



MMC Middle East
QUARTER 1 2019



**Quarterly Mixed
Migration Update:
Middle East**

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers the Middle East region (ME). The core countries of focus for this region are Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) and Turkey. Depending on the quarterly trends and migration-related updates, more attention may be given to any of the countries over the rest.

The QMMUs offer a quarterly update on new trends and dynamics related to mixed migration and relevant policy developments in the region. These updates are based on a compilation of a wide range of secondary (data) sources, brought together within a regional framework and applying a mixed migration analytical lens. Similar QMMUs are available for all MMC regions.

The Mixed Migration Centre is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration.

For more information on the MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit mixedmigration.org and follow us at [@Mixed_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

MMC's understanding of mixed migration

"Mixed migration" refers to cross-border movements of people, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking, and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have a range of legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel - often travelling irregularly, and wholly, or partially, assisted by migrant smugglers.

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Dara Al-Masri / DRC (2017)

A girl walks in an Informal Settlement in Zahle, Lebanon. January 2017.

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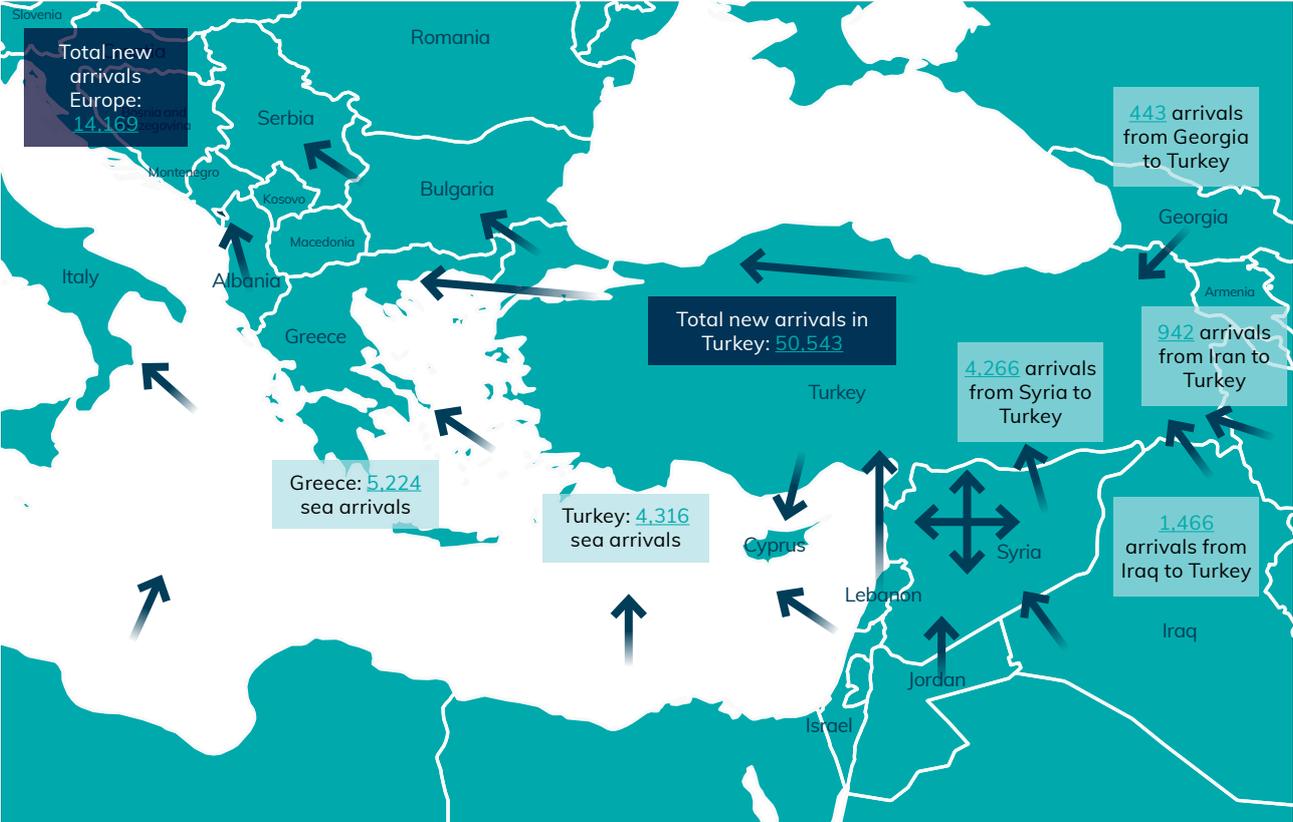
Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Middle East

Quarter 1 - 2019

Key Updates

- **EU-Arab Summit:** The first [EU-Arab Summit](#) was hosted in Egypt. The summit resulted in the [Sharm El Sheikh Declaration](#) with commitments on the protection of and support to refugees and migrants.
- **Syria crisis:** The 15th of March marked the 8th year anniversary of the Syria crisis and also the third time the EU hosts the [Brussels Conference](#) on [Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region](#).
- **Deportations from Saudi Arabia:** [Reportedly, 300-400](#) Bangladeshi workers are being deported from Saudi Arabia every week because they do not possess the right legal documentation. There are also reports about Kuwait launching a [detention and deportation campaign](#) on an estimated 120,000 irregular migrants. [Reportedly, 3,000](#) migrants have already been arrested in the past six months.
- **Eastern Mediterranean route arrivals:** A total of 14,169 new arrivals to Europe via land and sea have been observed this quarter. Via Eastern Mediterranean route specifically, there was a decrease of new arrivals to Greece via sea (from 9,075 to [5,224](#)) and land (from 4,146 to [2,801](#)). The numbers of people crossing are similar to the numbers of the first Quarter in 2018.
- **Arrivals in Greece:** As was the case in 2018, [during the first quarter of 2019](#), nationals from Afghanistan and the Middle East continue to be among the most common nationalities crossing the Eastern Mediterranean Sea into Greece. Out of the total 5,224 sea arrivals in Greece, most originate from Afghanistan (47.1%), Iraq (14.2%), Syria (11.6%) and Palestine (10.3%).
- **Arrivals in Turkey:** A total of [50,059](#) arrivals in Turkey were recorded during the first quarter of 2019. The majority are [from](#) Afghanistan (39%), Pakistan (14%) and Syria (9%). As reported by the Turkish Coast Guard, [4,316](#) people were apprehended/rescued in all seas surrounding Turkey.
- **Missing refugees & migrants:** [310](#) people have gone missing or died while crossing the Western, Central and Eastern Mediterranean Seas in this quarter. Around [13-14](#) people from Afghanistan, Iran, Yemen, Syria and Iraq have been recorded missing or dead in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Regional Overview



Mixed Migration Regional Updates

Middle East

EU-Arab Summit February 2019

On February 24 and 25th, the first [EU-Arab Summit](#) was hosted in Egypt by the League of Arab States (LAS) and the European Union (EU). Marking the start of a new dialogue between LAS and EU, the aim of the summit was to boost cooperation towards security, conflict resolution and socio-economic development throughout the region. The summit resulted in [Sharm El Sheikh Declaration](#). One of the states' main commitments outlined in the declaration covered migration through: regional cooperation between the LAS, EU, the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU); commitment to the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; protection of and support to refugees in accordance with the international law and combatting irregular migration, smuggling and trafficking.

Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region

The 15th of March marked the 8th year anniversary of the Syria crisis which, at the moment, counts [6.2 million internally displaced](#), [5.7 million refugees](#) in neighbouring countries, and more than [370,000 people dead](#). It is also the third time the EU hosts the [Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region](#). The [3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience](#) remains [underfunded](#) for 2019 with \$3.3 billion required for those displaced inside Syria, and \$5.5 billion for refugees and host communities in neighbouring countries. At the conference, [donors pledged](#) nearly [US\\$7 billion](#) for the 3RP. Progress on funding commitments can be monitored on [UNOCHA's Financial Tracking Service](#).

Jordan continues to regulate refugee status of those living outside of camps

The Government of Jordan (GoJ) has [achieved progress](#) in 2018 by launching and extending the Rectification of Status Process (RSP), which allows certain categories of refugees living informally outside of the camps to regularize their status. As of the end of January 2019, the RSP facilitated the issuance of at least [22,529](#) Asylum Seekers Cards by UNHCR, which subsequently allows refugees to present themselves to authorities to obtain Ministry of Interior (MoI) Cards. The RSP had a positive impact on freedom of movement, the perception of safety and eligibility for public services and assistance. Despite the RSP, a certain number of refugees do not fit the criteria set by the GoJ and are not able to legally stay in their place of residence, move freely, access public services and humanitarian assistance, or [register births](#), deaths, and marriages. In general, obtaining civil documentation remains challenging for some categories of refugees, with complex cases stranded in legal limbo and persisting financial barriers. Meanwhile, over [10,000 Syrian refugees are currently confined](#) within the barbed-wire-enclosed area of Azraq's village 5, allegedly for security reasons, with no exit possibility unless screened and approved by the security authorities.

Israeli government suspends deportation of Congolese refugees and migrants

In October 2018, Israel [announced](#) the removal of temporary protection for hundreds of Congolese refugees and migrants who have been in Israel for 15 years. This led to opposition from rights groups: HIAS Israel, the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, ASSAF, Physicians for Human Rights and the African Refugee Development Centre. On February 21, after the NGOs' public campaigning and [court action](#), the Interior Minister Arye Deri decided to [delay the decision](#) to end the collective protection of nationals from the Democratic Republic of Congo because of recent developments in the country. There are an estimated hundreds of Congolese nationals residing in Israel who fled Congo following an outbreak of violence in the early 2000s.

The Congolese are not the only Africans in Israel as there are an estimated total of [36,552 Africans](#) who originate mainly from Sudan and Eritrea. They began arriving in Israel in 2005 through the border with Egypt after Egyptian security forces reportedly attacked demonstrating asylum seekers in Cairo in Mustapha Mahmoud Park'. Word spread of safety and job opportunities in Israel and tens of thousands crossed the desert border, often after enduring dangerous journeys. However, the Israeli Ministry of Interior (MOI) regarded them as "[infiltrators](#)" and completed a barrier in 2012. Only [300 asylum seekers](#) have entered Israel via Egypt since 2013. As of 2017, crossings through Egypt have stopped. While many say they are refugees fleeing conflict or persecution, the government of Israel views them as job-seekers who [threaten](#) the country.¹

Iraqi refugees and migrants missing and dead after boat accident on the Evros river

Greek police say four refugees and migrants, including three girls, have gone missing since their inflatable boat was punctured by a tree branch when they tried to cross the Evros River from Turkey into Greece. Police found eight Iraqi refugees and migrants – five adults, two boys and a girl – on a rock outcropping in the middle of the river. A police search recovered the boat with the refugees and migrants' belongings, but there were no signs of the missing. The father of the three girls is among the survivors, as are two of their siblings, a girl and a boy.

Eight Sudanese nationals detained after suspected illegal entry to Lebanon

On January the 4th, the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) [reportedly](#) detained eight Sudanese nationals in the northern border district of Akkar for entering Lebanon illegally. The two Lebanese men who were

¹ See also the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants' ['Guide for Integrating Asylum Seekers \[in Israel\]'](#), published in December 2018.

suspected of smuggling them have also been detained. The Sudanese had allegedly travelled from Sudan through Egypt and Syria before entering Lebanon. ISF's stated that one of the smugglers had several arrest warrants in his name, including on charges of attempted murder and kidnapping. All detainees have been referred to the judiciary.

Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC)²

Abuses Women Suffer in Immigration Detention in the Gulf

In [Kuwait](#), female foreign nationals who become pregnant outside of marriage are put in a secured maternity hospital ward known as "[Ward 10](#)" or the "Illicit Pregnancies Ward." [Reportedly](#), following birth, the women with their new-born are moved to this 'prison' while they await deportation. [Reportedly](#), similar practices have been observed in other Gulf states, such as [Bahrain](#), [Qatar](#), and [Saudi Arabia](#). Historically, rules, regulations and procedures on prison operations were developed almost exclusively for men, which aggravates the often [unacknowledged](#) plight of women in detention. The Global Detention Project (GDP) [states](#) that "for migrant and asylum-seeking women and victims of trafficking, risks in detention include threats of sexual abuse in absence of female security staff and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health." The international community has sought to address the gap in international standards on addressing the needs of women in detention by unanimously adopting the [United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders](#) (also known as the "[The Bangkok Rules](#)"). However, to date, no specific set of rules or guidelines have been developed on the proper treatment of women in immigration detention or on the need to avoid putting pregnant and lactating women in detention.

Yemeni national's claim for asylum not considered by the Qatar authorities

[Qatar](#) authorities are threatening to forcibly expel a [Yemeni](#) national without considering his claim for asylum, [Human Rights Watch](#) said on the 25th of February. The Yemeni national should qualify for political asylum under Qatar's Law no. 11/2018, article 1, which protects refugees who are "unable or unwilling to return to their country due to a justified fear of execution or bodily punishment, torture, inhumane or degrading treatment, or persecution, on account of their ethnicity, religion, or affiliation with a specific social group, or due to their political beliefs." However, the government has so far failed to implement a law passed in September 2018 that sets out the standards for granting asylum and the rights and benefits for people granted asylum in the country.

² The movement of refugees and migrants from the Horn of Africa through Yemen and towards the Gulf Countries, primarily Saudi Arabia, is covered in the Quarterly Mixed Migration Updates by the MMC East Africa & Yemen and therefore not included here.

North Macedonia rejects asylum claim of woman who fled the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

On February the 14th, [HRW reported](#) on [Hind Albolooki](#) who fled the United Arab Emirates (UAE) after receiving threats from family members and marital domestic violence. Hind sought asylum in North Macedonia, but authorities rejected her asylum claim. She is now trapped in an immigration detention centre, [begging not to be deported](#) back to the UAE and instead allowed to claim asylum elsewhere. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has barred her deportation while it processes her case. It is unclear whether Macedonian authorities will send her back to the UAE or comply with the ECHR's decision.

Unexpected Dangers for Fleeing Saudi Women

[Rahaf al-Qunun](#), the Saudi woman who [fled](#) her allegedly abusive family on the 5th of January, provided her account on women facing discrimination and being exposed to domestic violence under the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia. She said that that women have few places to go to when they face abuse, leading some women to attempt an escape and flee the country. According to [Human Rights Watch](#), the women risk forced return and retaliation from the government and family for their escape attempts.

Bahraini Refugee football player released from detention after being threatened with extradition

Hakeem Al-Araibi, a former member of the national soccer team of Bahrain, was detained and allegedly tortured following the 2011 Arab Spring protests. He was granted refugee status in Australia, where he has been living since 2014, but was still sought by the Bahraini authorities. He was arrested in Thailand when he was on [holiday](#) with his wife. After [action](#) from athletes, governments, NGOs, UN, Sports federations and the global rights movement, he was [released](#) and could return home to Australia on the 11th of February 2019. The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights [reported](#) that other Bahraini citizens haven been less 'lucky' with international support for their release.

'Saudi authorities deport 86 Bangladeshi workers'

There have been [reports](#) of [300-400](#) Bangladeshi workers being deported from Saudi Arabia every week. For example, on 18 March 2019, 86 workers were deported for various reasons, including for working in companies other than the ones that they were contracted for. According to The Daily Star in Bangladesh, workers who migrate to Gulf countries, particularly to Saudi Arabia, with the assurance of getting a fixed job, are often misled by brokers and recruiting agencies. After paying fees to brokers and recruiting agencies and arriving in the Gulf, the foreign workers may find that the jobs they were offered do not exist. Consequently, these foreign nationals become irregular migrants when they start working for other companies while not possessing the right legal documentation.

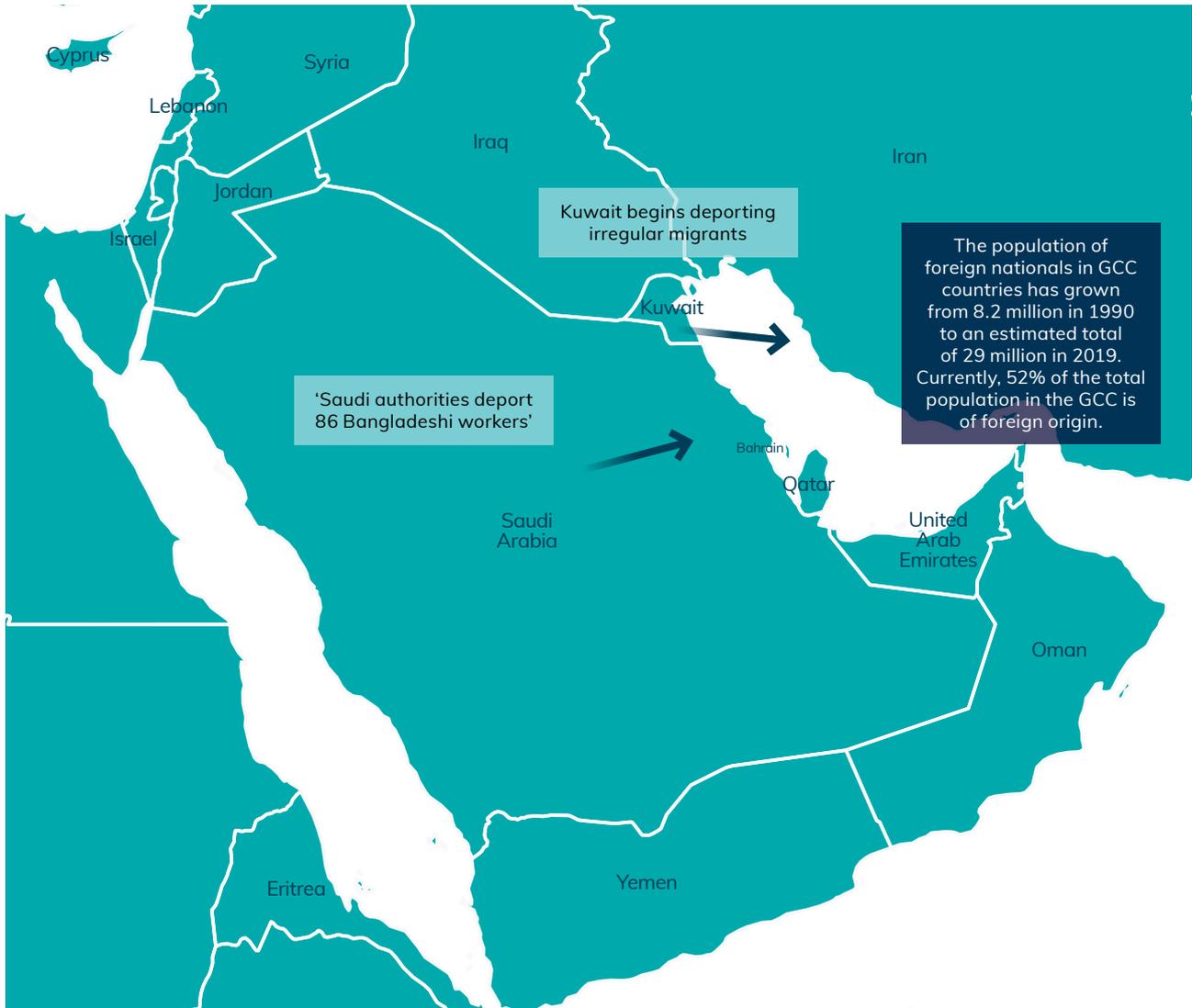
Kuwait begins deporting irregular migrants

[Arab Times Online](#) reports that Kuwait will launch a [detention and deportation campaign](#) on an estimated 120,000 irregular migrants. 3,000 migrants have already been arrested in the past six months and the two biggest suspects in visa traders and fake companies have been put in police custody. Also, 15 cases of human trafficking have been uncovered. According to statistics released on the 8th of January, 48,965 domestic workers make up the largest portion of undocumented workers.

GCC employment policies threaten livelihood of 29 million foreign nationals

[Policies pursued](#) by the GCC to reduce the number of expatriates and replace them with local citizens are increasing [pressure](#) on foreign workers, especially as the economic conditions in their home countries are deteriorating. Reportedly, jobs in the public sector [have been filled](#) by nationals and therefore the focus is being put on replacing foreign workers in the private sector. Figures released by the Saudi General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) show that 839,200 foreign workers lost their jobs in the public and private sectors during the first nine months of 2018 already. Economic expert, Mohammed Ramadan has said the policies are driven by high unemployment rates among locals. For example, at the end of 2018, GASTAT reported an unemployment rate of 12.7% in Saudi Arabia.

Foreign Nationals in the Gulf Cooperation Countries



Country	Population	All Foreign Nationals	Percentage of Foreign Nationals	Date
UAE	9,121,176	7,967,600	87%	end 2016
Bahrain	1,501,116	823,610	55%	mid-2017
Saudi Arabia	33,413,660	12,645,033	38%	mid-2018
Oman	4,656,133	2,049,548	44%	Nov 2018
Qatar	2,743,932	2,395,453	87%	Oct 2018
Kuwait	4,640,415	3,241,463	70%	Nov 2018
Total GCC	56,076,432	29,122,707	52%	

Mixed Migration to Europe

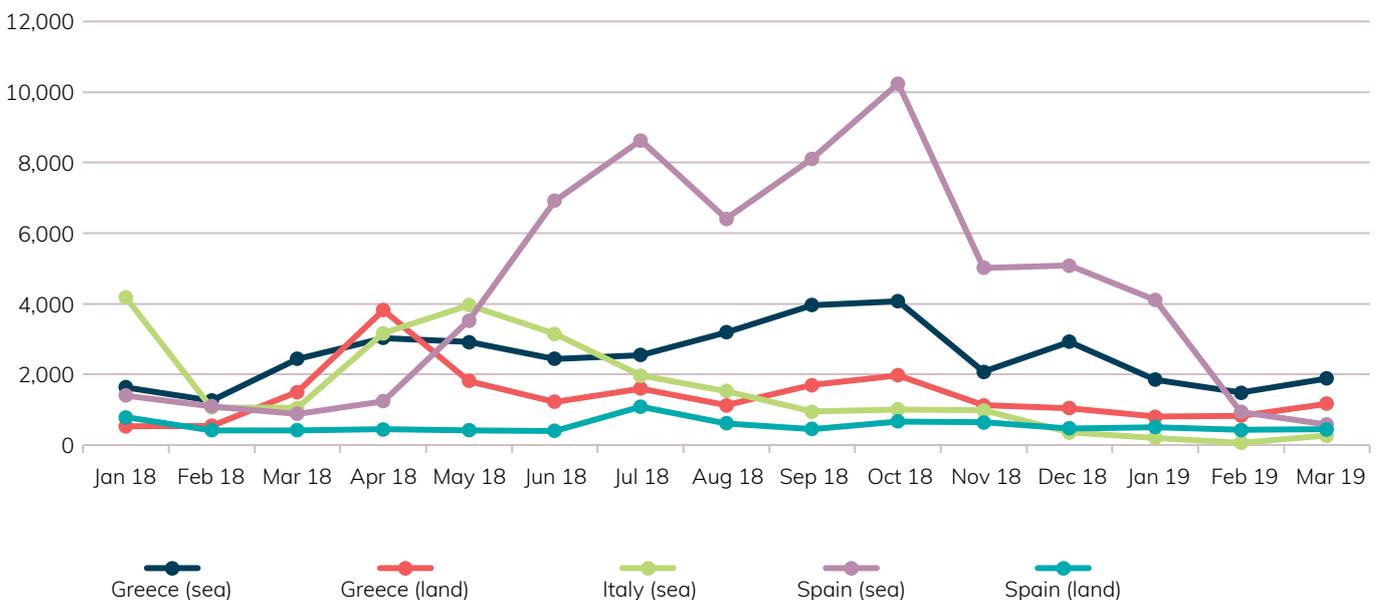
Refugees and migrants continue to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe

For many people, the sea crossing is just the final step in a journey that has involved travel through conflict zones or deserts, the danger of kidnapping and torture for ransom, and the threat from traffickers in human beings. Despite all the risks involved, refugees and migrants continue to flee their countries due to conflict, human rights violations, persecution, and poverty and attempt to make the Mediterranean Sea crossing.

In 2018, a total of 139,900 people crossed the Mediterranean via all routes. Some [changes](#) occurred in 2018. In the first half of 2018, more people arrived in Greece than Italy or Spain. Most of those arriving in Greece were from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. However, in the second half of the year, more people crossed via the Western Mediterranean Sea and fewer Syrians arrived by sea in Greece. Furthermore, refugees and migrants have tried to find new routes via the Western Balkans. Bosnia and Herzegovina recorded some 24,100 arrivals, who were mainly coming from Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria transiting via Albania, Montenegro, Greece and Serbia.

Throughout 2018, Cyprus received several boats carrying Syrians directly from Lebanon, along with arrivals from Turkey. With family reunification not being available for Syrians with subsidiary protection in Cyprus, some of those arriving by sea [reported](#) risking the journey to reunite with close family members already in Cyprus.

Number of Arrivals by Mediterranean Route



Mediterranean Route Arrivals

	2018 Q1	2018 Q2	2018 Q3	2018 Q4	2019 Q1
Greece (sea)	5,330	8,387	8,181	9,075	5,224
Greece (land)	2,578	6,866	3,948	4,146	2,801
Italy (sea)	6,296	10,281	6,647	2,346	524
Spain (sea)	3,385	11,681	21,954	20,351	5,620
Spain (land)	1,615	1,259	2,098	1,785	1,386
Total	17,589	37,215	40,730	35,918	14,169

In the first quarter of 2019, there have been a total of 14,169 new arrivals to Europe via land and sea compared to 35,918 in the previous quarter. Focusing on the Eastern Mediterranean route specifically, there is a decrease of new arrivals to Greece via sea. Numbers of arrivals usually tend to be lower around winter time in Q4 and Q1 of each year, as reflected in the table above.

In 2018, Afghans (18%), Syrians (16%) and Iraqis (12%) have been among the most common nationals of the total 32,500 sea arrivals in Greece. Based on [available data from the first quarter of 2019](#), nationals from these countries continue to be among the most common nationalities crossing the Eastern Mediterranean Sea into Greece as almost half (47.1%) of the [5,224](#) people who crossed originate from Afghanistan. Those from Iraq (14.2%), Syria (11.6) and Palestine (10.3%).³ follow next. The decreasing numbers of Syrians crossing the Eastern Mediterranean may be related to the fact that most Syrians who wanted and were able to cross, attempted or did so already. Another reason might be the overall reduction in hostilities in Syria, which may increase Syrians prospects and hopes of a voluntary return to Syria. Syrians who already arrived in Europe continue to seek asylum and international protection as they lodge the [highest number of asylum applications](#) in Europe in 2018 and the first two months of 2019. The Syrians are also among the most likely to be granted asylum in Europe.

Based on [available data from the first two months of 2019](#), there have also been 287 Syrians and 163 Palestinians who arrived in Spain via land (Ceuta & Melilla) and sea. No other nationals from the Middle Eastern countries have been recorded on this route.³

Via Central Mediterranean route, based on [available data from the first two months of 2019](#), Italy received 38 people from Iraq. No other nationals from the Middle Eastern countries have been recorded along this route.⁴

It is anticipated that these trends will continue in the next quarter as root causes of displacement and migratory movements – such as human rights violations and conflict or poverty – remain unresolved.

³ The majority of arrivals via Western Mediterranean route are from countries in Africa, such as Guinea (1,121), Morocco (1,025) and Mali (935).

⁴ Most arrivals via Central Mediterranean route are from Bangladesh (57), Tunisia (52) and Algeria (39).

Crossing the Eastern Mediterranean remains deadly

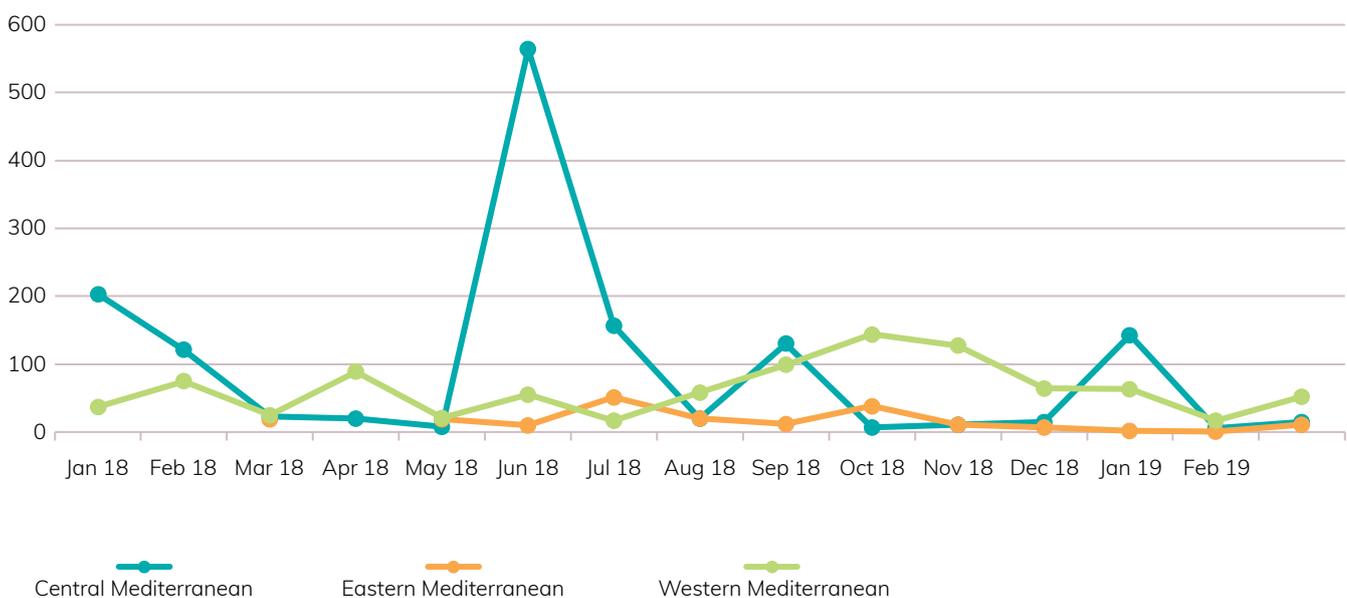
An estimated [2,277 people](#) perished in the Mediterranean in 2018 – an average of six deaths every day. On several occasions, large numbers of often traumatised and sick people were kept at sea for days before permission to disembark was granted, sometimes only after other states had pledged to relocate the majority of those who had been rescued.

During the first quarter of 2019, 310 people have gone missing or died while crossing the Western, Central and Eastern Mediterranean Seas. Due to the challenges of collecting information about these people and the contexts of their deaths, the true number of fatalities is likely much higher.

During the first three months of 2019, around [13-14](#) people have been recorded missing or dead in the Eastern Mediterranean, compared to [164](#) in the Central and [132](#) in the Western Mediterranean Seas.

Towards the end of the first quarter (on 26 March) a particular incident occurred in the Eastern Mediterranean. [IOM](#) reported that a [boat carrying 15 people](#) - most likely from Afghanistan and Iran - capsized off the coast of Ayvack, in Turkey’s province of Çanakkale. Three young women and a one-year-old child drowned at sea and their remains were recovered by the Turkish Coast Guard, who was also able to rescue 11 survivors. On 28 March another tragic incident was recorded in the Aegean Sea, when a boat sank off the coast of Chios, Greece. The Hellenic Coast Guard rescued 36 survivors who originated from Yemen, Syria and Iraq, including three women and three children. According to [testimonies](#) from the survivors, two men are thought to be missing at sea.

Number of Dead and Missing at Sea



Dead and Missing at Sea

	2018 Q1	2018 Q2	2018 Q3	2018 Q4	2019 Q1
Central Mediterranean	347	592	307	33	164
Eastern Mediterranean	19	29	83	56	14
Western Mediterranean	137	165	174	335	132
TOTAL:	503	786	564	424	310

Refugees, Foreign Nationals and Arrivals in Turkey

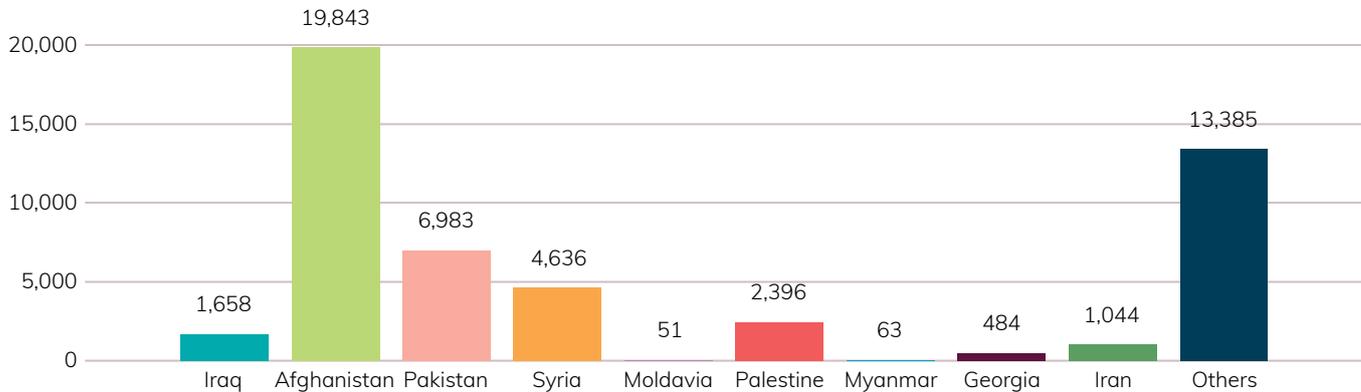
As of 28 March 2019, according to the latest available figures from the Turkish Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM), there are more than 4 million foreign nationals present in Turkish territory seeking international protection. Most of them are Syrians ([3,641,344](#)⁵ individuals) who were granted the temporary protection (TP) status. According to UNHCR there are - as of 28 February 2019 - also [368,230](#) asylum-seekers and refugees from Afghanistan (170,000), Iraq (142,000), Islamic Republic of Iran (39,000), Somalia (5,700) and other countries. In addition, as of 28 March, there are [922,530](#) foreign nationals under residence permit holder status including humanitarian residence holders. In 2018, [104,444](#) Iraqi and [99,643](#) Syrian nationals were among the majority residence permit holders in Turkey. Out of a total of [85,840](#) work permit holders, [16,783](#) Syrian were also among the top nationalities who have been in Turkey with a work permit in 2018. No data is available yet on the numbers and nationalities of permit holders in Turkey in 2019.

The number of readmitted migrants and refugees to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement increased with 35 this quarter, bringing the total to [1,841](#). The majority are from Pakistan (710), Syria (351), Algeria (193), Bangladesh (101) and Afghanistan (105). [UNHCR reports](#) that of all of those returned, 45% did not express a will to apply for asylum or withdrew their will to apply for asylum or their actual asylum claims in Greece

A total of [50,059](#) arrivals in Turkey were recorded during the first quarter of 2019. The majority are from Afghanistan (39%), Pakistan (14%) and Syria (9%). The total number of arrivals in Turkey was 268,003 in 2018, 175,752 in 2017, 146,485 in 2016.

⁵ Although coming from the same [primary source](#), this number is slightly different from what [UNHCR](#) reports (as of 21 March).

Nationalities of Arrivals Turkey in 2019 (per 27 March 2019)



In the first quarter of 2019, the Turkish authorities apprehended a total of [1,609](#) smugglers. The total number of smugglers captured was 6,278 in 2018, 4,641 in 2017 and 3,314 in 2016.

[29](#) victims of human trafficking have been identified in this quarter. The total number of victims of human trafficking was 134 in 2018, 303 in 2017 and 181 in 2016.

[4,316](#) people were apprehended/rescued in all seas surrounding Turkey, whereas the total of the previous quarter was 6,994. These people were captured during a total of [119](#) operations, compared to 190 in the previous quarter. [9](#) 'Organisers' were apprehended at sea, compared to 26 in the previous quarter.

The [Turkish Coast Guard](#) and Turkish media regularly report on these apprehensions and provide more background to these figures. For example, on 3 March, Hurriyet Daily [reported](#) on 88 refugees and migrants in a rubber boat being apprehended by the Turkish Coast Guard. Among them were 22 Afghan, 17 Iraqi and five Syrian nationals. Six people were suspected of human smugglers and arrested.

In another case on 24 February, the Turkish Coast Guard apprehended [26 people](#) in a rubber boat off the coast of Balıkesir province. On the same day in the north western province of Edirne, [22 people](#) were apprehended and one alleged human smuggler was put into custody. Yet another group of [40 people](#) in the Aegean sea were rescued on 15 January. During this operation, the dead body of a 4-year-old girl was recovered.

On 2 Jan 2019, Bodrum Chief Prosecutor's Office presented the indictment to the court and launched a [landmark legal case](#) against migrant smugglers. In this case, 14 people were arrested for their alleged involvement in the capsizing of a boat off the coast of Bodrum in the southwestern Muğla province on September 17, 2018 during which 3 people died and 15 were rescued by the Turkish Coast Guard. The suspects were charged with "voluntary manslaughter with eventual intent", which could lead to a life-time prison sentence. According to the indictment, the suspects knew that the boat could only carry seven people and was leaking. Despite knowing this, they boarded 18 people from both Iraq and Syria. One of the victims later reported that the boat got into trouble very soon after departure.

Nationals from Syria and Iraq among the top-3 asylum seekers in Europe in 2018 and early 2019

In 2018, [EU+ countries recorded](#) some 634,700 applications for international protection, as reported by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).⁶ For the sixth consecutive year Syrians lodged more applications for asylum than any other citizenship: 74,800. One in 10 applicants in the EU+ was a Syrian. Afghan (45,300) and Iraqi (42,100) nationals also lodged high numbers of applications. Despite lodging fewer applications compared to 2017, these top three countries of origin still accounted for 26% of all applications in 2018.⁷

In January 2019, EU+ countries recorded some 58,609 applications for international protection, a large 21% increase compared to the preceding month, as [reported by EASO](#). Syrian, Afghans and Iraqis lodged the most applications in January 2019, such that a quarter of all applicants in the EU+ originated from one of these countries. Syrian nationals lodged about 6,099 applications, up by 25% from December 2018. Afghans (+13%) and Iraqis (+6%) also lodged increasing numbers of applications. Applicants from Afghanistan lodged considerably more applications than a year earlier in January 2018, confirming an upward trend that started in the second half of 2018.

⁶ The EU+ is composed of 28 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland

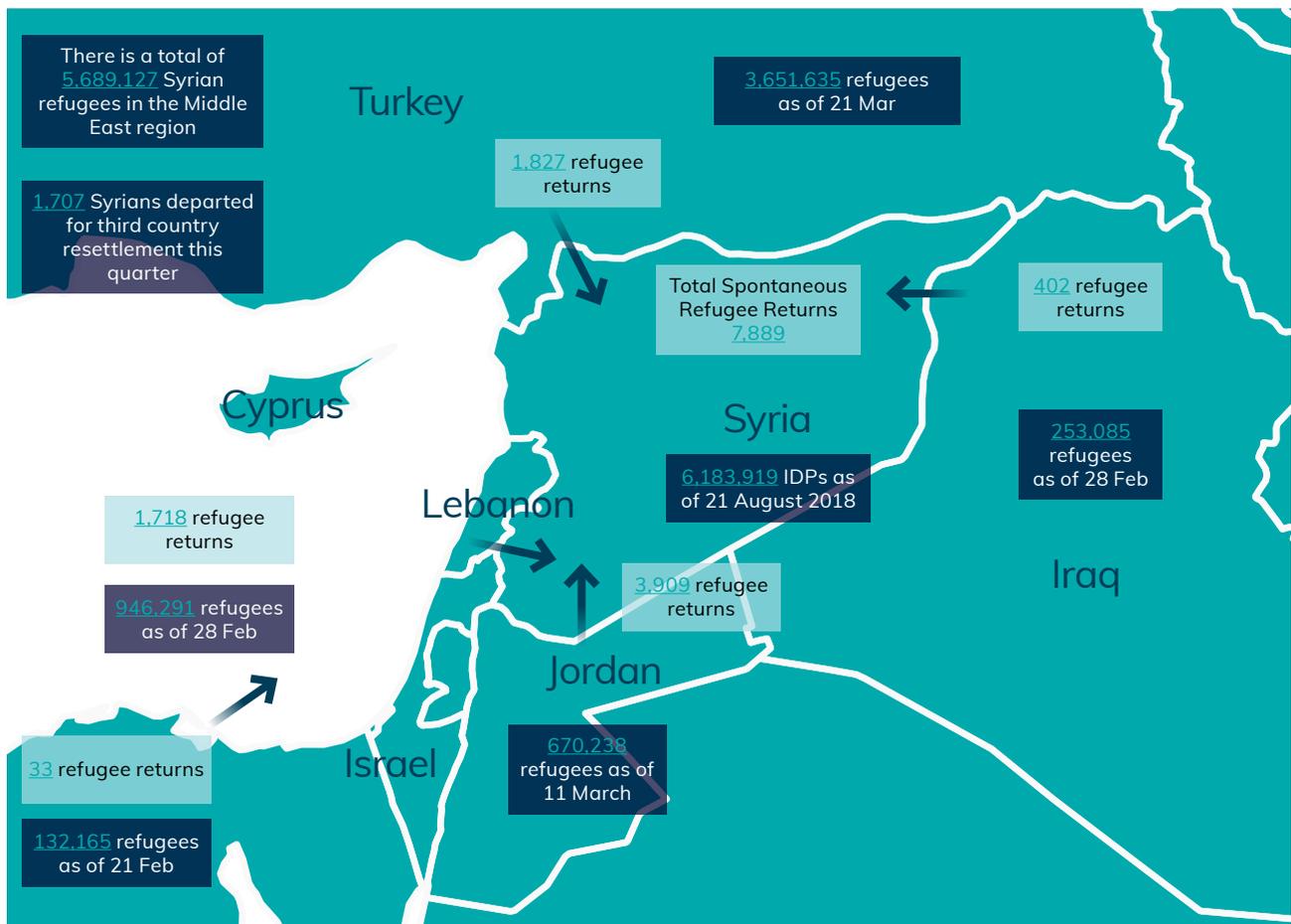
⁷ EASO's report was met with [critical feedback from Catherine Woollard](#), Secretary General for the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). She was not pleased with the celebratory tone on the decline in asylum applications because 1) those who need protection are still prevented from reaching safety and 2) people who are blocked en route to Europe are subject to horrific treatment. She also states that "in the absence of safe and legal routes to safety, refugees have to move in an "irregular" way (it is not illegal to cross borders to seek protection and a majority of those who arrived during the crisis were refugees). Those on the move for other reasons are still bearers of human rights and many leave quite desperate situations. Preventing the movement of people in need is not a cause for celebration." She pleads for an improvement of the functioning and fairness of asylum decision-making, which includes the need for better compliance with EU and international law.

Thematic Section: Syrian displacement

Syrian displacement in the Middle East

The Middle East hosts around [5.7 million Syrian refugees](#)⁸ and there are around [6.2 million internally displaced](#) inside Syria. In absolute numbers, the majority of refugees are hosted in Turkey (3.65 million). Relative to the total population, in each of the neighbouring countries, Lebanon ranks first as 15% of the people in Lebanon is a Syrian refugee. However, [governments in the Middle East are reluctant](#) to accept local integration of refugees as a durable solution. The [1951 UN Refugee Convention](#) provides a legal framework for the integration of refugees and articulates the obligation to ‘facilitate the assimilation and naturalisation’ of refugees, but it does not apply to Syrian refugees in Syria’s neighbouring countries where the convention has not been signed and ratified without limitations. Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq have [not signed](#) the [1951 Refugee Convention](#). Turkey has [signed](#) the convention but maintains a geographic limitation which avoids its application to Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Syrian Returns and Displacement numbers in January 2019, as reported by UNHCR and Turkey’s authorities



8 This includes an estimated 35,713 Syrian refugees in North Africa.

Spontaneous Refugee Returns of Syrians Refugees in the Middle East

In the UN's [3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience](#) Plan, durable solutions have been included as [a strategic direction](#). Durable solutions include local integration, third country resettlement and voluntary return in safety and dignity. In addition, an emphasis has also been placed on access to a third country through legal means other than resettlement (complementary pathways).

Whereas government actors in neighbouring countries are pressuring Syrians to return and whereas the international community is preparing and anticipating an increase in refugee return movements in 2019, [present conditions in Syria remain not conducive for voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity](#). Despite this, in 2018, a total of 56,047 refugees crossed the border back into Syria, which is a [10% increase in verified refugee return](#) movements compared to 2017. In January 2019, there were 7,889 verified refugee return movements from Jordan (3,909), Turkey (1,827), Lebanon (1,718), Iraq (402) and Egypt (33).

Restricted access to third country solutions

UNHCR [estimates](#) that 10% of Syrian refugees need resettlement and meet the criteria. As of this quarter, this means that 568,913 (registered) Syrian refugees are in need of resettlement. However, there have been only 23,409 resettlement departures from the Middle East in 2018. This means that only 4.6% of the Syrians in need of resettlement have been resettled in 2018.

Available data from the first month of 2019 indicates that [3,711](#) Syrian refugees have been submitted for resettlement, whereas in the same period [1,707](#) (46%) actually departed for resettlement. Thus, there is currently backlog of Syrian refugees from Jordan who have been submitted for resettlement but await actual departure. During the first quarter of 2019, the majority of Syrian refugees who did depart for resettlement were [able to go to](#) France (348), the Netherlands (252), the UK (226), Germany (199) and Spain (175).

Number of Syrians from the Middle East Submitted and Departed for Resettlement



Overall, after 2016, there is a worrying decreasing trend of available resettlement places, and consequently also numbers of submissions and departures.

Combined with limited prospects of local integration, lack of access to third country resettlement, and no opportunities to voluntary return to Syria in safety and dignity, most Syrians refugees will remain stuck, vulnerable and displaced in 2019.

Syrians pressed to return

On February 17, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad [called](#) on refugees “who left because of terrorism” to return to Syria and said that “the issue of refugees has been a source of corruption exploited by officials of some countries supporting terrorism”. [T]here are constant attempts to convince refugees and expatriates that they are wanted and would be arrested if they enter Syria, which [has] caused many to avoid returning to Syria out of fear for those rumours”. However, the [humanitarian community](#), including the [UNHCR](#), has consistently stated that “present conditions in Syria are not conducive for voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity”. Among other challenges, people inside Syria lack access to [safety](#), basic [human rights](#) and [needs](#). At the same time, [restrictive family reunification](#) laws and policies in [European countries](#) and [xenophobic tendencies](#) are driving refugees towards returning or [undertaking dangerous journeys](#) to unite with their loved ones. In Syria’s neighbouring countries, lack of legal status and economic and education opportunities and high costs of basic living are pushing Syrians to return involuntarily and prematurely.⁹

Meanwhile, [neighbouring states](#) are [pressing for help to return refugees](#). On the February 26, Lebanon’s president Aoun, [said](#) that “international aid should be paid to Syrian refugees after they return home to encourage their return” and that according to him “distributing aid to refugees in Lebanon along with their work here in which they compete with the Lebanese labour force are encouraging them to stay”.

On February 14, the Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi [said](#) refugees are “greatly burdening the Kingdom”. He indicated that efforts should be put to improve conditions for the return of refugees via a peace settlement negotiated under the terms of United Nations Resolution 2254. On the 22nd of February, when Safadi received [a delegation of US congressmen](#), he again stressed the importance of achieving a political solution to the Syrian crisis and restoring Syria's security and stability that would allow the voluntary return of refugees.

In January 2019, Turkish president Erdogan has [said](#) that so-called ‘safe zones’ will be set up in northern Syria to allow (more) refugees to return, even though [historical analysis and previous experiences](#) have shown that these zone are anything but safe.

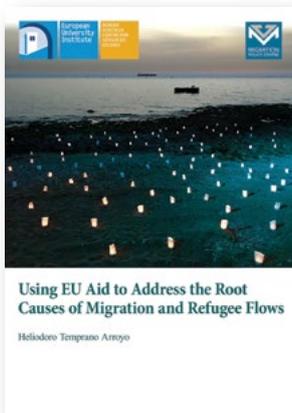
9 More news from this quarter on the topic of return: DRC & Oxfam (2019) [Aid in Limbo: Why Syrians Deserve Support to Re-build Their Lives](#), 12 March 2019; European Council on Foreign Relations (2019), [The Displacement Dilemma: Should Europe Help Syrian Refugees Return Home?](#), 13 March 2019; Syrian Voices for the Displaced (2019) [The Prospect of Returns: Now is NOT the time](#); UNHCR (2019) [Eight Years on, Syrian Refugees Weigh Thorny Question of Return](#), 5 March 2019.

Stranded at the Syria-Jordan border

In 2018, MMC has been reporting about approximately 40,000 Syrians stranded and trapped in the Rukban desert settlement at the Syria-Jordan border. The vast majority are women and children who have been living there under increasingly [deteriorating](#) conditions for up to four years now. The UN's [largest humanitarian convoy](#) in Syria's eight-year conflict arrived at Rukban on the 6th of February, which is the second convoy since November 2018. However, residents have reported that the latest shipment of over 100 trucks with food and clothes is [not enough](#).

On 27 February 2019, [UNICEF reported](#) that "death and despair haunt children in Rukban". Since the beginning of this year, 12 children have died and five of them were new-borns who did not even survive their first week of life. The [UN-conducted intentions survey](#) in Rukban shows that the majority wish to leave the camp, however people fear doing so. Many are worried about their safety and security if they choose to return to their homes. Lack of civil documentation and concerns about access to their property were also reported. While both the Jordanian Government and the Assad regime denounced responsibility for the camp's people, the UN is [urging](#) the international community to find a solution.

Highlighted New Research and Reports



[Using EU aid to address the root causes of migration and refugee flows - Making EU External Financial Assistance More Relevant for Migration and Refugee Policy](#)

Heliodoro Temprano Arroyo, Migration Policy Centre | 2019

This [book](#) looks at the potential use of the EU's external financial instruments to address the root causes of migration and refugee inflows. After providing an updated survey of the literature on aid and migration and looking at the actual responsiveness of EU aid to migration and refugee pressures, the book

takes stock of the different financial instruments the EU has at its disposal, including new facilities such as the trust funds for Africa and for the Syrian refugee crisis, the Facility for Refugees in Turkey and the EU's External Investment Plan. It also looks at the relevance of climate finance for developing countries as an instrument to ease forced displacement and at the role of migrant remittances, which although not an official flow, are four times larger than ODA and can be influenced by public policy. The last part of the study discusses whether aid effectiveness can be strengthened through bilateral cooperation with recipient countries in the context of migration or refugee compacts. This sets the scene for assessing the design and results obtained by the EU through a number of such cooperation agreements, notably the [EU-Jordan Compact](#), the [EU-Turkey Statement](#) and the [new Partnership Framework with Third Countries on Migration](#).



[The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey / How Migration Deals Lead to Refugee Commodification](#)

Gerasimos Tsourapas, Middle East politics at the University of Birmingham | 5 January 2019

How does forced migration affect the politics of host states and how does it impact upon states' foreign policy decision-making? The relevant literature on refugee politics has yet to fully explore how forced migration encourages

host states to employ their position in order to extract revenue from other state or non-state actors for maintaining refugee groups within their borders. This [article](#) explores the workings of refugee rentier states, namely states seeking to leverage their position as host states of displaced communities for material gain. It focuses on the Syrian refugee crisis, examining the foreign-policy responses of three major host states – Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. While all three engaged in post-2011 refugee rent-seeking behaviour, Jordan and Lebanon deployed a backscratching strategy based on bargains, while Turkey deployed a blackmailing strategy based on threats. Tsourapas' [Refugees Deeply article](#) further explains how “migration deals”, such as the EU-Turkey deal and the [Jordan compact](#) have led to ‘refugee commodification’. Also see the article on “[migration diplomacy](#)” which he wrote together with Fiona B Adamson.

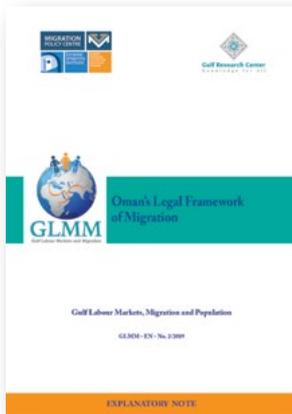


[Rejected Syrians: Violations of the Principle of “Non-Refoulement” in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon](#)

Vasja BADALIČ, Institute of Criminology at the Faculty of Law in Ljubljana, Poljanski | February 2019

In her [paper](#) in [Twohomelands](#), Vasja BADALIČ analyses the practices used by Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon to prevent Syrians from exercising their right to seek and enjoy asylum. First, she examines how all three host countries violated the principle of non-refoulement by employing a range of unlawful practices (e.g. border closures and “pushbacks”, arbitrary detentions and deportations

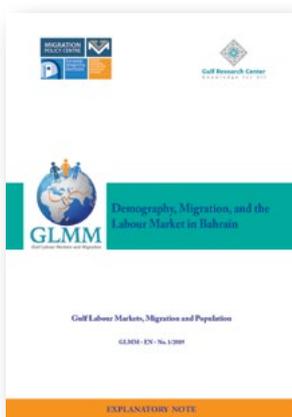
etc.). Second, she analyses how Lebanon resorted to practices that created circumstances for constructive refoulement of Syrian asylum seekers and refugees (e.g. shutting down the authority responsible for processing asylum claims, stripping Syrian refugees of their protected status etc.).



Oman's Legal Framework of Migration

Maysa Zahra, Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population (GLLM) | February 2019

This brief overview of [Oman's regulatory framework of migration](#) is intended to serve as a guide for researchers looking to navigate the set of laws and implementing regulations covering a broad range of migration-related issues from entry and exit conditions to rights and settlement, citizenship, and asylum.

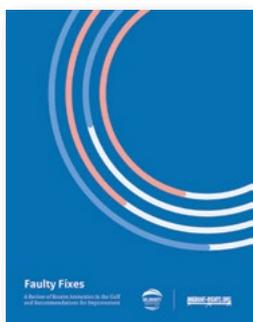


Demography, Migration, and the Labour Market in Bahrain

Françoise De Bel-Air, Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population (GLLM) | January 2019

This newly published explanatory note presents the [Demography, Migration and Labour market in Bahrain](#). Mid-2017, Bahrain's population was estimated at 1,501,116, of whom 823,610 (55 per cent) were foreign nationals. Most were from Asia (85 per cent) and especially India (half of all foreign residents). Seventy-four per cent of expatriates were employed in 2018. They accounted for 79 per cent of the employed population and 83 per cent of the private

sector's workforce. Asians were overwhelmingly involved in services and blue-collar occupations, while Arabs more often filled managerial posts. Immigration flows to the Kingdom expanded significantly over the 2000s, fuelled by high oil prices and the ensuing boom in the construction and services sectors. During the 2010s, the foreign resident population increased again. In order to accelerate the Bahrainisation of the workforce, while maximising economic productivity and flexibility of the labour market, a string of reforms were enacted starting 2004, among which were a partial loosening of the [kefala system](#), measures to protect domestic workers and the introduction of a "flexi-permit" designed to incorporate some foreign workers in irregular situation in the labour market.¹⁰



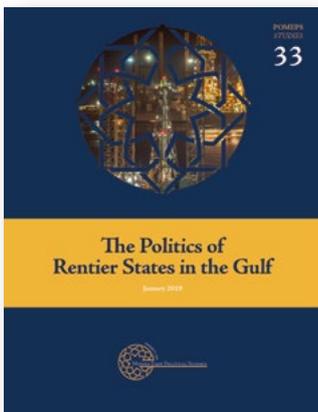
Faulty Fixes: A Review of Recent Amnesties in the Gulf and Recommendations for Improvement

Solidarity Centre and Migrant-Rights | 28 March 2019

The GCC countries are characterized by a majority migrant workforce that is regulated by the kafala (sponsorship) system. Migrant workers who are unable

¹⁰ The Kefala system dictates the entry and ongoing legal residency of migrant workers in Jordan (based on the bylaws/regulations issued according to Labour Law no. 8 of 1996), Lebanon, Iraq and the GCC countries. The legal status of labour migrants in these states is linked to an employer-sponsor who maintains effective legal responsibility for the individual they are sponsoring while they are in the country's territory.

to legally leave their job, or leave the country in some cases, are vulnerable to a range of abuses. Over the past 30 years, GCC countries have [periodically declared amnesties for irregular migrants](#) with the aim of addressing irregular migration and reducing or eliminating financial and legal penalties to enable migrants to either regularize their employment and residency status or leave the country. The report examines the design and implementation of 19 amnesties in the GCC from 2004 to 2018. It concludes that GCC governments can and should implement amnesties more effectively and with greater adherence to human rights standards. Campaigns designed and implemented to address the injustices produced by the overarching migration system are more likely to result in a higher amnesty turnout and better achieve their stated aims. The report can be found [here](#)



[Labour markets and economic diversification in the Gulf Rentiers](#)

Michael Herb, Georgia State University | January 2019

As part of the publication [The Politics of Rentier States in the Gulf](#), [this chapter](#) looks at the diversification of economies in the Gulf beyond oil exports. According to the author, each of Gulf economies has two labour markets, one for citizens and the other for foreigners. In the richer rentiers these two labour markets are almost entirely separate. Citizens mostly work in the public sector and foreigners in the private sector. Labour costs in the private sector are low due to the presence of millions of foreign workers

whose reservation wage rates are set by their home economies. Successful economic diversification in the Gulf has taken place primarily in the UAE, where diversification is highly reliant on foreign labour. No Gulf monarchy has successfully diversified any substantial part of its economy by employing citizen labour. The central question of the chapter was whether it will be citizens or foreigners who provide the labour in the diversified sectors of the economy. The author concludes that at present, the Gulf governments are serious about nationalization of their labour force, which is expected to have adverse consequences for expatriates in terms of raids on undocumented migrants as well as lack of opportunities.

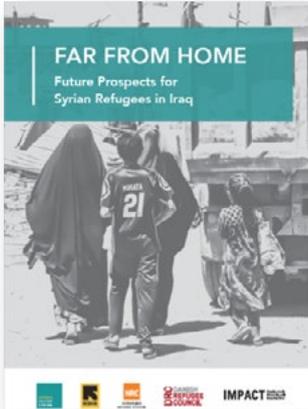


[The Effect of Refugee Integration on Migrant Labour in Jordan](#)

Allison Spencer Hartnett, Yale University | 15 January 2019

Before the Syrian civil war, Egyptians were the single largest migrant labour community in Jordan. Labour market pressures and changes to the Jordanian work permit system have resulted in the increasing vulnerability of Egyptian labour, who have been the primary labour force on Jordanian farms and construction sites since the late 1970s. In this [article](#), Allison Spencer Hartnett shows that higher concentrations of Syrians at the subdistrict level are associated with higher rates of informal labour market participation for Egyptians. Furthermore, findings suggest that Syrian labour does not directly compete with the Jordanian labour force.

findings suggest that Syrian labour does not directly compete with the Jordanian labour force.



[Far from Home: Future Prospects for Syrian Refugees in Iraq](#)

DSP, IRC, NRC, DRC and Impact Initiatives | 8 January 2019

The Durable Solutions Platform’s report ‘Far from Home: Future Prospects for Syrian Refugees in Iraq’ examines the potential for local integration of Syrian refugees in Iraq. It shows that the shared Kurdish identity and language has facilitated socio-cultural integration of Syrian refugees in Northern Iraq. However, the influx of IDPs and refugees caused competition over job opportunities, which is becoming a challenge and could form a potential source of community tension. Also, the road to long-term legal protection of refugees remains uncertain. Most refugees do intend to stay in Iraq, both on the short term and on the long term. If the overall situation for Syrian refugees in Iraq does not improve, there is a risk that Syrians may embark on irregular journeys to third countries or decide to return to Syria prematurely. The report can be found online on the websites of [NRC](#), [DRC](#), [IMPACT Initiative](#) and [Reliefweb](#)



[A Fragile Situation: Will the Syrian Refugee Swell Push Lebanon Over the Edge?](#)

Dina Eldawy, Migration Policy Institute | 21 Feb 2019

This [article](#) examines the context for Syrian and Palestinian refugees in a country in which political, economic, and social tensions have existed for decades within the native Lebanese population as well as longstanding refugee communities that exist at the margins of society. Coupled with the lack of integration and resources, these tensions suggest that newly arrived Syrians face increased hardship, with possible effects on the future mobility and well-being of other refugee communities in Lebanon, such as the Palestinians.

MMC Global



[Op-Ed: Collateral damage? The high price to pay for halting mixed migration](#)

Chris Horwood | 15 February 2019

Despite the predictions that mixed and irregular migration was unstoppable and inevitable and part of [the new global reality brought on by the inequality of the world economic and political order](#), the last 4 years have seen dramatic reductions in flows into Europe. This has been achieved by a combination of policies and strategies that are not only questionable from an ethical, legal and practical perspective and do nothing to change the prevailing conditions that compel or tempt people to move, but they also cause additional harm to some of the most vulnerable and victimized people on the planet.



[Comparing and contrasting the war on drugs and the emerging war on migrant smugglers](#)

Chris Horwood | 25 February 2019

There are those who seek to apply the experience of the war on drugs to the emerging war on migrant smugglers to warn that such a confrontation carries high costs, low chances of success and would likely lead to an escalation of violence against the migrants themselves. Such arguments suggest we should learn from the war on drugs' failures, and design different policy and criminal justice responses to irregular migration and human smugglers so as not to repeat past and ongoing failures. This research report examines this hypothesis;

that the war on drugs is analogous to the war on migrant smuggling and that the lessons derived from the war on drugs are applicable to current policy makers around migration. Using a compare-and-contrast analysis it looks at the intrinsic aspects of the commodities themselves (substances vs migrants), the dynamics and modalities of the respective illicit economies, the lessons learnt from the war on drugs, the policy environment and implications of using alternative approaches, namely 'legalising' drugs and/or new approaches, inter alia, towards decriminalizing irregular migration. More in the [full](#) or [summary](#) report.

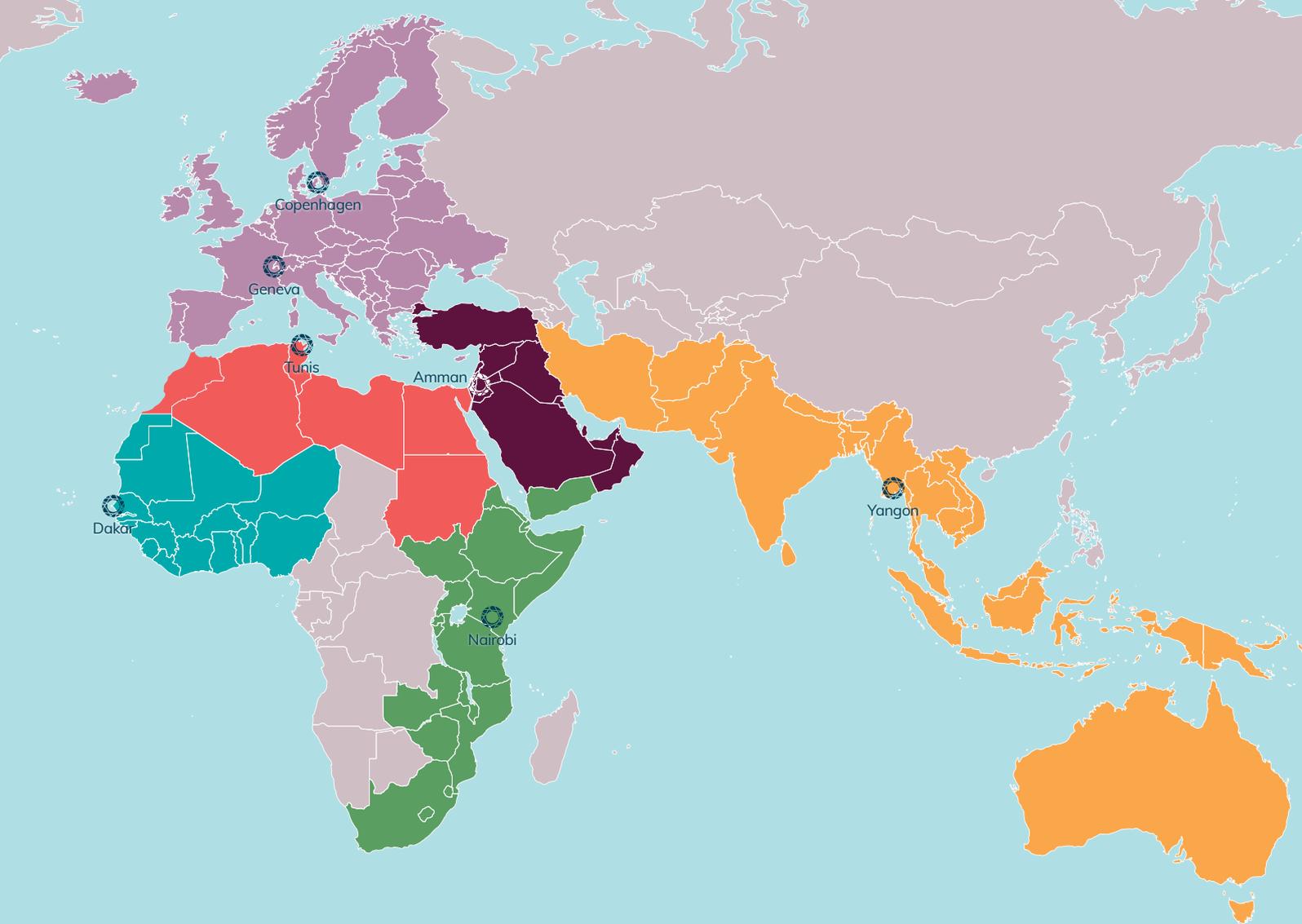


[Distant Dreams - Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees](#)

MMC and Seefar | 12 March 2019

This [report](#) is based on 56 in-depth interviews with former Afghan migrants and refugees who have returned from Iran, Pakistan and Europe. The research reveals returnees' aspirations and hopes for their future, including psychosocial challenges when reintegrating and how those suffering from more severe psychosocial conditions after return have also considered re-migration as a solution. The report provides recommendations to humanitarian and development actors, such as prioritising psychosocial assistance in reintegration

programming, allowing returnees to function in their environment by restoring a sense of agency, and rethinking categorical approaches to reintegration aid. The study was commissioned and led by MMC Asia and carried out by Seefar.



The MMC is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and global and regional MMC teams are hosted by the DRC offices in Amman, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis and Yangon.

For more information visit:

mixedmigration.org and follow us at [@Mixed_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

