



European  
Commission

# EMN INFORM

## Inform on migrants' movements through the Mediterranean

### 1. KEY POINTS TO NOTE

**THIS EMN INFORM SUMMARISES THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE EMN POLICY BRIEF STUDY ON MIGRANTS' MOVEMENTS THROUGH THE MEDITERRANEAN.** This report has been compiled by the UK National Contact Point (NCP) of the European Migration Network (EMN) with the collaboration of the Italian, French, Netherlands and Swedish NCPs, the EMN Service Provider and input from other members of the EMN along with Frontex and Eurostat.

### 2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

When this analysis was first commissioned in late 2014 it was intended to address the arrival of people from North Africa across the Mediterranean to countries such as Italy and their onward movements to northern European countries. However, in 2015 the movement of people has changed significantly with greater numbers arriving via land and sea at the South Eastern EU borders, and the focus of this report has broadened to cover these routes of entry. The study focuses on irregular migratory movements, rather than the regular migration of people using legal mechanisms which are well-established and are measured routinely in published statistics.

It is in this context that the current large numbers of asylum seekers, migrants and displaced persons arriving at our borders is a test for the European Union and its Member States. The normal flow and reception of people has been disrupted by these large numbers of people seeking to enter the EU. In a constantly changing picture of migratory flows, this has emerged in different forms and at different parts of the EU and its external borders.

It is against this backdrop that this Inform, supported by the accompanying full report on Migrant movements through the Mediterranean and onward movements to other Member States<sup>1</sup>, has been produced by the EMN for the European Commission. The aim is to present key data on the irregular movements of people across the EU external borders and within the European Union (EU) itself, whether as asylum seekers or as migrants in search of greater economic security, over the past few years and including the first nine months of 2015.

In identifying key data to illustrate irregular migratory flows, this report attempts to summarise patterns for the EU while focusing on the most important flows and countries of origin. As these patterns are continuously subject to change the picture it presents should be seen as a snapshot of developments over the time period covered.

### RECENT EU DEVELOPMENTS

In light of the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers, displaced persons and other migrants in the European Union, the European Commission presented the European Agenda on Migration<sup>2</sup> to face the challenges stemming from these new arrivals.

With the aim of managing the pressure of migratory flows at the shared external Schengen borders, the European Agenda on Migration envisaged the roll-out of so-called '**hotspots**' to support those Member States most impacted by current arrivals. The hotspots are set up in Italy and Greece with the aim of guaranteeing quality reception and ensuring the identification, registration and processing of migrants as they arrive, by way of Migration Management Support Teams that support the work of the host Member State on the

<sup>1</sup> Published separately:

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/index_en.htm)

ground. These teams are coordinated by European Regional Task Forces, involving national authorities, Frontex, EASO, Europol and Eurojust.

A second element of the Agenda is the adoption by the Council of a mechanism for **relocating** 160,000 people in clear need of international protection from the Member States most affected. As of the end of September 2015, these were citizens from countries whose nationals were granted international protection on average in over 75% of the cases<sup>3</sup>, these being nationals from Syrian, Eritrean, Iraq, Central African Republic, Yemen, Bahrain and Swaziland. To this end, the European Commission will work with Member States, EASO, Frontex, IOM and UNHCR. Migration Management Support Teams will support affected Member States to assist in the identification of people in need of international protection.

A third aspect of focus in the Migration Agenda is **resettlement** from third countries of people in need of international protection. To bolster the number of people resettled, a Relocation and Resettlement Forum was held on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015 to ensure Member States commitments in the area, while a second informal forum took place on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015. The aim is to resettle over 20,000 refugees over the course of 2016 and 2017.

At the time of the October 2015 Justice and Home Affairs Council, Member States endorsed the European Commission's **Action Plan on Return**. Assisting effective return operations is a task of the Migration Management Support Teams present at the hotspots in Italy and Greece. Linked to the approach on return is the European Commission's commitment to **readmission**, both in ensuring application of existing readmission agreements and through direct dialogues with a number of countries in Africa, such as the Valletta Summit on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015. In assisting this process Member States will deploy European Migration Liaison Officers in 11 countries, likely towards the end of 2015 or early 2016.

Cooperation with regional partners is therefore a key element of the Migration Agenda. **An action plan for Turkey** is being drafted and should focus on practical cooperation. Further cooperation with countries such as Libya, Lebanon and Jordan is also being considered.

In the area of funding, the European Commission has allocated **additional funding** in 2015 to affected Member States, stemming from the Asylum, Migration and Immigration Fund and the Internal Security Fund, for a current total of EUR 100 million. The **European Neighbourhood Instrument** has also been bolstered with additional funding in the region of EUR 300 million. The **EU Trust Fund for Syria** is targeted to reach around EUR 500 million, while a similar sum is envisaged to be provided by the Commission and Member States for **Humanitarian Aid** with the aim of supporting refugees through UNHCR and the World Food Programme. Meanwhile an **Emergency Trust Fund for Africa** was set-up targeting the Sahel Region, the Horn of Africa and North Africa. Additional funding for affected Member States, EU agencies involved and for operating the activities mentioned above, have also been established.

Finally, the European Commission has reiterated its commitments to the **correct implementation of the Common European Asylum System** and the application of the Eurodac Regulation, Dublin III Regulation, Asylum Procedures Directive, Reception Conditions Directive, and the Qualifications Directive, as well as the Return Directive and the Schengen Borders Code, notwithstanding the need to keep (some) of these legal instruments under review in order to ensure that they are able to perform well under the current circumstances. In October 2015 the Council was briefed by the presidency on the progress of discussions on a regulation establishing an EU common list of safe countries of origin, a regulation establishing an emergency relocation mechanism and amending the Dublin regulation.

### 3. MEMBER STATE TRENDS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

#### ★ DETECTIONS (FRONTEX)

The routes irregular migrants use to enter the EU are constantly changing. The Central Mediterranean route from Libya to Italy increased three fold between 2013 (45,000 detections) and 2014 (171,000) and has witnessed the deaths of more than 5,000 migrants over the last two years. This is considered the most perilous route into the EU, but was also by far the most common one used in 2014 and the number of detections was

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<sup>3</sup> For all Member States in the period January-September 2015.

three times higher than the Eastern Mediterranean route to Greece (51,000).

This pattern changed, however, in 2015. The most common route between January and September 2015 was the Eastern Mediterranean (401,000 compared to 132,000 in the Central Mediterranean). There were nearly eight times more detections via the Eastern Mediterranean route in the first nine months of 2015 (401,000) than during the whole of 2014 (51,000). In September 2015 almost 70% (102,000 of the 149,000) of all detections in the Eastern Mediterranean were of Syrian nationals, whereas few Syrians are now crossing the Central Mediterranean.

The Western Balkan land route<sup>4</sup> also saw a large increase in detections in 2014 (43,000) compared to 2013 (20,000). However, in early 2015 there was a huge rise in detections through this route (totalling 297,000 in the first 9 months of the year), almost seven times higher than the whole of 2014 reflecting the increased inflow of migrants from within Europe (e.g. the Western Balkans) alongside those asylum seekers coming from outside and particularly those who had initially entered through the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>5</sup>.

In 2015 the Central Mediterranean route has mainly been used by people coming from a large number of different African countries. While the top nationalities arriving in Italy in 2014 were Syrian (40,000) and Eritrean (34,000), from January to September of 2015 the most common nationalities were Eritrean (34,000) and Nigerian (18,000).

In 2015, the majority of Syrians switched to using the Eastern Mediterranean route possibly in part because of additional visa requirements for Syrians imposed by North African countries which made travelling via the Central Mediterranean route more difficult. Other primary users of the Eastern Mediterranean route in 2015 have been people from Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan.

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<sup>4</sup> This route describes two main migration flows; migrants coming from the Western Balkan states into Hungary and the secondary movements of migrants who initially entered the EU through the Eastern Mediterranean through Greece, Bulgaria or Cyprus.

<sup>5</sup> As the Frontex data is on detections and not people double counting will occur.

## ★ ASYLUM APPLICATIONS (2009-SEPTEMBER 2015), BY MAIN NATIONALITIES AND BY MEMBER STATE

Based on Eurostat data, between 2009 and September 2015 there were 3.3 million asylum applications to the EEA<sup>6</sup>. The number of applications more than doubled between 2009 (287,000) and 2014 (662,000), a sharp increase witnessed especially since 2013. In the first nine months of 2015, however, numbers significantly increased again, and at the end of September 2015 there were 901,000 asylum applications lodged in the EEA, almost twice the number recorded over the same period in 2014.

The top nationalities claiming asylum in the first nine months of 2015 were Syrian (222,000; 25%), Afghani (103,000; 11%), Iraqi (69,000; 8%), Kosovar (69,000; 8%) and Albanian (54,000; 6%).

Among EU Member States, by far the largest number of asylum applications in recent years have been received by Germany. In the first nine months of 2015 Germany received 289,000 (32%) of all applications in the EEA, up from 11% of the total in 2009. The Member States receiving the next largest numbers of asylum seekers in the first nine months of 2015 were Hungary 176,000 (20%), Sweden 73,000 (8%), Italy 59,000 (7%), Austria 57,000 (7%), and France 51,000 (6%). On the other side, less than 100 applications were registered in Croatia and Slovak Republic, less than 200 in Estonia and Slovenia, and under 250 in Lithuania and Latvia. In the Mediterranean, Cyprus and Malta received 1,500 and 1,200 asylum applications, respectively.

Of the total applications for asylum recorded by Germany between January and September 2015 24% were from Syrian nationals, and a further 14% were Eritreans, Afghans, Somalis and Iraqis. However, still one third of Germany's asylum applications were from three Western Balkan countries whose citizens are much less likely to be granted international protection- Albania, Kosovo and Serbia.<sup>7</sup>

The number of asylum applications in Hungary for the year up until September (176,000) is already four times

<sup>6</sup> 28 EU member states + EEA (Norway, Liechtenstein, Iceland) + Switzerland

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the numbers reported by Eurostat regarding applications to Germany relate only to completed applications.

greater than the whole of 2014. Four years ago, Hungary received only 1,700 applications for asylum. It is expected that applications for asylum in Hungary will have decreased significantly by the end of 2015 as a result of the measures taken to secure its borders.

## ★ DECISIONS

The average recognition rate for all nationalities applying for international protection across the EU in the first nine months of 2015 was 48%, though this varies considerably between Member States (from 14% in Hungary to 76% in Sweden).

The high number of asylum seekers who withdraw their application in Hungary partly explains the low number of positive decisions compared with other EEA Member States. However, average recognition rates will vary considerably, depending on the nationalities contributing to the flow of asylum seekers received by a particular EEA Member State. Syrians (96%) and Eritreans (87%) have a high recognition rate across EEA Member States at present, while nationals from Kosovo (2%) and Albania (3%) evidently have a very low recognition rate.

Despite almost one half of the people seeking asylum in the EU receiving refugee status or another form of protection, of the asylum-seeking nationalities arriving in the EU in significant numbers fourteen (in descending order of magnitude nationals from Syria, Eritrea, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Iran, as well as Palestine, Central African Republic, Yemen, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Swaziland and Laos) currently have an EU-wide average recognition rate above 60%. It must be noted that also stateless persons have a recognition rate of over 60%. These nationalities and stateless persons together account for just over half (53%) of the total applications for asylum recorded by EEA Member States in the first nine months of 2015.

## ★ SECONDARY MOVEMENTS OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS WITHIN THE EU

A number of factors influence secondary movements of irregular migrants in the EU, including the impact of weather conditions on the numbers of crossings over the various routes of entry into the EU, the role of migrant smugglers and the routes and destinations they commonly use. Other important factors include economic conditions, the legal situation (ability to work), and general labour market conditions.

Furthermore, a welcome culture is also an important element, as well as established networks that could provide information on the conditions in different countries and the routes to take to reach them, and communities to support people on arrival for societal integration. This also partially explains the large differences in secondary movements across the EU.

In 2013 the biggest diaspora groups for migrants from the five nationalities granted asylum in the largest numbers in Europe for 2014 were in Sweden, Germany and the United Kingdom which may help to account for the apparent attractiveness of these countries as destinations. Iraqis in Sweden were estimated to be the largest of these foreign born populations in Europe (estimated as around 130,000), followed by the Afghani and Iraqi nationals in Germany (98,000 and 94,000 respectively), and Somali nationals (93,000) in the United Kingdom.

Recently, between October 2014 and September 2015, Italy was the main point of entry to the EU for Eritrean and Somali nationals. However, less than 1% of the asylum seekers from Eritrea and 3% of the asylum seekers from Somalia lodged their applications in Italy.

Over 30% of asylum applications from Eritrean nationals and 45% from Somali nationals were presented in Germany or Sweden. A further 25% of applications from Eritreans were made in Switzerland.

Between October 2014 and September 2015, Greece was the main point of entry to the EU for Syrians, Iraqi and Afghani nationals. However less than 2% of the asylum applications from Syrian, Iraqi and Afghani asylum seekers were received in Greece.

Six out of ten of all applications from Syrians were made either to Germany (31%) or Hungary (29%). Hungary received over 45% of all applications from Afghani nationals. In the first nine months of 2015 Germany (21%) and Finland (18%) were the top destinations for Iraqi asylum seekers.

## ★ RESETTLEMENT

Resettlement is the process whereby, on a request from UNHCR and based on a person's need for international protection, third-country nationals are transferred from a third country and brought to a Member State where

they are permitted to reside with a specific status.<sup>8</sup> Member State resettlement programmes generally involve the selection and transfer of individuals or families from a third country in which they have sought protection to a Member State which has agreed to receive them through a planned approach. At least 18 EU and EEA States currently run resettlement programmes.<sup>9</sup>

Over the period 2009-2014 a total of nearly 40,000 refugees were resettled across the EEA in this way. In these six years Sweden was the top country accepting nationals from Syria (905), Eritrea (1,785), Afghanistan (2,180), and Somalia (1,730) under an established resettlement programme. Germany was the top country for resettling nationals from Iraq (2,900).<sup>10</sup>

In 2014, of EEA countries, Norway accepted the most Syrian refugees for resettlement in 2014 (785), while the United Kingdom was the top country for resettling nationals from Somalia (240) and Iraq (115). Sweden resettled the most people from Eritrea (305) and Afghanistan (540).

## ★ HUMANITARIAN AID

There are very large numbers of refugees living outside the EU, with at present around 2 million Syrians in Turkey, 1.1 million in Lebanon and 0.6 million in Jordan, who are also in urgent need of support.<sup>11</sup> The EU has allocated significant funding to assist displaced persons who are still in their region of origin, amounting to almost €4 billion. Such assistance has focused in providing food and nutrition assistance, health care and education for children, as well as other types of support. Providing aid in the region of origin may also help deter asylum seekers from attempting perilous journeys to Europe.

Among EU Member States, the United Kingdom has been the largest contributor of humanitarian aid to

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<sup>8</sup> (i) 'refugee status' within the meaning of point (e) of Article 2 of Directive 2011/95/EU;

(ii) 'subsidiary protection status' within the meaning of point (g) of Article 2 of Directive 2011/95/EU; or  
(iii) any other status which offers similar rights and benefits under national and Union law as those referred to in points (i) and (ii);

<sup>9</sup> Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the UK, as well as

Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq since 2009 (€1.4 billion), followed by Germany (€850 million) and Sweden (€350 million) following as the next most significant contributors.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This Inform shows that the movements of asylum seekers, migrants and displaced persons to the EU has changed and evolved in 2015. The Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes of arrival are well-established, while the last few months have seen a renewed uptake in movements through the Western Balkans. As part of this process, detections of irregular migrants have gone up significantly in 2015, as has the number of asylum applicants. In view of the relocation scheme proposed as part of the European Agenda on Migration, recognition rates of asylum applications across the EU also show a continuously evolving picture, with numerous nationalities now eligible for relocation as of September 2015. The section on secondary movements highlights that while Mediterranean frontline Member States are an important point of entry for nationals from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Eritrea, many ultimately apply for asylum in other Member States such as Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Finland.

Finally, it must be noted that several Member States that receive significant numbers of asylum seekers also run resettlement programmes and contribute humanitarian aid to third countries in need.

## 5. FURTHER INFORMATION

You may obtain further details on this EMN Inform and/or on any other aspect of the EMN, from HOME-EMN@ec.europa.eu.

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Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. Austria, France, Germany, Italy and the UK run humanitarian admission or evacuation programmes. Other Member States, such as Luxembourg, run ad-hoc resettlement activities.

<sup>10</sup> And resettled in its separate humanitarian admission program (HAP 20.000) in 2013 to 2014 a total of 11,800 refugees from Syria.

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR

## ANNEX 1: POLICY BRIEF ON MIGRANTS' MOVEMENTS THROUGH THE MEDITERRANEAN

The full Policy Brief on Migrants' movements through the Mediterranean is available as a separate document.