cross borders irregularly have died while trying to move on irregularly from Greece and Bulgaria to another EU Member State. In addition to the deaths previously reported between January and April this year,<sup>18</sup> another nine Afghan and Pakistani nationals died in Bulgaria in a minibus crash. The vehicle was reportedly driven by an unlicensed 16-year-old.<sup>19</sup> In May, a Pakistani national was killed and another severely injured after they fell while trying to board a train in Croatia<sup>20</sup> while in early June, an unknown man was found electrocuted near freight trains in Thessaloniki, Greece after it is believed he tried to hide aboard a train headed to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>21</sup> On 23 June, a 15-year-old Afghan unaccompanied child died and a 13-year-old was severely injured after they jumped out of a moving truck near the Croatia-Serbia border after realizing that it was headed to Belgrade rather than crossing the border.<sup>22</sup>

Of those moving onwards irregularly, most travel from Greece via the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to Serbia or cross directly from Bulgaria to Serbia in order to then try to cross to Hungary, Croatia, or Romania. Other routes onwards from Greece include a land route used by smaller numbers of people via Albania and Montenegro or Kosovo,<sup>23</sup> or with smugglers by boat to Italy, or else by ferry to Italy using false documents or hiding in a vehicle during its embarkation. Since the start of the year, Greek authorities have reported intercepting over 1,300 refugees and migrants attempting to depart the country irregularly by sea.

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR, [UNHCR deeply concerned at reports of informal forced returns from Greece to Turkey](#), 8 June 2017.

<sup>16</sup> The Greek Ombudsman, [Ex officio investigations for the anaesthesiologists and alleged readmissions to Turkey](#), 9 June 2017; Ekathimerini, [Probe under way into claims of pushbacks at Greek border](#), 20 June 2017.

<sup>17</sup> UNHCR, *Desperate Journeys: January to April 2017*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> DW, [Several migrants killed in smuggler bus crash in Bulgaria](#), 5 June 2017.

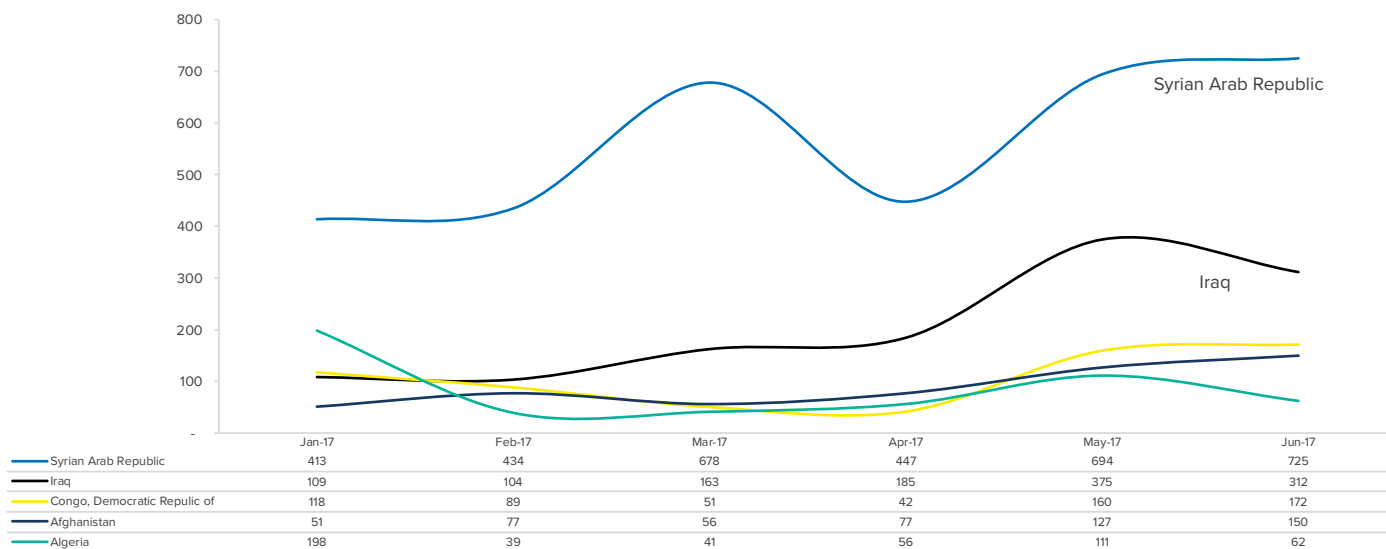
<sup>20</sup> Are You Syrious, [Daily Digest](#), 23 May 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Δημοσιογραφικό Συγκρότημα ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑ, [Μετανάστης έπεσε νεκρός από ηλεκτροπληξία στη Διαλογιά](#), 2 June 2017.

<sup>22</sup> UNHCR, [Serbia update: 19-25 June 2017](#), June 2017.

<sup>23</sup> References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

## MONTHLY SEA ARRIVALS IN GREECE BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN - JAN TO JUN 2017



Arrival figures for Greece are provided by the Hellenic Coast Guard and Police. All figures are provisional and subject to change.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNHCR staff reported the arrival of over 2,400 refugees and migrants thought to have crossed from Greece between April and June.<sup>24</sup> Most of those recorded were men and from Pakistan and Afghanistan. Once in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, most try to transit the country by car with the help of smugglers, although some try to cross the country on foot. UNHCR continues to observe push-backs from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to Greece. More than 660 people, including from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria and Iraq, are reported to have been irregularly returned to Greece over the past three months. Most of those recorded as having been pushed back were from Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also included Syrians and Iraqis. UNHCR staff and partners in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have also continued to document refugees and migrants being pushed back from Serbia. UNHCR staff and partners have noted the return of over 700 persons, mostly Afghans, Pakistanis, Algerians, and Syrians,

from Serbia since the start of the year. Most have been pushed back but a smaller number are thought to be attempting to return irregularly to Greece, including due to the lengthy waiting period for admission to the Hungarian 'transit zones'.

UNHCR and partners in Serbia have recorded the arrival of over 2,500 refugees and migrants since the start of the year.<sup>25</sup> Of those encountered by UNHCR, around 60% have reported arriving via Bulgaria, with 36% reporting crossing via the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and another 4% using other routes. Most of these new arrivals were nationals of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria and 37% were women and children, including over 300 unaccompanied and separated children. As of the end of June, 5,810 refugees and migrants were recorded as being present in Serbia, a 21% decrease from April, with 93% in governmental facilities, the majority waiting for their turn for admission to the two Hungarian 'transit zones', which continue to admit just 10 per week day. Of those in

<sup>24</sup> In the absence of official statistics on irregular migration, UNHCR notes arrival trends based on observations by field staff and partners.

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## MOVEMENT OUT OF TURKEY AND ONWARD MOVEMENT FROM GREECE AND BULGARIA



# A JOURNEY MORE DIFFICULT THAN THE SEA

By: Ljubinka Brashnarska

Noori Shtaat, a 63-year-old electrical engineer, fled Syria in early 2016, following a route his family had already taken several months before to Germany. By the time he reached the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the border with Serbia was closed and he remained in the country for another 16 months waiting to be reunited with his family.

When Noori's family decided to flee their town in Idlib at the end of September 2015, the money they had saved was only enough for six of them to travel so Noori sent his wife, three daughters and two sons ahead while he waited for another opportunity to leave.

"The journey was very difficult and dangerous. We were walking between stones, trees, in water, rain for four or five hours. The night was very dark. We couldn't see in front of us. I fell down many times. I told the others to leave me. I lay down on the ground and I couldn't continue. One man from the group who I didn't know helped me and carried me on his shoulders. It was very difficult, more difficult than the sea."

Once in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Noori registered in the Vinojug Reception and Transit Centre then continued by train to the northern border with Serbia. "We went directly to the border. There police told us to stop and wait. Cars came from UNHCR and other organizations and distributed food. While we were eating, the rain started. The night and the rain and the dark and the cold came," Noori recalled, trying hard not to be overwhelmed by his tears. "There was no choice to either go back to the camp in Tabanovce or to Serbia. I stayed there. After some hours, they brought some tents. I was sitting and I couldn't do anything. The border was closed in front of me. For 20 consecutive days, we stayed at the border and hoped that the border will open."

## "One man from the group who I didn't know helped me and carried me on his shoulders."

Noori was just one of many affected when on 7 March 2016, countries along the Western Balkan route ended their practice of allowing nationals of certain countries, including Syrians, to transit through the country. Despite the prospect of prolonged separation from his family, Noori remained positive. "I said to myself 'I have right to family reunification. I must be patient. That is normal.' Then I started learning German because my family is in Germany. The distance from my family is very difficult. They are also very tired, but technology has helped us stay in touch."

As Noori sought to join his family via a formal application for family reunification, a further problem emerged. As he had never thought of leaving Syria, he did not own a passport. Fortunately, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia issued him a temporary passport in order to be able to travel and reunite with his family. Soon after his interview, news arrived that Noori's visa had been granted and he would travel to Germany in July.

Although happy to be joining his family, Noori had praise for the country which was his home for over a year. "I would like to thank [the former Yugoslav Republic of] Macedonia because it protected us and we live here well. Everything is fine. And it gave me the passport, which is more important."

Noori's family have been settling into life in Germany. "Every one of my five children knows what they want to do – get a job, go to college, to school. My oldest daughter



A perfect host, Noori offered us some kaek he made himself in the shared kitchen of the Vinojug Reception and Transit Centre to treat everyone for having received a passport. 12 July 2017, Vinojug Reception and Transit Centre, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Ragad, who is a civil engineer, is starting an internship in a company so that she could work there. A week ago, Ragad passed her language exam and she was the best, so I am happy." With their prolonged separation finally at an end, Noori and his family can start to rebuild life as a family once more.





An Afghan mother and her daughter are reunited in Bulgaria this year after being separated during a border crossing attempt. The family remained apart for three months while UNHCR and the respective authorities worked to secure their reunion.

governmental facilities, 80% were from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria and 52% were women and children. Only 151 persons have so far applied for asylum in Serbia this year with others reporting concerns over lengthy and unreliable asylum procedures, limited employment and integration prospects, as well as a lack of existing family and community ties.

In light of the very limited numbers able to enter Hungary legally each day, many attempt to enter Hungary or other states neighbouring Serbia irregularly. Since the start of the year, Hungary has reported apprehending 3,958 people on its territory and returning them to the other side of the fence at the Serbian border and UNHCR Serbia and its partners have received multiple accounts of people being denied access to asylum procedures as well as allegations of violence by border authorities. Others try to move from Serbia to Croatia or Romania. Croatian officials have reported the irregular entry of 949 persons since the start of the year, most of whom entered from Serbia. However, UNHCR Serbia and its partners have also received reports of more than a thousand refugees and migrants pushed back from Croatia since the start of the year with many alleging they were denied access to asylum procedures and some reporting violence by border authorities.<sup>26</sup> Romanian authorities have recorded the irregular entries of 1,190 refugees and migrants crossing from Serbia in the first six months of 2017, with numbers dropping considerably in May (197) and June (12) from the 609 recorded as entering from Serbia in April. At the same time, since April UNHCR and partners in Serbia have consistently received reports of alleged push-backs from Romania, including allegations of violence by border authorities.<sup>27</sup>

In the first six months of the year, 1,440 asylum-seekers were granted admission to Hungary via the two 'transit zones', an average of 240 per month. Asylum-seekers entering Hungary via the 'transit zones' are automatically detained for the duration of their asylum processing. In March, UNHCR noted that Hungary's new asylum law violated Hungary's obligations under international and EU laws and would have a significant impact on women, children and men.<sup>28</sup> The European Commission is following up on the infringement procedure on account of the amendments to Hungary's asylum law.<sup>29</sup>

Asylum-seekers, including families and unaccompanied children, arriving in Hungary via the 'transit zones' have recounted to UNHCR lengthy journeys of up to 14 months and multiple hardships they have endured on the way. Some have been held hostage by smugglers demanding additional payments and being provided with very limited food, endured lengthy journeys of up to 20 hours on foot at a time, and been beaten by police and pushed back across borders, sometimes more than once.

Of those attempting to depart from Bulgaria, Bulgarian authorities have intercepted 1,880 refugees and migrants at exit points in the first six months of 2017, 88% of whom were intercepted at the Bulgaria-Serbia border. Of all of those intercepted, only 221 had not been previously registered by Bulgarian authorities. Most of those intercepted at exit points have been from Afghanistan. Others moving onwards from Bulgaria try to cross to Romania and since the start of the year, Romanian authorities have recorded the irregular entry of 68 refugees and migrants from Bulgaria.

26 UNHCR, [Serbia Monthly Snapshot – May 2017](#), June 2017; UNHCR, [Serbia Monthly Snapshot – June 2017](#), July 2017.

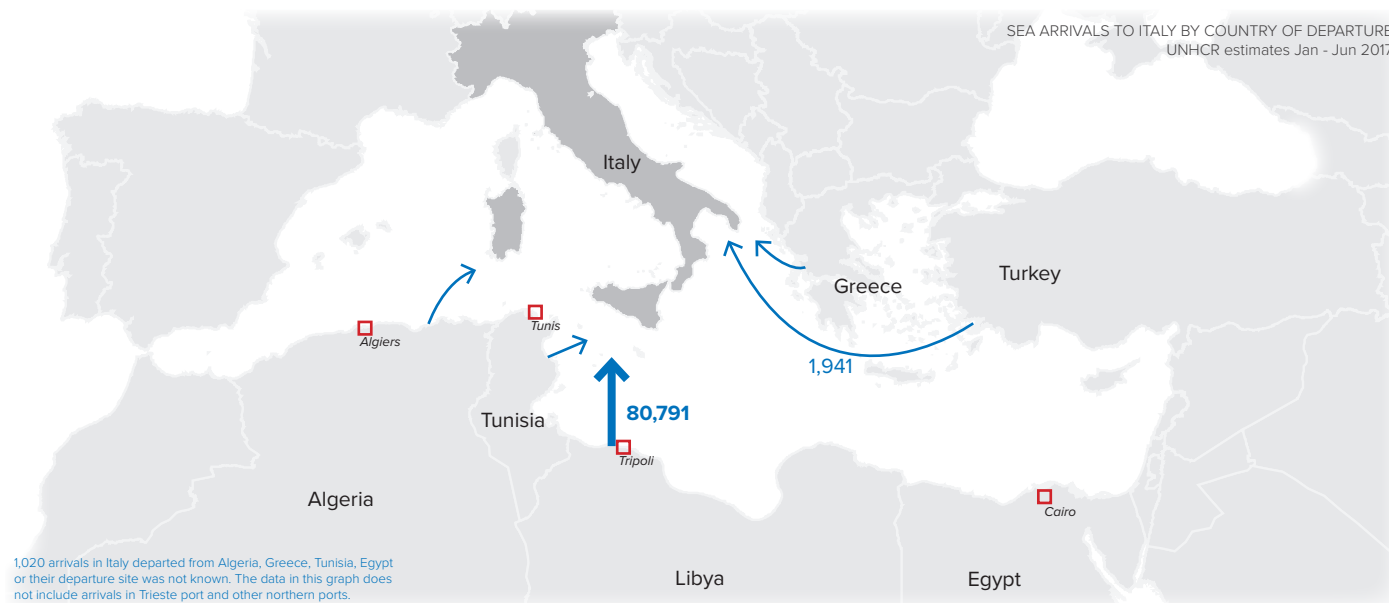
27 Ibid.

28 UNHCR, [UNHCR deeply concerned by Hungary plans to detain all asylum seekers](#), 7 March 2017.

29 European Commission, [Commission follows up on infringement procedure against Hungary concerning its asylum](#), 17 May 2017.



# CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE



Many refugees and migrants crossing the sea to Italy have overcome great dangers and abuse along the route, such as the harsh desert crossing, detention, torture, and violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.

The trend of high numbers of unaccompanied children arriving in Italy continued with 11,406 UASC arrivals in this period, 14% of all arrivals.

Those crossing the central Mediterranean include people in need of protection. Eurostat data from the first quarter of 2017 shows that the average rate of protection, including humanitarian status, granted to the top 10 nationalities that arrived in Italy in the first six months of 2017 was 34% in the EU+ region.

NGOs continue to play a critical role in saving lives at sea and were responsible 37% of the rescues conducted in the first five months of 2017.

The number of refugees and migrants that crossed the central Mediterranean from North Africa in the first half of 2017 rose 19% compared to the same period last year. However, lower numbers crossing the sea from Libya in July meant that the number of arrivals in Italy in the first seven months of 2017 remained at a similar level to the same period in 2016. Persons arriving in Italy continue to report having overcome multiple hardships during their journeys including dangerous desert crossings,<sup>30</sup> and widespread human rights abuses in Libya.<sup>31</sup> Many women and girls, and some men and boys, are reported to have suffered sexual violence at some point during their journey, including in detention in Libya, at police or army checkpoints during the journey, or at the hands of smugglers and traffickers while travelling to or in Libya. UNHCR continues to hear reports of abuses in detention and persons kidnapped or detained for ransom. In June, UNHCR and IOM released a joint statement after a video was circulated showing around 260 Somali and Ethiopian nationals held captive in Libya and reporting horrific abuse by their captors to extract ransom payments.<sup>32</sup> UNHCR has stepped up its assistance in Libya during a visit by High Commissioner, Filippo Grandi, the newly-appointed Special Envoy to the Central Mediterranean Situation, Vincent Cochetel, and

the Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Amin Awad, to the country in May.<sup>33</sup>

Research by the University of Warwick<sup>34</sup> and the MEDMIG project<sup>35</sup> suggests that many of those who ultimately end up crossing the central Mediterranean to Italy may not intend to do so when they leave their countries of origin. In the two studies, some set off with no clear destination in mind or an alternative destination but conditions in countries along the way encouraged them to keep moving onwards. Others had initially fled to a country in the region seeking international protection but ultimately decided to move on because of lack of effective protection and assistance, while some of those who have crossed to Europe still had no intention to cross the sea even up to the time of departure but were forced into boats, either against their will or without knowing what was happening, sometimes after asking employers for their money. Similarly, only 46% of the 720 unaccompanied and separated children interviewed by UNICEF and REACH in Italy between December 2016 and May 2017 left home with the intention of crossing to Europe.<sup>36</sup>

30 UNHCR, News comment: UNHCR shocked at deaths in Sahara desert.

31 UN Security Council, [Final report of the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973 \(2011\)](#), 1 June 2017; United Nations Support Mission in Libya and OHCHR, [Detained and Dehumanised](#), 13 December 2016.

32 IOM, [Facebook video circulates showing 260 Somali and Ethiopian Migrants and Refugees Abused, Held against their Will by Gangs in Libya](#), 15 June 2017.

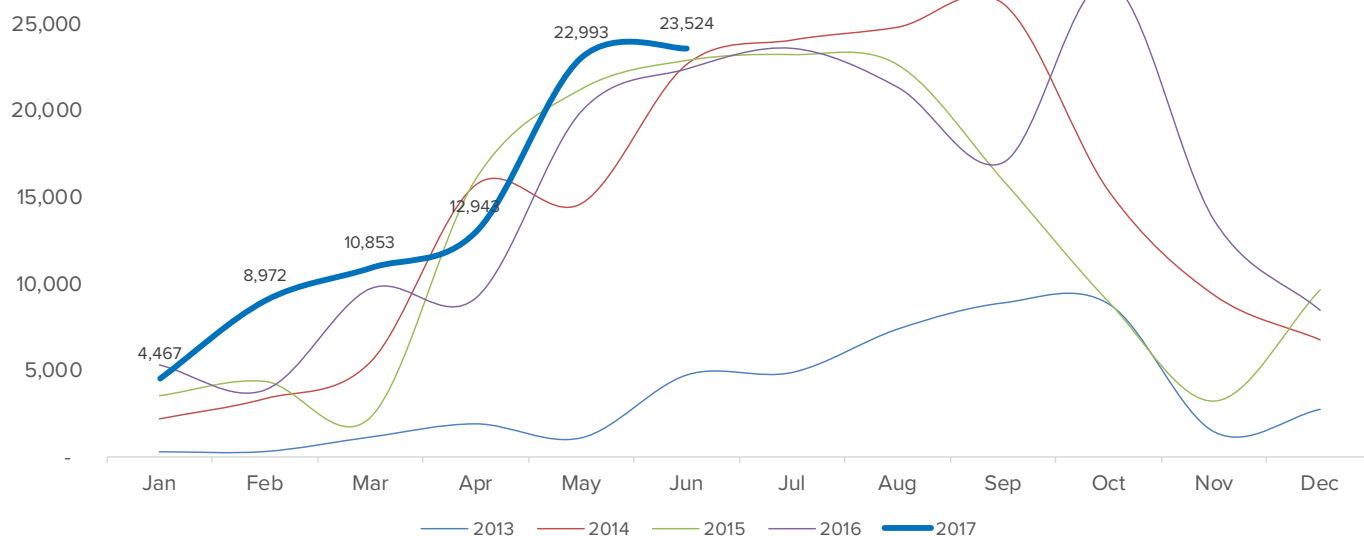
33 UNHCR, [As Libya crisis deepens, UNHCR chief steps up assistance](#), 22 May 2017.

34 V. Squire, A. Dimitriadi, N. Perkowski, M. Pisani, D. Stevens, N. Vaughan-Williams, [Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat: Mapping and Documenting Migratory Journeys and Experiences](#), Final Project Report, 4 May 2017.

35 McMahon, S. and Sigona, N. [Boat migration across the Central Mediterranean: drivers, experiences and responses](#), MEDMIG Research Brief No.3, 3 September 2016.

36 UNICEF and REACH, [Children on the move in Italy and Greece](#), July 2017.

## MONTHLY SEA ARRIVALS TO ITALY 2013 - JUNE 2017



Off the coast of Libya, the departure point for approximately 96% of those arriving in Italy, the tragedy continues to unfold with NGOs, and sometimes merchant vessels, filling gaps in search and rescue capacity. Since the start of the year, as of the end of May,<sup>37</sup> NGOs contributed 37% of the rescues in 2017 compared to 6% in the same period in 2016. Merchant vessels contributed 15% of rescues in the first five months of 2017 (including 28% of rescues in April) compared to 14% in the same period in 2016.<sup>38</sup> While merchant vessels play a valuable role in helping save lives in the absence of other vessels, reliance on the intervention of such vessels is not a substitute for the presence of trained search and rescue actors. In the past months, several incidents have highlighted the need for increased resources dedicated to search and rescue in the central Mediterranean.

The high number of deaths at sea continues with an estimated 686 people dying in the central Mediterranean in May and another 300 in June, contributing to an estimated total of 2,171 in the central Mediterranean in the first six months of 2017.<sup>39</sup> As of the end of June, there have been 16 incidents in which 50 or more people are thought to have lost their lives at sea this year<sup>40</sup> but there have been no mass drownings of over 200 persons so far this year, including due to the quick response of rescuers.<sup>41</sup> As a result, compared to the same period in 2016, the number of deaths has dropped by 12%. The rate of deaths in the central Mediterranean for the first six months of 2017 was one for every 39 who reached Italy compared to one for every 28 in the same period in 2016.

In the first six months of the year, the Libyan Coast Guard has rescued or intercepted 8,165 refugees

and migrants at sea. In May and June, the Libyan Coast Guard conducted several interceptions in international waters, including two incidents in which the coast guard intervened once a rescue by an NGO had already been initiated. Video footage from one incident on 10 May appears to show a coast guard vessel performing a dangerous manoeuvre across the path of an NGO rescue vessel<sup>42</sup> as well as the captain of the Libyan vessel pointing a firearm at the persons on the boat being rescued.<sup>43</sup> In another incident on 23 May, Libyan Coast Guard personnel allegedly fired shots into the air during the course of a rescue and took personal items from persons on an inflatable boat, prompting many of those on board the boat to jump in the water in panic where they were later rescued by an NGO vessel.<sup>44</sup>

Between January and June, most arrivals by sea in Italy were from Nigeria (17%), Bangladesh (10%), Guinea (9%), Côte d'Ivoire (9%), and The Gambia (6%). Whilst the number of Nigerians, Guineans and Ivoirians continue to increase in accordance with typical seasonal trends, the number of Bangladeshi arrivals dropped in June to less than half the number of arrivals in May. This follows a move by Mitiga airport in Tripoli to ban entries by several nationalities including citizens of Bangladesh.<sup>45</sup> Although still relatively small compared with the number of arrivals by other nationalities, Syrian arrivals to Italy by sea have increased significantly to 1,601 in the first six months of 2017 compared to 195 in the same period in 2016. Some Syrian arrivals reported residing in Libya for a long time and departing to Italy on account of the deteriorating security situation in Libya. Others reported leaving from the Middle East (Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and Jordan) to Sudan before travelling onward to Libya and then Italy.

Eurostat data shows that in the first quarter of 2017, the average rate of protection by nationality, including humanitarian status, granted to the 10 most common nationalities that arrived in Italy in the first six months of 2017<sup>46</sup> was 34% in the EU+ region, with a recognition rate for refugee status or subsidiary

Read more about sea arrivals to Italy:

37 Italian Coast Guard, [Attività S.A.R. \(Search and Rescue\) nel Mediterraneo Centrale – Maggio 2017](#), July 2017.

38 Data for rescues in June was not yet available at the time of publication.

39 UNHCR, [Europe: Dead and missing at sea](#), July 2017.

40 UNHCR, [World Refugee Day – Reports of three new shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea, 20 June](#), 20 June 2017; UNHCR, [News comment on latest shipwrecks on Mediterranean Sea](#), 11 June 2017; UNHCR, [Twenty feared dead in latest Mediterranean tragedy](#), 16 May 2017; UNHCR, [Update on two shipwrecks in the Central Mediterranean](#), 9 May 2017.

41 According to UNHCR figures, between January and June 2016, 1,885 people are thought to have drowned in five incidents in which the number of persons who died was over 100. Of those incidents, all involved casualties of over 200 persons and two involved 500 or more deaths. In the same period in 2017, 1,080 people are thought to have died in eight incidents in which 100 or more people died. Of these, the largest number of deaths was in an incident in January when 176 people are thought to have died.

42 Sea Watch, [Libyan navy is risking lives of Sea-Watch crew and refugees during illegal return operation](#), 10 May 2017.

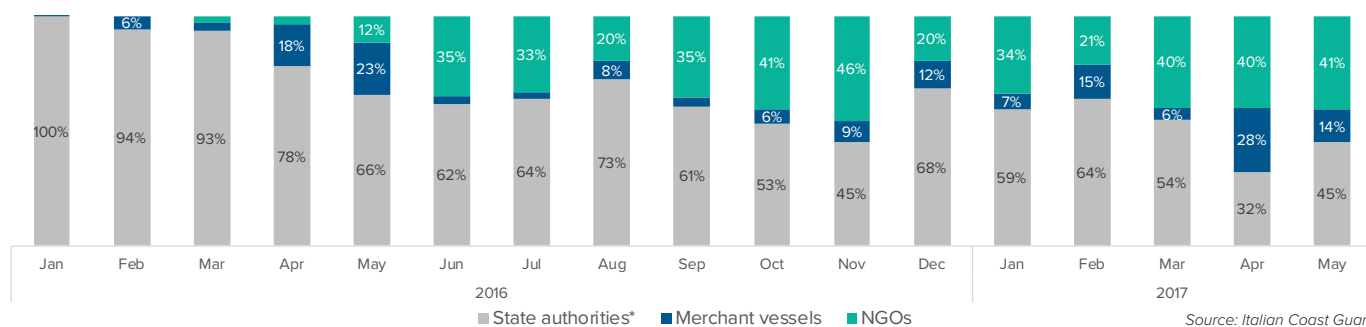
43 Spiegel TV, [Sea Watch gegen libysche Küstenwache](#), May 2017.

44 MSF, [MSF accuses Libyan coastguard of endangering people's lives during Mediterranean rescue](#), 24 May 2017.

45 Libyan Express, [Mitiga airport authorities ban entries of five countries' nationals to Tripoli](#), 8 May 2017.

46 Nationals of Nigeria, Bangladesh, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Eritrea, Morocco, and Sudan.

## PROPORTION OF RESCUES IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN - JAN 2016 to MAY 2017



\* Includes Italian Coast Guard and Navy, vessels deployed as part of Frontex's Operation Triton and EUNAVFOR Med's Operation Sophia, as well as other military vessels

protection of approximately 22%. In Italy, of the 37,213 asylum decisions issued by the Territorial Commissions since the start of the year, 42% were granted some form of protection, including humanitarian status, with 9% granted refugee status and 9% granted subsidiary protection.

Most arrivals in Italy in the first half of 2017 were men but the trend of high numbers of unaccompanied children amongst arrivals continued, with 11,406 UASC arrivals in this period or 14% of all arrivals. As of the end of June, most UASC were from Guinea, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia and Nigeria and most were boys between the age of 16 and 17.<sup>47</sup> Assessments conducted earlier this year with UASC from Guinea, The Gambia and Nigeria who had crossed the sea to Italy showed that only between 48% (of the Guineans) and 58% (of the Gambians) of the groups interviewed had initially intended to come to Europe when they left their country of origin. They had travelled for between 12 and 14 months since leaving home until they reached Europe. Reasons for leaving home primarily varied between persecution, the desire for better economic opportunities, and problems or violence at home. Most reported spending more than a month in Libya with 66% of the Guinean and Nigerian children interviewed reporting being kidnapped and imprisoned.<sup>48</sup>

Although only 11% of arrivals were women, the proportion amongst Nigerians was far higher (30%). The proportion of women amongst Ethiopians and

Somalis (both 22%) was also higher than amongst others. Concerns about the trafficking of women to Europe via the Central Mediterranean route, particularly of Nigerians, continue.<sup>49</sup> While many Nigerian women have been recruited directly from Nigeria, others arriving in Italy are still vulnerable to recruitment by trafficking networks.<sup>50</sup>

As of the end of June, over 200,000 refugees and migrants are estimated to be in reception centres across Italy. While over 72,700 people have applied for asylum in Italy since the start of the year, others still continue to try to depart irregularly. Since the start of the year, eight refugees and migrants were reported to have died while trying to cross from Italy into neighbouring countries irregularly. Six of the eight deaths occurred in the vicinity of Ventimiglia at the border with France, contributing to a total of at least 12 deaths at this border in the past year.

Some UASC have been sleeping rough near the river in Ventimiglia.<sup>51</sup> In an assessment earlier this year by REACH and UNICEF with UASC in Ventimiglia, children described sleeping on the street and repeated attempts to cross the border by hiding on trains or taking the dangerous route through the mountains<sup>52</sup> where a Sudanese man was killed earlier this year.<sup>53</sup>

49 IOM, [UN Migration Agency Issues Report on Arrivals of Sexually Exploited Migrants, Chiefly from Nigeria](#), 21 July 2017.

50 PRI, [Nigerian women are being trafficked into Sicily at a rapidly increasing rate](#), 18 May 2017.

51 UNHCR, [Europe: Monthly Report](#), June 2017.

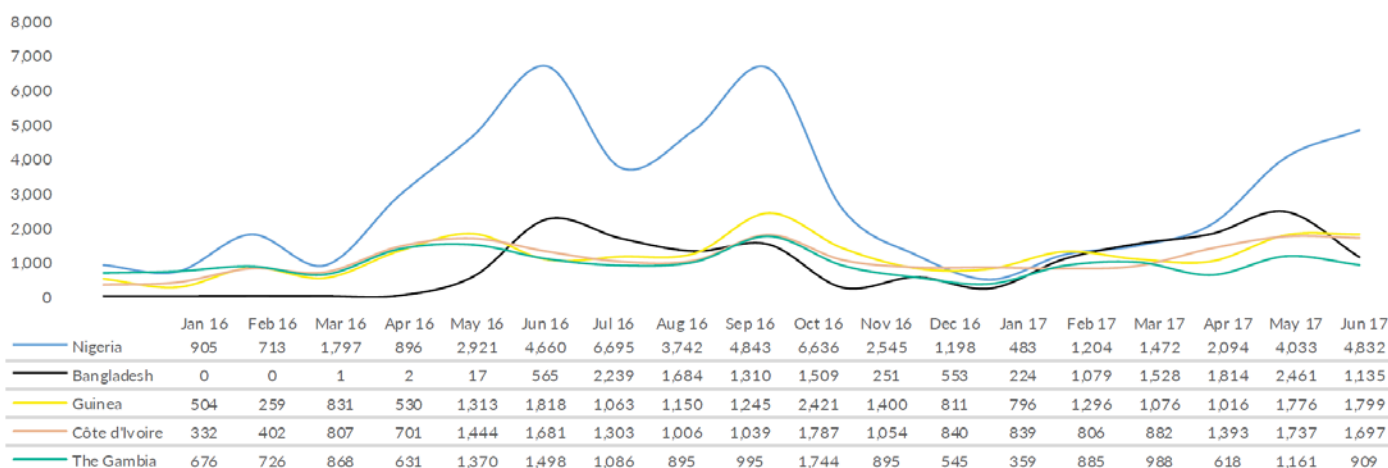
52 UNICEF and REACH, [Situation Overview: Unaccompanied and Separated Children in Transit in Ventimiglia](#), February 2017.

53 Il Secolo XIX, [Un altro migrante morto per passare in Francia: trovato il corpo nella scarpata](#), 21 March 2017.

47 UNHCR, [Italy: Unaccompanied and Separated Children \(UASC\) Dashboard – June 2017](#), July 2017.

48 UNICEF and REACH, [Unaccompanied and Separated Children from The Gambia in Italy](#), May 2017; UNICEF and REACH, [Unaccompanied and Separated Children from Guinea Conakry in Italy](#), May 2017; and UNICEF and REACH, [Unaccompanied and Separated Children from Nigeria](#), May 2017.

## SEA ARRIVALS TO ITALY: MOST COMMON COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN - JAN 2016 to JUN 2017





# SYRIAN MOTHER REUNITES WITH CHILDREN SHE FEARED HAD DROWNED

By: Anders Monsted and Caroline Bach



Manal with her three children, eight-year-old son Karam, thirteen-year-old Joudy and eighteen-year-old Sarah.

Manal was working for the Syrian Ministry of Justice when the violence of the country's conflict came too close for comfort. Running out of options, and without time and money to organize a journey for all of her family, she fled for her life, leaving her three children then aged 16, 11, and 6 behind in the belief they would be able to join her once she reached safety. In fact, it would be more than a year until she saw them again.

When Manal arrived in Denmark in December 2014, she learned that she would have to wait three years to obtain the right for her family to join her. Desperate, Manal turned to people smugglers to bring her family to Denmark as soon as possible. "I had one wish," she said. "To see my children. I could never imagine to live my life without them. No one wants to live without their children."

## "I had one wish – to see my children."

They set out to join her in October 2015 and on 30 October, her oldest daughter Sarah wrote to say they had reached the Turkish coast and would cross to the Greek island of Lesbos the following morning. Then she heard nothing more. The following morning, Manal woke to reports that a boat had capsized off Lesbos. It was the boat her children had been on. As she waited for more news, she searched through media reports studying the pictures of the dead for her children. In one, she saw a boy who looked just like her eight-year-old son, Karam.

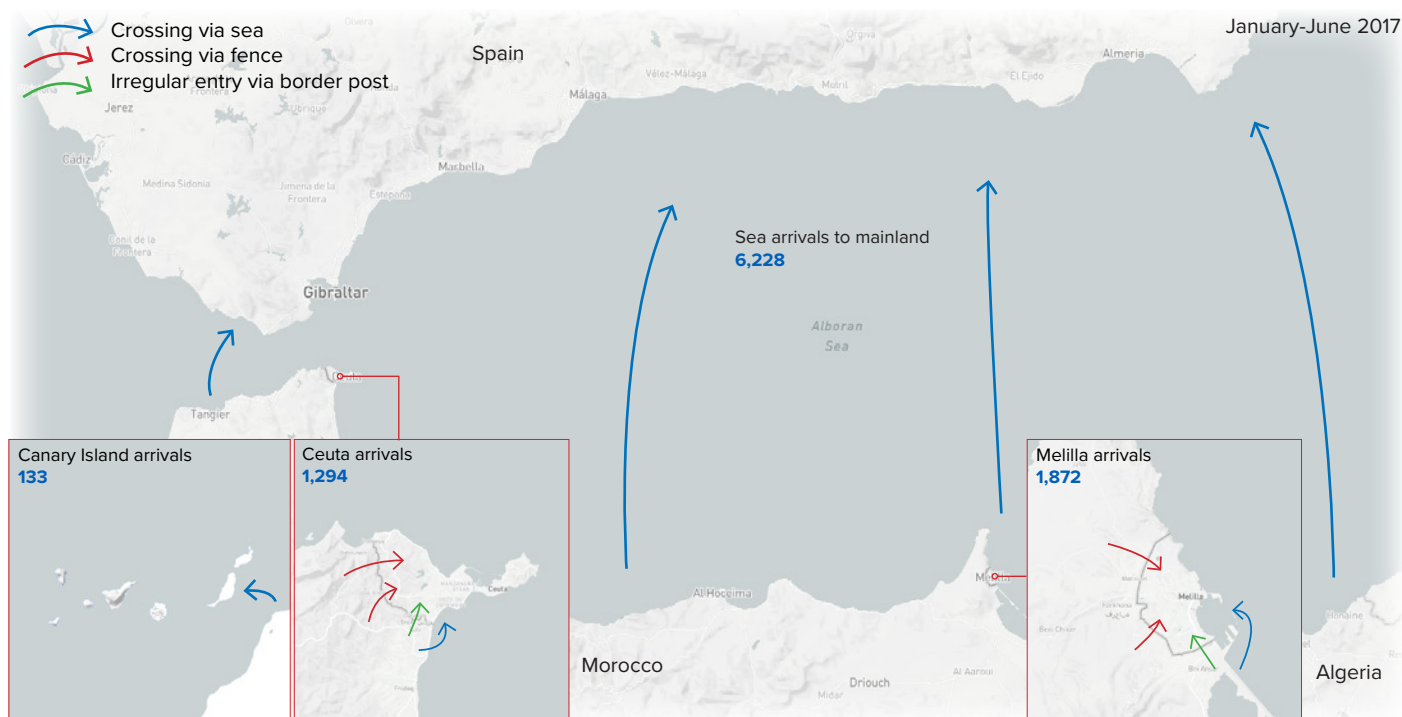
Then a message arrived in her Facebook inbox from a stranger. It simply said: "Your children are alive. They are in Turkey." A fisherman had rescued all three and taken them to a Turkish island. They were in detention but safe.

After 10 days, they were released and decided to try again with their father. This time, they reached Lesbos and continued their journey through the Balkans by train, eventually arriving in Denmark in November 2015. After more than a year, they were reunited but still faced delays and obstacles as their asylum applications were processed and the children were temporarily accommodated over an hour away from Manal. But they were still safer and closer than they had been before and Manal hoped others won't have to face the same dangers as her family to be together.

"No one should have to cross an ocean and risk their lives to reunite with their family," she said. "No one."

Read the [full story](#).

# WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE



Sea arrivals to Spain have increased 196% compared to the same period last year.

The sea crossing remains highly risky and 52 people are known to have died crossing the sea to Spain by the end of June.

Syrians, often families, continue to arrive in Spain using diverse routes including through countries such as Sudan, Mauritania, Mali, Algeria, and Morocco.

The number of refugees and migrants crossing from North Africa to Spain has increased by 93% this year in comparison with the same period last year. By the end of June, a total of 9,507 refugees and migrants had crossed into Spain irregularly this year with 6,228 crossing the sea to the Spanish mainland in small boats compared to 2,105 between January and June last year, an increase of 196%. In Ceuta and Melilla, irregular arrivals have also increased by 28% to 3,166. A further 133 people have crossed to the Canary Islands.

In the first six months of 2017, the five most common nationalities arriving in Spain were Guineans, Ivoirians, Gambians, Moroccans, and Syrians.<sup>54</sup> As of the end of June, men comprised 81% of arrivals with women making up 9% and children 10%. The largest number of women arrivals were from Côte d'Ivoire (237, constituting 15% of Ivoirian arrivals) and Syria (211, constituting 26% of Syrian arrivals). Most Ivoirian women crossed the sea to the Spanish mainland while most Syrian women crossed through the border crossing point to Melilla. Most children arriving in Spain were Syrian (368, comprising 46% of Syrian arrivals), an illustration of how most Syrian arrivals continued to be family groups.

To get to Spain, Syrians have used a diverse range

of routes. While some have been resident for some time in Algeria, others have reported travelling from Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt and using a variety of routes including through countries such as Sudan, Mauritania, Mali, Algeria and finally Morocco in order to avoid a dangerous sea journey to Italy. Many have told UNHCR that they have travelled this way to reunify with family members already in Europe because of the lack of accessibility of formal family reunification mechanisms.

In April, a group of 41 Syrians, including two pregnant women in need of medical care, as well as infants and children, became stranded at the border between Morocco and Algeria near Figuig.<sup>55</sup> The situation was resolved after seven weeks when the 28 remaining members of the group were granted entry to Morocco.<sup>56</sup>

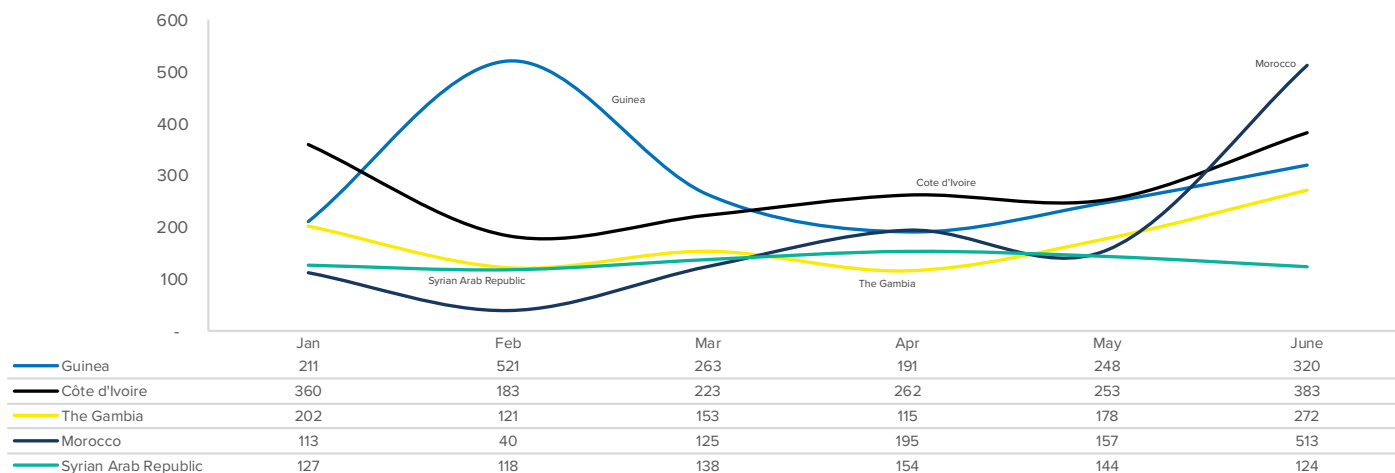
To cross the sea to Spain, most use inflatable boats usually holding between 35 and 40 persons. The journey is risky and already this year 52 people are believed to have died or gone missing at sea as of the end of June. In the first six months of 2017, most deaths occurred in the Straits of Gibraltar but several deaths have also occurred during the longer sea journey in the Alboran Sea. In mid-June,

<sup>54</sup> Based on the nationality breakdown provided by Spanish authorities. As of the end of June, data for 2017 included 823 persons from Sub-Saharan Africa whose nationalities had not yet been determined

<sup>55</sup> UNHCR, [UNHCR statement on Syrians stranded between Algeria & Morocco](#), 30 May 2017.

<sup>56</sup> UNHCR, [UNHCR welcomes admission of Syrians by Morocco](#), 22 June 2017.

## TOP FIVE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF ARRIVALS TO SPAIN - JAN TO JUN 2017



a merchant vessel spotted a boat drifting with the bodies of five people in the Alboran Sea.<sup>57</sup> On 1 July, a further 49 people are thought to have drowned in the worst tragedy of the past decade along routes to Spain when their inflatable boat capsized around midnight. Only three survivors were later rescued clinging to the boat.<sup>58</sup>

At the land borders, some can pass undetected through border crossing points while others take their chances trying to climb the fences. While several hundred people were able to cross the fences into Ceuta in February, since then fewer than 70 have entered this way each month. In Melilla, numbers entering the enclave are higher with over 400, including 144 Syrians, arriving in May but

dropping down to 253 in June. UNHCR continued to receive reports of push-backs from both enclaves in the first six months of 2017.

Smugglers have also resorted to using other risky methods to cross the land border. In May, a group of 27 men from different Sub-Saharan African countries were detected at the Melilla border post in a false compartment in the back of a truck where they risked suffocation.<sup>59</sup> In mid-June, a car carrying nine persons rammed through the border checkpoint into Melilla, injuring a police officer.<sup>60</sup>

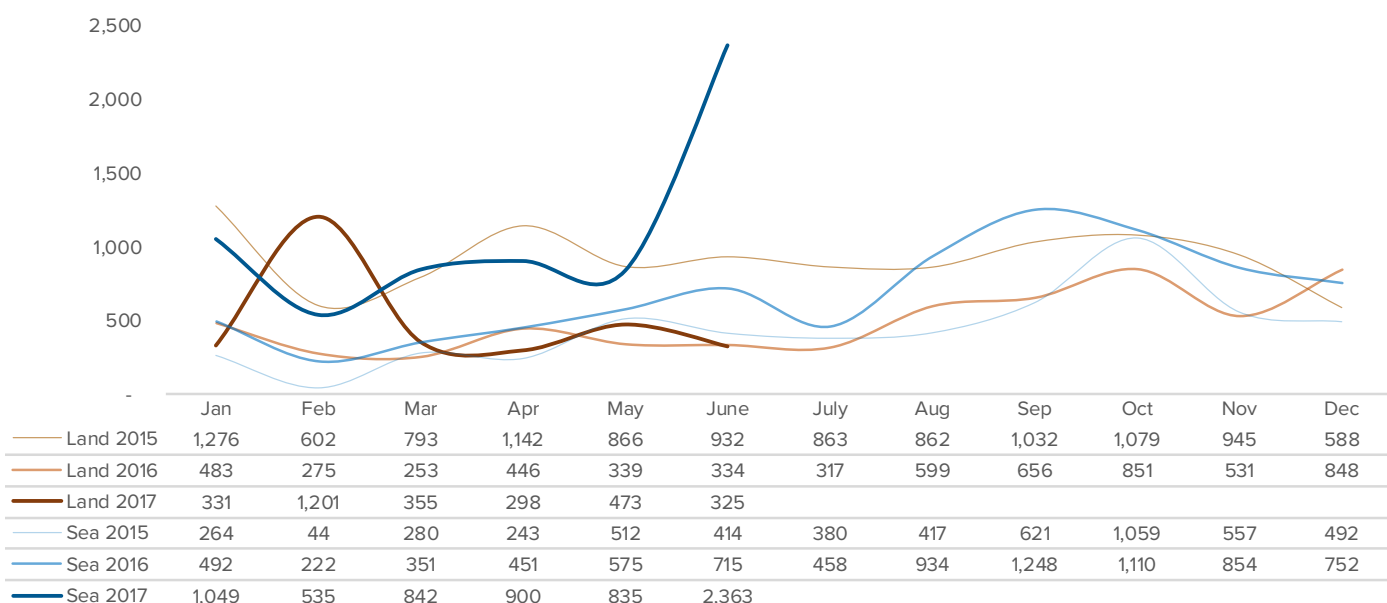
57 US News, [Spain: 5 Migrants Found Dead in Drifting Boat, 92 More Saved](#), 17 June 2017.

58 UNHCR, [UNHCR dismayed by the worst tragedy of the last decade in the Western Mediterranean](#), 5 July 2017.

59 Europa Press, [Descubren 27 inmigrantes en el doble fondo de un camión en la frontera de Melilla y rescatan a un polizón de un tubo](#), 18 May 2017.

60 EFE, [Car with 9 migrants speeds through border into Melilla, injures 2 officers](#), 16 June 2017.

## SEA AND LAND ARRIVALS TO SPAIN 2015 - 2017



Arrival figures for Spain are provided by Spanish Ministry of Interior and Spanish Police. Figures are subject to future adjustment and should not be considered final.



## SAFE AND LEGAL PATHWAYS

While there has been much effort expended on trying to reduce and prevent irregular entries into Europe, insufficient steps have been taken to improve protection conditions and access to solutions where people are as well as to increase access to safe and legal pathways.

More needs to be done to create increased access to safe and legal pathways for people in need of international protection to enter Europe in order to offer a viable alternative to the dangerous journeys many undertake. Increasing access to safe and legal pathways could not only help to reduce the instances of refugees being confronted with multiple dangers, but it can also promote border integrity, enable States to conduct any required background checks, and reduce people's reliance on the use of smugglers.

Over the past year, some progress has been made in expanding opportunities for legal pathways with 18,175 persons resettled to Europe in 2016, a 63% increase compared to 2015.<sup>61</sup> The five European countries resettling the most refugees in 2016 were the United Kingdom (5,180 or 29% of all refugees resettled to Europe), Norway (3,290 or 18%), Sweden (1,890 or 10%), France (1,420 or 8%) and Germany (1,240 or 7%). However, a far more substantial increase is necessary to present real alternatives. For example, 405 Eritrean refugees were resettled in Europe in 2016 but over 20,000 Eritreans crossed the sea from North Africa to Italy that year.<sup>62</sup> UNHCR estimates that a significant number of refugees along routes used by refugees and migrants to travel to Libya are in need of resettlement, including around 263,000 refugees in the East and Horn of Africa, 19,300 refugees in West Africa, and 18,000 refugees in North Africa.<sup>63</sup>

The desire to join family already granted protection in Europe, along with the length of family reunification procedures, is one reason why some travel irregularly to Europe. UNHCR, the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner,<sup>64</sup> and many others have noted the multiple obstacles that prevent refugees from being able to utilize the channels intended for this, including preventing or delaying beneficiaries of subsidiary protection's access to family reunification, the application of limited definitions of family by some States, and difficulties accessing embassies abroad. As a positive step, Germany has increased staff at several of its embassies in the Middle East to process family reunification applications, though applicants reportedly still face delays of many months for an appointment. IOM has also opened four service centres (in Beirut, Istanbul, Gaziantep and Erbil) to assist Syrian families applying for German family reunion visas.<sup>65</sup> In Belgium, UNHCR has initiated an information campaign for beneficiaries of international protection on family reunification<sup>66</sup> while in the United Kingdom and Ireland, UNHCR has provided financial support with the travel costs of refugees arriving via family reunification via the national Red Cross societies.

There are already a number of innovative programmes that have been developed by European countries in addition to these projects,<sup>67</sup> which demonstrates what is possible within

the limits of individual countries legal systems. This includes humanitarian admission programmes, humanitarian visas, private sponsorship programmes and academic scholarships. What European States must strive to do is to make such programmes a more permanent feature of the way in which they provide protection, rather than *ad hoc* measures in response to emergency situations.



© UNHCR/Benjamin Loyseau

Syrian refugee and former TV chef Mohammad El Khaldy, 36, is reunited with his mother for the first time in four years. Chef Mohammad El Khaldy from Syria lives as a refugee in France and had not seen his mother for more than four years. She has been living in Lebanon, having also fled the war back home. After the nightmare 12-day journey that brought them to Europe on an overcrowded boat from Egypt to Italy, Mohammad's new life in France is better than he could ever have dreamed.

Of those already in Europe, in the first six months of 2017, 10,424 people were relocated from Greece to other EU Member States via transfers under the Dublin Regulation and the Emergency Relocation Mechanism, an average of over 1,700 a month. While as of the end of June only 15,832 asylum seekers (24% of the initial target of 66,400 envisaged by the end of September 2017) had been relocated from Greece under the Emergency Relocation Mechanism, progress has been made with over 8,558 people transferred from Greece in the first six months of 2017 compared to 7,192 in the whole of 2016.<sup>68</sup> In June 2017, there was a record monthly high with over 3,000 transfers under the relocation scheme.

In addition, between January and June this year, Greece submitted 7,267 requests to other EU Member States to take responsibility for examining an asylum claim in accordance with the Dublin Regulation. Of these, the majority concerned persons with family members already granted protection in another EU Member State (2,948), or seeking asylum in another EU Member State (2,307), 625 concerned children, and 1,076 were submitted on the basis of the 'humanitarian clause'.<sup>69</sup> However, in the first six months of 2017, only 1,866 transfers to another EU Member State took place under the Dublin Regulation.<sup>70</sup>

As of the end of June, only 6,792 asylum-seekers have been relocated from Italy, just 17% of the initial target set for completion by the end of September 2017, with many of those arriving by sea in Italy not eligible for the relocation scheme.

61 UNHCR, [Europe Resettlement 2016](#), 9 June 2017.

62 According to Eurostat, 92% of Eritreans who applied for asylum in the EU+ region in 2016 were granted refugee status or subsidiary protection.

63 UNHCR, [The Central Mediterranean Route: Working on the Alternatives to Dangerous Journeys 2017](#), July 2017.

64 Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, [European countries must lift obstacles to reunification of refugee families](#), 19 June 2017.

65 IOM, [IOM's Family Assistance Programme](#), 2016; IOM, [Family Assistance Programme Centre Opens in Erbil to Facilitate Family Reunification in Germany](#), 3 March 2017.

66 UNHCR, [Family reunification](#), July 2017.

67 For example, please refer to [Resettlement and Other Admission Pathways for Syrian Refugees](#), May 2017.

68 Greek Asylum Service, [Statistical Data of the Greek Asylum Service – Relocation Procedures](#), July 2017.

69 Discretionary clauses allow Member States to assume responsibility for an application even though they are not strictly obliged to do so under the Dublin Regulation, for example, on humanitarian grounds.

70 Greek Asylum Service, [Statistical Data of the Greek Dublin Unit \(7.6.2013-30.06.2017\)](#), July 2017.



Syrian refugee, Ahmad Mansour, 36, and his wife Sara have found a safe haven in an Austrian village raising not only their own sons, Feras, Nabil and Sohaib, but also two nephews, Abdallah and Mostafa. Abdallah and Mostafa's parents were tragically killed in a bomb attack in Syria. Ahmad and Sara took the boys in and treated them as their own children, but they had no official adoption papers that gave them guardianship. Under Austrian law, only 'nuclear' families (meaning spouses and their children) are eligible for reunification. UNHCR, the Refugee Agency, mediated to find a solution and the nephews were brought to Austria under a resettlement programme. Read the [full story](#).

## CONCLUSION

In the first half of 2017, over 105,000 refugees and migrants entered Europe via the three Mediterranean routes and over 2,290 are thought to have died along land and sea routes while undertaking the dangerous journeys usually necessary to cross borders. For those crossing to Europe via the central Mediterranean, greater regional support for Italy is required, as well as increased efforts to address the root causes of movement via Libya, provide support for countries receiving and hosting refugees and transit countries, renew efforts to find solutions and protection for refugees before they reach Libya, and take steps to address smuggling and trafficking.<sup>71</sup> In July, UNHCR launched an appeal to help provide meaningful alternatives to refugees and others undertaking dangerous journeys to Europe.<sup>72</sup> These include scaling-up existing activities or implementing new ones to provide effective ways and means to protect refugees and asylum-seekers along the various routes leading to Libya.

While European leaders discuss responses to the current situation, more concerted efforts are needed as part of a regional response. With so many lives at stake, UNHCR stresses the vital importance of rescue at sea operations undertaken by all actors involved. Further work is needed to remove obstacles to existing legal pathways, including family reunification. Greater numbers of legal pathways would offer a feasible alternative to irregular journeys for a larger number of people, something that currently makes more people reliant on smugglers and undermines anti-smuggling initiatives. While some progress has been reported with some States taking steps to investigate allegations of human rights abuses at borders, further measures are required to address the continued reports of such practices in some countries in the region.

For those already in Europe, more needs to be done to strengthen access to asylum procedures and effective protection where people are to prevent dangerous onward journeys. In addition, further steps are needed to strengthen identification and assistance for unaccompanied and separated children including improving registration, age assessments and guardianship systems, access to legal representation, as well as broader care arrangements.<sup>73</sup> Within the European Union it is also necessary to speed up and extend the emergency relocation scheme as well as ensure timely family reunion and implementation of the humanitarian and discretionary clauses within the Dublin regulation.

71 UNHCR, [High Commissioner Grandi urges more solidarity with Italy](#), 1 July 2017.

72 UNHCR, [UNHCR seeks support for alternatives to dangerous refugee journeys](#), 18 July 2017.

73 UNHCR, UNICEF and IRC, [The Way Forward to Strengthened Policies and Practices for Unaccompanied and Separated Children in Europe](#), July 2017.