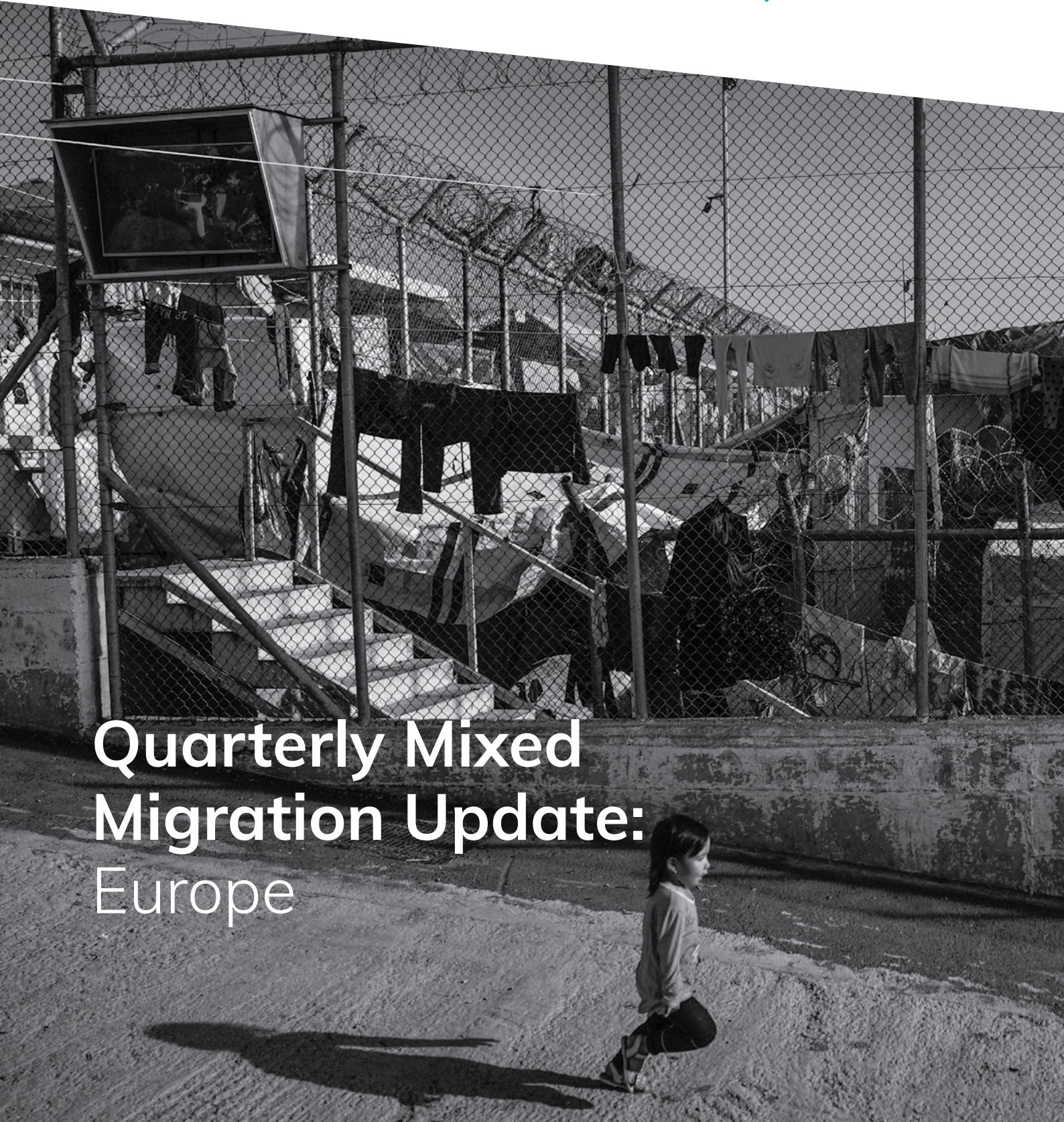


MMC Europe

QUARTER 4 2024



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 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 and the quarterly updates from other regions, visit mixedmigration.org and subscribe to the [MMC newsletter](#) to receive our latest research. Follow us on BlueSky [@mixedmigration.org](#), on X [@Mixed_Migration](#) and LinkedIn [@mixedmigration-centre](#).

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.

Front cover photo credit:

Lesbos, Moria camp. Jan Krarup 2019

SUPPORTED BY:



Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Europe

Quarter 4 - 2024

Key Updates

- **Less arrivals overall, though trends vary by route:** while the total [number of registered arrivals](#) in Europe declined in 2024 to 199,200, down from 270,700 in 2023, much of this drop was attributable to migration along the [Central Mediterranean route](#) during 2024 being less than half (42%) that of the previous year. Movement along the [Eastern Mediterranean route](#) to Greece, on the other hand, rose by 27% during the year and increased by 16% along the [Western Africa / Atlantic route](#) to the Canary Islands.
- **Cyprus finally grants entry to dozens of migrants caught in buffer zone:** after months trapped at the border with the Turkish-controlled north of the island, Cypriot authorities responded to international pressure and [allowed migrants into its territory](#).
- **Greece and Cyprus attract condemnation from the European Court of Human Rights:** While both countries have repeatedly been accused of pushbacks, recent rulings against [Cyprus](#) and [Greece](#) may help to ensure greater justice and accountability for other victims in future.
- **An uncertain future for Italy's Albania migrant centre amid legal challenges:** the future of Italy's offshore migrant centres in Albania has been thrown into doubt by successive legal challenges that forced the government to transfer the [first groups](#) of asylum seekers to Italy, leaving the facilities in Albania [empty](#).
- **Worsening humanitarian conditions in the Canary Islands:** local facilities have been strained by the [growing number of unaccompanied minors](#), prompting calls for [more central government support](#) and the [redistribution](#) of underage migrants to other parts of Spain.
- **Spain announces ambitious regularisation programme for undocumented migrants:** The government committed in December to a major overhaul of its migration policy by [regularising the status](#) of 900,000 migrants already in the country over the next three years.
- **Croatia accused of incinerating migrant belongings in "burn piles":** a [new report](#) claims that Croatian security forces have destroyed smartphones, identification papers and clothing belonging to migrants before pushing them back into Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- **Evidence mounts of migrant abuses at the Poland-Belarus border:** An investigation by Human Rights Watch highlighted the [egregious treatment](#) meted out to migrants on both sides of the Poland-Belarus border, including illegal pushbacks, violent beatings and property destruction.
- **EU greenlights temporary suspension of asylum for states at the Eastern Border:** in December the EU [formally authorised](#) countries on the Eastern Border to suspend asylum claims in contexts where migration has been “weaponised” by hostile actors.
- **Cracks emerging in Europe’s solidarity towards Ukrainian refugees:** While the Temporary Protection Directive remains in place, in recent months several governments (including [Norway](#) and the [Slovak Republic](#)) have rolled back some protections or threatened to withdraw financial assistance to refugees in their territory.
- **Deportations now a top EU priority:** [New legislation](#) in development will provide member states with greater powers to expedite deportations. The EU is also considering the creation of “[return hubs](#)” outside its territory to hold migrants before they are returned to their countries of origin.
- **Uncertain prospects for Syrian refugees in Europe:** Following [the fall](#) of Bashar al-Assad’s regime in early December, many countries across Europe [suspended asylum applications](#) for Syrian, despite continued security concerns.

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 to Greece

- According to [UNHCR](#), 21,022 arrivals reached [Greece](#) in the final quarter of 2024, a rise of 19% compared to the total in the same period of 2023 (17,667). This brought the yearly number of registered arrivals to 62,022, up 27% from the total in 2023 (48,721). As of 30 September, the majority of registered arrivals during the year were from Syria (38.9%), Afghanistan (21.6%), Egypt (12.4%), Eritrea (4.3%), Palestine (4%), Yemen (3%), Sudan (2.7%) and Somalia (2.6%).
- In [Cyprus](#), meanwhile, UNHCR registered 994 arrivals in the final quarter of 2024, just over a third (36%) of the total in the same period in 2023 (2,762). This brought the total number of arrivals in 2024 to 6,097, a significant drop from the total in 2023 (10,920). The majority of arrivals in 2024 to Cyprus were from Syria (64.5%), followed by Afghanistan (7.2%), Iran (6.2%), Somalia (5.6%) and Nigeria (4.3%).
- According to data from IOM's Missing Migrants project, 94 migrants died or disappeared in the [Eastern Mediterranean](#) in the final quarter of 2024, compared to 103 in the final quarter of 2023. The total number of fatalities in 2024 (173) was similar to that in 2023 (171). There was also an additional fatality on the [Greece-Türkiye land border](#), bringing the yearly total there to 6 fatalities, compared to 24 during the whole of 2023.

Cyprus finally grants entry to dozens of migrants trapped in buffer zone

Against a backdrop of increasingly restrictive asylum policies to curb the number of arrivals, Cypriot authorities had for months denied entry to [more than 60 migrants](#) trapped in the UN-controlled buffer zone separating its territory from the Turkish-controlled north of the island. Following widespread international pressure, including an appeal from the Council of Europe's Commissioner of Human Rights who highlighted the government's [legal and humanitarian responsibilities](#) to grant them access, the government announced in November that the migrants had finally been [allowed into the country](#). While some sources credited the decision to pressure from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), officials were quick to emphasise that it [did not represent a shift in their migration policy](#) and that the migrants in question would either be resettled in third countries or deported back to their home countries.

Greece and Cyprus attract condemnation from the European Court of Human Rights

While Cyprus and Greece have been repeatedly accused of [pushbacks](#) and other [human rights violations](#) against migrants, government officials have typically responded to these accusations with denials. However, recent rulings against both countries by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) may help to ensure greater justice and accountability for victims in future. In the case of Cyprus, the ruling concerned the [forced return of two Syrian nationals](#) to Lebanon in 2020 without their asylum claims being considered, with the court concluding on 8 October that these actions were [in contravention of international human rights law](#). The ruling was [hailed by human rights activists](#), with some predicting that the judgement could help support claims by other migrants in future who had suffered violations, including the dozens of migrants who at the time of the ruling were still stranded in the buffer zone.

On 7 January 2025, meanwhile, the ECtHR issued a judgement in [a case brought by a Turkish woman against Greece](#) for deporting her illegally back to Türkiye in 2019 despite her stated desire to request asylum. The ruling represented the first time the ECtHR had issued a judgement on Greece's use of pushbacks, despite evidence of the practice being carried out for more than a decade. The court also pointed to the evidence that this incident formed part of a broader pattern of [systematic pushbacks](#) by Greece. The ruling has been praised by campaigners as a "[landmark moment](#)" that could shape how European migration policy is carried out in future. However, some also expressed disappointment at the ECHR's decision in favour of Greece in a separate case concerning the [alleged pushback in 2020 of an Afghan asylum seeker](#) to Türkiye that the court deemed "inadmissible" due to inadequate evidence, a move the applicant's lawyer [condemned](#) as "profoundly unjust".

The Central Mediterranean route to Italy

- According to [UNHCR data](#), there were 16,784 registered sea arrivals in Italy in the final quarter of 2024, a significant drop from the number in the same period in 2023 (23,780). This trend was even sharper over 2024 as a whole, with a total of 66,475 registered sea arrivals—less than half (42%) the total in the previous year (157,651).
- Between January and the end of November, the [most represented countries of origin](#) among sea arrivals in Italy were Bangladesh (20.5%), Syria (19.0%) and Tunisia (12.1%), followed by Egypt (6.6%), Guinea (5.5%), Pakistan (4.8%), Eritrea (3.3%) and Sudan (3.3%).
- According to data from [IOM's Missing Persons Project](#), at least 460 people died or disappeared along the Central Mediterranean route in the final quarter of 2024, bringing the total overall in 2024 to 1,717: though the second highest since 2017, this was significantly lower than the total in 2023 (2,526). Nevertheless, given the sharp decrease in arrivals of 42%, it means the ratio of reported fatalities to registered arrivals actually increased, particularly in the final quarter.

An uncertain future for Italy's Albania migrant centre amid legal challenges

In November 2023, the Italian government announced an agreement with Albania to establish an off-shore migrant reception facility. The proposal, encompassing two planned centres, allowed for the reception of up to 3,000 men intercepted by the Italian coast guard every month while their asylum claims are processed in Italy. However, while the first of the two centres was [formally opened in October](#) and the first group of asylum seekers (a total of 12) were received shortly afterwards, the government was forced to [transfer them to Italy](#) almost immediately following a ruling from a court in Rome on 18 October that their countries of origin (Bangladesh and Egypt) could not be classified as safe countries. While both featured on a recent decree by the Italian government listing countries it deemed to be safe, the EU has yet to designate either as safe.

While the government subsequently [passed a decree](#) to circumvent these legal obstacles, it was forced to transfer a second group back to Italy in November when a court decision again deterred to the [European Court of Justice's position](#) that neither country could be designated as safe for returns until all areas and minority communities within its territory were safe. At the end of the year, both facilities in Albania were empty "[ghost towns](#)". Amid concerns about both its costs and human rights implications, opposition to the programme has strengthened and its [future remains uncertain](#).

The Western Mediterranean and Atlantic routes to Spain

- According to UNHCR, the total number of registered arrivals in [Spain](#) in the final quarter of 2024 was [21,735](#) (16,035 along the Atlantic route 5,700 along the Western Mediterranean route)—a decline from the same period [in 2023](#) (a total of 30,569: 25,125 along the Atlantic route and 5,444 along the Western Mediterranean route). For the year as a whole, however, there was significantly more movement to Spain, with a total of 64,318 registered arrivals in 2024 compared to 57,538 in 2023. Most of the increase was attributable to an uptick in movement along the Western Atlantic route to the Canary Islands: while the numbers travelling along the Western Mediterranean route were relatively similar in 2024 to the previous year, the number reaching the Canary Islands (46,843) was 16% higher than in 2023 (40,330).
- The most represented countries of origin between January and October 2024, according to [Frontex data](#), were Mali (28.6%), Senegal (19.8%), Algeria (15.6%) and Morocco (14.6%), with smaller numbers from Guinea (6.5%), Mauritania (5.4%) and The Gambia (4.2%).
- In terms of fatalities, according to data from IOM's Missing Persons Project, 48 people died or disappeared along the [Western Mediterranean route](#) in the final quarter of 2024, bringing the total over the course of the year to 412 people, a slight decrease from the total of 458 in 2023. On the [Western Africa / Atlantic route](#) to the Canary Islands, 208 deaths or disappearances were recorded in the final quarter of 2024, bringing the total during the year to 1,062 (up from 959 in 2023).
- However, these are likely to be significant under-estimates, as evidenced by a report published at the end of the year by the organisation [Ca-Minando Fronteras](#). Their independent tally suggested that as many as 10,457 migrants perished at sea on their way to Spain during the year (with data collection ending 15 December), an increase of 58% from their estimate the year before: this amounts to an average death rate of 30 migrants every day. Of the various routes, the Western Africa / Atlantic route is by far the most deadly, with an estimated 9,757 during 2024.

Worsening humanitarian conditions in the Canary Islands

The increasing number of migrants reaching the Canary Islands includes a [significant proportion of unaccompanied minors](#) (now totalling more than 5,400) with a range of protection needs. Local facilities are inadequate to accommodate these underage migrants, prompting the Spanish minister for territorial policy to call for an urgent national response. The issue has become increasingly politicised along party lines. The regional Coalición Canaria, an ally of the conservation opposition group Partido Popular (PP), has blamed the Spanish government for “[abandoning](#)” the islands. The government, in turn, has blamed the PP and its allies for [blocking a proposed “redistribution agreement”](#) whereby all of Spain’s regions would be obliged to host unaccompanied minors to alleviate pressure in the Canaries.

Spain announces ambitious regularisation programme for undocumented migrants

While the Spanish government has stated its intention to curb arrivals, it has also committed to a major overhaul of its migration policy by regularising the status of 900,000 migrants already in the country over the next three years. The plan, announced in December, has been justified not only as a progressive move to [support inclusion and human rights](#), but also as an economic necessity for a country with an ageing population. [According to the Minister of Migration](#), “Spain has to choose between being an open and prosperous country or being a closed and poor country.” Its proponents argue that expanding regular migration opportunities will ensure that Spain is able to benefit from a young, tax-paying workforce to fund the needs of its older citizens.

The Western Balkans route

- According to [preliminary data from Frontex](#), the number of migrants travelling along the Western Balkans route in 2024 dropped by 78% compared to the previous year to a total of 21,520, including 4,552 in the [final quarter](#) of 2024 (compared to 17,238 in the [final quarter of 2024](#)). This reduction has been attributed to the increasingly restrictive border policies put in place by various countries in the region.
- Between January and November 2024, the [three most represented countries of origin](#) among migrants travelling the route were Syria, Türkiye and Afghanistan.

Croatia accused of incinerating migrant belongings in “burn piles”

In October, the organisation No Name Kitchen published a report, [Burned Borders](#), that documented numerous instances between October 2023 and August 2024 of so-called “burn piles”—clandestine locations where Croatian security forces have [destroyed the personal belongings](#) of apprehended migrants, including smartphones, identification papers and clothing, before pushing them back into Bosnia and Herzegovina. While the incineration of passports and other documentation serves to hinder their ability to apply for asylum, the destruction of smartphones may be intended to wipe any photographic evidence of abuses carried out by officials. Other alleged abuses featured in the report included testimonies of sexual assault, beatings and an incident where a number of migrants were forced to walk barefoot over burning coals. Croatian authorities have repeatedly dismissed evidence of gross human rights violations at the border: following the report’s publication, the government [released a statement](#) denying that pushbacks at its border had “ever” taken place.

The Eastern Border

- According to [Frontex data](#), the number of arrivals along the Eastern Border¹ rose almost threefold (an increase of 192%) to 17,001 during 2024, including 3,806 in the [final quarter](#) (compared to 1,327 in the same period of 2023). The three most represented countries of origin among migrants during the year as a whole were Ukraine, Ethiopia and Somalia. [Frontex reports](#) that “the vast majority of the people detected on this route were Ukrainian men of military age” prohibited from leaving Ukraine.
- According to data from [IOM’s Missing Persons Project](#), 4 deaths occurred at the Belarus-EU border in the final quarter of 2024, bringing the yearly total to 16. This compares to 41 deaths during 2023. [Further deaths](#) were also reported during the year at the Ukraine-Romania border.

Evidence mounts of migrant abuses at the Poland-Belarus border

A report published by Human Rights Watch in December, drawing on interviews with migrants, provided [further proof](#) of the egregious treatment meted out to migrants on both sides of the Poland-Belarus border. Among other abuses, it documented incidents of illegal pushbacks, violent beatings, property destruction and the use of pepper spray. In contravention of international law, apprehended migrants have been denied the right to claim asylum and instead forced back into Belarus, where many have been subjected to violent or degrading treatment by security forces.

EU greenlights temporary suspension of processing asylum claims from people entering at the Eastern Border

In October, Poland announced that it was considering [temporarily suspending asylum](#) for asylum seekers entering from Belarus and Russia to counter the use of migration as a form of “hybrid warfare” by both countries against the EU. Having received significant support from other member states, in the face of [protests from human rights groups](#), in December the EU [formally authorised](#) countries on the Eastern Border to suspend asylum claims in contexts where migration has been “weaponised” by Belarus, Russia or other hostile external actors.

Ukraine

- **Ukraine:** As of mid-December 2024, according to [UNHCR](#), there were 6.25 million Ukrainian refugees in Europe, with the largest numbers in Russia (1.27 million), Germany (1.23 million), Poland (0.99 million) and Czechia (0.38 million). In addition, according to [IOM](#), as of October 2024 3.56 million people were internally displaced.

Cracks emerging in Europe’s solidarity towards Ukrainian refugees

The immediate response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022—in particular, the provision of protection to millions of Ukrainian refugees through the EU’s Temporary Protection Directive (TPD)—was remarkable for its solidarity and the relative generosity of its provisions at a time when European immigration policy in general was becoming increasingly restrictive. With the conflict now approaching its three-year mark, the TPD remains in place but in recent months there have been signs of fatigue from

¹ This is the border between Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the EU Member States – Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Romania.

some governments. Following Hungary's decision in August to [restrict state assistance](#) to Ukrainians who had moved from areas directly affected by the fighting, at the end of September Norway announced that it would [no longer be offering automatic protection](#) to Ukrainians from areas of the country it deemed "safe". At the beginning of January 2025, Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico [threatened to withdraw financial assistance](#) to Ukrainian refugees in the country after Kyiv closed a gas pipeline used to channel gas from Russia to Central Europe.

A number of factors appear to have informed these decisions. In the case of Norway, for instance, the move appears to have been rooted in a perception that the country had already met its obligations as a host to Ukrainian refugees, particularly compared to some of its neighbours. According to a [senior government official](#), "immigration must be controlled and stable, not disproportionately higher than in other Nordic countries", prompting the government to treat asylum seekers from Ukraine to the same criteria as those from other countries and "more precisely targeted to those who need it". Alongside this fatigue, there is also some concern that some of those being granted protection are [men of military age](#) who are eligible for the draft in Ukraine. Geopolitical allegiances are also likely playing a role for both Hungary and Slovakia, whose leaders are widely seen to be "[Russia-friendly](#)" compared to the majority of European states.

The United Kingdom

- The [number of migrants](#) crossing the Channel to the United Kingdom (UK) reached a total of 36,816 in 2024, including 11,572 in the final quarter of the year, an increase of 151% compared to 4,607 during the same period of 2023. The yearly total for 2024 was [25% higher](#) than the total in 2023 and the second highest year on record (following a peak of 45,755 in 2022).
- According to data from [IOM's Missing Persons Project](#), 31 migrants died in the final quarter of 2024 attempting the crossing to the UK, bringing the yearly total to 82—the highest figure since records began in 2014. This compared to a total of 24 deaths during 2023. A report published by [the UK Refugee Council](#) blamed the risk in deaths on the UK government's policies of deterrence, arguing that efforts to prevent crossings have made the journey "even more dangerous". The organisation called for enhanced search and rescue operations off the French coast, joint data collection and publication of reported deaths by authorities in the UK and France, and the expansion of legal migration pathways such as family reunion and refugee programmes.

Tougher legislation announced to tackle people smuggling

The UK government, since its election in July 2024, has focused its efforts to curb irregular migration on [disrupting smuggling networks](#)—a shift from the previous government's promise to "stop the boats" to instead "smash the criminal boat gangs". As part of this agenda, on 2 January 2025 the government announced plans to implement new legislation to enable [Serious Crime Prevention Orders](#) to be used against people-smuggling gangs. If implemented in the coming weeks, these reforms will enable law enforcement agencies to impose immediate restrictions on suspects, including bans on the use of laptops, mobile phones and social media as well as travel and financial restrictions.

France

Several killed in shootings near migrant camp near Dunkirk

An [attack by a lone gunman](#) on 14 December 2024 near a migrant camp in the coastal town of Loon-Plage left five dead, including two migrants and two security guards. The migrant victims were part of a group that had just been rescued by the French coast guard [after their dinghy sank](#). The motives for the attacks were not confirmed at the time.

Stricter immigration law announced

Following the passage of a [draconian immigration bill](#) at the beginning of the year, viewed by critics as an effort to appease far-right sentiment, on 13 October the government announced proposals for further legal reforms, including the extension of the maximum period of “administrative detention” for migrants deemed to be dangerous [from 90 to 210 days](#). The proposed legislation will be presented in early 2025 and could include other provisions, with a government spokesperson stating that there should be “[no taboos in terms of protecting the French](#)”. Critics have again criticised the legislation as pandering to the far-right.

Policy and Legal Updates

Deportations now a top EU priority

In recent months the EU has adopted an increasingly restrictive position around asylum and immigration, driven in part by the [political resurgence of the far-right](#) across Europe. The latest policy development in this regard is the championing of so-called “[return hubs](#)”—facilities established outside the EU to hold migrants scheduled for deportation while they wait to be sent back to their countries of origin. [The proposal](#), outlined by the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on 18 October, seeks to address the fact that only a fraction (around [19 per cent](#)) of migrants with a return decision are actually sent back.

In the current climate, the idea has been warmly welcomed by many EU member states. Spain, however, is a [notable exception](#): Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez expressed his resistance to the centres, arguing that “they don’t solve any problems and create other ones”. Other countries have also [voiced concerns](#) about the cost efficiency of the programme, with Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo pointing out that “these so-called migration hub solutions have never been shown to be very effective in the past and the cost is very, very expensive”. Human rights groups such as Amnesty International have also strongly criticised the “[highly alarming](#)” proposals.

Though details around the hubs have yet to be finalised, new legislation will likely be approved [in early 2025](#) to provide member states with greater powers to expedite deportations from their territories while further [rolling back safeguards](#) for migrants. In many ways, this externalised approach to deportation is already being piloted in Türkiye, where EU-funded deportations centres have been responsible for the detention and forced return of thousands of Afghans and Syrians to their home countries, despite the extreme dangers they may face there. A [Lighthouse Report](#) co-published with various media outlets in October 2024 highlighted the scale and severity of rights violations created and sustained with EU funding. Among other abuses, migrants (including legal residents) have been arbitrarily arrested in the street and forced to sign return papers, subjected to torture and physical mistreatment, and returned against their will to potentially life-threatening conditions.

Uncertain prospects for Syrian refugees in Europe

The dramatic [ousting of Bashar al-Assad](#) and his regime in December, ending decades of brutal dictatorship and human rights abuses, has put a [renewed spotlight](#) on the future of the more than 1 million Syrian refugees in Europe. Even before Assad's sudden and unexpected downfall, some countries were already exploring the possibility of returning Syrian nationals on the grounds that parts of Syria could be deemed "safe". Both Denmark and Hungary, for instance, had already [rescinded the residency](#) of some Syrian refugees on this basis. In June 2024, seven EU member states had [issued a statement](#) calling for the situation in Syria to be reassessed with a view to facilitating the return of Syrian refugees. Italy, in particular, had even [sought to normalise relations](#) with the Assad regime through sustained diplomatic efforts during the year. One aim of this engagement was reportedly to secure the [creation of a safe zone](#) in Syria to facilitate the return of refugees in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions on the regime.

In this context, many countries across Europe responded by swiftly [suspending asylum applications](#) for Syrian nationals, including those already being processed. Austria went even further, announcing on the day after Assad's fall that it had [started preparing plans](#) for "an orderly return and deportation programme" of Syrian nationals in the country. Of particular importance is how Germany, host to the largest Syrian population in Europe, responds in the medium term. Migration has become a highly divisive political issue within Germany in recent years, with significant support for an [end to protections](#) for Syrians even before the end of Assad's rule. Subsequently, the German government has released a [four-point plan](#) for Syrian nationals in the country that, while allowing for "well-integrated" individuals to remain, also outlines provisions to fast-track those with criminal or extremist associations and establish a program for voluntary repatriation for those who want to leave Germany.

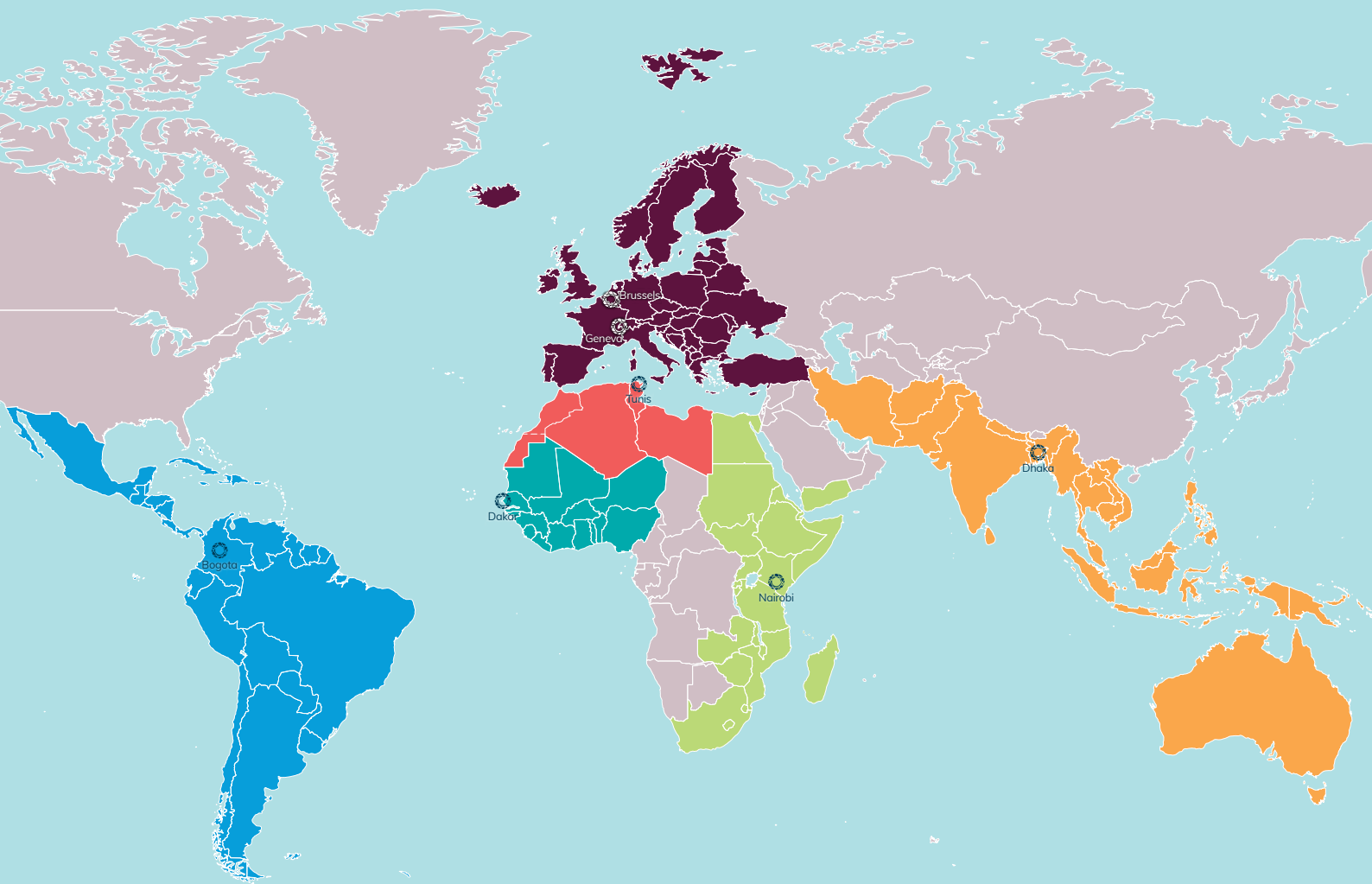
Nevertheless, given the uncertain situation in Syria, human rights groups have urged caution, with the [Council of Europe](#) warning that "hasty returns of refugees" must be avoided. Similarly, [Human Rights Watch](#) drew attention to the "inherently volatile" situation in Syria and the persistence of fighting in some areas of the country. [UNHCR](#) also issued a statement in the wake of Assad's overthrow, recognising the desire many Syrians might now feel to return to the country and their right to do so. However, "in view of the many challenges facing Syria's population, including a large-scale humanitarian crisis, continued high levels of internal displacement and widespread destruction and damage of homes and critical infrastructure", the agency "is not promoting large-scale voluntary repatriation to Syria".

Fears of further crackdowns on solidarity and assistance

On 13 December, the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council [approved a directive](#) to create a [new legal framework](#) to counter people smuggling. Among other provisions, the legislation will expand existing definitions and impose harsher penalties on those associated with the crimes. However, there are serious concerns that it could further [expose individuals and organisations](#) providing essential humanitarian services. While signatories are invited not to criminalise humanitarian acts, there is no binding legal requirement in the text to prevent signatories from using its provisions to prosecute migrants and those who help them.

EU greenlights €30 million in funding to curb migration from Senegal

In October, the EU announced the release of [€30 million in funding](#) to curb irregular migration by combatting trafficking, supporting vulnerable migrants and communicating information about the risks of the journey. Though [superseded by Mauritania](#) during 2024 as the most popular country of embarkation on the Western Africa / Atlantic route, Senegal remains a major gateway for migrants seeking to reach the Canary Islands. There is already a [€5.75 million](#) EU-funded programme in place in Senegal to strengthen the country's border management.



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).

For more information visit: www.mixedmigration.org

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