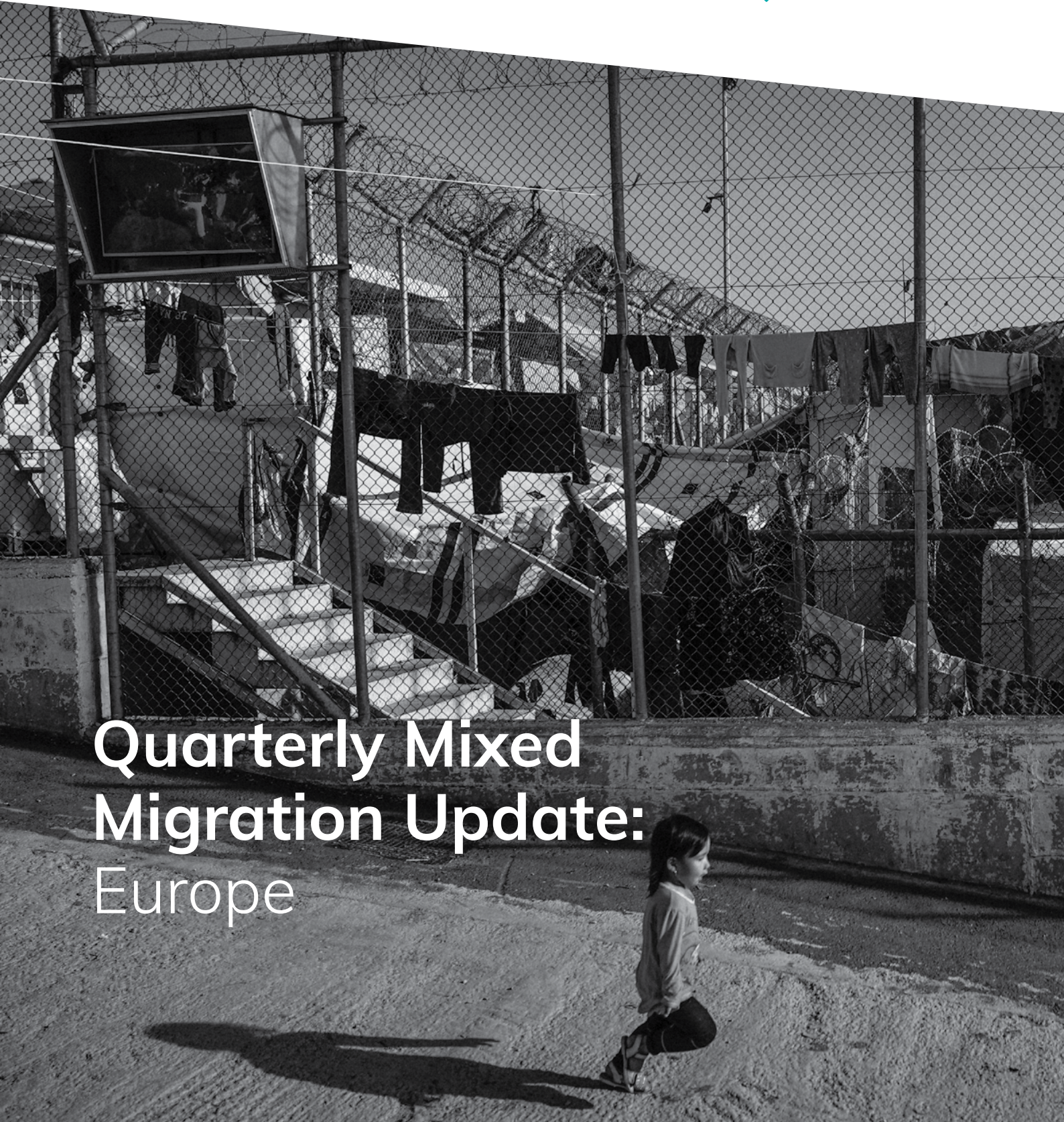


**MMC Europe**  
**QUARTER 2 2023**



# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Europe

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers Europe. The core countries of focus are Spain, Italy, Greece and countries along the Balkan migration route. 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.

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 Copenhagen, 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 traveling along similar routes, using similar means of travel – often traveling irregularly, and wholly or partially, assisted by migrant smugglers.

#### Front cover photo credit:

Lesbos, Moria camp. Jan Krarup 2019

#### SUPPORTED BY:



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FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF DENMARK**  
*Danida*

# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Europe

## Quarter 2 - 2023

## Key Updates

- **A “historic” agreement to overhaul EU asylum policy – though divisions remain:** On 8 June the majority of member states agreed to a [radical package of reforms](#) that sought to reach a compromise between the different camps, though Hungary and Poland have continued to publicly denounce the provisions of the agreement.
- **Almost 600 dead and missing in sinking off coast of Messenia, Greece:** In one of the worst incidents in recent memory, a boat carrying up to [750](#) passengers sank near Pylos, Greece, on its way from Libya to Italy, resulting in the deaths or disappearance of [596](#) people.
- **A new partnership on the horizon between the EU and Tunisia:** In response to the growing popularity of the Central Mediterranean route from Tunisia, in June the EU released details of a controversial [€1 billion package](#) of financial and technical assistance that included support for increased border control by Tunisia.
- **Italy imposes further restrictions around migration:** In the wake of a [deadly shipwreck](#) near the coastal town of Cutro in Calabria in February, the Italian government passed the so-called [Cutro Decree](#) in May. The provisions, far from increasing protections, make it even harder for arrivals to access humanitarian support and essential services.
- **Pushbacks and returns from Croatia into Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Returns from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina have been increasing since the beginning of 2023, coinciding with Croatia’s formal entry into the Schengen zone on 1 January. [Violent pushbacks and illegal deportations](#) by Croatian authorities have also continued.
- **Western Balkan countries commit to greater cooperation around migration:** At the Third Sarajevo Migration Dialogue on 8 June, the six countries in the Western Balkans region [agreed to work more closely together](#) on managing migration through their territory.
- **The United Kingdom (UK)’s Rwanda policy is struck down by the court of appeal:** On 29 June the [UK’s appeal court ruled](#) that the government’s controversial “Rwanda policy”, whereby asylum seekers deemed to have entered the country illegally are sent to Rwanda to have their claims processed there, was illegal.

## Regional Overview\*



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

# Mixed Migration Regional Updates

## Europe region

### The Eastern Mediterranean route

- According to [UNHCR](#), the Eastern Mediterranean remained the least travelled route into Europe in the second quarter of 2023, with a total of 4,607 arrivals (2,998 by sea and 1,609 by land) between April and the end of June. Even though there was an overall drop in the number of sea arrivals, this was still a significant rise from the total in the first quarter (3,601: 3,101 by sea and 500 by land) due to a sharp increase in the number of land crossings.
- Among [registered arrivals](#) between January and the end of May 2023, by far the largest group were from the State of Palestine (23.4 per cent), followed by Afghanistan (11.2 per cent), Somalia (9.9 per cent), Eritrea (9.4 per cent) and Democratic Republic of Congo (9.2 per cent).
- Despite the reduced numbers of people attempting the journey through the Eastern Mediterranean, the [death toll](#) has risen in recent years, with a total of 378 dead and missing in 2022 – the highest recorded figure since 2016. The second quarter of 2023 appeared to have seen a reduction in deaths, with 12 dead or missing recorded, all in May. This is a significant drop from both the total in the first quarter of 2023 (36) and the total during the second quarter of 2022 (53).

### Pressure on Greece intensifies over alleged abuses

Though the EU has itself been repeatedly criticized for failing to hold the Greek government to account for reported abuses by its border forces against refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, [unconfirmed reports](#) emerged in late June 2023 that the EU border agency Frontex might withdraw its personnel and resources from the country due to its repeated human rights violations. This was shortly after the capsizing of a boat off the coast of Messenia (in this instance, originating from North Africa along the Central Mediterranean route). The [scale of the tragedy](#) – along with over 80 confirmed deaths, another 500 passengers on the boat are missing and presumed dead – brought renewed attention to the dangers faced by those travelling through Greek waters and how the government's hostile policies may have exacerbated these risks. This incident and reports of illegal pushbacks from the island of Lesbos to Turkey have prompted Frontex to seek "[clarifications and information](#)" at the end of June.

### Central Mediterranean route

- According to [UNHCR](#), the number of people detected travelling to Italy between April and the end of June (36,970) is more than three-quarters higher than the total during the same period in 2022 (20,801) and considerably higher than the number of arrivals in the first quarter of 2023 (27,695).
- Between 1 January and 31 May, the [most represented country of origin](#) among arrivals in Italy was Cote d'Ivoire (14.8%), followed by Egypt (12.4%), Guinea (12.2%), Pakistan (10.2%) and Bangladesh (9.6%).

- The number of [dead and missing](#) on the Central Mediterranean route in the second quarter of 2023 alone was 1,292, roughly three times the total of the first quarter (435) as well as the total in the second quarter of 2022 (460). The high numbers were due in part to the tragic shipwreck off the coast of Greece on 14 June that resulted in 596 people dead or missing.

### **Almost 600 dead or missing in tragic sinking of trawler near Pylos, Greece**

On June 14, a trawler carrying possibly as many as [750](#) individuals, predominantly from Pakistan, Egypt, Syria and Afghanistan, capsized. Though details are still emerging and the exact death toll is unclear, it is now estimated that [596 people died or are missing](#) in the wake of the tragedy – making it one of the most deadly incidents ever to occur in the Mediterranean. Having set sail from Eastern Libya on 8 June, on the fourth day at sea, approximately 70 – 100 km off the coast of Greece, the engine failed. The exact [sequence](#) and details of events remain unconfirmed, as [multiple sources](#) have provided convergent but slightly differing accounts. The first points of contact with the distressed refugees and migrants seem to be an [Alarm Phone activist](#) based in Italy, the Italian authorities and a [Frontex](#) surveillance aircraft. Given the boat's proximity to Greece, all initial points of contact informed the Greek authorities. When the distressed refugees and migrants contacted the Italian authorities via [satellite](#) phone, they were notified of an approaching rescue. Two large ships, likely Maltese and Greek, carrying food and water supplies arrived.

Later that evening, the Greek coastguard dispatched a ship and attempted to get closer to the boat by casting ropes, which were presumably rejected and thrown back by the refugees and migrants. This argument put forth by Greek authorities has been criticized by some [legal experts](#) who asserted that [maritime law](#) required Greek authorities to undertake the rescue mission and render assistance due to dangerous conditions [regardless](#) of whether the people had requested it. Greek authorities have also claimed that the boat was steadily heading towards Italy until it capsized off the coast of Greece. However, tracking data reviewed by the [BBC](#) found that the boat remained stationary for at least seven hours before capsizing. Another argument put forth against the Greek actions was regarding their rescue operations and the absence of [video footage](#) documenting it. In response, the coastguard's spokesperson [mentioned](#) that while the cameras were functioning, the rescue operations were not recorded.

Survivors' accounts mentioned that after the Greek coastguards had [thrown the rope](#) and tried to attach it, it broke off. This manoeuvre – potentially exacerbated by people onboard trying to secure water and food supplies, which could have also contributed to the boat's destabilization and panic onboard – may have caused the boat to tilt left and right before capsizing. Though this interpretation was [rejected](#) by the Greek authorities, [subsequent investigations](#) by British, German and Greek outlets in partnership with the organization Forensis uncovered evidence that contradicted the official account of the tragedy. Besides discovering other [incriminating details](#), including evidence that Greek authorities had been offered assistance by Frontex on not two but three separate occasions and suggestions that survivor testimonies may have been tampered with, [evidence also emerged](#) that the Greek coastguard was attempting to tow the trawler when it capsized.

As with other deadly incidents, Greek authorities have been quick to blame the tragedy on human smugglers, with nine people arrested shortly after the sinking occurred. While in this case there is [clear evidence](#) that those who facilitated the journey were guilty of mistreating those on board and had shown a callous disregard for their safety by overcrowding the boat far beyond its capacity, the failure of Greek authorities to prioritize the protection of those on board was also a major factor in how events unfolded.

IOM and UNHCR issued a [joint statement](#) urging immediate and decisive measures to prevent further loss of life at sea, emphasizing that search and rescue operations are “a legal and humanitarian imperative” and calling on governments to address the acute protection gaps and establish safe and regular pathways for asylum seekers, calls echoed by The [Danish Refugee Council](#) (DRC) and other organizations.

### Mixed migration from Tunisia to Italy on the rise

There has been a significant [uptick in migration from Tunisia](#) in the first half of 2023, with more than half (33,860) of the total of 64,846 registered arrivals in Italy by the start of July originating from Tunisia (followed by 27,863 from Libya, 2,844 from Turkey and 279 from Algeria). Strikingly, this is more than double (130%) the number who reached Italy during the first six months of 2022 (28,251). However, though Tunisia was the most used route in the first quarter of 2023, Libya became the primary [country of disembarkation](#) to Italy during April-May, with 11,783 arrivals compared to 9,768 from Tunisia. Though Tunisians are also leaving, reportedly in response to the country’s growing economic and political crisis, many of those doing so are sub-Saharan Africans who have been increasingly targeted in [violent attacks and hate speech](#). While the overall proportion of Tunisian nationals travelling the Central Mediterranean route to Italy (including from Libya, Turkey and Algeria) has reduced from 12% in January – May 2022 to 7% in January – May 2023, the representation of other nationalities has increased: the most commonly identified country of origin during this period was Cote d’Ivoire (15%, up from 5% in January to May 2022), followed after Egypt (down to 12% from 18% in the same period the previous year) by Guinea (12%, compared to 3% during January-May 2022).

## Western Mediterranean Route and Atlantic Route

- According to [UNHCR](#), 8,403 arrivals (8,248 by sea and 155 by land) reached Spain in the second quarter of 2023, almost double the total in the preceding quarter (4,372: 4,238 by sea and 134 by land) and considerably higher than the total during the second quarter of 2022 (5,508: 5,077 by sea and 431 by land). The majority entered through the Canary Islands, followed by Mainland Andalucía, with others entering through the Eastern coast of mainland Spain, the Balearic Islands and Melilla.
- According to [IOM](#), the number of dead and missing travelling the Western Mediterranean route in the second quarter of 2023 was 59, compared to 40 in the three months before and 103 in the second quarter of 2022. Along the Western Africa – Atlantic Route to the [Canary Islands](#), meanwhile, 69 people have died or gone missing in the second quarter of 2023, compared to 57 in the first quarter but almost half the total during the second quarter of 2022 (136).
- Following the winter months, movement along the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic routes typically picks up, resulting not only in more arrivals on Spanish territory but also in more frequent emergency incidents, some of them deadly. On [21 June](#), for instance, a boat with more than 60 passengers on board sank off the coast of Morocco, en route to the Canary Islands, with dozens feared dead or missing. According to one NGO, the vessel reportedly had to wait 12 hours after sending out a distress call before rescue services arrived. The day after, [around 350 people](#) were rescued by the Spanish coastguard in five separate emergencies near the Canary Islands. On 3 July, [another sinking](#) off the North African coast of a boat travelling to the Canary Islands led to the deaths of at least 51 people. On 10 July, reports emerged that another 300 refugees, migrants and asylum seekers had gone missing, including [around 200](#) on a fishing boat from Senegal, with Spanish authorities searching the waters for the vessels.

## No justice a year on for those killed at Melilla

On 24 June 2022, an estimated 2,000 refugees, migrants and asylum seekers attempted to cross the barrier into the Spanish enclave of Melilla, bordering Morocco, resulting in [at least 37 deaths](#). The fatalities were attributed in part to the violent response by both Moroccan and Spanish security forces, with the former accused of physically attacking people as they scaled the fence while the latter deployed tear gas against them. A year on, however, with 76 others still missing and 22 bodies held in a morgue in Morocco, no one has been held accountable so far for the incident in what [Amnesty International](#) has condemned as a “deliberate and concerted coverup” by both Spanish and Moroccan authorities.

## Western Balkans

- The Western Balkans route remains the [second most used](#) irregular migration route into the European Union. According to [Frontex](#), there were around 15,400 arrivals in April and May 2023, almost equalling in two months the total arrivals for the entire first quarter of 2023 (over 15,800) but markedly lower than the total during the April-May period of 2022 (around 22,500).
- This decline from the same period in 2022 may be largely attributable to various countries in the region adjusting their visa restrictions in line with EU policies. For example, due to amendments imposed in 2022 and early 2023, nationals of Burundi, India and Tanzania are no longer able to enter Serbia without visas.
- In terms of nationalities, the [most represented countries of origin](#) remain Syria, followed by Afghanistan and Turkey.

## More pushbacks and returns from Croatia into Bosnia and Herzegovina

Beginning in the early months of 2023, shortly after Croatia’s formal entry into the EU’s visa-free Schengen zone on 1 January, there has been an apparent rise in the frequency of pushbacks reported at the border. For years, Croatian police and security officials have been accused of undertaking systematic expulsions of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers into Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a [Human Right Watch report](#) published in May documenting the continued practice of these illegal returns to this day. There has also been a rise in the number of returns into Bosnia and Herzegovina under the terms of an agreement brokered between the two countries back in 2011. While Croatian authorities attribute the uptick to Bosnia finally implementing their side of the agreement, the Bosnian government has [rejected this interpretation](#), pointing to the almost 3,500 people who had been returned under the agreement since 2017.

## Ukraine

- At present, there are [more than 6.33 million](#) registered Ukrainian refugees globally, including 5.97 million in Europe. The largest populations are present in Poland (1.63 million), Russia (1.28 million), followed by Germany (1.08 million) and the Czech Republic (0.35 million).
- As of the end of May, there are almost [5.09 million IDPs](#) in Ukraine, with the largest concentration in the east of the country and around Kyiv, though most oblasts contain a significant internally displaced population. The [destruction of the Kakhovka Dam](#) on 6 June, apparently by Russian forces,



displaced around 2,200 people in the immediate aftermath, but there are concerns that the long-term environmental, economic and health implications of the catastrophe could lead to larger numbers leaving the area permanently.

- There have been a significant number of returnees ([4.8 million](#)) in Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict, some of whom have returned from abroad. According to UNHCR's [most recent survey](#) on the intentions and perspectives of refugees and IDPs, the majority envisions returning to their place of origin in the long term, but not immediately. While 14% of refugees and 15% of IDPs planned to return permanently in the next three months, with another 62% and 67% respectively stating their desire to return at some point in the future, 18% and 6% were undecided, while 6% and 12% had no intention of returning. This last group was composed predominantly of refugees originating from Lvivska and Luhanska as well as IDPs from Luhanska, Kyivska and Donetska.

## Policy and Legal Updates

### EU member states reach a “historic” agreement on migration management, though tensions remain

For years, EU countries have been divided over the issue of how the responsibility for the hosting and resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers should be shared between member states. Countries in Southern Europe like Italy and Spain, both of which have received a large portion of sea arrivals from Northern Africa, have long advocated for refugees and asylum seekers to be resettled more equitably across the region. Other countries, particularly Hungary and Poland, have [strongly resisted this proposal](#), arguing that too many people are entering the EU irregularly and moving between countries without authorization.

On 8 June, however, the EU appeared to have reached a milestone by agreeing in principle to a [dramatic overhaul of its existing asylum policy](#). On the one hand, the reform would envision a two-tier asylum reception process at a country's borders, with certain groups (for example, those who originated from countries with an asylum recognition rate of less than 20% or who are believed to have withheld information or been intentionally misleading) processed through an accelerated asylum determination procedure that would see those refused asylum deported to third countries far more quickly. At the same time, the agreement would impose a flexible system of “mandatory solidarity” that would require member states to either receive a quota of asylum seekers, pay a fine of €20,000 for each person they refused to accept or provide a financial contribution to operational activities related to migration. Individual countries would also have more leeway in determining the eligibility of arrivals and where those refused asylum could be removed to. Only two countries – Hungary and Poland – voted against the agreement, though a number of countries chose to abstain.

The agreement will still need to be agreed in the European Parliament to become law. In the meantime, its critics have continued to publicly resist its provisions. At the end of the month, at a high-profile EU summit, Hungary and Poland [refused to endorse](#) the relevant sections on migration in a joint statement by the EU, meaning the text had to be edited out of the official declaration. Though this was largely a symbolic gesture that would have no direct bearing on the approval of the agreement, it nevertheless highlights that the

longstanding tensions and disagreement around how migration is managed within the EU are unlikely to dissipate in the near future. Meanwhile, [human rights groups](#) have decried the agreement's provisions for eroding the fundamental rights protections of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers through the creation of fast-track processes that could lead to the deportation of persons in need of protection.

## Proposed migration deal with Tunisia raises fresh human rights concerns

In response to the increasing number of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers travelling to Europe from Tunisia, in mid-June, the EU announced the details of a proposed agreement with the Tunisian government to provide financial assistance in return for increased border management. The deal (part of a broader package of cooperation that totals [more than €1 billion](#)) would include €105 million for a new partnership to curb irregular migration and human smuggling. While the EU has announced that it could serve as [a blueprint](#) for future agreements with other countries exchanging financial assistance for increased border control, some questions about the future of the partnership remain. Besides significant [human rights concerns](#) around the implications for migrant protections and the "[whitewashing](#)" of President Kais Saied's increasingly authoritarian regime, the agreement had not yet been formally approved by the Tunisian government as of 1 July, with [Saied himself stating](#) that "we cannot be a guard for their countries".

## UK appeals court rules Rwanda plan illegal

On 29 June the UK's Court of Appeal ruled that the UK government's so-called "Rwanda plan" was illegal. Originally announced in April 2022 as a deterrent to the increasing numbers of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers entering the country on small boats from France, the proposed agreement would mean that anyone who had entered the UK irregularly could be transferred to Rwanda to have their asylum claims processed there: even those whose claims have been approved are not permitted to return to the UK. Though the policy was approved as lawful by the high court in December 2022, the court of appeal [reversed this decision](#) on the basis that Rwanda could not be deemed a safe third country due to the real risk that applicants with credible asylum claims could be returned to their countries where they would face a risk of persecution or other mistreatment. Following this decision, the UK government announced that it would be [appealing this ruling](#) at the supreme court. In the meantime, the boats continue to cross the Channel to the UK: in mid-June, the government announced that [more than 10,000](#) refugees, migrants and asylum seekers had reached the country since the beginning of the year, including 2,529 in the space of just a week (10 – 17 June).

## Italy passes new restrictions on migrant rights and protections

Following a shipwreck in February 2023 where [more than 80 people](#) died near the Italian town of Crotona, with authorities failing to launch a rescue prior to the boat sinking despite it being just 150 metres from the shore, the government's so-called [Cutro decree](#) was passed less than three months later. Named after the boat that capsized, the legislation does not strengthen protections for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers making the dangerous crossing, but instead imposes further restrictions on their fundamental rights. The measures, pushed through using emergency powers, include extended detention, a rollback

of essential services in reception centres and additional barriers to the granting of “special protection” on humanitarian grounds.

## Balkan countries pledge closer collaboration around migration

Representatives from all six countries in the Western Balkans region – North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, as well as Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina – convened on 8 June at the Third Sarajevo Migration Dialogue to discuss a shared commitment to [greater cooperation around migration governance](#), in partnership with the United Nations (UN) and the EU. The region has been a popular area of transit for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers from Afghanistan, the Middle East and South Asia since 2015, with numbers now having returned to pre-pandemic levels. The Western Balkan states, who are all seeking accession to the EU, have increasingly adopted policies of containment and deportation towards people transiting through their territory in exchange for financial and technical assistance.

# Thematic Focus:

## Pakistani Nationals on the Move to Europe: New Pressures, Risks, Opportunities

The recent shipwreck in Greece, where a fishing vessel transporting up to 750 people sank off the Greek coast, highlighted the continued risks associated with migration and reignited conversation around who is to blame: the human smugglers who organize these crossings, often with a clear disregard for the lives of those on board, or the EU and the various member states whose failures and inaction are falling short of their legal and moral responsibilities to protect the vulnerable people travelling through their waters. However, with around half of those on board being Pakistani nationals, hundreds of them presumed dead, the tragedy also drew attention to another phenomenon that is generally overlooked in Western policy discussions around migration – the scale and dynamics of mixed migration to Europe from Pakistan.

### Are more people leaving Pakistan for Europe?

While it is not possible to extrapolate numbers from a single incident, even one of the most deadly disasters in the Mediterranean for many years, the broader data available on mixed migration to Europe confirms that movement from Pakistan has significantly increased in 2023. While Pakistan did not even feature in IOM's ranking of the top ten countries of origin among arrivals in Europe in 2022, Pakistan was the [fifth most represented country](#) in the first half of 2023, with 5,342 arrivals. However, in Greece, there has been no significant recorded increase of Pakistani nationals between 2022 and 2023. Instead, there has been a sharp uptick in the number of Pakistani arrivals registered in Italy: while in 2022 Pakistani nationals comprised just 3 per cent of the total number of arrivals in Italy, according to UNHCR, so far in 2023 this proportion has risen to around 10 per cent.

### Why are they choosing to leave?

Though the absolute numbers of Pakistani refugees, migrants and asylum seekers entering Europe are still relatively modest, if looked at long-term, it is important to understand what may have caused this recent spike. [Previous research by MMC](#), drawing on interviews with Pakistani arrivals in Italy between November 2019 and September 2021, identified a variety of intersecting factors that drove the need to migrate, with many (48%) citing multiple reasons for doing so, the most common being violence, insecurity and conflict (54%), lack of rights and freedom (36%) and economic reasons (33%). Given the deteriorating economic situation, high unemployment and runaway inflation, these factors are likely to have evolved, with [desperation and lack of opportunity](#) driving more to migrate. The devastation and displacement brought on by last year's catastrophic flooding have only made matters worse.

## Which routes are they taking?

Until recently, [according to MMC's research](#), the majority of Pakistani refugees, migrants and asylum seekers were travelling through Iran and Turkey before entering Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean route and the Western Balkans before moving on to Italy. Others travelled the less common sea route from Turkey to Italy. For most of those interviewed the journey was arduous and protracted, usually involving more than one means of transportation (89%) and in almost three-quarters of cases (72%) taking more than a year to reach Italy.

Over the last year, however, there has been a decided shift towards the Central Mediterranean route, prompted by a number of developments elsewhere. Crossings from Türkiye into Europe have fallen sharply as Greece has stepped up sea patrols and built a border fence along the Evros. These developments have been accompanied by [violent pushbacks and systematic human rights abuses](#) against refugees and migrants, including illegal detention, physical assault, theft and humiliation. On multiple occasions, this brutal treatment has proven fatal: in February 2022, for instance, the bodies of 12 people who had been pushed back from Greece were found on the Turkish border, frozen to death after being stripped of their clothes and shoes.

This strategy of deterrence, aiming at discouraging people by all possible means from entering the EU, is now being replicated in the [Western Balkans](#). 2022 saw the highest number of arrivals in the Western Balkans since the so-called 'migration crisis' of 2015/16, with [144,118](#) attempts to cross borders between the EU and Western Balkans recorded during the year. However, at the same time countries in the region (frequently in response to pressure from the EU) began to put in place more restrictive migration policies to curb transit. This included, in 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina's first forcible returns of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Moroccan nationals. This may be a factor in the apparent reduction, from the summer of 2022 onwards, in the number of Pakistanis transiting Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, there has been an increase in those choosing to make the dangerous Mediterranean crossing to Italy, either directly from Turkey or along the Central Mediterranean route from Egypt, Tunisia and Libya.

## Understanding the risks

Though refugees, migrants and asylum seekers are frequently stigmatized in policy discussions for the "illegality" of their entry to Europe, in the wake of the recent tragedy the attention has focused instead on the smugglers and their criminal actions. In this instance, the vilification of the smugglers is more than warranted: the trawler was dangerously overloaded, with food and water supplies [reportedly running out](#) before the sinking. Perhaps most disturbingly, Pakistani nationals were apparently [singled out](#) (along with women and children) to be confined in the lower hold, the most hazardous part of the vessel, and subjected to mistreatment by the crew when they attempted to come on deck.

Yet the use of human smugglers to reach Europe remains widespread, with [88%](#) of Pakistani respondents interviewed in the MMC study engaging them at some point during the journey. The level of service provided appears to vary considerably, with 66% of respondents believing that the smugglers had helped them reach their destination, while 44% thought they had been intentionally misled. These figures point to the complexity of human smuggling as a phenomenon and its almost commonplace role for most Pakistani

nationals seeking to reach Europe. Though it may seem glib to characterize human smugglers as de facto “travel agents”, given the death or disappearance of so many people en route, they are able – in a context where no regular or legal pathways to migration exist – to achieve a degree of legitimacy for the thousands of Pakistani nationals seeking to leave their country every year.

In [Pakistan](#), in the days following the tragedy, the Prime Minister declared Monday, 19 June, a day of national mourning and ordered an “immediate crackdown” on individuals involved in people smuggling. The Pakistani authorities confirmed the [arrest of 14 individuals](#) allegedly connected to people smuggling from Pakistan to Libya and Europe. Meanwhile, in Greece, nine [Egyptian](#) men who survived the shipwreck were also accused of people smuggling. The momentum to hold the criminals who orchestrated the crossing to account is understandable and necessary, given the direct responsibility they bear for the deaths of those on board, but to focus only on smuggling without understanding the broader motivation of those desperate to migrate, not to mention the role that European policies have played in exacerbating the dangers, will not deliver a lasting solution.

The reality is that the current EU approach to human mobility, with almost no resettlement for asylum seekers and very few accessible working visas for migrant labourers, smuggling (dangerous though it is) remains the only available option. Until this is recognized, more tragedies will occur. Indeed, on 26 February, less than four months before the tragedy at Messenia, a boat carrying around 200 passengers sank off the coast of the southern region of Calabria, Italy, claiming the lives of [at least 94 people](#) (including Pakistani nationals) on board. In the wake of these deaths, a number of suspected smugglers were arrested, and new legislation announced – though crucially, the latter has focused on increasing restrictions rather than strengthening protections for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, despite suggestions that the slow response of Italian authorities and Frontex may have contributed to the disaster. Without a more comprehensive solution that recognizes smuggling as a symptom of a dysfunctional migration landscape, this latest tragedy will likely not be the last.

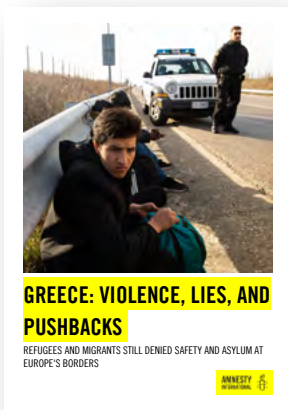
# Highlighted New Research and Reports



## [EUAA Asylum Report 2023 – Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union](#)

### **European Union Agency for Asylum | July 2023**

This report provides a comprehensive overview of key development in 2022 relating to asylum in the EU+.



## [Greece: Violence, lies, and pushbacks – Refugees and migrants still denied safety and asylum at Europe's borders](#)

### **Amnesty International | June 2023**

This report is an opportune reminder, given Frontex's recent threat to withdraw from the country, that pushbacks, violent deportations and other human rights violations of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers have been a systematic part of Greece's border management for the last decade – and continue to be widely practised to this day.



## [Improving Stakeholder Coordination in Refugee Resettlement: A Path to More Effective, Inclusive Programs](#)

### **Migration Policy Institute Europe | June 2023**

Drawing primarily on research from Europe (Finland, Germany, Spain and Sweden), as well as Argentina and the United States, this publication explores the challenges of effective stakeholder coordination and how this has impacted on refugee resettlement outcomes. It also includes case studies and recommendations on how to improve communication, capacity strengthening and sustainable funding.

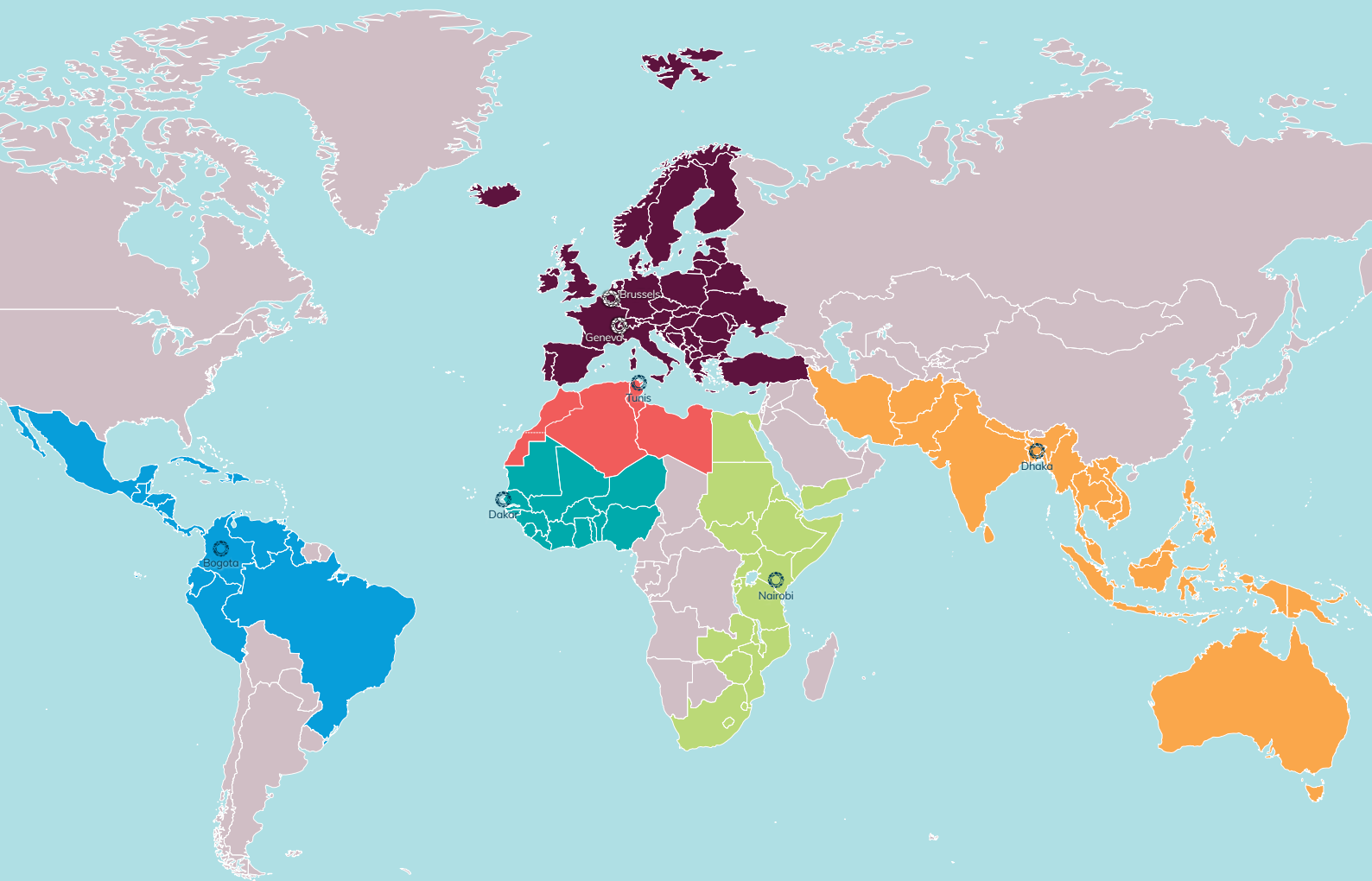


## [‘Like We Were Just Animals’: Pushbacks of People Seeking Protection from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

### **Human Rights Watch | May 2023**

This report, drawing on recent interviews, highlights the ongoing use of violent pushbacks, illegal deportations and other human rights abuses by Croatian security forces against refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, including unaccompanied minors. Some of the incidents documented in the report occurred as recently as April 2023 and demonstrate the systematic nature of these abuses.





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 Copenhagen, 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).

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