



**MMC North Africa**

**QUARTER 3 2024**

A photograph of two men on a boat. The man in the foreground is wearing a white t-shirt and has his hand to his face, looking down with a somber expression. The man behind him is also in a white t-shirt, looking out at the sea with his hands clasped in prayer. The background shows a vast blue sea 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, Libya, Morocco, 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 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 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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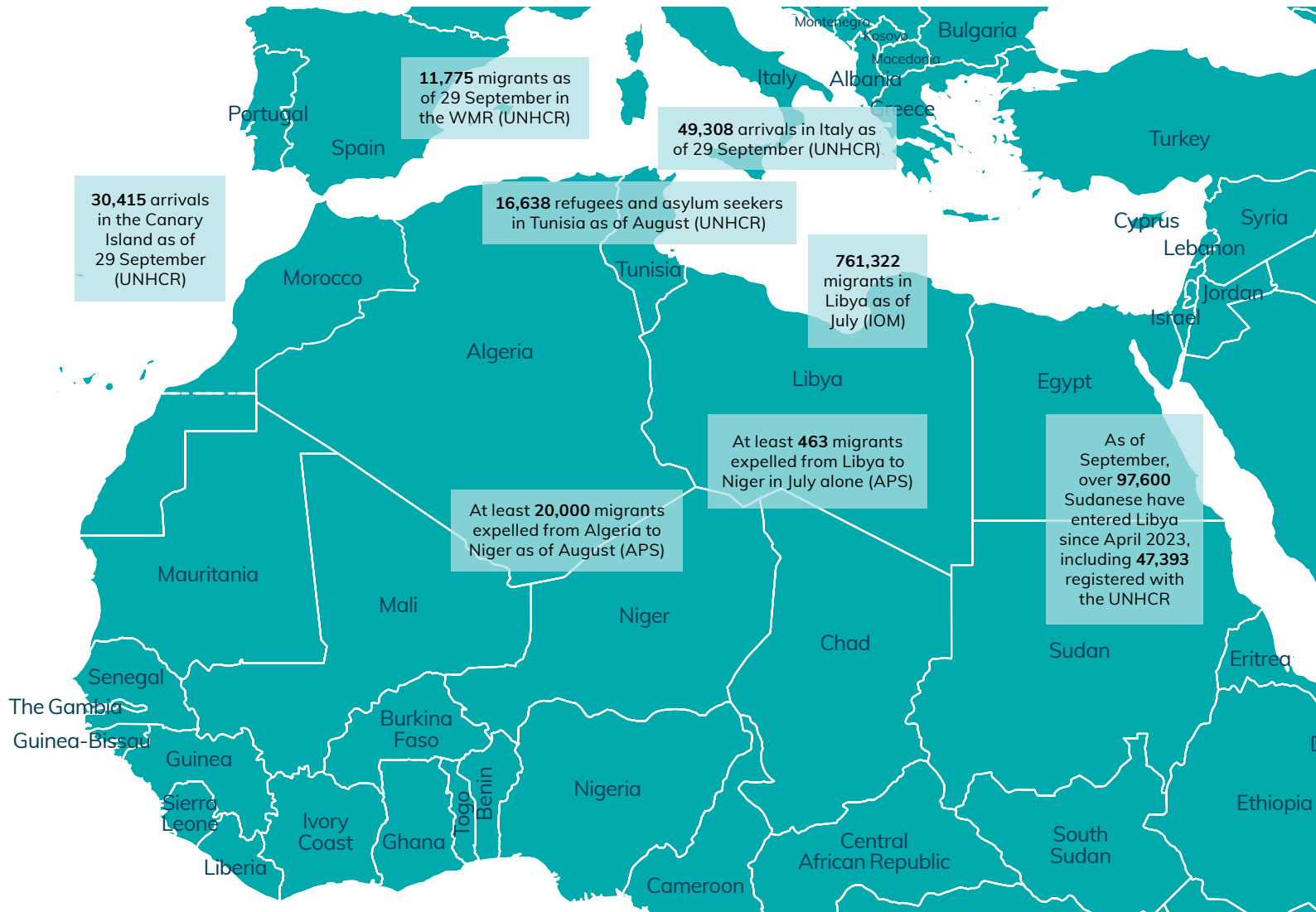
# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: North Africa

## Quarter 3 - 2024

### Key Updates

- **More Algerians are making their way to Spain from Algeria's northern coasts:** What was once described as an 'invisible' route has now become more utilized by migrants, especially Algerians, driven by worsening conditions in Algeria and tightening controls on other North African routes.
- **Libya hosts the Trans-Mediterranean Migration Forum (TMMF) shortly before the release of the Secretary-General's latest UNSMIL report highlighting ongoing violations against migrants:** In July, the Tripoli-based government convened leaders from African, Mediterranean, and European states during the TMMF to develop a shared vision for migration management. In August, the Secretary-General's [latest UNSMIL report](#) highlights ongoing human rights violations against migrants, particularly in detention, including arbitrary arrests, exploitation, forced labor, and torture in Libya.
- **Sudanese continue to arrive in Libya amidst ongoing war in Sudan:** The number of Sudanese nationals in Libya increased by 33% in just one quarter. This increase, primarily observed in Kufra, is linked to the ongoing war in Sudan, with over 97,600 Sudanese refugees estimated to have entered Libya since April 2023. As of [August](#), Sudanese represent 65% of the refugees and asylum seekers population in Libya.
- **The number of migrants who crossed into Ceuta from Morocco increases over recent months, amid political tension in Spain:** This increase in arrivals is part of a broader trend observed since [earlier this year](#) of more and more people attempting to swim into Ceuta. On 15 September, [clashes](#) erupted between Moroccan police and migrants attempting to cross by land into Ceuta. These developments have sparked broader debates over Spain's migration policies amid tensions between the Spanish central government and regional authorities in Ceuta.
- **Arrest of Libyan Airline director highlights Libya's role in US-bound migrant transit via Nicaragua:** In response to the rising number of flights from [Libya to Nicaragua](#), Libyan authorities [have arrested](#) the commercial director of the Libyan company Ghadames Air in July, charging him with facilitating migrant smuggling. According to [La Prensa](#), Managua is not listed among the official destinations of Ghadames Air but the company operates these flights via non-regular charter flights.
- **Algeria-Niger diplomatic relations show fragile improvements, but expulsions persist:** Despite a diplomatic visit from Niger's Prime Minister to Algeria in August 2024, which aimed at enhancing cooperation, expulsions from Algeria to Niger continue, with nearly 20,000 expelled between early 2024 and August. Additionally, new expulsions from Libya to Niger has been reported. APS has [called](#) for an end to mass deportations, arbitrary arrests, and police violence, and the establishment of safe routes for migrants across the Sahara and the Mediterranean.

## Regional Overview\*



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

# Mixed Migration Regional Updates

## Mixed migration from North Africa to Europe

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

According to [UNHCR](#), as of 29 September, Spain registered 42,190 irregular arrivals representing a 57% increase compared to the same period in 2023 (including 16,940 people during the period [30 June](#) to [29 September](#)). Most arrivals are recorded in the Canary Islands with a decline of sea arrivals to the Spanish Peninsula and Balearic Islands, according to [Spanish Ministry data](#). However, land arrivals to Ceuta and Melilla have increased this quarter.

On the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands, arrivals [increased](#) by 102% compared to the same period last year, reaching 30,415 as of 29 September (10,938 for this quarter only). The WMR overall saw a 0.5% increase of arrivals compared to the same period last year, totalling 11,775 as of 29 September (6,002 for this quarter). However, sea arrivals to the Spanish Peninsula and Balearic Islands [dropped](#) from 10,011 between January and 15 September 2023 to 9,084 over the same period in 2024. Regarding arrivals to Ceuta and Melilla, the [Ministry data](#) reveals an increase of land arrivals, rising from 829 to 2,088 most occurred in Ceuta (from 717 to 2,026).<sup>2</sup>

On the Atlantic route, the [main nationalities](#) include Malians (10,118), Senegalese (4,963), Moroccans (2,150), and Mauritians (1,915). In line with [previous quarter's](#) observations, [Frontex](#) reports that Algerians and Moroccans continue to be the main nationality represented in the increase of arrivals to Spain via the WMR, with 4,366 and 3,093 arrivals, respectively. Moroccans increasingly attempt to enter Ceuta via both land and sea.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, arrivals of Algerian nationals have been observed through various entry points, including the Balearic Islands, Almeria, Murcia, Alicante, and other coastal areas.<sup>2</sup>

### Central Mediterranean Route (arrivals to Italy)

As of 29 September, Italy [recorded](#) 49,308 irregular sea arrivals, a 63% decrease compared to the same period last year. From 30 June to 29 September, 23,504 individuals reached Italy. The largest group of arrivals consisted of Bangladeshis (21%), followed by Syrians (17%), Tunisians (14%), Egyptians (6%), and Guineans (6%). The majority (61%) of those arriving by sea departed from Libya (30,143), followed by 32% from Tunisia (15,800), with 702 arriving from Algeria.

The share of West Africans departing from North Africa has declined compared to the same period [last year](#). Guinea's share decreased from 14% to 6%, and Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, which were at 14% and 6% respectively last year, no longer appear in the top ten countries of origin. Mali experienced a slight decrease of 1 percentage point, from 4% to 3%. The Gambia, which was not on the list last year, now accounts for 3% of West African departures from North Africa. This [decrease](#) can be partly attributed

<sup>1</sup> More detailed information can be found on page 10.

<sup>2</sup> More detailed information can be found on page 13.



to increased interceptions on Tunisian shores. Although these interceptions target both Tunisians and non-Tunisians, they disproportionately affect sub-Saharan African migrants. For instance, according to a Tunisian [CSO](#), between January and July 2024, 80% of interceptions were Sub-Saharan African migrants. Given the recent increase in departures from West African countries like Senegal and Mauritania, coupled with restrictions on the North African route for Sub-Saharan African migrants, many have sought alternative paths, redirecting their journeys toward the Atlantic route.

Based on data from the Italian Interior Ministry, obtained by [Agenzia Nova](#), the majority of departures from the Libyan coast originated from the western region of the country. Nevertheless, these departures have [decreased](#) by 30% compared to same period last year (January – August), possibly due to the [continually](#) growing number of [interceptions](#) along Libya's western coast. In contrast, 4% of all arrivals to Italy from Libya arrived in Italy from the Eastern region, Cyrenaica. Similar to what was observed [last quarter](#), migrants continue to make their way from eastern Libya towards Greece. Out of the 3,127 arrivals in the Greek Island of Crete as of [22 September](#), 1,000 arrived in the first two months of the year. While arrivals slowed down between March and early June, they increased again by 21% from 16 June to 22 September.

## Dead or missing refugees and migrants<sup>3</sup>

According to the IOM's [Missing Migrants Project](#) (MMP), as of 2 October, at least 1,158 people have died or gone missing on the CMR, including 279 during the third quarter. On the WMR, 254 individuals have been reported missing or dead, including 51 in the third quarter. Additionally, at least 436 migrants have lost their lives or gone missing while attempting to cross the [Atlantic Ocean to the Canary Islands](#). Of these, 233 died or disappeared during the third quarter of 2024. [La Vanguardia](#) reports that when comparing the number of deaths with the number of survivors on each route, they find that this year, the Canary Route has one death for every 31 survivors, the CMR has one for every 48, and the WMR one for every 72. This [indicates](#) that the death rate on the Atlantic is 55% higher than that on the Mediterranean. As the MMP acknowledges, these figures are likely a substantial underestimate, as many incidents go unreported or undocumented.

## Mixed migration in Libya

### Latest figures on migrants and refugees in Libya

According to the latest available estimates from the [IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix](#) (DTM), as of July 2024, there were 761,322 migrants in Libya. This represents an increase of 5% compared to the 719,064 migrants reported last quarter (as of February 2024). The primary countries of nationality of migrants this quarter were Niger (24%), Sudan (24%), Egypt (21%), Chad (10%), and Nigeria (4%). Most migrants in Libya (54%) reside in the West of the country, followed by the East (33%), and South (13%). As of 1 October, there were 69,676 refugees and asylum seekers in Libya. Sudanese represented the largest group, comprising 68% of the total population. Syrians accounted for 14%, while Eritreans made up 11%.

<sup>3</sup> Numbers in this section are drawing on IOM's MMP and based on MMC calculations made accessing the website on 4 October 2024.

## Continuing arrivals of Sudanese in Libya

The total [number](#) of Sudanese nationals in Libya rose from 136,622 (19% of 719,064 total [last quarter](#)) to 182,717 (24% of 761,322 total), reflecting a 33% increase over just one quarter. This increase in arrivals has been observed since the [first quarter](#) of 2024. In fact, according to [IOM](#), the increase in the number of migrants in Libya is attributed to the continuing arrival of Sudanese, especially in Kufra. Based on [UNHCR](#) data, it is estimated that over 97,600 Sudanese have entered Libya since April 2023, including 46,093 registered with the UNHCR. As of 1 [October](#), they represent 68% of the refugees and asylum seekers population in Libya (47,393 out of 69,676). Notably, at least [65,000](#) Sudanese have arrived through Alkufra alone, with 300 to 400 new arrivals each day. The UNHCR acknowledges the challenges in providing exact numbers of Sudanese due to the irregular nature of their entry as well as insufficient data from authorities.

## The trans-Mediterranean migration forum in Libya: migration management and human rights concerns

The Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU) held the Trans-Mediterranean Migration Forum (TMMF) in July 2024, [bringing together](#) leaders from various African, Mediterranean, and European states, along with representatives of international and regional organizations. The [key goals](#) of this forum included developing a shared vision for migration management, underscoring the importance of reallocating funds from migration control to development projects in African countries.

The forum was [welcomed](#) by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), which views it as an opportunity to advance a human rights-based approach to migration governance, urging Libya to develop a comprehensive legal framework in line with international obligations. The Secretary-General's [latest UNSMIL report](#), dated 8 August, highlights ongoing human rights violations against migrants, particularly in detention, including arbitrary arrests, exploitation, forced labor, and torture. The report calls on Libyan authorities to uphold their human rights commitments, decriminalize irregular entry, consider detention alternatives, and implement measures to prevent abuse and exploitation.

## Libya and Chad sign agreement for the regularization and repatriation of Chadian migrants

Libya and Chad signed an agreement to manage the situation of Chadian irregular migrants in Libya during the Trans-Mediterranean [Forum](#) on Migration in Tripoli. As of [July 2024](#), there were around 76,132 Chadian migrants in Libya, making up 10% of the country's total migrant population. The agreement focuses on establishing clear procedures for identifying and regularizing the status of Chadian nationals residing in Libya without proper documentation, with specific provisions for the repatriation of Chadians who wish to return home. On 23 July, Chad [repatriated](#) 157 of its citizens from Libya, in collaboration with the IOM and Libyan authorities. A [second repatriation](#) effort took place on 13 August, returning an additional 128 Chadians.

## Malta renews controversial support for Libyan coastguard

Ahead of the migration forum in Tripoli, Malta [reinforced](#) its support for the Libyan coastguard. The visit of the Maltese Prime Minister [culminated](#) in the extension of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two countries first established in 2020, which aimed at stemming irregular migration from Libya. The agreement continues and reinforces Malta's support for the Libyan coastguard, including the training of officials. The Maltese Prime Minister [praised](#) the coastguard's role in reducing migrant arrivals in Europe. This cooperation has raised [concerns](#) about the coastguard's problematic practices, including pushbacks and dangerous interceptions.

## Arrest of Libyan airline director highlights Libya's role in US-bound migrant transit via Nicaragua

In response to the rising number of flights from [Libya to Nicaragua](#), Libyan authorities [have arrested](#) the commercial director of Ghadames Air in July, charging him with facilitating migrant smuggling. Ghadames Air began operating flights to Managua in [May 2024](#), transporting migrants, including from countries whose nationals need an entry visa to Nicaragua, such as [India](#) and [Bangladesh](#). According to [La Prensa](#),<sup>4</sup> Managua is not listed among the official destinations of Ghadames Airlines, but the company operates via non-regular charter flights. According to [La Prensa](#), data from Nicaragua's Central Bank indicate a steady and sustained use of Nicaragua as a key transit point for migration to the U.S. since 2022.<sup>5</sup> [Le Monde reports](#) that since May 2023, there has been an increase in charter flights to Managua, with over 1,140 charter flights predominantly from other Latin American countries as well as from Morocco and Libya.

## The Libyan coastguard await official authorization to commence search and rescue operations in Tunisian waters

Libya's [coastguard](#) is seeking official Tunisian approval to conduct search and rescue operations in Tunisia's recently [established](#) Search and Rescue Region (SRR). While Libya's SRR already [extends](#) into Tunisian territorial waters, and the Libyan coastguard operates there in coordination with Tunisian authorities, this request aims to formalize and expand the existing arrangement.<sup>6</sup>

Besides Libya, the Tunisian SRR also [overlaps](#) with Malta's and [reaches](#) the borders of Italy's SRR, leading to complex jurisdictional challenges. For instance, there are [concerns](#) about the coordination of SAR operations in these overlapping regions, as states may engage in a "ping pong" of responsibilities, passing distress calls back and forth instead of taking immediate action. Furthermore, [critics](#) question whether Tunisia could be [considered](#) a safe country for rescued migrants, particularly in light of potential [negative impacts](#) of the SAR operations, including the use of force during sea interceptions. Both the [Tunisian](#) and [Libyan](#) coastguards have repeatedly been the subject of [criticism](#) over their treatment of intercepted migrants.

4 Nicaragua's oldest and most prominent newspaper.

5 In 2022, 634,800 passengers arrived at Augusto C. Sandino International Airport, with 322,400 likely continuing to the U.S. This pattern persisted in 2023, with 878,900 arrivals and 306,300 suspected onward migrations. Recent data for January and February 2024 shows 130,300 arrivals and 11,000 unaccounted departures, mirroring trends from early 2023 and indicating a continued steady movement of migrants.

6 According to SOS Méditerranée, only a small portion of the Libyan SRR covers Libyan territorial waters, with the majority falling within international waters.



## Mixed Migration in Tunisia

### Latest figures on refugees in Tunisia

According to [UNHCR](#), as of 31 August, 16,638 refugees and asylum seekers were registered with UNHCR Tunisia, representing a 9% decrease compared to the 18,362 registered last quarter. The primary countries of nationality include Sudan (47%) Syria (16%), Somalia (7%), Côte d'Ivoire (5%), and Cameroon (3%).

The decline in the overall numbers of refugees and asylum seekers likely stems from several factors, including ongoing [registration challenges](#), as reported by [UNHCR](#), and the absence of a national asylum law in Tunisia. In [May](#), UNHCR announced a temporary halt of pre-registration activities, meaning that individuals seeking refugee status can no longer initiate the registration process due to the suspension. Without proper registration, it becomes challenging to track and support asylum-seekers. This complicates efforts to provide services, such as healthcare, shelter, and financial assistance, which are contingent on registered status. After the [May](#) announcement, [subsequent updates](#) indicated no new registrations, stating only that UNHCR is focusing on maintaining assistance and renewing cards for those already registered.

### Concerns over migrant treatment in Tunisia amid decrease in interceptions

According to a Tunisian [CSO](#), interceptions in Tunisia have decreased by 19% this year compared to last year. Between January and July 2024, a total of 19,711 individuals were intercepted, with 80% being non-Tunisians and 20% Tunisians. Over the same period last year, 24,477 individuals were intercepted, comprising 83% non-Tunisians and 17% Tunisians. This decrease in interceptions might be indicative of declining migrant departures, especially of non-Tunisians, which may be linked to the intensified enforcement measures by Tunisian authorities. Additionally, ongoing [expulsions](#) of migrants could have further contributed to the [reduction](#) in migratory movements, raising [concerns](#) about the [treatment](#) of migrants in Tunisia.

Allegations of [violence](#) and abuse against migrants by Tunisian security forces have emerged. A [recent investigation](#) by the Guardian provided testimonies and evidence raising grave concern regarding the treatment of sub-Saharan African migrants in Tunisia. A few days after The Guardian's investigation, on 24 September, the European Commission's spokespersons [urged](#) the Tunisian authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into the allegations and cases. Similarly, a collective of Tunisians has also [called](#) on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate alleged mistreatment of sub-Saharan African migrants in Tunisia. This request highlights [claims](#) of mistreatment, including arbitrary arrests, collective expulsions, and abuse along the borders with Algeria and Libya. The ICC Prosecutor's Office has confirmed receipt of the request.

## Mixed Migration in Morocco

### Ceuta migrant crossings increase amid political tension in Spain

In recent months, the Spanish enclave of Ceuta has seen an increase in irregular migration, particularly by individuals swimming from Morocco. On August 25 and 26, nearly [300](#) migrants attempted this [dangerous](#) journey, with most being intercepted by Moroccan forces before reaching Ceuta. Those who arrived include mainly Moroccan minors and migrants from Algeria, as well as sub-Saharan African countries, both adults and minors. While minors and non-Moroccan adults receive temporary housing, Moroccan adults are deported under existing [migration agreements](#) between Spain and Morocco. This increase in arrivals is part of a broader trend observed [earlier this year](#).

These developments have sparked broader debates in Spain over its migration policies. While the central Spanish government is [responsible](#) for adult migrants, regional governments must provide care and support for minors, creating [tension](#) between the Spanish central and [local](#) authorities, especially in [Ceuta](#). The government has proposed amendments to immigration law to redistribute unaccompanied minors across regions, a measure blocked by opposition parties advocating stricter controls. Meanwhile, Spain is [collaborating](#) with the EU to secure additional financial resources and develop a strategic plan to relieve pressure on reception centers. Frontex has also [urged](#) Spain to formally request assistance, but support remains contingent on government action.

### Clashes between Moroccan forces and migrants amid heightened security at Ceuta border

On 15 September, [clashes](#) erupted between Moroccan police and [migrants](#) attempting to cross by land into Ceuta from Fnideq, Morocco. The group, composed largely of Moroccan nationals, including [minors](#), gathered following [social media calls](#) encouraging collective crossings. The migrants were unable to enter Ceuta, as both Morocco and Spain [strengthened](#) their security forces presence at the border. Moroccan authorities had already arrested and deported many people in the days leading up to the event and had intensified monitoring of digital content inciting irregular migration. According to [local Moroccan sources](#), the Ministry of the Interior has announced that a total of 45,015 irregular migration attempts have been thwarted since the beginning of 2024. In August alone, 11,323 attempts were intercepted in M'diq and 3,325 in Nador, involving people of various nationalities. At the end of the day, [ENASS](#) reports that many individuals were injured, and no one managed to cross the borders.

### Côte d'Ivoire reinstates visas for citizens traveling to Morocco

On 14 August, Côte d'Ivoire announced its decision to [reinstate visas](#) for citizens traveling to Morocco, sparking controversy. The decision, effective 1 September, reversed a longstanding free movement agreement, citing concerns about counterfeit passports and increasing irregular migration to Europe.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Along the same lines, Morocco [tightened](#) visa rules in 2018 to curb irregular migration to Europe by requiring electronic visas from nationals of Mali, Guinea, and Congo-Brazzaville.

The Ivorian government [justified](#) the policy change by citing a profiling process that revealed that out of 14,800 migrants arriving in Lampedusa as purported Ivorians, only a few dozen was confirmed as actual Ivorian nationals. Additionally, the government [alleged](#) the existence of organized networks involved in producing counterfeit passports and stamps. Critics, including Ivorians residing in Morocco, [argue](#) that the decision was too sudden, leaving individuals with insufficient time to adjust their plans. The Moroccan ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire [stated](#) that between 150 and 200 visas have been issued since the implementation of the new policy. While the policy's goals in curbing irregular migration remain questionable, its effectiveness has [raised doubts](#).

## Mixed Migration in Algeria

### France-Algeria tensions fuel uncertainty for undocumented Algerians in France

On 30 July, Algeria [withdrew](#) its ambassador to France in response to comments made by the French President regarding the Western Sahara, intensifying tensions between the two countries. This diplomatic rift has ignited larger discussions about the [legitimacy](#) of migrants retention in France (regarding Algerians and non-Algerians) particularly since Algeria had [previously](#) withheld consular passes ([laisser-passer](#)) for its nationals to be sent back to Algeria as a form of diplomatic leverage during political disagreements with France. As a result, Algerians who received an "Order to Leave French Territory" (OQTF – Obligation de Quitter le Territoire Français) cannot be deported without these documents, leading to longer retention periods.

Concerns have arisen about the effectiveness of current immigration policies, as many Algerians held in France are [never deported](#). Lawyers cited by [Le Monde](#) argue that these prolonged retentions are unjust, highlighting that the poor prospects for deportation make retentions both legally questionable and unfair. The ethical implications highlight concerns regarding the treatment of detainees who may be held indefinitely without prospects for deportation. Algerians make up the [largest group](#) of foreigners held in detention centers (33%).

### Algeria-Niger diplomatic relationship improves, but expulsions persist

A [visit](#) to Algeria by Niger's Prime Minister and a larger delegation on 13-14 August, signaled a desire for enhanced [cooperation and new joint projects](#), though the migration topic was reportedly not discussed. This indicates a slight improvement in diplomatic relationships between Algeria and Niger, which had deteriorated last quarter when Niger [summoned](#) the Algerian ambassador to protest the "violent nature" of migrant expulsions from Algeria. Notwithstanding the recent warming of diplomatic ties, expulsions from Algeria continue. Alarme Phone Sahara (APS) reported nearly [20,000](#) people were expelled from Algeria to Niger between early 2024 and August, condemning the violence reported by Algerian security forces. APS also documented new expulsions from [Libya to Niger](#), with 463 people expelled to Dirkou in northern Niger in July 2024. Local Libyan sources suggest this is the start of a broader expulsion campaign, with an estimated 10,000 people detained in Libya for deportation. In a context of continuing and increasing

expulsions, APS has [called](#) for an end to mass deportations, arbitrary arrests, and police violence, and the establishment of safe routes for migrants across the Sahara and the Mediterranean.

## Algeria reinstates visas for Moroccans

On 26 September, Algeria reintroduced, [effective immediately](#), visa requirements for Moroccans. The decision ends almost two decades of visa-free travel between Algeria and Morocco, despite the borders being closed since 1994. Morocco had [removed](#) visa requirements for Algerians in 2004, followed by Algeria in 2005. Among other reasons, Algeria [claims](#) that Morocco has exploited the visa exemption system for activities undermining its stability, including human trafficking and irregular migration. According to [Le Monde](#), Morocco dismissed the allegations, calling the decision "completely unjustified."

# Thematic Focus: Gradual increase in Algerian migration to Spain: understanding the trends and context

## Introduction

Spain has experienced a rise in irregular migration from Algeria via the route connecting Algeria to the Iberian Peninsula and the Balearic Islands<sup>8</sup> over the last year. This trend, which began [growing](#) in 2023, accelerated in 2024.<sup>9</sup> While the route has been used since 2006, a report issued by [Caminandos Fronteras](#) in February 2023 described it as the “invisible” route. Its prominence has increased post-COVID-19, and it consolidated in 2022, with mixed groups of migrants—ranging from those seeking better opportunities to children, families, and women fleeing domestic violence—choosing this path due to deteriorating conditions in Algeria and heightened security on other North African routes, especially in Tunisia and Morocco. Rather than framing this increase as a sudden “surge” in 2024, it may be more accurate to view it as a gradual rise throughout the years, making a previously less visible route more prominent, shifting migration dynamics, and increasing mobility restrictions in other North African countries.

## Algerians have led the increase in Western Mediterranean arrivals to Spain

Last quarter, [MMC](#) reported that Algerians, as well as Moroccans, are leading the increase in Western Mediterranean (WMR) arrivals to Spain in 2024. In 2023, both were the most prominent nationalities among arrivals to Spain via the WMR. This trend not only continued but also intensified in [2024](#), especially for Algerians with 1,877 making the journey between January and April 2024, a 67% increase compared to the same period in 2023. The primary routes taken by Algerian migrants involve maritime crossings from Algeria’s northern coast to various entry points in Spain, including the Balearic Islands, Almeria, Murcia, Alicante, and other coastal areas.

This quarter, data from [Frontex](#), along with reports from a [local Spanish non-governmental organization](#) operating in Andalusia, indicate that between 2,500 and 3,700 Algerians arrived between May and August 2024. In one week in July, [800](#) Algerians reached Spain on 50 boats, and in mid-August, [200](#) more arrived within two days, including Syrians. According to [InfoMigrants](#), over 580 migrants, mostly Algerians, landed

8 Numbers may differ across sources. [Frontex](#) defines the Western Mediterranean route as the path from North-West Africa to southern Spain, whereas [Caminando Fronteras](#) distinguishes between the “Strait Route,” the “Alboran Route,” and the “Algerian Route.” The latter connects the northern Algerian coast to eastern Andalusia, Murcia, the Levant coast, and the Balearic Islands, and is considered the [second deadliest route](#) after the Canary Islands route.

9 According to [Caminandos Fronteras](#), while this route has mainly been used by Algerians, it has also been used by other nationalities, including Syrians, Palestinians, Malians, and Guineans.



on the Balearic Islands in just three days in early September. On 3 September, a boat arrived in Ibiza with 100 migrants on board. On the other hand, [Algerian Naval Forces reported](#) 826 interceptions in July 2024, which marks a 274% increase compared to July 2023. According to [Frontex data](#), between January and August 2024, Algerians continue to be the main nationality using this route, with 4,366 detections.

## Potential explanations of the increase

Several factors contribute to the increase in Algerian migration to Spain, for both Algerians and third country migrants, including economic and political stagnation in Algeria, increasing restrictions on regular migration for Algerians, increasing securitization of other regional migration routes and the costs of migration route from Algeria to Spain.

- **Economic and political stagnation in Algeria**

Economic hardship remains one of the primary drivers. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Algeria has faced rising [inflation](#), affecting food prices. The [unemployment rate](#) stands at 15%, with young people particularly affected, as one-third of those under 24 were unemployed in 2023. Moreover, political and social instability, coupled with a [shrinking](#) civic space over the [years](#), has also driven Algerians to seek better living conditions elsewhere. Since the [containment](#) of the [Hirak protest](#) movement, in 2021, political repression has intensified, with ongoing restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, particularly ahead of the [elections](#) that were held early September.

- **Increasing restrictions on regular migration for Algerians**

While there has been an increase in irregular migration from Algeria to Spain, most Algerian migrants still use regular migration channels. Between 2014 and 2023, Algerian nationals submitted approximately [5.6 million](#) visa applications to EU member states. However, a substantial proportion of these applications were rejected, making Algerians the nationality with the [highest visa refusal](#) rates. In 2022, Algeria recorded the [highest](#) Schengen visa [rejection](#) rate among African countries, particularly from France, reaching 46%. Such restrictions, combined with limited regular pathways for migration, have contributed to sustaining irregular migration. They have also fueled the growth of smuggling networks operating [across both shores](#) of the Mediterranean, as migrants seek alternative routes to reach Europe.

- **Increasing securitization of other migration routes**

Many recent articles, including a recent investigation by [Lighthouse](#), reports from [Caminando Fronteras](#) and the [Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime](#) (GI-TOC) have highlighted the growing securitization and harsh measures used against migrants in Tunisia and Morocco, and [increased](#) interceptions. Stricter migration controls in Tunisia and Morocco, while disproportionately affecting sub-Saharan African migrants, may have discourage Algerian migrants to consider alternative routes to Europe, previously perceived as easier, and therefore prioritizing journeys to Spain.

- **Costs of migration route from Algeria to Spain**

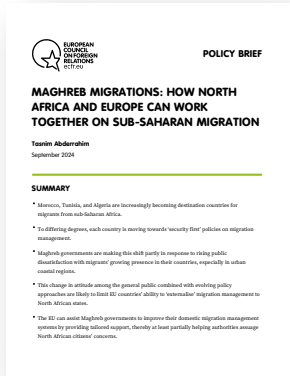
In a report published last quarter, the [GI-TOC](#) argued that the cost of sea crossings from Algeria to Spain is relatively lower than those from Morocco. Migrants are typically charged around €6,000 for a crossing

from Algeria to Spain, compared to €9,000-€10,000 for a similar journey from Morocco. While Algerian also [leave](#) from Morocco, this price difference, along with a perceived leniency in coastal surveillance in Algeria, might have contributed to this increasing use of the Algerian route. While prices from Algeria are generally lower, however, they can [fluctuate significantly](#) (ranging from ranging from €4,000 to €10,800) depending on factors such as the season, the type of boat, and the specific route taken. While higher costs are often associated with more secure and reliable methods, such as high-speed "Sari3" boats capable of evading coastguard patrols, the availability of cheaper crossings continues to make Algeria an attractive alternative.

## Conclusion

The gradual intensification of irregular migration of Algerians to Spain reflects changes in migration dynamics influenced by many interrelated factors. These include deteriorating socio-economic conditions in Algeria, increased political repression, and restrictive migration policies for Algerians by EU member states. Also, the increased securitization of routes from Tunisia and Morocco, while disproportionately impacting sub-Saharan African migrants, may have discourage Algerian migrants from considering these alternative routes. Based on ongoing developments, all these elements are expected to further deteriorate, likely resulting in continued, and potentially increased movements of irregular migrants toward Spain.

# Highlighted New Research and Reports



## [Maghreb migrations: How North Africa and Europe can work together on sub-Saharan migration | ECFR](#)

### ECFR | September 2024

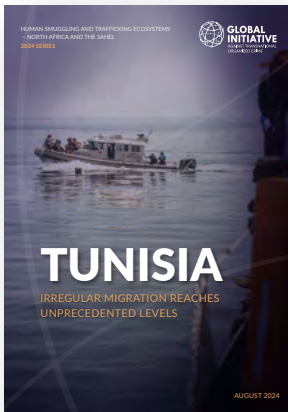
This policy brief analyzes the evolving migration dynamics between sub-Saharan Africa and the North African countries, with Tunisia and Morocco emerging as the most critical transit and destination points for migrants. The study discusses the rise of Tunisia as a key departure hub for Europe, surpassing Libya, and the socio-political factors driving this shift. It also explores the growing security-first approach adopted by North African countries in managing irregular migration. It also highlights the ongoing development of EU collaboration with North African countries on migration policies. The brief calls for a more integrated North African-European strategy to address both migration flows and human rights concerns.



## [Migration Attitudes in the Middle East and North Africa \(2023-2024\) – Arab Barometer](#)

### Arab Barometer | August 2024

This survey explores the public perception of migration in key countries across the MENA region, including Tunisia and Morocco. The findings highlight the complex attitudes towards migration, with a significant portion of the population expressing interest in emigration, particularly among younger demographics. The study sheds light on how economic hardship and political instability, amongst other factors, drive migration aspirations.



## [Tunisia irregular migration reaches unprecedented levels](#)

### **GI-TOC | August 2024**

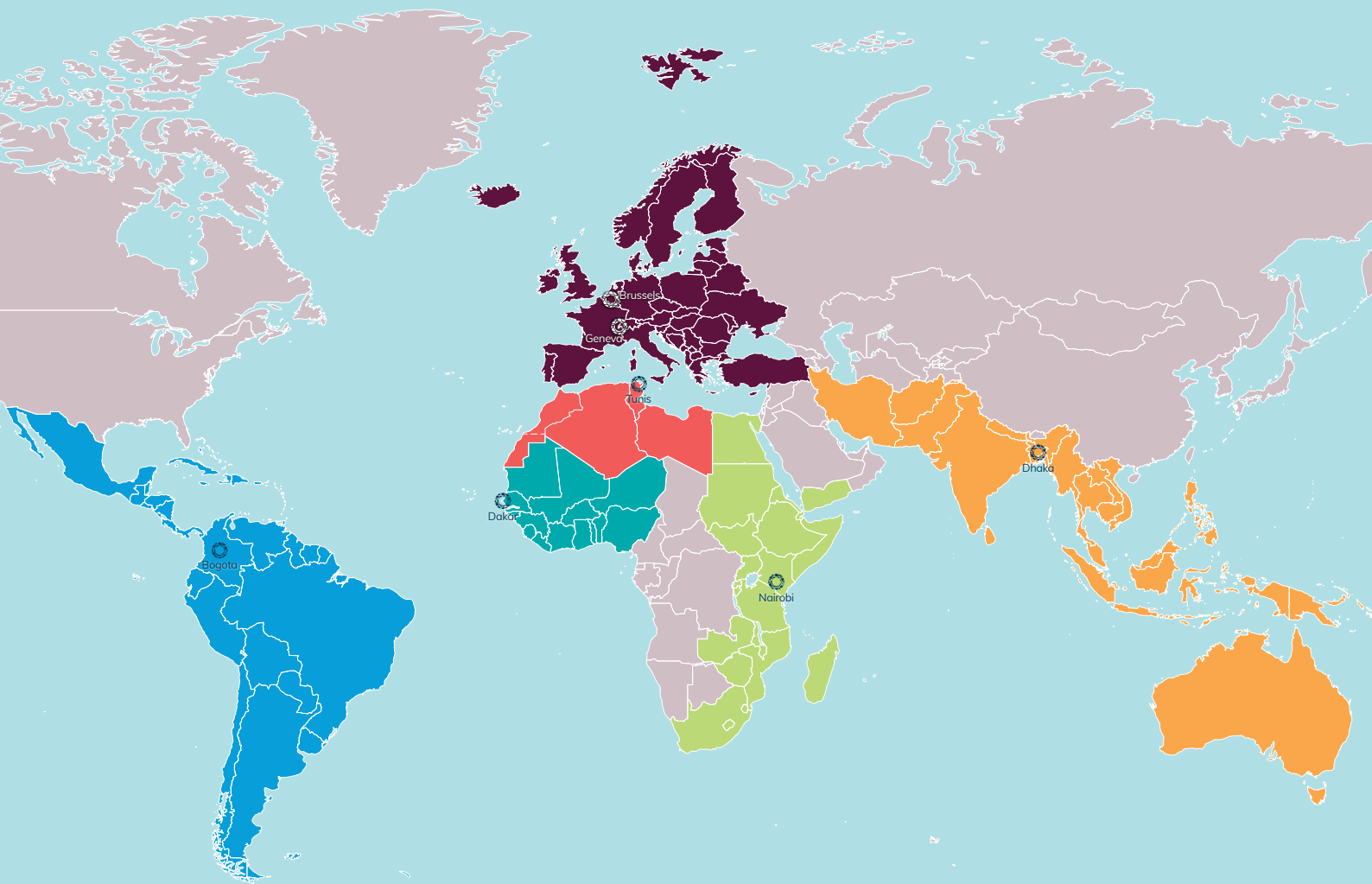
This GI-TOC report examines Tunisia's emerging role as a hub for irregular migration, especially as it surpassed Libya as the primary departure point to Europe in 2023. This shift has given rise to new phenomena, such as an increase in self-smuggling among Sub-Saharan African migrants, a practice that was once predominantly used by Tunisians. Despite heightened border security, smuggling networks have adapted to meet demand. Additionally, the report notes the solidification and intensification of previously established trends, which regained prominence in 2023. The Tunisia–Algeria border has witnessed a boom in smuggling operations, which have shifted focus from contraband to facilitating migrant crossings. The report also highlights the resurgence of smuggling across the Tunisia–Libya border since April 2023, with Sudanese nationals constituting a significant portion of arrivals after the eruption of the war. These smuggling networks involve Tunisian and Libyan actors, including traders, drivers, and security personnel, who facilitate much of this movement.



## [Beyond Boundaries: A Ballet of Borders and Concepts](#)

### **Souffles Monde | July 2024**

This piece explores the interplay between migration and refuge in an evolving world where the clear-cut distinctions between both blur in the face of real-world experiences. Through the story of Samuel, a young man from Burkina Faso whose journey took him across Mali, Algeria, and Libya before reaching Tunisia, the article illustrates the challenges faced by those in mobility in the region. Initially leaving home to provide for his family, Samuel's trajectory quickly transformed into one of survival as he endured exploitation, violence, and detention across several borders. The author critically examines how these experiences call into question the rigid legal distinctions between migrants and refugees. The narratives of people like Samuel expose the inadequacy of terminologies to fully capture the complicated realities of their lives. The article further critiques the politicization of migration terminology, drawing attention to how terms like “migrant” have become charged and often dehumanizing in public discourse. As global crises such as climate change intensify, the future of migration will likely be marked by even more blurred lines.



MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs 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 mixed migration 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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