

SEA MOVEMENTS 2023

212,100

reported attempts by migrants and refugees to cross the central Mediterranean Sea from Algeria, Libya and Tunisia to Europe in 2023, which represents a 52% increase from 2022.

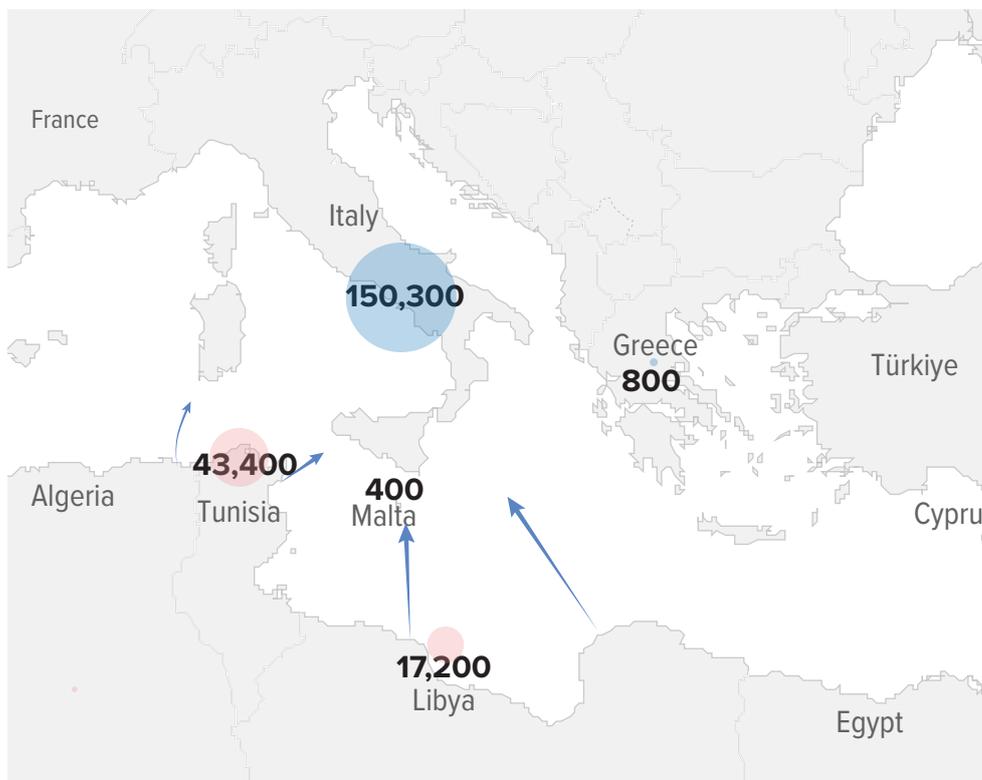
LEGEND

- Arrivals in Italy and Malta
- Disembarkations in North Africa

This map does not reflect the total number of sea arrivals to Italy, Malta, and Greece in 2023, but only arrivals who departed from Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia.

The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Note: figures in the map are rounded to nearest 100



GENERAL OVERVIEW

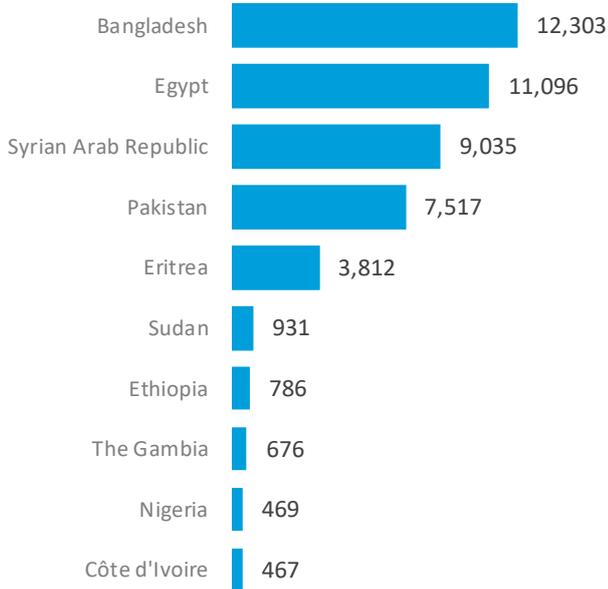
In 2023, an estimated 212,100¹ attempts by migrants and refugees to cross the central Mediterranean Sea² from Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia to Europe were reported. This was a 52% increase compared to known attempts in 2022 and marks the highest number since 2017. Of those who attempted to depart in 2023, 71% (151,500 persons) were disembarked in Europe, while 29% (60,600 persons) were intercepted or rescued and disembarked in North Africa (21% in Tunisia, 8% in Libya).

Based on EU asylum data for relevant nationalities, UNHCR estimates that some 27% of those who arrived in Europe via the central Mediterranean Sea in 2023 may have been in need of international protection.³

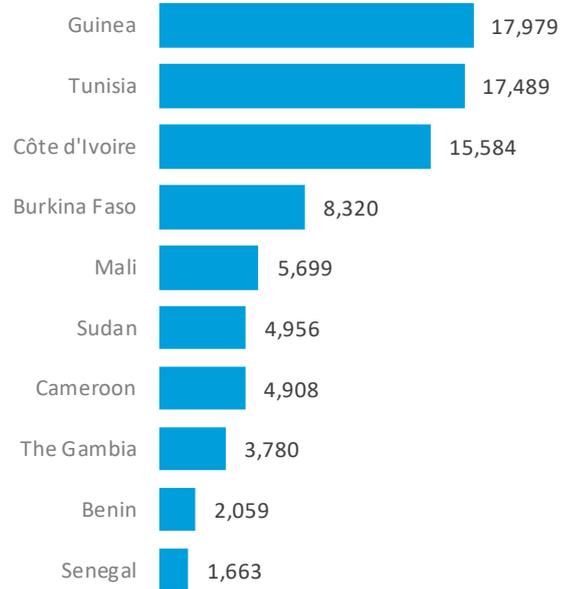
Arrivals to Italy through the central Mediterranean Sea in 2023 stood at 150,273 individuals, a 73% increase compared to 2022. The majority of these arrivals were rescued by Italian authorities, some arrivals were spontaneous (i.e., arrived on their own), and according to the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), about 14,090 persons (9% of the total arrivals) were rescued by Search and Rescue (SAR) NGOs and subsequently disembarked in Italy in 2023.⁴

In 2023, Italy witnessed a significant increase in sea arrivals from Tunisia, surpassing those from Libya. Concurrently, there was a notable rise in nationals of West and Central Africa from January until September, when the number of Tunisian nationals increased. While non-Tunisians represented only 43% of sea arrivals to Italy from Tunisia in 2022, in 2023 they accounted for 82%. Predominantly, the main nationalities arriving in Italy in 2023 included nationals from Guinea, Tunisia, Côte d'Ivoire, Bangladesh, Egypt, the Syrian Arab Republic, Burkina Faso, Pakistan, Mali, and Sudan.⁵ Guinean, Tunisian, Ivorian, Burkinabe, Malian, and Sudanese nationals departed mainly from Tunisia while Bangladeshi, Egyptian, Syrian, and Pakistani nationals departed mainly from Libya.

MOST COMMON COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF PEOPLE ARRIVING IN ITALY AFTER DEPARTING FROM LIBYA IN 2023

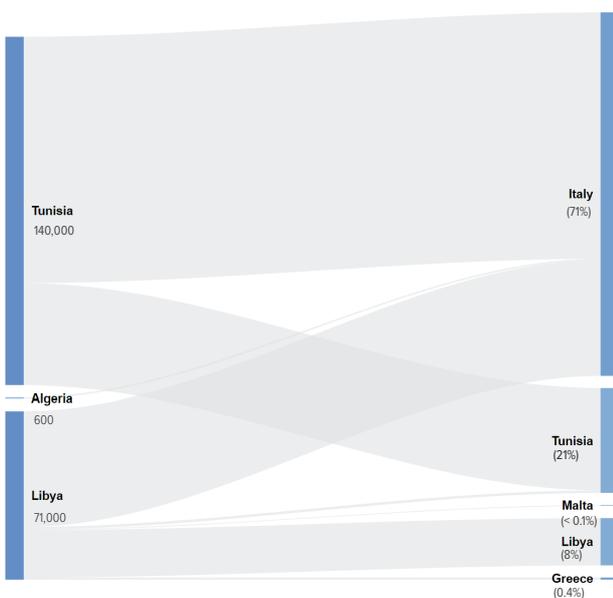


MOST COMMON COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF PEOPLE ARRIVING IN ITALY AFTER DEPARTING FROM TUNISIA IN 2023

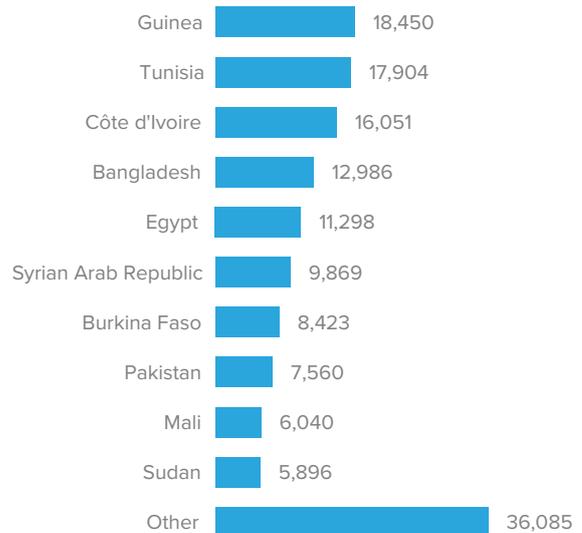


Guineans emerged as the foremost nationality among the arrivals to Italy in 2023. Additionally, there was a substantial increase in arrivals of nationals from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Sudan, many of whom were likely to be in need of international protection,⁶ primarily departing from Tunisia. Although the number of Sudanese arrivals remained limited, it marked a substantial increase compared to 2022. In total, 5,887 Sudanese nationals arrived in Italy via the central Mediterranean Sea, with 4,956 persons crossing from Tunisia and 931 persons from Libya, compared to 1,058 Sudanese arrivals in 2022 from Tunisia and Libya. This suggests that as Sudanese and other nationalities continue to flee the conflict in Sudan and move onwards to and within North Africa, in search of protection and assistance, the number of Sudanese arrivals in Italy may further increase.

SEA MOVEMENTS VIA THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN SEA IN 2023



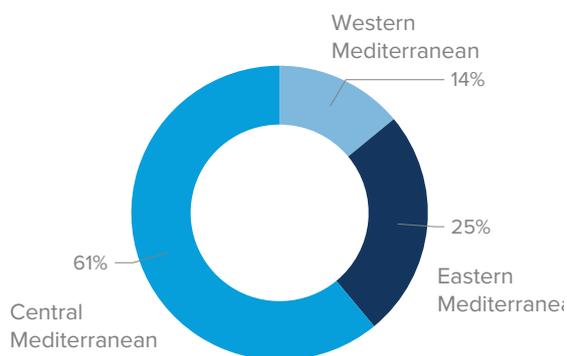
MOST COMMON COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF PEOPLE ARRIVING IN ITALY AND MALTA AFTER DEPARTING FROM ALGERIA, LIBYA, AND TUNISIA IN 2023



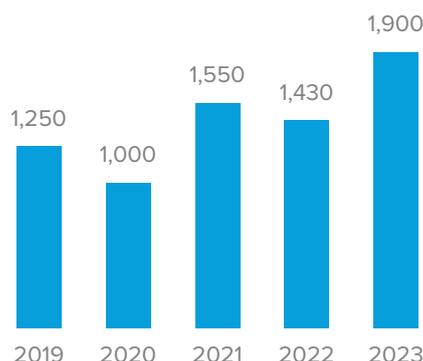
Children and women comprised a significant percentage of arrivals in Italy from Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia in 2023. Children accounted for 17%, consistent with 2022. Most of the children were unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), primarily Guinean, Tunisian, Egyptian and Gambian nationals. The share of women among the arrivals increased to 10% in 2023 compared to 7% in 2022. This was primarily attributed to changes in the top nationalities, as indicated above, with a notable rise in arrivals from, for example, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, where women constituted a large share of arrivals (e.g., of the 16,051 Côte d'Ivoire nationals who arrived in Italy, 5,055 were women, constituting approximately 31.5%, while 7,809 were men, making up about 48.6%). The predominant nationalities of women arriving in Italy remained similar to those in 2022, including Ivorian, Guinean, Tunisian, Cameroonian, and Syrian nationals. However, men continued to constitute the majority of arrivals in Italy through the central Mediterranean Sea.

In 2023, more than 3,105⁷ migrants and refugees are known to have **lost their lives or gone missing at sea** while attempting to cross to Europe along the three Mediterranean routes (eastern, central and western Mediterranean), an increase compared to more than 2,500 deaths recorded in 2022. 61% of the deaths in 2023 took place on the central Mediterranean Sea. According to IOM's Missing Migrants Project, more than 700 deaths occurred off the coast of Tunisia, more than 680 off Libya and more than 460 off Italian shores. The increasing number and proportion of deaths off the coast of Tunisia is unprecedented in the last 10 years. Notably, more than 1,900⁸ deaths in the central Mediterranean Sea in 2023 were linked to mass shipwrecks involving the loss of more than 20 lives at sea. However, the real number of dead and missing along these routes is believed to be higher as many incidents go unreported or undetected.

DEAD AND MISSING AT SEA IN 2023 ALONG THE MEDITERRANEAN ROUTES



DEAD AND MISSING AT SEA BY YEAR ALONG THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE



The movement of migrants and refugees by boat across the Mediterranean Sea continues to be of critical concern to UNHCR and IOM due to the high risks those attempting the journey face. Those risks are aggravated because of limited State search and rescue (SAR) responses in some regions; the deteriorated protection environment in some countries in North Africa and elsewhere along the route for migrants and refugees, particularly those with vulnerabilities, including victims of trafficking, children and women or others with specific needs; transfers of some persons disembarked to arbitrary and prolonged detention in official and unofficial places of detention; and the very limited safe and regular pathways available for migrants and refugees, including those seeking to join family members in Europe.

SEA MOVEMENTS FROM LIBYA

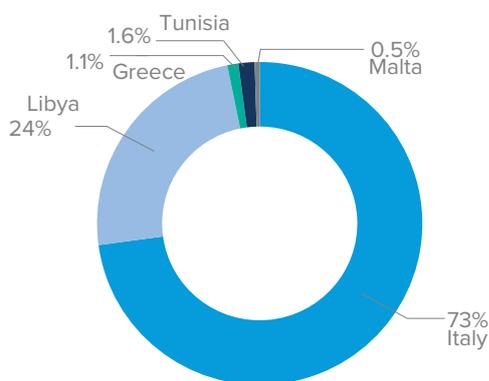
In 2023, some 71,500 migrants and refugees are known to have attempted to cross the central Mediterranean Sea from Libya to Europe, a decrease of 10% compared to 2022, but still far below the numbers of annual crossings between 2014 and 2017. Among those who attempted the journey, 73% were disembarked in Italy, 1.6% in Tunisia, 0.5% in Malta, and 1.1% in Greece,⁹ while 24% were intercepted or rescued and disembarked in Libya. According to data available to

UNHCR and IOM, the primary nationalities attempting to cross from Libya were Bangladeshis (21%), Egyptians (19%) and Syrians (17%).

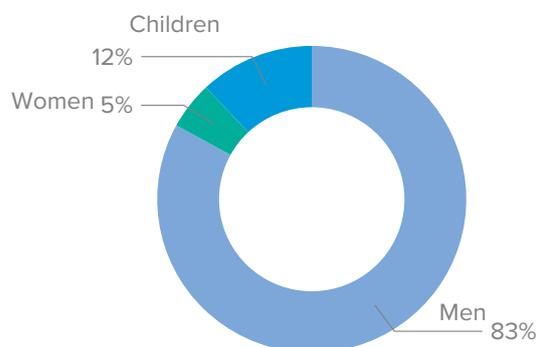
The second half of 2023 witnessed a substantial shift of sea departures from eastern Libya to the western region of the country, particularly from Zuwara. Departures from Zuwara involved the use of predominantly large fishing boats carrying 300 or more persons. This had been a distinctive feature in departures from eastern Libya in 2022 as well as in the first nine months of 2023.¹⁰ These vessels departing from Zuwara commonly carried nationals from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt, and the Syrian Arab Republic. In addition, towards the end of 2023, there was a rise of departures from Sabratha of large wooden boats carrying the aforementioned nationalities, along with various nationalities from East and Horn of Africa (EHA), mainly Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Somalis, as well as from West and Central Africa (WCA).

In western Libya (Azzawiyah) and Tripoli, IOM and UNHCR retained access to disembarkation points. However, an estimated 30% of the disembarkations in Libya in 2023 were not attended by any humanitarian actor. In several instances, humanitarian actors were notified of disembarkations by the Libyan authorities only after they had been commenced or at times concluded. As a result, humanitarian actors were not able to provide assistance for those being disembarked or identify individuals with international protection needs or other specific needs. In addition, many disembarkations were carried out by entities - such as the Stabilization and Support Apparatus (SSA) - in western Libya that fall outside the authorities officially mandated to conduct interceptions or SAR operations and subsequent disembarkations in Libya.

DISSEMBARKATIONS FOLLOWING DEPARTURE FROM LIBYA 2023



DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF DISSEMBARKATIONS FOLLOWING DEPARTURE FROM LIBYA¹¹



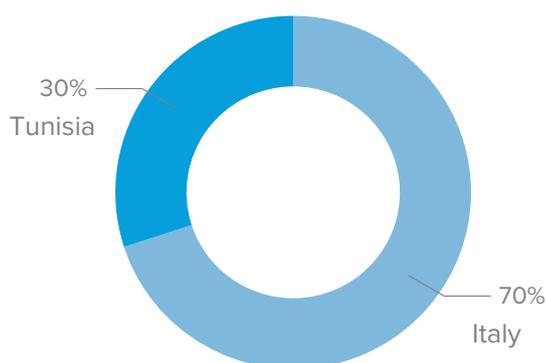
SEA MOVEMENTS FROM TUNISIA

In 2023, some 140,000 migrants and refugees are known to have attempted to cross the sea from Tunisia to Europe, a 138% increase compared to 2022. Among those who attempted the journey, 42,240 (30%) persons were rescued or intercepted and disembarked in Tunisia,¹² while 97,667 (70%) persons arrived in Italy. Notably, the second week of September (11-18) witnessed the highest number of arrivals from Tunisia to Lampedusa within a single week in 2023, with around 11,698 people arriving in 278 landings.

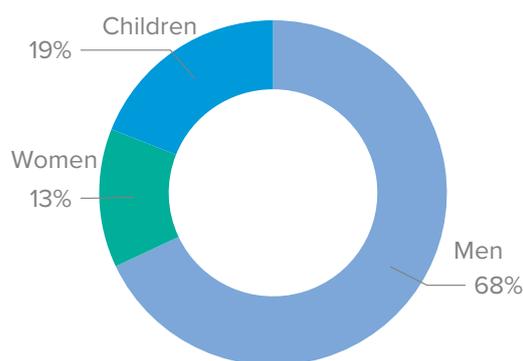
Similar to 2022, non-Tunisian nationals¹³ continued to constitute the majority (85%) of all persons disembarked in Tunisia in 2023. The majority of arrivals in Italy from Tunisia were Guineans, Tunisians, followed by Ivorians, Burkinabes, Malians, Sudanese, Cameroonians, Gambians, and Beninese. This represents a change compared to the years up to 2022, when Tunisian nationals were the main nationality of sea arrivals to Italy.¹⁴

Reports indicate that nationals of EHA and WCA countries departing from Tunisia often have few choices other than to embark on iron ('poor-quality') boats for their sea journey. These boats are relatively simple to construct, requiring only basic, readily available materials and minimal equipment. In contrast, Tunisian nationals departing from Tunisia generally travel on wooden or rubber fishing boats which are generally perceived as safer and more seaworthy compared to iron boats.¹⁵

DISEMBARKATIONS FOLLOWING DEPARTURE FROM TUNISIA 2023



DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF SEA ARRIVALS TO ITALY FROM TUNISIA



KEY CONCERNS

UNHCR and IOM remain concerned about high fatalities in the central Mediterranean Sea; the persistent need for enhanced SAR capacities at sea and safe disembarkation processes; and limited overall protection space for migrants and refugees in some North African countries. Concerns also extend to the ongoing expulsions from North African countries, including vulnerable groups and persons registered with UNHCR, which pose significant protection risks.

- UNHCR and IOM remain extremely concerned by the continued high numbers of deaths in the central Mediterranean Sea.
- UNHCR and IOM remain concerned about SAR and disembarkation processes which continue to be ad hoc and unpredictable in some parts of the central Mediterranean Sea. Delays or a lack of coordination have contributed to tragic incidents, with individuals losing their lives or going missing at sea. There need to be more consistent responses by all coastal States in line with their international legal obligations to ensure that migrants and refugees are promptly rescued and disembarked in a place of safety, and receive timely assistance, counselling, and referral to appropriate services.
- UNHCR and IOM remain concerned about the disembarkation in Libya of persons intercepted or rescued at sea, as the country is still not considered a place of safety for the purpose of disembarkation.¹⁶
- UNHCR and IOM also remain concerned about the limited overall protection space for migrants and refugees in North African countries. In addition, there remain too few solutions in terms of regular and safe pathway opportunities for migrants and refugees in these countries, as well as for refugees in need of evacuation to the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) in Niger and Rwanda.
- UNHCR and IOM are also concerned about the ongoing expulsions of migrants and refugees from North African countries, following their interception or rescue at sea and subsequent disembarkation. Such expulsions also affected vulnerable groups, including pregnant women and children and persons holding UNHCR documentation. Arbitrary detention and expulsions of migrants and refugees also occurred from

cities and other population centres. An estimated 13,993 persons were reportedly collectively expelled from Libya to neighboring countries in 2023. Similarly, between June and December 2023, according to different sources, including Human Rights Watch, MSF, and World Organisation Against Torture OMCT, thousands of people were also expelled/pushed back from Tunisia to either Libya or Algeria.¹⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

More steps need to be taken to reduce deaths at sea and mitigate perilous irregular mixed movements on both land and sea along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR). This could be done through strengthening search and rescue capacity to respond to situations of distress at sea; providing greater access to safe and legal pathways; and strengthening access to protection in and along routes to North Africa. In this regard, IOM and UNHCR recommend that:

SAR AT SEA, DISEMBARKATION PROCESSES, AND PLACE OF SAFETY

- States prioritize the increase of SAR capacity and promptly respond to any call of distress at sea, deploying the necessary rescue capacity in a timely manner, and effectively co-operating to identify a place of safety where survivors can be disembarked. This includes ensuring that the rescued persons are not returned to situations that may result in further harm and human rights violations including arbitrary detention, expulsion, and refoulement.¹⁸
- Persons rescued or intercepted at sea are not returned to Libya, as it is still not considered a place of safety.¹⁹ Therefore, States' Rescue Coordination Centres (RCCs) should refrain from ordering commercial ships to disembark rescued migrants and refugees in Libya.
- Governments and their relevant RCCs make every effort to minimize the duration rescued migrants and refugees spend aboard assisting vessels, ensuring timely disembarkation in a place of safety and access to adequate assistance.
- Upon disembarkation, in line with relevant national law and international human rights law, authorities across North African countries make alternatives to detention. They also provide access to the required humanitarian and medical assistance where needed and ensure care arrangements for children, families, and other vulnerable individuals.
- IOM, UNHCR, and other humanitarian organizations are granted systematic access to formal sites of disembarkation by the mandated authorities in coastal countries to respond to the immediate needs of the persons disembarked, identify and assist persons with international protection needs, or other protection needs, including migrants in a vulnerable situation.

ROLE OF NGOs

- States refrain from any measures that may hinder the rescue work of SAR NGO vessels, which provide much needed rescue capacity.

COMMERCIAL SHIPS

- States remind shipping companies sailing under their flag to render assistance to migrants and refugees at sea and consider relevant legal procedures when assistance to people in distress at sea is denied for no permissible reasons under international public law, in particular international Maritime Law.

RESPONSIBILITY SHARING

- States develop and implement broader regional responsibility-sharing mechanisms to ensure swift and predictable disembarkation and subsequent processing of persons rescued or intercepted at sea.²⁰
- States improve coordination between State entities and with private vessels to ensure greater predictability in SAR operations including by adopting a broad interpretation of the notion of distress at sea, in line with the definition provided in the SAR Convention.²¹

SAFE AND REGULAR ALTERNATIVES

- States expand regular pathways for migrants and refugees as one of the alternatives to perilous irregular journeys by sea, including pathways for migrants in vulnerable situations.
- Resettlement quotas for refugees in Libya and those evacuated to the ETM are increased. Resettlement quotas for refugees in the rest of North African countries are also increased.
- States maintain expedited processing in order to maximize evacuation opportunities to the ETM.
- States maintain expedited processing also for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR), such as the lifting of lengthy exit visa processes for migrants.

PROTECTION-SENSITIVE BORDER MANAGEMENT

- States conduct swift identification and referral of persons with international protection needs and other specific needs (including victims of trafficking, UASC, survivors of gender-based violence) following rescue or interception operations and upon disembarkation, in particular women, children, and older persons, and adopt disembarkation procedures that ensure prevention of further harm and family separation. UNHCR and IOM stand ready to support with specific capacity development on protection-sensitive border management and disembarkation procedures to States.
- States develop cross-border mechanisms for sharing information on missing migrants and refugees and to facilitate the restoration of family links with relevant actors and with adequate data protection safeguards.
- States establish a focal point for missing migrants and refugees in coordination with other relevant actors in countries of transit in particular IFRC and national Red Crescent / Red Cross Societies.
- States in North Africa work to develop asylum legal frameworks to enhance access for those in need of international protection. States also further develop/ align migration legislation with international human rights law.
- Coastal States with the assistance of relevant humanitarian organizations continuously conduct multilingual campaigns to sensitize migrants and refugees on risks and dangers associated with irregular sea journey, in particular in line with the Palermo protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and the Palermo protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA ON MIGRANT AND REFUGEE MOVEMENTS

- States work to improve the quality and availability of data and analysis on migrant and refugee sea movements. IOM and UNHCR stand ready to provide support, including by developing joint methodologies and dedicating more of their own resources, to better understand the situation of migrants and refugees undertaking dangerous journeys.

CROSS-REGIONAL COLLABORATION AND DIALOGUE

- States increase collaboration with UNHCR, IOM, and other key stakeholders to hold cross-regional dialogues with countries and regions of origin, transit and destination along key routes to address drivers of mixed and onward movements.

Endnotes

1. These figures represent the total number of migrants and refugees who arrived in Italy, Malta, and Greece after departing from Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia in 2023. The numbers may include migrants and refugees who made more than one attempt to cross the sea from these countries. These figures also include those who were intercepted or rescued by the authorities of Libya and Tunisia and disembarked in these countries in 2023.

Arrivals from Algeria were also recorded in Spain, but these fall outside the scope of this factsheet.

2. Data on disembarkation in the three North African countries and arrivals in Greece is sourced from a variety of channels, including media monitoring, and data gathered at the disembarkation points where UNHCR and IOM or partners were present.

Data on arrivals in Italy and Malta is received from the Ministry of Interior/Home Affairs of both countries.

3. The estimated number of people who may be in need of international protection is based on analysis of rates of recognition as refugees or provision of subsidiary protection in Europe for each identified nationality reported to have arrived in Europe through the central Mediterranean Sea in 2023. This indicates the proportion of asylum applicants of each nationality who were granted refugee status or subsidiary protection after going through formal asylum procedures in the EU+ region between 2018 and 2023. It is calculated using decisions at first instance stage between January 2018 to June 2023, and decisions at appeal stage from January 2019 to June 2023. The rate of recognition as refugees or provision of subsidiary protection for each nationality is then applied to the number of persons of that nationality who arrived in Europe via the Central Mediterranean route in 2023. For further details, see UNHCR Data Finder at: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download?url=IAR67y>

4. An estimated 9% of total arrivals by sea in Italy followed rescue by NGO vessels according to Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), available at: ISPI - [ISPI - Standoffs in the Central Mediterranean \(Crisi in mare\) - Google Sheets](#)

5. Nationalities are listed in the descending order of arrival groups.

6. UNHCR Position on Returns to Sudan. May 2023. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/6450e5814.html>; UNHCR Position on Returns to Mali – Update III. January 2022. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/61f3a52e4.html>; UNHCR Position on Returns to Burkina Faso – Update I. July 2023. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/64c2748c4.html>

7. The numbers of the dead and missing in this factsheet relate to incidents that took place on the three Mediterranean routes for which IOM and UNHCR has received a sufficient level of detail. Because data on deaths during sea crossings are highly incomplete, these figures are rounded to reflect the fact that the true number of lives lost in the Mediterranean Sea is not known. To explore data, see IOM [Missing Migrants Project](#) and UNHCR Dead and [Missing at Sea dashboard](#).

8. IOM attributes the incident that took place off Pylos, Greece, where more than 500 individuals lost their lives on 14 June 2023, while en route from Libya to Italy, to the central Mediterranean Sea.

Joint Press Release: UNHCR and IOM call for coordinated action and safe pathways, 14 June 2023, available at: [Hundreds of refugees and migrants feared dead and missing in worst sea tragedy off Greece in recent years – UNHCR Greece](#)

9. Among those who departed from Libya in 2023, some 817 persons arrived in Greece in 21 separate disembarkation operations between June and December. All arrivals departed from eastern Libya. Of these, 95 survivors were rescued by the Hellenic Coast Guard and brought to the port of Kalamata, Greece, on 14 June 2023. This rescue followed the tragic capsizing of a large fishing vessel which departed from eastern Libya carrying over 700 persons, off the coast of Pylos, Greece.

10. Between January and September 2023, 21 large fishing boats, each carrying over 300 individuals, arrived in Italy from eastern Libya, while between October and December 2023, an additional 5 large fishing boats, also carrying over 300 people each, arrived in Italy from western Libya.

11. The demographic breakdown is based on 96% of disembarkations in Libya. For the remaining 4% (2,522), demographics breakdown was unknown.

12. Source: Official website of the Tunisian Ministry of Interior and the social media pages of the Tunisian Ministry of Interior and Tunisian National Guard, other media and social media monitoring.

13. A precise breakdown of nationalities for non-Tunisians disembarked in Tunisia is not available.

14. From 2022 to 2023, the profile of arrivals in Italy from Tunisia changed, with more nationalities from EHA and WCA living in Tunisia departing, including due to the evolving protection environment in the country.

15. For example, Civil MRCC, ECHOES Issue 9, November 2023, available at: ECHOES Issue 9, November 2023 – English – Civil MRCC; [ECHOES Issue 9, November 2023 – English – CivilMRCC](#); Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), Tunisia: Increased Fragility Fuels Migration Surge, July 2023, available at: [Tasnim-Abderrahim-Tunisia-Increased-fragility-fuels-migration-surge-GI-TOC-July-2023.pdf \(globalinitiative.net\)](#)

16. UNHCR, Position on the Designations of Libya as a Safe Third Country and as a Place of Safety for the Purpose of Disembarkation Following Rescue at

Sea, September 2020, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5f1edee24.html>; and Joint IOM and UNHCR Press Release, IOM and UNHCR condemn the return of migrants and refugees to Libya, 16 June 2021, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/news-releases/iom-and-unhcr-condemn-return-migrants-and-refugees-libya>

17. Human Rights Watch, Tunisia: African Migrants Intercepted at Sea, Expelled, 10 October 2023, available at: [Tunisia: African Migrants Intercepted at Sea, Expelled | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/10/tunisia-african-migrants-intercepted-at-sea-expelled); World Organisation Against Torture OMCT, SOS-Torture Network, Cartographie des violations subies par les personnes en déplacement en Tunisie [Routes of torture – Cartography of the violations suffered by displaced people in Tunisia], July–October 2023 (in French), available at: [Migration-et-torture-Finale-Planches-.pdf \(omct-tunisie.org\)](https://www.omct-tunisie.org/fr/medias/1477-migration-et-torture-finale-planches-pdf); See also, MSF, Death, despair and destitution: The human costs of the EU's migration policies, 20 February 2024, available at: <https://www.msf.org/death-despair-and-destitution-human-costs-eu-migration-policies>

18. International Maritime Organization's MSC.167(78), Guidelines on the Treatment of Persons Rescued at Sea, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/imo/2004/en/32272>

19. UN Security Council, United Nations Support Mission in Libya Report of the Secretary-General (5 April 2023) S/2023/248, para. 96; UN Security Council, United Nations Support Mission in Libya Report of the Secretary-General (19 January 2021) S/2021/62, para. 107

20. UNHCR and IOM, Proposal for a regional cooperative arrangement ensuring predictable disembarkation and subsequent processing of persons rescued-at-sea, 27 June 2018, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/partners/eu/5b35e60f4/proposal-regional-cooperative-arrangement-ensuring-predictable-disembarkation.html>; also, <https://www.unhcr.org/eg/wp-content/uploads/sites/36/2021/08/Final-Recommendations-Mixed-Movements-in-Central-Mediterranean.pdf>

21. The SAR Convention defines the “distress phases” as “a situation wherein there is reasonable certainty that a person, a vessel or other craft is threatened by grave and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance;” available at: [https://www.imo.org/en/about/Conventions/Pages/International-Convention-on-Maritime-Search-and-Rescue-\(SAR\).aspx](https://www.imo.org/en/about/Conventions/Pages/International-Convention-on-Maritime-Search-and-Rescue-(SAR).aspx)