



**MMC North Africa**

**QUARTER 4 2022**

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 forehead, looking distressed. The man in the background is also wearing a white t-shirt and has his hand to his mouth, looking out at the sea. The background shows a vast blue ocean under 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.

MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs hosted in Danish Refugee Council (DRC) regional offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Geneva and Brussels. For more information on MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit [mixedmigration.org](https://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 engaged in mixed migration 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. Mixed migration describes refugees and migrants travelling 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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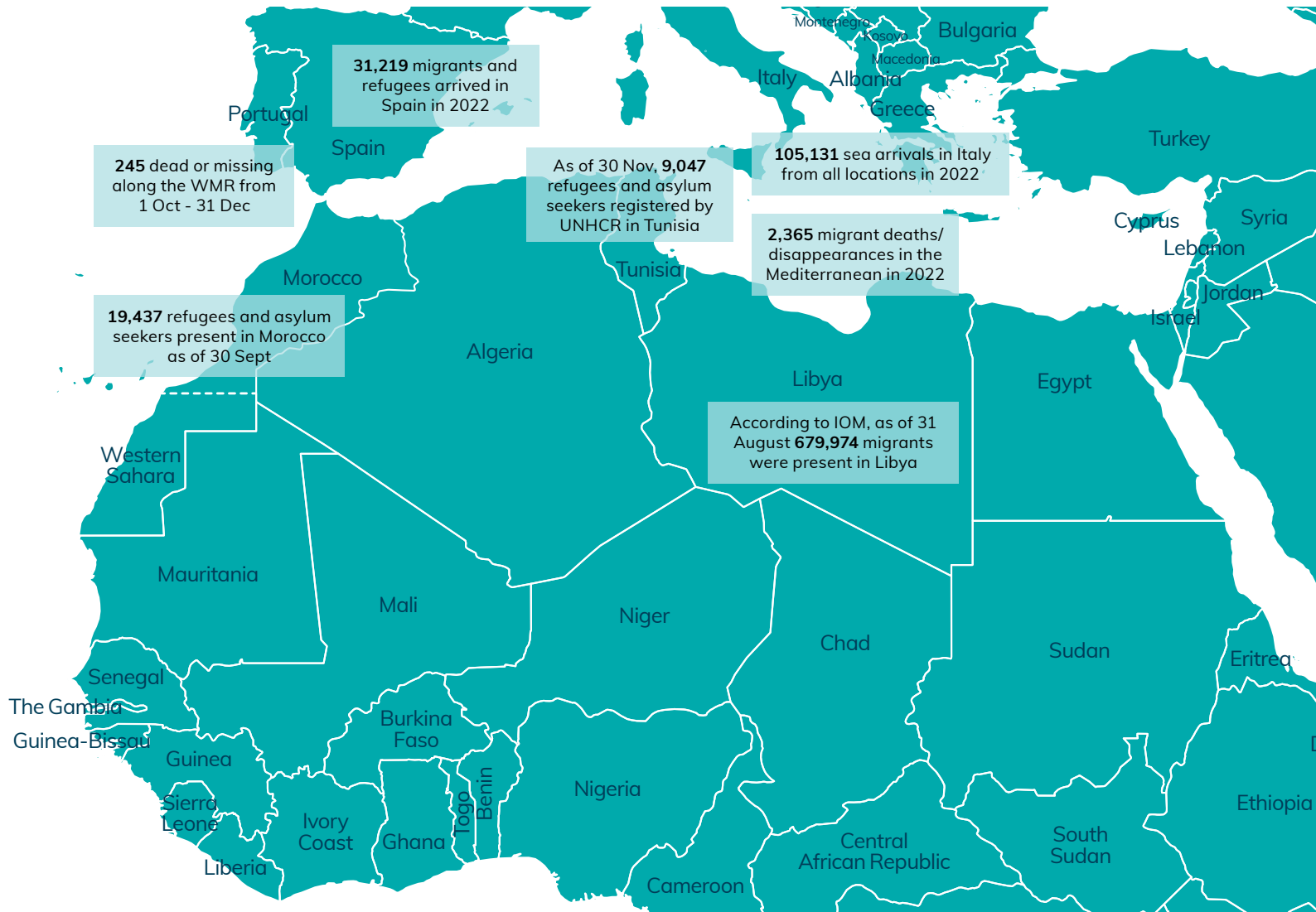
# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: North Africa

## Quarter 4 - 2022

## Key Updates

- **Demonstrations in Zarzis:** The residents of the coastal town of Zarzis in southeastern Tunisia expressed indignation over authorities' inaction to deploy search and rescue operations for a boat with 18 Tunisian migrants who went missing in late September. Weeks of [protests and a general strike](#) prompted the Ministry of Justice to open an investigation at the order of President Kais Saied.
- **Investigation into the Melilla incident closed with no charges:** Spain [closed](#) its investigation into the incident that in June led to the [deaths of dozens](#) of refugees and migrants attempting to enter the Spanish enclave of Melilla, dismissing the criminal charges against the Spanish officers involved. Meanwhile, Moroccan authorities reportedly continued their [policing](#) of refugees and migrants in the country through arrests, forced displacements, and imprisonments.
- **UN report finds assisted returns from Libya are not always voluntary:** A [report](#) on assisted voluntary returns from Libya by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) found that the limited choices and abuse faced by migrants in Libya jeopardizes the possibility of "truly voluntary" decisions to return to their countries of origin.
- **Obstructions to search and rescue in the Mediterranean:** Several NGO search and rescue (SAR) vessels [remained at sea](#) in the Mediterranean for weeks while waiting for a safe port in Europe. A standoff over the Ocean Viking vessel prompted an [EU action plan](#) on the Central Mediterranean, while Italy issued a [new decree](#) restricting NGO SAR operations.
- **Central and Western Mediterranean Route trends:** The [Spanish Ministry of the Interior](#) reported 31,219 refugees and migrants had arrived irregularly in Spain via land and sea in 2022, representing a 26% decrease from 2021. Meanwhile, [UNHCR](#) reported 105,131 migrants and refugees arrived in Italy by sea in 2022, representing an increase of 56% compared to 2021.

## 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

### Western Mediterranean Route & Atlantic Route (arrivals to Spain)

According to the Spanish Ministry of Interior, 31,219 refugees and migrants arrived irregularly in Spain via land and sea in 2022. This was a decrease of 26% compared to 2021. This decrease is particularly noticeable in terms of arrivals by sea. For instance, the number of sea arrivals to the Spanish mainland and the Balearic Islands – a location of arrival common for [departures](#) originating in Algeria – dropped from 17,341 in 2021 to 12,955 in 2022. At the same time, an [increase](#) of 24% was noted in arrivals by land through the enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta.

In 2022, [Frontex](#) recorded 7,338 Algerians arrived in Spain through the Western Mediterranean Route and the Atlantic Route as did 10,875 Moroccans (4,422 through the WMR and 6,453 through the Atlantic Route). In 2021, 11,660 Algerians and 12,789 Moroccans had entered Spain through these routes.<sup>1</sup>

### Central Mediterranean Route

In 2022, 105,131 migrants and refugees arrived in Italy by sea according to [UNHCR](#), indicating an increase of 56% compared to 2021 (67,477 people).

The [same source](#) also reported that the largest share of refugees and migrants crossing the CMR and arriving in Italy had departed from Libya (51%, up from 47% during the same period in 2021), followed by Tunisia (31%, up from 30%) and Türkiye (15%, down from 19%). Departures also occurred from Lebanon (2%, up from 0%) and Algeria (1%, down from 2%).

According to [UNHCR](#), migrants and refugees who arrived in Italy by sea in this period are mainly Egyptians (20%), Tunisians (18%), Bangladeshis (14%), Syrians (8%) and Afghans (7%). The agency noted a significant increase of arrivals from Côte d'Ivoire throughout Q4 and that Ivorians were the top nationality among arrivals in December. While Libya remains the point of departure for most migrants, most Ivorians [embarked](#) from Tunisia.

<sup>1</sup> These numbers are based on MMC calculations based on the [data](#) collected and provided by Frontex in the "detections of illegal border-crossing statistics updated monthly" database, adding the total number of entries by Moroccan and Algerian nationals via the WMR and Western African/Atlantic Route.



## Interceptions and rescue operations in the Mediterranean

According to [UNHCR](#), up to 24,000 migrants, asylum seekers and refugees were disembarked in Libya in 2022. IOM Libya [reported](#) a similar number of 24,684 migrants intercepted and returned to Libya in 2022, marking a decrease of 24% compared to 2021 (32,425).

For more information on search and rescue operations, please see this quarter's Thematic Focus: Search and Rescue in the Mediterranean (page 15).

## Dead or missing refugees and migrants

From October – December 2022, [594 refugees and migrants](#) were reported dead or missing in the Mediterranean, of which 230 along the CMR and 245 along the WMR. This marks a slight increase compared to the same period in 2021 (543).

By the end of 2022, IOM's [Missing Migrants Project](#) reported that at least 25,779 refugees and migrants have been recorded as dead or missing in the Mediterranean since 2014, 2,365 of which in 2022 alone. A December 2022 [report](#) by Spanish NGO Caminando Fronteras mapping deaths along land and sea crossings to Spain highlighted the linkages between the deadliness of these routes and states' search and rescue (SAR) practices, which include poor coordination on SAR responsibilities and operations, inadequate or slow mobilization of SAR operations, and, as highlighted by this quarter's thematic focus (page 15), "Delays in mobilising search and rescue operations due to negotiations between countries focusing on migration rather than on defending the right to life."

The disappearance of their loved ones takes an incredible toll on the families and friends of missing migrants, as highlighted in a [New Yorker article](#) following efforts to identify those who have gone missing in Italy. The uncertainty of a missing family member's fate produces symptoms comparable to those experienced by survivors of torture, according to a psychiatrist interviewed for the article, and can directly impact immigration and asylum proceedings for those applying for family reunification. The importance of the identification of missing migrants – as well as preventing these deaths in the first place – has [gained traction](#) on the international stage in recent years, but "has yet to be translated into tangible action", according to some analyses.

## Mixed migration in Libya

### Latest figures on refugees and migrants in Libya

Latest publicly available IOM numbers (as of 31 August) estimate that there were some [679,974 migrants](#) in Libya, with 55% located in the west of the country, 33% in the east, and 12% in the south. This number represents the continuation of an increase seen throughout 2022, as compared to [667,400](#) migrants as of 30 June and [635,051](#) as of 31 January. IOM identifies the main migrant nationalities to be Nigerien (24%), Egyptian (21%), Sudanese (19%), Chadian (13%), and Nigerian (5%).

UNHCR [reported](#) that as of 1 January 2023, some 44,724 asylum seekers and refugees were registered in Libya, mainly from Sudan (19,827), Syria (14,462) and Eritrea (5,773). This represents a slight increase from the [previous quarter](#) (43,000 as of 1 September).

## Assisted returns and expulsions from Libya

On 11 October, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [published](#) a report focusing on the rights and protection of migrants who receive assistance to return from Libya to their countries of origin. Examining the experiences of migrants who participated in assisted return and reintegration programmes, which are in principle voluntary, the [report](#) found that “many migrants, particularly those in Libyan detention centres, are unable to make a truly voluntary decision to return in accordance with international human rights law and standards”. The report underscored the “coercive environment” produced by the multitudinous [human rights violations](#) and [ongoing forms of violence](#) inflicted upon migrants in Libya, as well as the denial of protection pathways such as asylum.

In late November, Libyan authorities [expelled](#) 226 Egyptian, Chadian and Sudanese nationals. According to reporting by Agence France Presse as cited in [Le Monde](#), Libyan authorities associated with the Ministry of the Interior of the Government of National Unity organized buses to forcibly return the individuals to border locations according to their respective countries.

## Ongoing cooperation between Europe and the Libyan Coast Guard

Cooperation between the EU and European states and Libyan authorities on the prevention of irregular migration continued in Q4, amid strong criticism and activism from NGOs.

On 2 November, Italy tacitly [renewed](#) its [2017 Memorandum of Understanding](#) with the Libyan Government of National Accord to reduce irregular migration to Italy and combat human trafficking. The renewal took effect despite [protests](#) by 40 civil society organizations and [several Italian unions](#) in Rome demanding the Italian government suspend the agreement and “shed light on the management of European funds financing Libyan coast guards”, according to [reporting](#) by Italian news outlet ANSA. The agreement, already renewed in 2020, has now been renewed for an additional three years. In an [article](#) marking five years since the agreement’s signature in 2017, Médecins Sans Frontières called the MoU “part of a broader defensive strategy being pursued by European governments, based on a security approach” that “seeks to keep them [migrants] out”.

Less than three weeks after the renewal of the agreement, the [Libya Observer](#) reported that Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Tajani suggested in televised remarks that Italy may furnish the Libyan Coast Guard with Italian police boats to increase Libyan authorities’ interception capacities. In reports on a later [press conference](#) by Agenzia Nova, Tajani referenced ongoing negotiations around the possible supply of patrol boats and that Italy expects to see “concrete results” from the collaboration. A meeting to strengthen bilateral cooperation in terms of security and irregular migration was also [reported](#) to take place between the Libyan Government of National Unity Minister of Interior and an Italian delegation in Tripoli in late December.

Search and rescue NGO Sea-Watch [alleged](#) in October that a Libyan Coast Guard vessel threatened to shoot an aircraft used to monitor interceptions in the Mediterranean Sea. According to [reporting](#) by Africanews, the Libyan authorities claimed the aircraft was over Libyan territorial waters despite the plane's location over international waters for which Malta has responsibility for search and rescue operations.

An investigation by [Le Monde](#) found that Frontex-operated surveillance equipment has been used by the Libyan Coast Guard to intercept boats carrying refugees and migrants. The Executive Director of Frontex [told](#) the European Parliament in March 2021 that Frontex does not collaborate with the Libyan Coast Guard.

## Departures from eastern Libya more common in the last quarter

Quoted in [The Guardian](#), academic and Alarm Phone member Maurice Stierl noted that sea crossings from the eastern Libyan city of Tobruk have become more common since late October and often involve “incredibly large old fishing vessels repurposed for crossing”. Echoing the nationalities reflected in the figures of [arrivals to Italy](#), departures from eastern Libya include a growing numbers of Egyptian nationals seeking to migrate to Europe.

The journey from eastern Libya to Italy is significantly farther than from western Libya, where most migrants attempt to cross the Mediterranean to Italy. While this implies a longer time at sea, and in a [zone without NGO search and rescue](#) activity, reporting by [InfoMigrants](#) suggests that this route is seen by migrants to have advantages. For the primarily Egyptian and Bangladeshi users of this route, an eastern Libya sea departure means avoiding the dangerous land journey to western Libya. Additionally, the journey is typically undertaken in larger boats that are more suited to multiple days at sea. According to InfoMigrants, interceptions by the Libyan Coast Guard are significantly less common. Given their greater reliability, journeys from eastern Libya tend to cost around two times as much as those from western Libya.

## Refugee activists organize two-day protest on rights in Libya

Nearly [one year](#) after Libyan security forces violently ended a [100-day protest](#) by refugees in Libya, the same self-organized group of refugee activists, Refugees in Libya, organized a [two-day demonstration](#) in Geneva to call attention to the abuse and exploitation faced by refugees and migrants in the country. Taking place on December 9-10 in cooperation with the activist network Solidarity with Refugees in Libya, the protesters [presented](#) a set of [demands](#) to UNHCR representatives at the agency's headquarters, including to “advocate for the end of violent pullbacks, pushbacks, and all other organised practices of border violence”.

## UA-EU-UN Taskforce looks at stranded migrants and refugees in Libya

A meeting gathering members of the [UA-EU-UN taskforce](#) occurred in Addis-Ababa on 1 November. This meeting aimed to enhance the cooperation between the three entities to strengthen the protection of stranded migrants and refugees in Libya. The status of the assisted voluntary return program for stranded



migrants in Libya to countries of origin as well as the evacuation of asylum-seekers and refugees to Niger and Rwanda Emergency Transit Mechanisms were addressed among other topics. Recommendations were issued mainly intending to update the terms of reference of the taskforce, to expand its mandate and geographical coverage and to undertake a mission to Libya to improve the responses and interventions.

## More migrant deaths on Chad – Libya migration route

On 13 December, the bodies of 27 refugees and migrants were discovered in the Chadian desert, according to an [IOM press release](#). The agency reported that the individuals had left a town in West-Central Chad nearly a year and a half prior and that the truck carrying them got lost and broke down in the desert, causing them to die of thirst. At the time of reporting, IOM noted that 149 deaths had occurred in the Sahara Desert in 2022. Refugees and migrants often [transit](#) the desert in Chad to reach Libya and other North African countries. This tragedy followed the deaths of [at least 20 individuals](#) in the Libyan desert near Kufra in June.

## Mixed Migration in Tunisia

### Latest figures on refugees and migrants in Tunisia

As of 30 November 2022, [UNHCR](#) reported that there are 9,047 registered refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia, of which the top [nationalities](#) are Ivorian (37%), Syrian (27%), Cameroonian (6%), Sudanese (5%), and Guinean (5%). This number represents a slight [decrease](#) compared to the previous quarter (9,676 refugees and asylum seekers as of 31 August). Grand Tunis (4,955), Sfax (1,647), and Medenine (652) continue to host the largest refugee and asylum seeker populations.

### Indignation in Zarzis in the aftermath of a shipwreck involving 18 Tunisian migrants

Throughout the fourth quarter, there was significant tension in the coastal town of Zarzis after a [boat](#) carrying 18 Tunisians went missing in late September. Located on the southeastern coast of the country, Zarzis constitutes an [important point of departure](#) for Tunisians and others seeking to cross the Mediterranean to Europe.

Relatives of the missing migrants remained [without information](#) for three weeks until two bodies washed ashore, soon followed by others. The Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) [quoted](#) a spokesperson from the Regional Committee for Disaster Response and the Organization of Rescue under the Regional Directorate of Civil Protection in Medenine as stating that “Material and human resources were upgraded to ensure search operations are carried out.” However, according to reporting from [DW](#), officials did not initially dispatch search and rescue boats, and some relatives of the missing migrants felt that the local authorities were covering up for their own inaction. Local media organization Meshkal [reported](#) that some families alleged authorities in Zarzis had gone so far as to claim that the migrants were being held in Libya in order to reduce pressure for the search.

Local authorities had buried the [bodies](#) of four Tunisians [retrieved](#) between 27 September and 6 October without informing their families. A representative of the Tunisian Red Crescent in Medenine told [InfoMigrants](#) that "it [was] a mistake by the authorities to have buried these bodies without prior DNA sampling". A [statement](#) signed by more than 30 Tunisian civil society organizations expressed solidarity with the families of the dead and missing and condemned the hasty burials, accusing the authorities of failing to respect proper procedures.

The role played by the local authorities in the aftermath of the shipwreck has fueled weeks of [protests](#) in Zarzis. A [general strike](#), organized by the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), was held on 18 October to show solidarity with the protesters. Other demonstrations were organized on [4 November](#) and [24 November](#) where hundreds of people gathered to demand accountability. The protests saw violent responses from Tunisian authorities, according to a [statement](#) issued by FTDES on 18 November, including tear gas that reached a primary school. Demonstrations continued into December, with a [sit-in](#) outside local government buildings on 12 December and another protest [organized](#) on 18 December to coincide with International Migrants Day. Following the strike in October, the Ministry of Justice opened an [investigation](#). By the end of the fourth quarter, the investigation had not yielded any publicly available results.

This shipwreck is indicative of a broader pattern off the southern coast of Tunisia that according to the [Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights \(FTDES\)](#) amounts to a securitized approach to border enforcement with little action taken to mitigate the human costs.

## Serbia puts an end to free visa entry for Tunisian nationals

Following the significant increase in the number of Tunisian migrants travelling through the [Balkan route](#), Serbian authorities decided to put an end to visa [exemptions](#) for Tunisian nationals, among others. The decision took effect on 20 November 2022. Amid ongoing EU accession negotiations, Serbia has been facing pressure from the EU Commission to align its [visa policy](#) with that of the EU. The EU's demand for changes to Serbia's entry policy was backed by the [threat to suspend visa-free access](#) to the Schengen Area for Serbian nationals, which has been in place since 2009. By the end of the fourth quarter, Serbia had [announced](#) an end to visa-free travel arrangements for citizens of Tunisia, Burundi, India and Guinea-Bissau.

## Mixed Migration in Morocco

### Latest figures on refugees in Morocco

As of 30 September 2022, [UNHCR](#) reported that there were 9,949 registered refugees and 9,488 asylum seekers present in Morocco from more than 43 countries of origin. Most registered refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco remain nationals of the Syrian Arab Republic (28%), followed by Guinea (14%), Sudan (8%), Ivory Coast (7%), Yemen (6%), and the Central African Republic (6%).

### Migration cooperation between Morocco and Europe

On 9-10 November, the third EUROMED Migration V Peer-to-Peer [Conference](#) on “Multilateral Migration Partnerships for Sustainable Development” was held in Rabat. [Morocco World News](#) quoted the Director General of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) as indicating the conference’s aim was to join EU member states and partner countries in the Mediterranean region to “discuss what could be done for partnership in migration”. According to reporting by the North Africa Post, the Ambassador of the European Union to Morocco highlighted to attendees Morocco’s position as “a [major strategic partner](#) of the EU in several areas, including migration management”.

The conference represents a continuation in ongoing cooperation between the Moroccan government and the European Union. It followed the [announcement](#) in August that the EU would increase financial support to Morocco for migration management up to 500 million Euros over the period 2021-2027. In its [report on migration and asylum](#) published in October 2022, the European Commission declared, “Engagement with Morocco this year confirmed a strong joint commitment to continue the dialogue and cooperation in all areas related to migration, including the regional dimension, return, Talent Partnerships and fighting migrant smuggling.”

On the margins of the EUROMED conference, ICMPD signed a [seat agreement](#) with Morocco to establish a permanent representation in the country. According to the Ambassador Director General of the Kingdom of Morocco Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates, “this agreement marked a formalization and intensification of years of close cooperation on migration governance between the Kingdom of Morocco and ICMPD”. In their [press release](#) on the agreement, ICMPD emphasized that “all countries and regions linked by migration flows should work together in the principle of partnership.” ICMPD and Morocco already have a history of collaboration, including through the Rabat Process and technical migration and [border management](#) initiatives. The creation of an ICMPD office in Morocco is also meant to [facilitate](#) broader cooperation with other African countries on joint projects.

Just a few weeks prior, the chiefs of staff of the militaries of the ten western Mediterranean members of the “[5 + 5 Defense Initiative](#)” – in Europe, Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Portugal; in North Africa, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, and Tunisia – met in Rabat. They approved their [joint action plan](#) for 2023 on various issues including irregular migration.

## Cooperation between Morocco and Spain

In mid-October, Spain approved a decision to fund the government of Morocco with a [new grant](#) of 30 million euros to prevent irregular migration. The funding package includes [financing](#) for operational expenses related to interventions and deployments for border patrol and surveillance, maintenance costs for the equipment of authorities on the borders, and allowances paid to Moroccan police forces during their cooperation with Spain on anti-trafficking initiatives. The funds follow three [similar transfers](#) of 30 million euros from Spain to Morocco in 2021, 31 million euros in 2020, and 32 million euros in 2019.

## Cooperation between Morocco and Frontex

In a meeting held on 27 October, Frontex and Morocco renewed their [partnership](#) on border management. In a statement published on [Frontex's website](#), the agency's acting Executive Director of Frontex highlighted Morocco's efforts in preventing migrant smuggling and human trafficking. She added that Morocco is "a reliable and credible partner". The two parties will work together through a [joint roadmap](#) including on issues such as coast guard cooperation, risk analysis and trafficking in persons.

## Spanish investigations into the violence inflicted on migrants in Melilla closed in December as crackdown on migration continues

On 23 December, the public prosecutor's office [dismissed](#) the criminal charges of homicide against border officials involved in the incident, on 24 June, leading to the [deaths](#) of at least 23 and as many as 37 individuals who attempted to enter the Spanish enclave of Melilla. The dismissal happened despite reports from the [BBC](#) and [Amnesty International](#) – among other organizations – documenting deadly brutality by border guards, including pushbacks, denial of medical care, and enforced displacement and disappearances.

Meanwhile, Morocco has reportedly increased its [policing](#) against people on the move in the northern regions of the country. The director of migration and border surveillance in Morocco's Ministry of the Interior [said](#) in October that encampments in the forests in the north and south of the country, where many refugees and migrants live to avoid police detection and harassment from the public, would no longer be tolerated. According to [Alarm Phone](#), arrests, imprisonments and deportations have been taking place in Oujda, Nador and Berkane. EFE [reported](#) that 500 people detained near Ceuta have been displaced to the centre of the country following operations carried out in the province of Tetouan and the prefecture of M'diq Fnideq. The news outlet also reported on the [arrest](#) of two Spanish citizens by Moroccan nationals on suspicion of human smuggling from the Moroccan coast to Ceuta.

Omar Naji, spokesperson for the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) in Nador, [explained](#) that "Morocco plays the role of policeman in the service of European immigration policy". These operations are conducted amid [condemnation](#) by UN human rights experts of "the continuing lack of accountability for stark dehumanization of African migrants at the perimeter of Europe."

## Mixed Migration in Algeria

### Expulsions from Algeria

During the fourth quarter, multiple waves of expulsion of refugees and migrants took place from **Algeria** to **Niger**, with at least 8,223 people expelled, according to estimates from NGO Alarme Phone Sahara (APS).<sup>2</sup> This would bring the total number of people expelled during the year to at least 25,328. According to [APS](#), one migrant death was recorded during these expulsions, which they termed “chaotic.”

#### “Official convoys,” primarily of Nigeriens

During the quarter at least eight mass expulsions of primarily Nigeriens took place in “official” convoys to northern Nigerien towns. These totalled some 4,950 people, including an expulsion occurring on [29 October](#) in which 1,124 people were said to be on the convoy but only 818 were ultimately registered in Assamaka, with nobody able to verify what happened to the other 306 people. These expulsions included 717 minors. These expulsions by “official” convoys, which are based on a [2014 agreement](#) between Algeria and Niger, typically just involve Nigerien citizens, but during the quarter multiple convoys also carried non-Nigerien nationals – a total of at least 126.

#### “Unofficial convoys” of non-Nigeriens

Also during the quarter, at least seven mass expulsions of non-Nigerien nationals took place via “[unofficial convoy](#),” meaning that those being expelled were left in the desert near the Algeria/Niger border, approximately 15 kilometres from the nearest town. These expulsions comprised some 3,273 people, including 77 minors. Guineans and Malians were the two most common nationalities among the expulsees, and most of the other nationalities represented were also from West and Central Africa. However, several of the people expelled came from other regions in Africa or Asia. These included three Syrians, 11 Yemenis, one Bangladeshi, one Ethiopian and one Egyptian. Among these [extra-regional and extra-continental migrants](#), six Yemenis, two Syrians and one Egyptian were not allowed to enter Niger on 16 November and four Yemenis were not allowed to enter Niger on 2 December due to their non-ECOWAS status.

### Migrant deaths on land and at sea

Several tragic incidents resulting in the deaths of refugees and migrants were reported in the fourth quarter.

A [road accident](#) on 14 November claimed the lives of 16 people, 13 Guinean nationals, one Malian and two Algerians. Arab News [reported](#) that the accident took place in the southwest desert of the country, according to updates from local officials.

On November 20, Algerian and Italian authorities deployed a search and rescue operation for a boat carrying at least 13 refugees and migrants. Seven individuals were rescued, up to three were reported missing and four died, according to Italian news agency ANSA as reported by [InfoMigrants](#). The incident took place in the Algerian search and rescue (SAR) zone, but the proximity to the Italian SAR area – just [15 nautical](#)

<sup>2</sup> Numbers in this section are based on MMC calculations made drawing on the following Alarme Phone Sahara sources of [21 October](#), [4 December](#), and [24 December](#), made on 22 January 2023.



[miles](#) – prompted the Algerian authorities to request support from the Italian Coast Guard. According to [La Repubblica](#), the boat had departed from the Algerian coastal city of Skikda on 9 November. The prosecutor of the Sardinian capital of Cagliari opened an [investigation](#) into the shipwreck and subsequent deaths.

A few weeks later, Spanish officials found the [bodies](#) of three individuals off the coast of Murcia reported to have departed from Algeria. Local officials believed that the individuals had been on one of the [four shipwrecked boats](#) in the area around that time.

# Thematic Focus:

## Search and Rescue in the Mediterranean

### Standoff at sea: Diplomatic tensions rise over NGO SAR vessels

On 10 November, a three-week standoff among European governments [ended](#) when the French government invited the Ocean Viking, an SOS Méditerranée search and rescue (SAR) vessel with 234 refugees and migrants on board, to dock in Toulon, France. According to a [press release](#) by SOS Méditerranée, the 21-day wait experienced by some of the survivors onboard was “the longest period of blockage ever experienced” by anyone rescued by the organization.

The ship had rescued the individuals in waters off the coast of Libya between 22 and 26 October and [requested support](#) from Libya and Malta, the states responsible for search and rescue in the waters where the operation took place. Stranded in what SOS Méditerranée [called](#) a “deafening silence” in response to these appeals, the Ocean Viking’s crew next sought a safe port in nearby Italy. The vessel made [daily requests](#) to dock there from 27 October to no success. According to a [press release](#) issued by SOS Méditerranée on 3 November, “The new Italian Minister of the Interior reportedly emitted a directive warning the Police Forces and the Harbour Master’s Office that his ministry was assessing the conduct of our rescue ships in order to adopt a ban on entry into territorial waters.” The NGO indicated that the Italian government had sent no formal communication to them nor other SAR organizations SOS Humanity and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), but that they “are nevertheless facing a complete blockage in high sea and an implicit ban from entering Italian Port”.

The Ocean Viking subsequently expanded its requests for a safe port from 2 November on to France, Spain, and Greece, which also [received no response](#). By 7 November, the situation onboard became “[unbearable](#)”, with some survivors indicating plans to jump overboard. The refusal of European governments to accept the vessel prompted the European Commission to issue a [statement](#) on 9 November demanding the “immediate disembarkation, at the nearest place of safety” of all onboard the Ocean Viking to “avoid a humanitarian tragedy”.

One day later, SOS Méditerranée [announced](#) “with a mixture of relief and anger” that the ship would make port in Toulon. The French Interior Minister [said unequivocally](#) that the Ocean Viking was “in Italy’s search and rescue zone” and that “France decided on an exceptional basis to make up for Italy’s unacceptable behaviour”, according to reporting by Al Jazeera. In a news conference quoted by Reuters, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni – who [took office](#) the month prior – [called](#) France’s response an “aggressive reaction” that was “incomprehensible and unjustified”. The Italian Interior Minister later took a [more conciliatory tone](#) following talks between the presidents of the two countries, quoted by Reuters as saying that Italy had not intended to produce “international tensions”. The diplomatic conflict between France and Italy – as well as Hungary’s endorsement of Italy’s approach – demonstrate the degree to which EU practices vis-à-vis irregular migration [reflect](#) respective European states’ political interests.

Those aboard the Ocean Viking were not the only refugees and migrants refused by European governments to disembark in November. On 7 November, a [joint press release](#) from IOM and UNHCR called for the

disembarkation of close to 600 people stranded on four NGO SAR vessels in the Mediterranean – 234 on the Ocean Viking, 217 on MSF ship Geo Barents, 35 on SOS Humanity ship Humanity 1, and 89 on the Mission Lifeline ship Rise Above. Like those on the Ocean Viking, most of the refugees and migrants rescued by the other boats had [departed](#) from Libya, according to Al Jazeera.

The day after the press release, Rise Above was [allowed](#) to dock in the Italian port of Reggio Calabria and all survivors disembarked. Geo Barents and Humanity 1 were docked in the Italian port of Catania at the time; authorities had [permitted](#) only children and those in need of medical attention to leave the vessels. Three people [jumped](#) from the Geo Barents into the harbour water, seemingly in an attempt to reach the shore. One returned to the ship and the other two men [remained](#) on the dock in the port for 24 hours. The wait [exacerbated](#) the existing trauma survivors experienced from violence in Libya, on the journey, or in their countries of origin, according to MSF:

**“After days and days on that boat, I was going insane. I had the feeling that my body and dreams were breaking apart. I’m grateful for all the assistance I had on board, but I couldn’t stand that situation anymore.”**

**Yousseuf\*, one of the individuals who jumped from the Geo Barents and swam to the dock, as told to MSF (\*name has been changed)**

In the days following, Italian authorities allowed those remaining on [Geo Barents](#) and the [Humanity 1](#) to disembark. Both [MSF](#) and [SOS Humanity](#) announced they would take legal action against the Italian government in response to the [inter-ministerial decree](#) that had trapped refugees and migrants on the ships, which mandated all individuals not in “emergency conditions and precarious health conditions” to leave Italian waters.

## The European Union sets an “action plan” on the Central Mediterranean

Just over two weeks after the passengers on the various ships were finally allowed ashore, the European Commission [presented](#) an “[EU Action Plan for the Central Mediterranean](#)”. Published ahead of the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting on 25 November, the plan contains some 20 provisions to “address the immediate and ongoing challenges along the Central Mediterranean route”. Upon the approval of the plan in the 25 November meeting, the European Commission Vice-President [as quoted](#) by France 24 said that the measures are intended to avoid further crises of inaction like that involving the Ocean Viking.

Among the three pillars of the [plan](#) are “a more coordinated approach on search and rescue” and “strengthened cooperation with partner countries” including [Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt](#) to prevent irregular migration from these countries to Europe. The third pillar reinforces the EU “solidarity mechanism” established in June 2022. Nevertheless, cooperation under the mechanism remains [tenuous](#), as France [suspended](#) its decision to accept 3,500 asylum seekers from Italy following the Ocean Viking incident. The French Interior Minister [tweeted](#) at the end of the meeting that France would resume relocations once other Member States assume responsibilities for relocations and the receipt of SAR vessels.

In an [article](#) titled, “New EU Migration Plan, Same Rights Violations”, Human Rights Watch (HRW) criticized the plan as “recycling old approaches that failed to protect people and instead perpetuated suffering”. The organization took aim at the plan’s focus on partnerships with governments in North Africa that it said are “often abusive” to refugees and migrants. Similarly, an [analysis](#) of the action plan by the NGO Statewatch underscored that “strengthened cooperation between police forces” on either side of the Mediterranean “will, of course, do little to nothing to improve the situation for migrants in Libya”. Both articles highlighted that the EU’s call for further guidelines on search and rescue at sea ignores those provided by international maritime law, which already governs such operations.

## Italy issues decree obstructing search and rescue operations

In early January, a new Italian decree [came into effect](#) that requires NGO search and rescue vessels to immediately request a safe port upon making a rescue, preventing them from making multiple rescues in a single deployment. The [decree](#) imposes a fine of up to 50,000 euros and subsequent impoundment of the vessel against those who defy the rule. NGOs [accused](#) the Italian government of blocking assistance to those in distress in the Mediterranean. In a [statement](#) signed by 20 organizations, NGOs said the decree will “reduce rescue capacities at sea and thereby make the central Mediterranean, one of the world’s deadliest migration routes, even more dangerous” – ultimately resulting in more deaths. The statement also objects to the decree’s requirement that crews collect information from those aboard about intentions to apply for asylum, which the NGOs say contradicts UNHCR guidance.

Reporting by InfoMigrants [emphasized](#) that the new decree is directly at odds with the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea, which obligates captains to assist people in distress. German SAR NGO Sea-Eye [called](#) the decree “illegal” and said they will refuse to obey it.

Adding to the limitations imposed by the decree is the [practice](#) of assigning ports of safety far from the vessel’s location, extending the length of each deployment and resulting in fewer days available for SAR operations. On deployments in late December and early January, for example, Italian authorities directed the Ocean Viking to the northern ports of [Ravenna](#) and [Ancona](#) after making rescues off the coast of Libya – each a four-day sail from the ship’s respective positions at the times of assignment. As one Ocean Viking crew member [told](#) InfoMigrants, “It’s the perfect way to slow us down.”

In late January, Italian authorities [assigned](#) MSF’s ship Geo Barents to a similarly distant port in La Spezia after the vessel reported a rescue in international waters off the coast of Libya. According to [Reuters](#), La Spezia was “the furthest and northernmost destination” to which Italy has directed an NGO SAR vessel. Geo Barents completed [two additional rescues](#) off the coast of Libya en route – one after an alert from Alarm Phone and another after encountering a boat in distress – before continuing on to the northern port. All 237 survivors [disembarked](#) in La Spezia, but the boat was subsequently [blocked](#) from leaving the port so that Italian authorities could investigate a potential violation of the decree. The MSF Head of Mission [insisted](#) that the crew was carrying out their humanitarian duty: “In dangerous situations, we cannot abandon people at sea.”

# Highlighted New Research and Reports



## [Morocco: “They beat him in the head, to check if he was dead”: Evidence of crimes under international law by Morocco and Spain at the Melilla border](#)

### **Amnesty International | December 2022**

Conducted between June and October 2022, this investigation traces the events leading up to the Melilla tragedy. It reveals that human rights violations had already been committed in the weeks leading up to 24 June. Amnesty International also alleges an abusive and illegitimate use of force by authorities on June 24 and stresses that the behaviour of the authorities - as well as the lack of medical assistance - has directly or indirectly caused the death of 37 people. Recalling that the fate of 77 individuals is still unknown, the report denounces a lack of transparency, a lack of accountability, and a lack of cooperation by the Spanish and Moroccan authorities. Finally, a list of recommendations is addressed to various actors to ensure that no more violations be committed at the borders of Ceuta and Melilla.



## [Migration and asylum in Tunisia: Domestic interests, external influences, and policy outcomes](#)

### **ASILE | September 2022**

This report delves into Tunisia's migration and asylum governance. While the country plays a key role in the European Union's migration strategy, the report finds that it lacks a coherent migration policy and that the country's system for integrating migrants and refugees is too weak. To illustrate these observations, three policy preferences - regarding border management, reception arrangements, and integration of asylum seekers and refugees - are analyzed through the prism of the concept of political responsibility. The analysis concludes that Tunisia's migration policy - or rather its absence - is more a matter of internal than external policy choice, stating that Tunisia mainly adapts to European preferences when it is in their interest, no matter the commitment for international agreement.

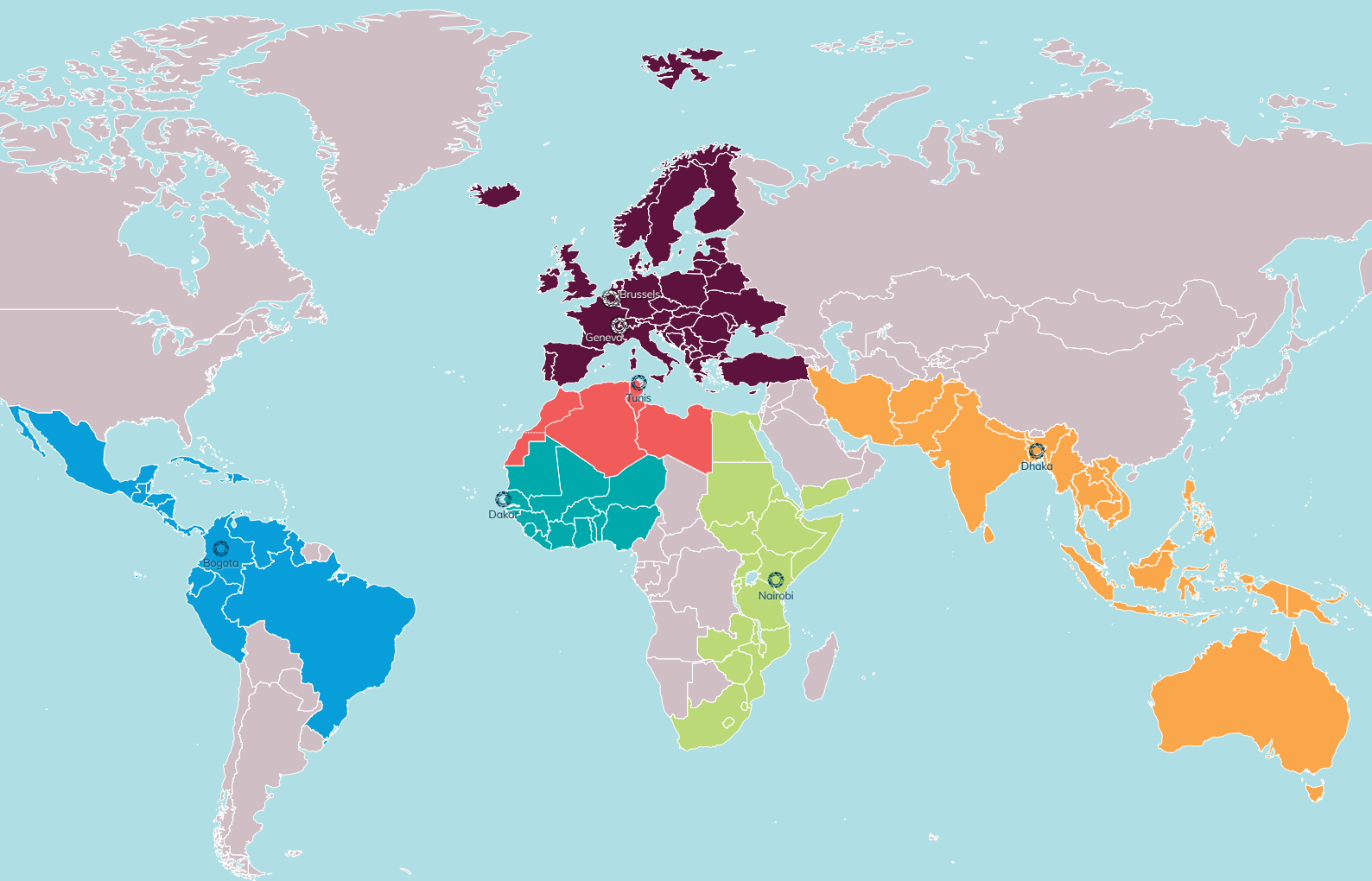




## [Le droit au logement comme lutte de places, d'espaces et de marges : le cas des migrants subsahariens en Tunisie](#)

### **FTDES | October 2022**

FTDES discusses the question of housing in the migratory experience. The study examines various issues through the case of sub-Saharan refugees and migrants in Tunisia for whom integration is difficult due to the racism they encounter in everyday life. Through a field survey conducted over three months, 34 sub-Saharan individuals of different profiles shared their experiences, addressing the difficulties of access to housing, discrimination suffered, the precariousness experienced and the power relations between landlord and tenant. Revealing difficult and sometimes unsanitary conditions, the report advocates for the respect of the primary right of housing and highlights one of the harsh realities that migrants and refugees encounter in their migratory journey.



MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs hosted in Danish Refugee Council regional offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Geneva and Brussels.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. 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. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

For more information visit:  
[mixedmigration.org](https://mixedmigration.org) and follow us at [@Mixed\\_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

