

MMC North Africa

QUARTER 4 2020

A photograph of two men on a boat. The man in the foreground is wearing a white t-shirt and has his hand to his face, looking distressed. The man in the background is also wearing a white t-shirt and has his hands clasped together, looking out at the sea. The background shows a blue sea and a clear sky.

Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: North Africa

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers the North Africa (NA) region. The core countries of focus for this region are Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. Depending on the quarterly trends and migration-related updates, more attention may be given to some 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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Taha Jawashi (2017)

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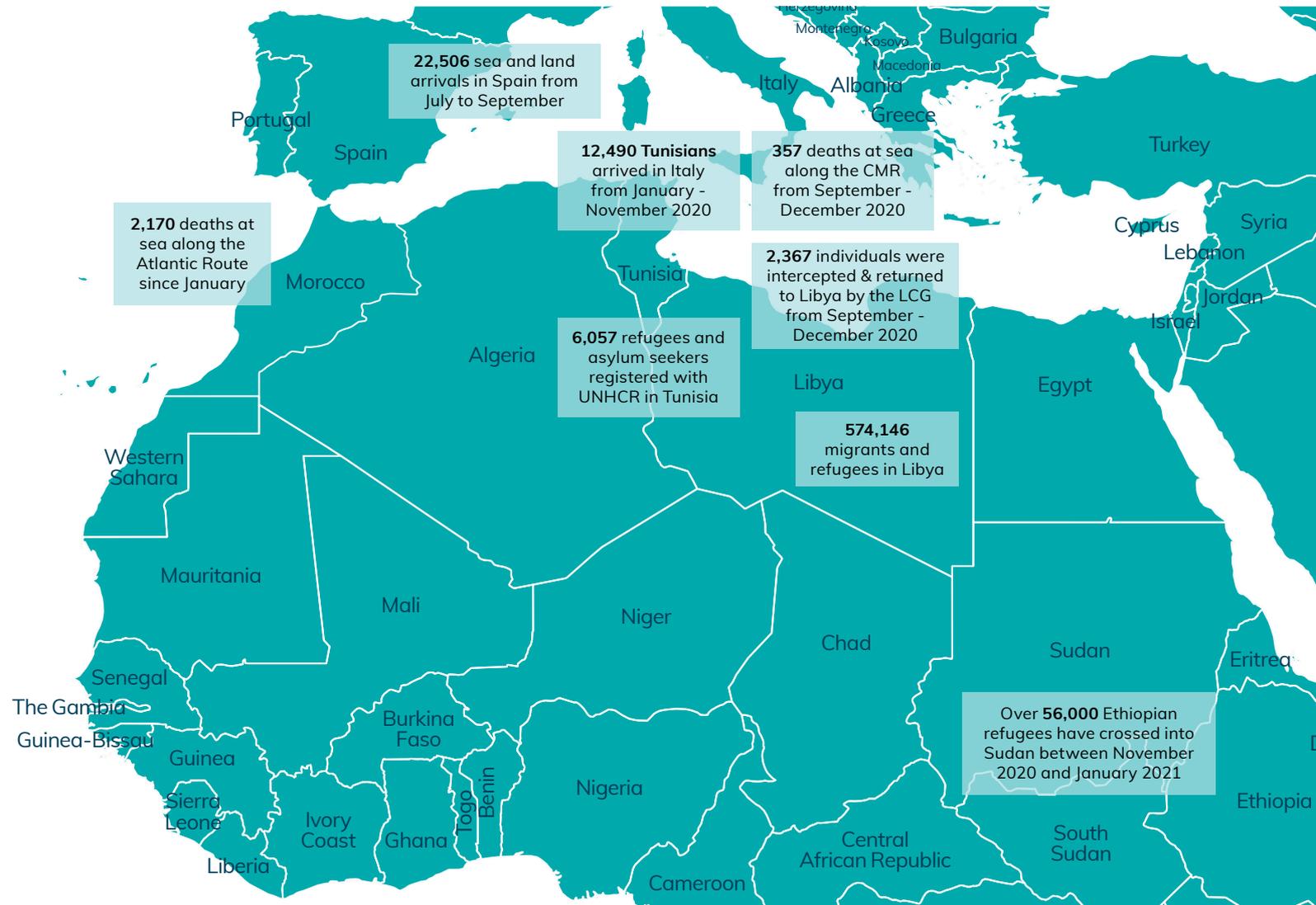
Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: North Africa

Quarter 4 - 2020

Key Updates

- **Land and sea arrivals to Italy and Spain from North Africa** (through the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes) [increased by 176% in Q4](#) compared to the same period in 2019. Overall, 2020 saw an 86% increase in arrivals on both routes compared to 2019.
- [With 38%, Tunisians represented the top nationality to arrive in Italy](#) through the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) **between January – November 2020**. In total, 12,490 Tunisians arrived in Italy, marking the highest number since 2011.
- Similarly, in 2020, the largest share of refugees and migrants travelling on the CMR had departed [from Tunisia \(45%\)](#), **overtaking embarkations from Libya (36%)**.
- [Spanish media](#) shared at the end of the year that over the course of 2020, **a total of 2,170 refugees and migrants had died on the Atlantic Route to the Canary Islands**, suggesting it may be one of the most dangerous routes.
- [In Q4](#), **2,367 refugees and migrants were intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) and returned to Libya**. This represents an increase of 10% compared to roughly the same period in 2019. The **overall figure for 2020** of intercepted refugees and migrants stands at 11,265, compared to 9,035 interceptions in 2019, marking a **25% increase**.
- From January – November 2020, **82,567 refugees and asylum seekers in Sudan were registered** by [UNHCR](#), which marks a **343% increase** compared to the same period in 2019. 57% of the newly registered arrived in the month of November, linked to the outbreak of conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region, increasing the number of Ethiopian refugees in Sudan **to 58,836**.

Regional Overview*



*Information on the map relates to selected updates and does not represent all mixed migration patterns within and out of North Africa.

Mixed Migration Regional Updates

Mixed migration from North Africa to Europe

North African arrivals in Europe

From October 1st – December 31st, 2020, the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) reports that 33,255 refugees and migrants entered Spain (by sea or land) or Italy (by sea) through the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes, representing a 176% increase compared to the same period in 2019. In total, 2020 saw an 86% increase (from 41,042 to 76,722) in arrivals on these two routes compared to the previous year. The increases were most apparent in Q3 and Q4.

Arrivals in Italy in Q4 along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR), as in previous quarters this year, continued to increase compared to the same period in 2019. [UNHCR](#) reported 10,407 arrivals from October – December 2020, up from 3,838 in 2019. Overall in 2020, 34,133 sea arrivals were reported in Italy, marking a 198% increase compared to 2019. North Africa remained a top region of origin of people on the move along the CMR to Italy, with Tunisians (the most common nationality) representing 38% of arrivals as of November 30th, followed by Algerians (4th; 4%), Egyptians (7th; 3%), Sudanese (8th; 3%) and Moroccans (9th; 3%).

Furthermore, according to [UNHCR](#), 2,281 refugees and migrants arrived in Malta from January – November 2020, compared to 3,406 for the period January – December 2019. Sudanese (the most common nationality to arrive in Malta) represented 28% of these arrivals.

On the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Routes to Spain, [UNHCR](#) data reveal that Q4 in 2020 experienced an increase of 145% compared to the same period in 2019 (from 9,168 to 22,506). In 2020 overall, 41,861 sea and land arrivals were reported in Spain, marking a 29% increase compared to 2019. While data on the most common nationalities of arrivals in Spain for Q4 had yet to be published by UNHCR at the time of writing, [Algerian media](#) estimate at least 10,000 Algerians crossed the WMR and arrived in Spain in 2020. Moreover, [in December](#), Spain deported 120 Algerians after a bilateral agreement with Algeria was reached.

The main locations of arrivals were: Canary Islands (23,023), Andalucía (10,024) and Murcia/Comunidad Valenciana (5,036) Compared to 2019, arrivals to Ceuta and Melilla decreased by 76%. Arrivals to the Canary Islands from disembarkation points in Morocco, the Western Sahara and West Africa, have experienced a seven-fold increase compared to [2019](#) (with 2,700 arrivals).

Departures on the CMR, WMR and Atlantic Route

[UNHCR](#) finds that the largest share of refugees and migrants crossing the CMR and arriving in Italy from January – October 2020¹ had departed from Tunisia (45%, up from 36% in 2019), followed in the region by Libya (36%, up from 29% in 2019) and Algeria (4%, down from 9% in 2019). Key points of departure in

¹ Data for November and December 2020 had yet to be published by UNHCR at the time of publication of this QMMU.

Tunisia include Sfax, Mahdia and Zarzis, and key disembarkation points in Libya include Tripoli, Alkhums and Azzawya.

Following the increase of arrivals at the Canary Islands over the course of 2020, [international media](#) have reported in Q4 on disembarkations from Morocco, Western Sahara and Mauritania, closest to the archipelago, but also from Senegal and The Gambia further south. Among potential explanations for a revival of the Atlantic Route, [The New Humanitarian](#) lists sharper security controls along the more northern WMR connecting Morocco with Spain, prompting people to search for alternative and more dangerous routes; increased economic hardship accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic; and environmental factors, including drought in Morocco and the depletion of available as livelihood source off the Senegalese coast.

Another alternative route to the WMR, already reported on in the previous [QMMU](#), linking Morocco with the Portuguese Algarve coast continued to be in use in Q4. In October, [Portuguese media](#) mentioned the arrival of multiple boats which had all disembarked in the Moroccan coastal city of El Jadida. In 2020, a total of 96 individuals reached the Portuguese coast taking this route. Moreover, the [Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#) (taking seat from January – June 2021) is prioritizing the launch of discussions with a set of third countries, including Morocco, for legal migration pathways towards the European Union to prevent refugees and migrants from undertaking increasingly dangerous routes.

Interceptions and rescue operations in the Mediterranean

Between [September 30th](#) and [December 31st](#), 2,367 refugees and migrants were intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) and returned to Libya. This represents an increase of 10% compared to roughly the same period in 2019.² The overall figure for 2020 of intercepted refugees and migrants stands at 11,265, compared to 9,035 interceptions in 2019, marking a 25% increase. The main nationalities to be intercepted were Sudanese (23%), Malian (12%) and Bangladeshi (11%). As of [November 30th](#), the main interception points of 2020 were Tripoli (8,441 individuals intercepted), Alkhums (1,074) and Azzawya (294).

In Algeria, interception operations carried out by the Algerian Naval Forces continued during Q4, notably in Mostaganem in [early October](#), where 13 boats were intercepted within 24 hours. In Tunisia, on December 14th, the Tunisian National Marine rescued 93 refugees and migrants from a shipwreck off the coast of Sfax, as Tunisian media [reported](#).

Dead or missing refugees and migrants

From October – December 2020, 492 refugees and migrants were [reported](#) dead or missing, of which 357 were along the CMR and 135 along the WMR. This marks a decrease of 23% compared to the same period in 2019. Overall in 2020, 1,247 refugees were reported dead or missing along the CMR or WMR, compared to 1,814 in 2019. In Q4, several shipwrecks continued to be reported around the region, including off the Libyan coast of Alkhums on November 12th with at least 74 refugees and migrants [announced](#) dead. At the end of December, at least 20 refugees and migrants drowned off the Tunisian coast at Sfax while allegedly en route to Lampedusa, as [reported](#). Deadlier than the other routes combined, [Spanish media](#) shared at the

2 Compared with data between [September 27th, 2019](#) and December 31st, 2019.

end of the year that over the course of 2020, a total of 2,170 refugees and migrants had died on the Atlantic Route to the Canary Islands.³

Mixed migration in Libya

Latest figures on refugees and migrants in Libya

As of December 13th, [IOM](#) estimates that there are at least 574,146 migrants in Libya, with 51% located in the West, 31% in the East and 18% in the South. This represents a 2% decline compared to the total number reported in the previous [QMMU](#). Similar to Q3, IOM identifies the main migrant nationalities in Libya in Q4 to be Nigerien (20%), Egyptian (17%), Chadian (15%), Sudanese (14%) and Nigerian (7%). The top three mantikas with the largest migrant populations are reported to be Tripoli, Ejdabia and Misrata.

[UNHCR](#) estimates that, as of January 1st, 2021, there are 44,199 registered refugees and asylum seekers in Libya. Similar to reporting in Q3, this represents a slight decrease compared to the previous quarter (46,247). As of December 16th, [UNHCR](#) estimates that around 2,000 refugees and migrants remain in detention centres across Libya, representing a decrease from the estimated number reported in [Q3](#) (2,400). While in earlier quarters of 2020, UNHCR visits to detention centres were hindered by authorities' measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, regular visits were reportedly taking place once again towards the end of the year. Moreover on detention centres, it was [reported](#) in October that the authorities in Tripoli announced moving centres under its control from coastal areas to the interior, as an effort to combat human trafficking.

Deportations and evacuations

In Q4, social media accounts continued to report on the forced deportation of refugees and migrants in Libya to Sudan by the Eastern authorities. In terms of humanitarian evacuation, UNHCR has been able to resume flights out of Libya after a 7-month suspension due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with flights to Niger resuming in [October](#) and to Rwanda in [November](#). In [December](#), UNHCR planned an air transport for voluntary returnees from Alkufra Airport to Khartoum Airport. However, when Sudanese authorities refused to receive the incoming flight, 160 migrants were transported in trucks to the other side of border and abandoned in the desert. This statement contradicts [news reports](#) from a week before that Khartoum had agreed to accept the evacuation of Sudanese nationals out of Libya.

Security operation cracks down on people on the move

On December 4th, it was reported by the [Libyan Observer](#) that the Saharan Patrol Department arrested 170 people on the move on their way to the beaches of Sabratha. The event had reportedly the character of a tight security operation, in which arrested refugees and migrants had been on the radar and tracked since Southern Libya. The article also mentions the involvement of police and members of the Western Military Region in the operation.

³ This number includes disembarkations from Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, Senegal and The Gambia.

Mixed migration in Tunisia

Latest figures on refugees and migrants in Tunisia

As of November 30th, UNHCR has registered 6,057 refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia, of which the top nationalities are Ivorian (33%), Syrian (33%), Sudanese (5%), Eritrean (4%) and Guinean (4%). This represents a 16% increase compared to the last quarter (dated on August 31st). While there continued to be an increase in registrations in Q4, [UNHCR data](#) shows the majority of those registered had arrived in country prior to Q4, highlighting the movement constraints that refugees and migrants might continue to experience due to the pandemic, as well as hinting at a clearing backlog exercise of already arrived refugees and asylum seekers. The cities of Tunis (2,695), Sfax (1,243) and Médenine (918) continue to host the largest refugee and asylum seeker populations.

Labour Union open to migrant workers

In early December, the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) announced the opening of the Labour Union and its affiliations to refugee and migrant workers of all nationalities working in Tunisia. On December 4th, its Secretary-General Nouredine Taboubi handed a number of membership cards to sub-Saharan migrants working in the country, as [reported](#). This follows a statement from July when Taboubi [declared](#) that “the General Labour Union will commit to defend migrants working in agriculture, construction and services through providing them with membership and a specific trade union structure, guaranteeing their economic and social rights.”

Orientation mechanisms set up in Greater Tunis municipalities

Within the framework of the project [I-MIGR](#), and the objective to improve refugees' and migrants' integration within communities and for them to better understand their rights, Raoued and La Marsa municipalities in Greater Tunis organised a launch in [November](#) after having set up information and orientation desks for refugees and migrants residing in these communities. Through personalised appointments, refugees and migrants will be guided towards improved access to basic services within their communities.

Mixed migration in Sudan

Latest figures on refugees and migrants in Sudan

As of November 30th, [UNHCR](#) estimated that Sudan hosts 1,038,177 refugees and asylum seekers, of which the main countries of origin include South Sudan (70.3%), Eritrea (11.8%), Syria (9%), Ethiopia (5.7%), and the Central African Republic (2.6%). The top three refugee-hosting states were Khartoum (305,746), White Nile state (261,518) and Kassala state (136,113). From January – November 2020, 82,567 new arrivals were registered by UNHCR, which marks an increase of 343% compared to the same period in 2019. Of all new registered arrivals within the first 11 months of 2020, 57% can be attributed to the month of November, linked to the outbreak of conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Similarly, the estimated number of Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers grew from 13,112 on [September 30th](#) to 58,836 on [November 30th](#).

Tigray conflict spurs Ethiopian refugee influx into Sudan

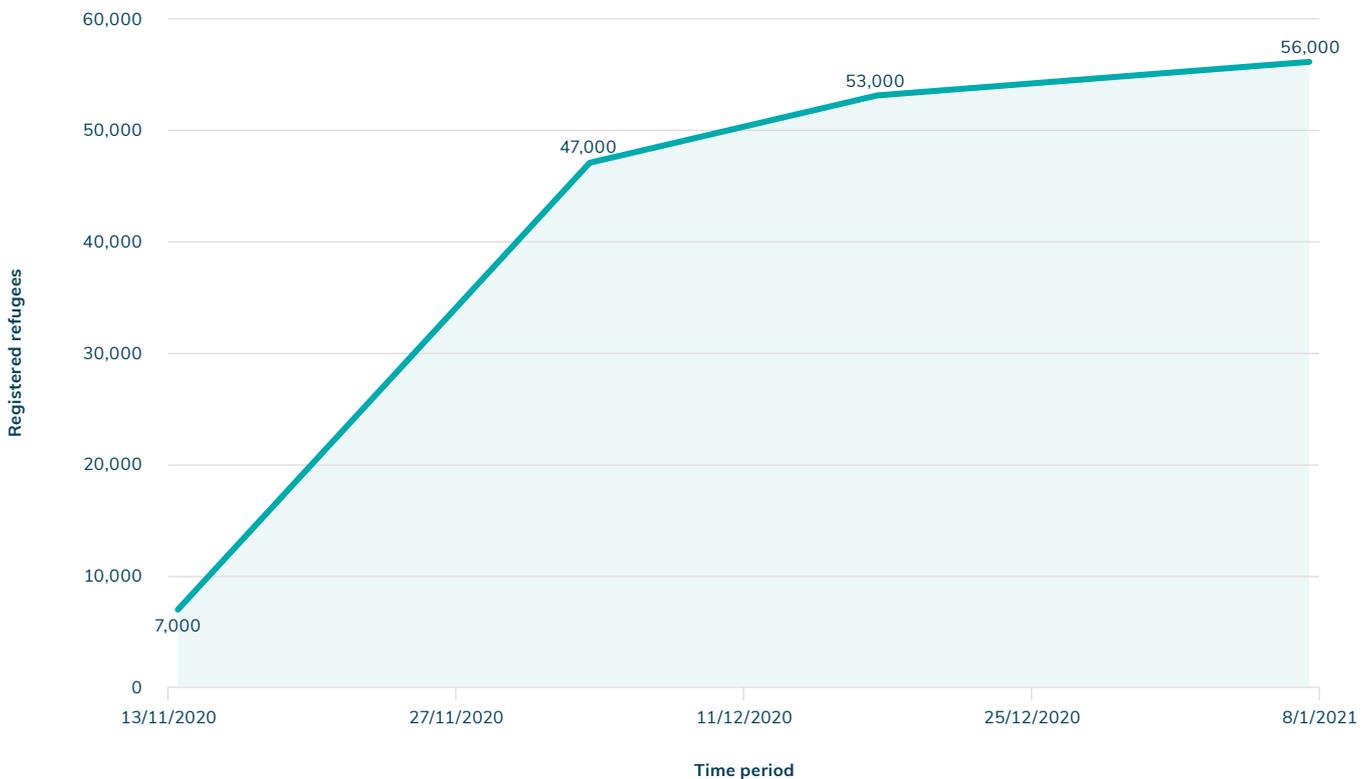
Early November, conflict erupted in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, causing thousands to flee from their homes. On January 7th, 2021, [OCHA](#) reported that UNHCR and the Sudanese Commissioner for Refugees (COR) had registered more than 56,000 individuals seeking refuge in the bordering Kassala, El Gedaref and Blue Nile states. Transit centres at the Hamdayet and Abderafi border points originally built for a few hundred have seen thousands of refugees. Andrew Mbogori, then UNHCR's Principal Emergency Coordinator in Sudan, mentioned the challenges faced by humanitarian emergency programming: "It's located in such a remote area and it has been challenging to upgrade facilities to minimum standards." While efforts have been made to move refugees away from the border to camps further into Sudan, [UNHCR](#) reports many refugees prefer to remain near the border crossings to wait for family members still in Ethiopia, or to be able to return home soon.

Thematic Focus: Ethiopian refugees in Sudan

Recent figures

As mentioned above, the arrival of Ethiopian refugees in Sudan has seen a sudden increase in Q4 of 2020 due to the outbreak of conflict in Ethiopia’s Tigray region, bordering Eastern Sudan. This led to a 3.5-fold increase of registered Ethiopian refugees in-country by UNHCR and COR between [September 30th](#) and [November 30th](#). Especially during the second half of November, Eastern Sudan experienced around 4,000 new arrivals per day, an influx unseen in this part of the country over the last two decades, as [UNHCR](#) reported. Figure 1 shows the rapidly increasing number of Ethiopian arrivals in Eastern Sudan, with numbers continuing to grow in early 2021, although at a slower pace, with some 800 new arrivals per day during the first week of the new year ([OCHA](#)).

Figure 1: Registered Ethiopian arrivals in Eastern Sudan between [November 13th, 2020](#) and [January 7th, 2021](#).



Humanitarian response capacity

Earlier in 2020, with Sudan's vulnerable populations impacted by the effects of an economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and floods, the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), and several media outlets already reported on the overstretched capacity of the humanitarian response. While Sudan has historically kept borders open to provide refuge to those fleeing conflict in the region, UNHCR assessed that managing the new influx of Ethiopian refugees will be a real challenge, with Sudan already hosting around 1 million refugees from other conflicts.

Further complicating the response is the geographical remoteness of the area where Ethiopians from Tigray cross into Sudan. The small transit camps at the Hamdayet (Kassala state) and Abderafi (El Gedaref state) border points are located at least a six-hour drive from the nearest major town, complicating equipment and infrastructure, especially WASH facilities. Health and hygiene needs were therefore marked as a priority in the UN-developed response plan in November. Moreover, there have been concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 virus, with the border transit camps lacking sufficient WASH structures ([WASH](#)) and capacity for testing and adequate protection equipment ([UNHCR](#)). To ease the pressure on these transit camps, relocations were carried out at the end of 2020 and early 2021 to Umraquba and Tunaydbah refugee camps, located further inland Sudan. Both are camps first setup in the 1980s to host Ethiopian refugees then driven out of the country [by famine](#). The camps are expected to host around 20,000 Ethiopian refugees.

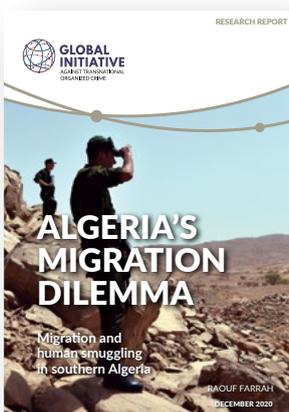
Highlighted New Research and Reports



[Libya's Migrant Report – Round 33](#)

Displacement Tracking Matrix – IOM | December 2020

This report presents the findings of DTM Round 32 (September-October 2020) in Libya. At least 574,146 migrants from over 43 countries were identified. This number marks a continuous decline over the past rounds since the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, but at a slower pace than earlier. Overall, it is estimated that 80,000 migrants left Libya since the start of the pandemic, mainly to neighbouring countries, due to less income-generating work opportunities, tightening security controls and mobility restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



[Algeria's migration dilemma. Migration and human smuggling in Southern Algeria](#)

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime | December 2020

This report narrates current migration and human-smuggling dynamics in the extreme south of Algeria, in border areas with Mali and Niger, and includes a set of policy recommendations. It is split up in three sections, offering a brief summary on the history of migration of sub-Saharan Africa to Algeria, detailing the practicalities of human smuggling in Algeria's borderlands, and assessing how the Algerian authorities address irregular migration



[Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean. Piecing Together the Shifting Dynamics](#)

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime | November 2020

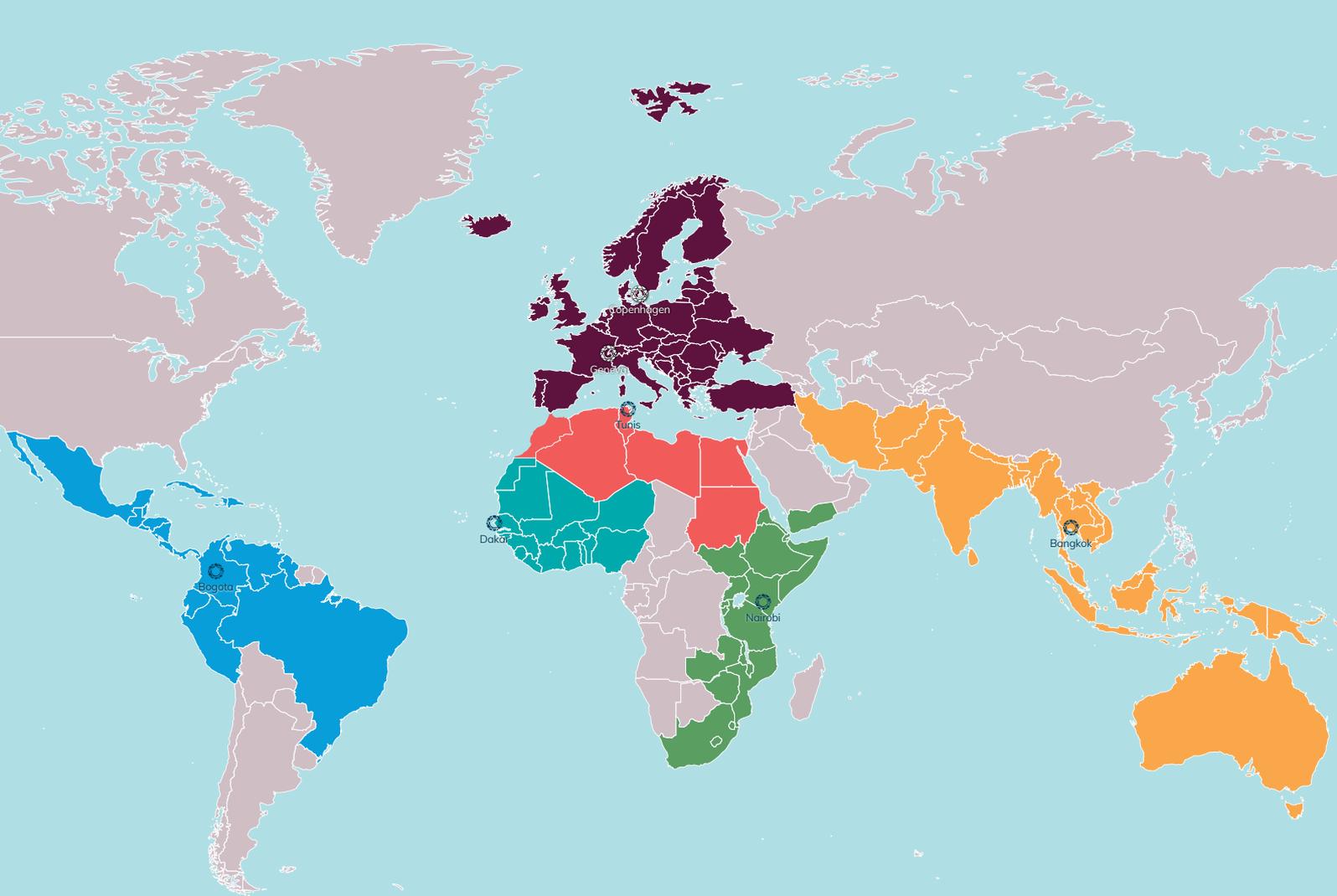
Tracking the shifting patterns of migration through the Mediterranean by analysing how the dynamics along the Central and Western Mediterranean routes have changed since 2015, this study presents data from fieldwork carried out across 8 countries in the region. It aims to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the Western Mediterranean and Central Mediterranean routes through studied initiatives and policy changes.



Protecting Migrants and Refugees in North Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for Reform

ECDPM | October 2020

This paper seeks to understand some of the dynamics driving or preventing reform of asylum, reception and migrant protection systems across North Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt), proposing a series of initial recommendations for international cooperation on such reform, taking into account the current COVID-19 crisis, underlying political interests, and local contexts and capacities.



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). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

For more information visit:

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

