



MMC North Africa

QUARTER 3 2023

A photograph of two men on the deck of a ship. They are looking out at a vast blue sea under a clear sky. The man on the left is wearing a white t-shirt and has his hand to his forehead. The man on the right is also wearing a white t-shirt and has his hand near his face. A dark metal railing is visible in the foreground.

Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: North Africa

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers North Africa. The core countries of focus are Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. 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.

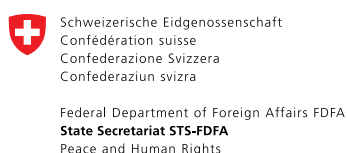
MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs hosted in Danish Refugee Council (DRC) regional offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels. For more information on MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit mixedmigration.org 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:
Taha Jawashi (2017)

SUPPORTED BY:



**MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK**
Danida

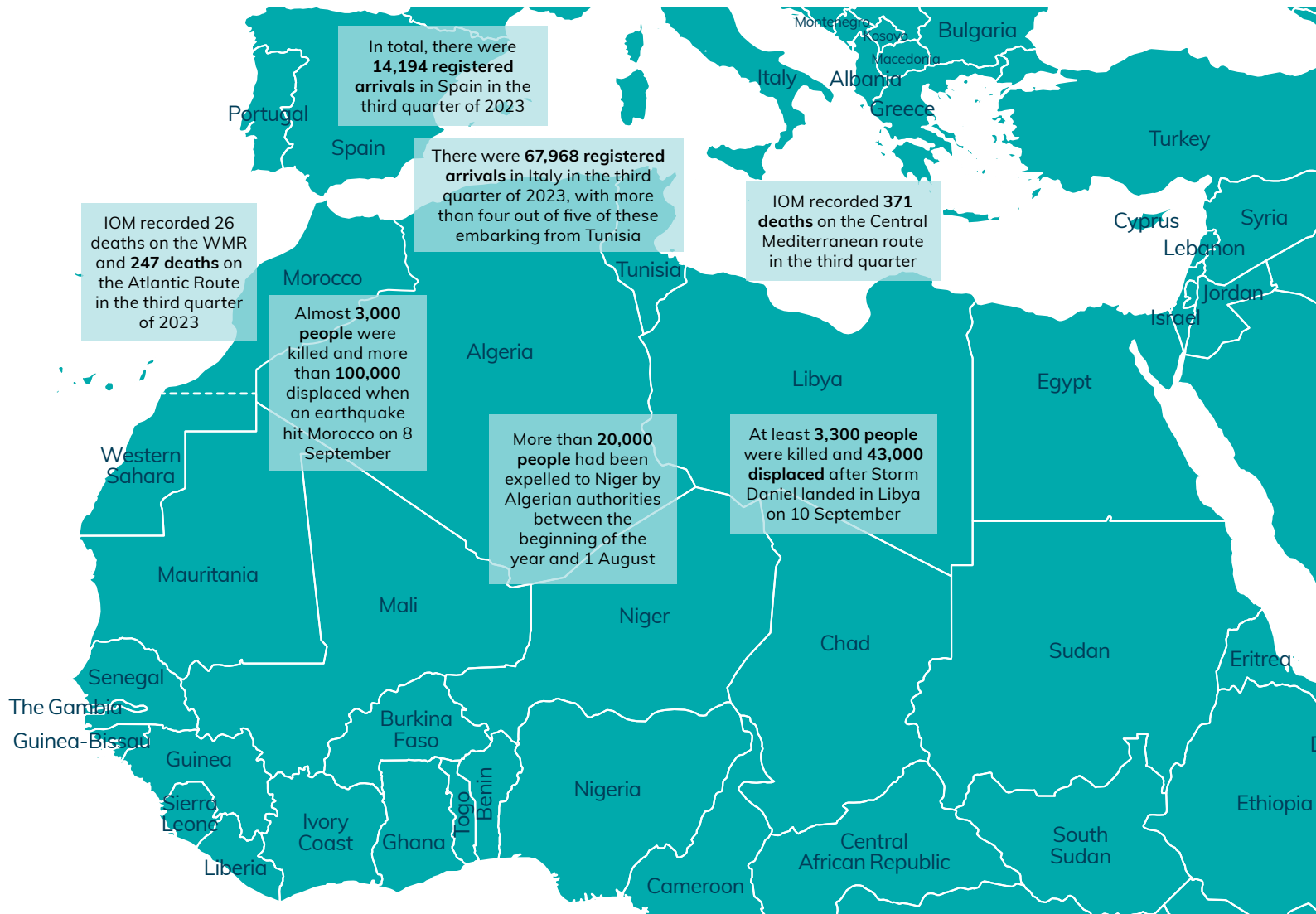
Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: North Africa

Quarter 3 - 2023

Key Updates

- **More deaths on the Atlantic route:** While the number of deaths on the Western Mediterranean route [reduced substantially](#) in the third quarter of 2023, IOM recorded [247 deaths](#) on the Atlantic route during the same period, more than the total in the previous six months combined.
- **Spain launches an investigation into rescue failures:** On 13 July Spanish prosecutors requested a [formal criminal inquiry](#) into the events surrounding the failed response to a migrant boat that departed from Morocco the previous month and subsequently sank, resulting in the [deaths of 36 people](#). [Both Moroccan and Spanish authorities](#) were criticized for their role in the tragedy.
- **Increasing departures from Tunisia to Italy:** The number of people embarking from Tunisia between [July](#) and [September](#) 2023 far outstripped the total in the previous quarter, with more than four out of five arrivals in Italy during this period having departed from there.
- **Morocco devastated by the worst earthquake in 60 years:** One of the most destructive seismic events in Morocco in living memory left [almost 3,000 people dead](#) and internally displaced [more than 100,000 others](#) after it hit on 8 September.
- **Death and displacement in Libya in the wake of Storm Daniel:** On 10 September, after Storm Daniel landed in northeastern Libya, two dams upstream of the city of Derna broke, resulting in [thousands of deaths](#) and the [displacement of tens of thousands](#) of others rendered homeless and at risk of contracting water-borne diseases.
- **Mass expulsions from Algeria to Niger:** The rise in the number of deportations of Nigeriens and nationals of other sub-Saharan African countries from Algeria this year continued in the third quarter, even in the wake of the military coup in Niger on 26 July, with [more than 20,000](#) people abandoned in the desert by 1 August, trapping many who are unable to move on or return.
- **A new EU agreement with Tunisia, despite targeting of sub-Saharan African nationals:** Rising levels of hate speech and racist violence, encouraged by the government's anti-migrant rhetoric, culminated in the mass [expulsion of around 2,000 sub-Saharan African nationals](#) from the city of Sfax in July. Despite this, the EU brokered a new 1 billion Euro agreement on 16 July that included significant components around migration management.

Regional Overview*



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

Mixed Migration Regional Updates

Mixed migration from North Africa to Europe

The Western Mediterranean and Atlantic routes to Spain

- As of 1 October, [according to UNHCR](#), 27,220 arrivals had reached Spain in 2023, including 14,878 via the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands, 779 into Ceuta and 419 into Melilla from Morocco, 7,135 into mainland Andalucía, 1,987 through the Mainland Eastern Mediterranean (the eastern coast of Spain) and 1,015 at the Balearics. In total, 14,194 refugees and migrants entered Spain in the third quarter, up from 8,403 in the previous quarter and significantly higher than the total in the third quarter (9,229) of 2022.
- The most represented countries of origin among those journeying on the Western Mediterranean route between January and August 2023 were Morocco, Algeria and Syria, [according to Frontex](#), while on the Atlantic it was Morocco, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire.
- The [number of dead and missing](#) in 2023 was 210 along the Western Mediterranean as of the end of September, including 26 deaths or disappearances in the third quarter, a significant drop from the totals in the previous quarter (144) and during the third quarter of 2022 (164). Along the [Atlantic route](#) to the Canary Islands, on the other hand, the picture was very different: of the 424 fatalities between January and the end of September 2023, more than half (247) occurred in the third quarter of the year, more than twice the number in the previous quarter (120) and far exceeding the total in the third quarter of 2022 (38). On 3 July, for instance, the sinking off the North African coast of a boat travelling to the Canary Islands led to the deaths of [at least 51 people](#). On 16 August, a boat that had left Senegal on 10 July was found drifting off near Cabo Verde, with [at least 63 of the passengers](#) on board presumed dead or missing.

Criminal investigations open into failed rescue response by Morocco and Spain

During the year, Morocco has intercepted [tens of thousands](#) of refugees and migrants attempting to reach Spain by land or sea, including one incident on 23 August when [almost 200 people](#) were rescued from boats and returned. However, both Moroccan and Spanish authorities have been criticised for the [long delays, poor coordination and overlapping jurisdictions](#) that have characterised both their rescue operations in the Mediterranean. These issues were brought into sharp relief on 21 June, when a boat with more than 60 passengers on board sank off the coast of Morocco, en route to Spain, with [36 people 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. With both Moroccan and Spanish coast guard having failed to respond in a timely fashion, on 13 July the Spanish Public Prosecutor's Office requested that [a criminal investigation be launched](#). However, while Spanish authorities insisted that the boat was located within Morocco's jurisdiction, a [Spanish rescue boat was located nearby](#) and under international law was best placed to

respond. [According to Caminando Fronteras](#), who filed the complaint, the investigation is something of a milestone, being the first time “a crime of omission of the duty to rescue has been investigated at the maritime border.”

The Central Mediterranean route to Italy

- [According to UNHCR](#), 67,968 arrivals reached Italy in the third quarter of 2023, compared to 37,824 in the previous quarter and 44,157 during the third quarter of 2022.
- The [number of dead and missing](#) along the Central Mediterranean route in 2023 as of the end of September was 2,145. This included 371 fatalities during the third quarter, compared to 1,295 in the previous quarter (including the sinking of a trawler off the coast of Messenia, Greece on 14 June which left an estimated 596 people dead or missing) and 369 in the third quarter of 2022.
- In addition to those who reach Italy or tragically die en route, thousands continue to be intercepted and returned. [At least 40,000](#) have been apprehended by Tunisian coast guards in the first eight months of the year, including 4,427 in August. In Libya, IOM reported on 23 September that [11,465 people](#) had been apprehended and returned to Libya during the year. This compared to [8,496](#) on 1 July, a rise of almost 3,000 during the third quarter. In the eastern part of the country, militias have also engaged in frequent [illegal “pullbacks” of boats](#) en route to Europe.

Crossings from Tunisia to Italy on the rise

In the context of protracted economic and political instability in Tunisia, the number of people embarking from there to Italy has risen significantly. With [56,373](#) registered arrivals between 3 July and 2 October, this was far more than the total in the six months before ([33,860](#)) and also far outstripped movement from other countries: during the same period, between 3 July and 2 October, there were 9,521 from Libya, 2,718 from Türkiye and 153 from Algeria, with additional movement from Lebanon (214) and Cyprus (11). Many within this group are Tunisian nationals: as of the end of August, [9,283 Tunisians](#) had reached Italy, including 4,965 in July and August, far outstripping the total in the second quarter (2,430).

Nevertheless, while the total number of Tunisian nationals leaving the country has risen, their overall proportion among those travelling the Central Mediterranean route to Italy has [reduced significantly](#), from 22% between January and the end of August 2022 to 11% during the same period in 2023. The majority of those leaving Tunisia for Italy are refugees and migrants who were already in Tunisia for some time, a situation that is likely to continue given the ongoing targeting of sub-Saharan African nationals resident in the country (discussed in more detail in the Thematic Case Study). The representation of other nationalities, in particular from several West African countries, has increased both in relative and absolute terms: the most [commonly identified countries of origin between January and August](#) were Guinea (14%, up from 2% during the same period in 2022), Côte d'Ivoire (13%, up from 3% in January to August 2022), with other sub-Saharan African countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Cameroon also featuring among the 10 most represented nationalities.

Mixed migration in Morocco

- As of the end of September 2023, [according to UNHCR data](#), 840 people had managed to cross the border from Morocco into Ceuta and another 442 into Melilla during the year. The majority of those who seek to enter by land or sea are either pushed back before they can reach Spanish territory or returned. To take one incident as an example, on 12 August [almost 100 Moroccan nationals](#) attempted to swim to Ceuta, but only 10 succeeded in reaching it and of these eight were returned to Morocco, meaning only two (both minors) were able to remain.
- According to Moroccan authorities, [tens of thousands](#) of attempted crossings to Spain have been prevented in 2023 and thousands of migrants rescued, including [over 500 rescued](#) over the space of two weeks in August.
- Morocco has [apprehended](#) and [repatriated](#) hundreds of Senegalese refugees and migrants during the quarter, including [50](#) on 26 July, [283](#) on 10 August and [325](#) on 23 August.

Communities wrestle with the aftermath of the devastating earthquake

On 8 September Morocco was hit by its worst earthquake [in more than 60 years](#). Though the effects were felt far beyond, its epicentre was concentrated south of Marrakech, resulting in the deaths of [almost 3,000 people](#) and leaving thousands of others injured. As many as 450,000 people were affected by the disaster, including [more than 100,000](#) internally displaced. The widespread destruction of houses, with some villages [razed to the ground](#) in their entirety, left [many homeless](#). Official estimates suggest that [as many as 60,000 buildings](#) were damaged in the disaster, of which around a third had completely collapsed.

Mixed migration in Libya

- According to the most recent estimates, published earlier in the year, Libya currently hosts more than [705,046 migrants](#), the majority from Niger (24%), Egypt (23%), Sudan (19%), Chad (12%) and Nigeria (4%). The majority (55%) are located in the West of the country, with the remainder in the East (33%) and South (12%). There are also, as of September, [49,713](#) registered refugees and asylum seekers in the country.
- Widespread abuse, mistreatment and discrimination against refugees and migrants continue to be reported. Conditions are particularly dire in the country's migrant detention centres, as highlighted by [video footage filmed in the Abu Salim facility](#) in August of a female migrant who had died on the floor, one of dozens in the facility suffering from tuberculosis.
- On 31 August, the UN Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Solutions to Internal Displacement praised the Libyan government's progress in [addressing internal displacement in the country](#) through a programme of improved security, reconciliation, reconstruction, compensation and social protection. The number of IDPs has reduced by more than 80%, from 316,000 in October 2020, to [around 50,000](#)

in need of sustained assistance today. While [recent IOM data](#) puts the number of IDPs at 125,802, of these 75,643 are on “solutions pathways”. The majority of those still displaced belong to the Tawergha and Murzug communities.

Storm Daniel brings death and displacement to Derna

On 10 September, Storm Daniel landed in northeastern Libya, devastating large swathes of the coast in the days that followed. Much of the destruction was concentrated around the city of Derna, where heavy rainfall led to the [breach of two dams](#) upstream. In the ensuing flood, between [3,300](#) and [11,300](#) were killed, including [many migrants and IDPs](#), and another [10,000 were reported missing](#). Other coastal towns, such as [Al Bayda and Al Marj](#), have also been severely affected.

With widespread damage to housing and infrastructure, including water supplies, an estimated [43,000 people](#) have been displaced by the disaster. There are concerns that the [deteriorating humanitarian conditions](#) there could result in a further wave of malnutrition and water-borne diseases such as cholera.

Mixed migration in Algeria

Mass expulsions to Niger

For years Algeria has expelled [tens of thousands](#) of undocumented Nigerien refugees and migrants from other countries such as Guinea and Mali. However, the numbers involved have accelerated significantly this year. Between the beginning of January and 1 August, according to figures from Alarme Phone Sahara, [at least 20,000](#) people were expelled by Algerian authorities towards Niger. Thousands of these migrants remain [stranded](#) in the northern town of Assamaka, where humanitarian conditions are precarious. All told [IOM](#) has registered some 5,000 stranded migrants at its transit centres across Niger, and an additional 1,400 remain outside of these overstretched centres.

Though the situation was already difficult, with so many stranded in the area and unable to move on, it has been further complicated by a [military coup](#) in Niger on 26 July that ousted the democratically elected government. On 1 September, IOM called for the [establishment of a humanitarian corridor](#) to allow for assisted voluntary return for these stranded migrants as well as for the delivery of emergency relief. Local activists, while refusing to condone the military’s seizure of power, [have also condemned the international response](#) to the crisis – sanctions, border closures and aid disruptions – for exacerbating the vulnerability of migrant and displaced populations in the country.

Thematic Focus:

Rising violence against sub-Saharan African nationals in Tunisia and the new EU partnership

On 16 July, weeks after the proposed agreement was first announced, a [memorandum of understanding](#) was formally agreed between the EU and Tunisia, encompassing around €1 billion in financial and technical assistance including support for stronger border management. Among other areas, it envisions closer collaboration around maritime search and rescue operations, tighter border management and the disruption of smuggling organisations in Tunisia. It also facilitates the return and readmission of Tunisians who have entered the EU irregularly, as well as expanded pathways for regular migration and seasonal work.

While the deal was brokered in response to the growing number of refugees and migrants reaching Europe from Tunisia, driven in part by the country's economic and political instability, it was widely criticised by human rights groups for [whitewashing](#) the abuses of the Tunisian government. Meanwhile, EU lawmakers also criticised what they see as the [ineffectiveness of the agreement](#), while others argued that these measures would not deter those wishing to make the journey but simply force them to [take more dangerous routes](#) to reach Europe. There appeared to be limited enthusiasm on the Tunisian side, too, with a statement from the Presidency a month before the agreement was finalised indicating that [Tunisia would not act as Europe's border guard](#) by taking on responsibility for the interception and return of boats. This position was reaffirmed just after the agreement was signed, with the government stating that [it would not be a "reception centre"](#) for sub-Saharan African nationals and would only accept returns of Tunisians.

Notwithstanding the role that Tunisia's economic and political crisis has played in the decision of growing numbers of people (including Tunisian nationals) to migrate, it is also the case that the increasingly inhospitable environment for sub-Saharan African refugees and migrants – reflected in a series of xenophobic and racist attacks in recent months – has also [encouraged many foreigners living in Tunisia to leave](#). Against a backdrop of escalating violence and anti-migrant rhetoric, abusive practices by authorities against migrants have also taken place, including [mass expulsions and deportations from the city of Sfax](#) after an altercation between locals and migrants led to the death of a Tunisian man on 3 July. Around [2,000 migrants](#) were subsequently abandoned in the desert near [Algeria](#) and [Libya](#) without food or water. Dozens may have died as a result of these actions: by mid-August, some estimates suggested that [at least 27 people had died](#) and another 73 were missing. By then, Tunisia and Libya had [reached an agreement](#) to allocate between them the hundreds of migrants at their border. However, further attacks have continued since, with reports in September that [security forces had rounded up around 500 migrants](#) who had settled in the port of Sfax after experiencing evictions in the crackdowns of July and expelled them from the city.

In an increasingly troubled political climate, migrants and Black Tunisians have been targeted following a [February statement by the president](#) to the National Security Council. Though in many ways mirroring disparaging language deployed against other groups, what distinguished rhetorical attacks against migrants was its apparent resonance with some Tunisians. In the wake of the February statement, long before the events of July and [the mass expulsions](#) that followed, migrants across the country faced [abuse and violent attacks](#) at the hands not only of security forces but also ordinary citizens. This was in part because the president's comments tapped into deep-seated discriminatory attitudes towards sub-Saharan African nationals that even extend to Black Tunisians.

The [EU's new deal with Tunisia](#) was formalised in July at the very moment hundreds of refugees and migrants were being in the desert. For [Human Rights Watch](#), the events of July provided ample evidence that Tunisia could not be credibly considered either a safe third country for asylum seekers or a safe place of return for those apprehended at sea. In this context, the EU's partnership with Tunisia around migration exposed it to criticisms of [being complicit](#) with the abuses being carried out there. Indeed, some believe that the EU has not only symbolically whitewashed the actions of the Tunisian government, but also through its policies created "[an incentivisation structure and aura of impunity that have fed into the current crackdown](#)". This perception is likely to be reinforced by the first [disbursement of funds](#) in September, [without any formal condemnation](#) from the EU of the Tunisian government's actions.

In the meantime, thousands of sub-Saharan African nationals still resident in the country are caught between a deepening "[climate of fear](#)" in Tunisia and the very real risks of a journey onward across the Mediterranean that has already claimed hundreds of lives this year. Nevertheless, it seems possible that the hostile environment that has emerged in Tunisia will drive [many more will choose to leave Tunisia](#) for Europe in the months to come, notwithstanding the recent agreement with the EU. Recent reports of further round-ups in Sfax, with hundreds of buses out of the city and then abandoned in rural areas near the main embarkation points for Italy, are [prompting suggestions](#) that authorities may be seeking to encourage them to leave for Europe. These developments only [confirm](#) the worst fears of critics of the EU's partnership with Tunisia: that the agreement will not only fail to adequately protect refugees and migrants, but also create the risk of further rights violations.

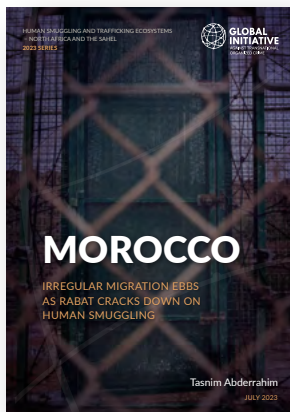
Highlighted New Research and Reports



[Libya: Sophisticated Smugglers Thrive as Libyan Governance Stagnates](#)

Global Initiative | September 2023

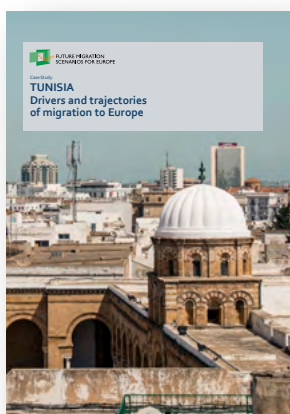
This paper gives an overview of the current state of human smuggling networks in Libya and the capture of much of the architecture of migration management by militias and other vested interests. In particular, it looks at how the country's political conditions have enabled smuggling operations to recover and expand over the last two years.



[Morocco: Irregular Migration Ebbs as Rabat Cracks Down on Human Smuggling](#)

Global Initiative | July 2023

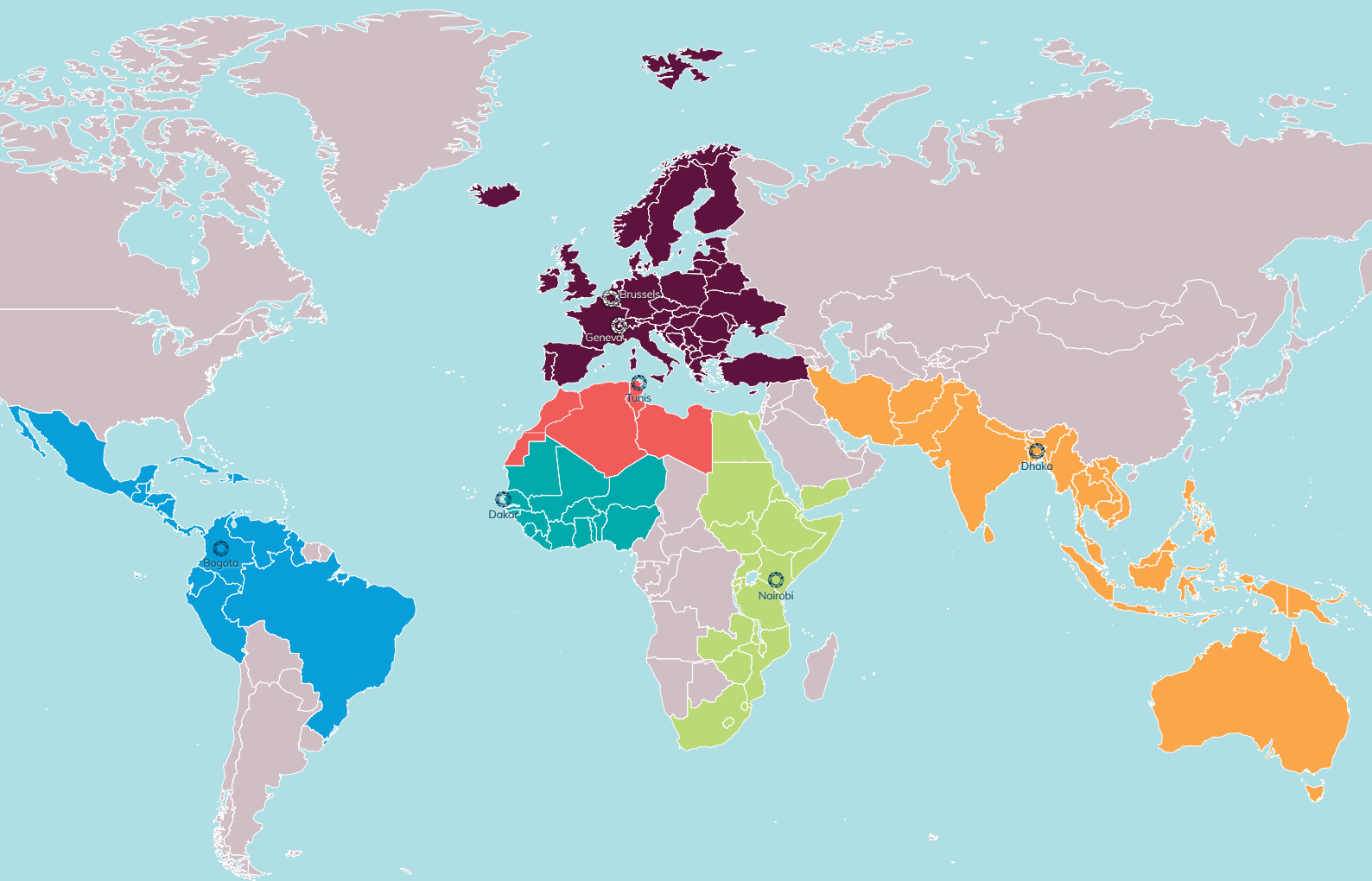
This paper provides a temperature check on the state of irregular migration in Morocco today. While highlighting recent government measures to curb smuggling, it also emphasises the likely persistence and evolution of irregular migration in the country, given that many of the economic and social drivers of this movement have yet to be addressed.



[Tunisia: Drivers and Trajectories of Migration to Europe](#)

Sobczak-Szelc, K., Pedziwiatr, K. and Boubakri, H. | July 2023

Commissioned as part of the Future Migration Scenarios for Europe programme, this in-depth case study of internal and international migration in Tunisia focuses on the city of Sousse and the role it plays as both a destination and stepping stone for rural migrants. Through this lens, it explores the complex dynamics currently shaping movement within the country and to Europe, in the process sketching out the different choices facing many Tunisians today.



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).

For more information visit:

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

