

UNHCR Contributions
Report of the Secretary-General on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, Part II
June 2018

Mediterranean

1. Large-scale mixed movements from, to and through the Middle East and North Africa region continued in 2017. Arrivals by sea across the **Mediterranean Sea** to Europe were around 50% lower than 2016 with over 171,330 people reported to have arrived in 2017. During the first five months of 2018, the number of arrivals to Europe via the Mediterranean amounted to approximately 32,210 persons. Approximately 3,140 are known to have died or gone missing en route by sea to Europe in 2017. Nearly 650 died or were lost at sea in the first five months of 2018.

Western and Eastern Med

2. On the **Western Mediterranean** route towards Spain, at approximately 28,350 persons, the total number of arrivals in 2017 was more than double that of 2016. Although the rate of land arrivals remained unchanged, sea arrivals increased from around 8,000 in 2016 to over 21,000 in 2017, with Algerian and Moroccan nationals representing 12 % of arrivals. In 2017, the **Eastern Mediterranean** route to Greece witnessed a drastic drop in arrivals as the “Balkans route” remained closed. 30,000 people arrived using this route, mostly Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans, as compared with 173,450 in 2016.

Central Med

3. While the numbers of refugees and migrants arriving in Italy by the **central Mediterranean** sea route from Libya have decreased considerably since July 2017, it remains the most frequently used route, and the need to prioritize saving lives at sea continues. Approximately 13,360 refugees and migrants arrived by sea to Italy in the first five months of 2018, representing an almost 80% decrease compared to the same period in 2017. Close to 119,400 made the journey in the course of 2017. The most common nationalities represented on this route were Nigerian, Guinean, Ivoirian, Bangladeshi, and Malian. Although it is not possible to comprehensively account for the decrease, possible reasons may be linked to increased enhanced capacity by the Libyan authorities to engage in search and rescue at sea, changes in smuggling networks’ dynamics, weather conditions, and conflict near key departure areas in Libya. Departures from Tunisia to Italy quadrupled in 2017 to 4,774, with the majority being Tunisians.
4. Despite the reduction of numbers arriving in Italy, there has been a significant increase in the rate of deaths in relation to arrivals to Italy, with approximately one death for every 28 persons who arrived in Italy from Libya between August 2017 and May 2018 compared to approximately one death for every 42 persons who reached Italy from Libya between August 2016 and May 2017.
5. According to the Italian Coast Guard data, over 40 per cent of those rescued in the central Mediterranean Sea in 2017 were rescued by NGO vessels. However, since August 2017, a number of NGOs previously active in the central Mediterranean Sea have ceased their activities, in the context of an expanded role adopted by the Libyan Coast Guard.

6. With regards to Libya, a major concern relates to refugees having no access to protection. A number of measures are underway to address their situation through evacuation and resettlement to third countries, advocacy on alternatives to detention, and strengthened support in urban settings.
7. An increased proportion of people are being rescued or intercepted at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard and returned to Libya. While the numbers crossing from Libya to Italy between August 2017 and May 2018 decreased some 81% compared to between August 2016 and May 2017, the number of persons rescued or intercepted at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard and returned to Libya increased by 26%. UNHCR is concerned that disembarkation in Libya is followed by the transfer to detention facilities of rescued persons, including those in need of international protection.
8. Those disembarking in Italy having departed from North Africa continue to include a significant minority in need of international protection. In addition, over 1,400 unaccompanied or separated children reached Italy in the first four months of 2018, as well as victims of trafficking. Refugees and migrants interviewed by UNHCR staff following arrival in Italy continue to report multiple abuses during their journeys including kidnap and torture for ransom, forced labour, sexual violence and exploitation, as well as witnessing multiple deaths, including in the desert.
9. [Two multilateral European operations are currently active in the Central Mediterranean: Frontex operation Themis, and EUNAVFOR Med operation Sophia. Operation Themis was launched in February 2018, replacing the previous operation Triton (November 2014 - January 2018). Unlike Triton, Themis does no longer foresee that all rescued migrants must be disembarked in Italian ports. In practice, all disembarkations have to date have continued to take place in Italy. However, there have been few reports of cases of rescues conducted by NGOs (that is, non-Frontex operations) following which Italian authorities insisted upon a formal request by the flag states of the assisting vessels before allowing disembarkation.]
10. UNHCR has been involved in trainings, seminars and discussions engaging actors at sea including Coast Guards engaged in interception, to sensitize them in protection issues. In 2017, UNHCR provided six training sessions on human rights and international protection in the context of rescue operations at sea, to EUNAVFOR Med and Libyan Coast Guard personnel. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have been developed, notably in Tunisia, to clarify roles at disembarkation. In Libya, UNHCR undertakes protection monitoring at disembarkation points and contributed to the improvement of reception conditions at six key disembarkation points, namely through the construction of water and sanitation facilities, health posts and shaded areas to protect refugees and migrants from the elements.

Gulf of Aden / Red Sea

11. The **Gulf of Aden** maritime route continues to be the second largest maritime movement in the world. While route the across the Gulf of Aden is more often frequented by Somalis and Ethiopians, some also make the short boat journey from Kenya to Tanzania, in the hope of eventually moving to South Africa seeking international protection or economic opportunities.
12. The number of asylum seekers, refugees and returnees arriving **from Yemen** to the Horn of Africa into Djibouti and Somalia by sea is stable and relatively less when compared to 2016.
13. In Somalia, as of March 2018, 190,000 persons had fled Yemen since the beginning of the conflict there, including refugees, asylum seekers, returnees and migrants. The vast majority fled in 2015. Since 2017, a few hundred persons reportedly arrive in Djibouti and Somalia on a monthly basis.

14. In Djibouti, since March 2015, 38,000 Yemenis arrived by boat. However, the current population of refugees is stable at approximately 3,960 individuals. In March 2018, 280 Yemeni new arrivals were registered in Djibouti.¹ Recent months have seen a slight increase in new arrivals in Djibouti.
15. There is no systematic monitoring of drownings and other deaths at sea on either side of the Gulf of Aden or Red Sea, other than ad hoc news reports in the media. Given the scale of movement to Yemen, it is likely that there may be unreported incidents at sea.
16. The region still does not have a functioning maritime rescue coordination centre (MRCC) to coordinate search and rescue mission at sea, and the capacity of coastal states to engage in rescue is very limited. At the same time there is a large presence of maritime actors, including anti-piracy operations and other military vessels.
17. The ongoing conflict in Yemen continues to contribute to the diminished capacity to protect lives along this maritime route. In addition to drowning at sea, there have been incidents of persons dying due to armed conflict during the journey on land or at sea. The most recent incident reported occurred in January 2018 when some 30 people were reported to have drowned. The smuggler boat, carrying 101 Ethiopians and 51 Somalis, capsized when gunfire hit the boat and its passengers. The incident took place off the coast of Yemen. A similar incident occurred in the first half of 2017 off the coast of Hodeida.
18. In February 2017, UNHCR launched the “Dangerous Crossings” campaign to spread awareness among refugees and migrants about the dangers of travelling to war-stricken Yemen across the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea. Despite the war in Yemen, every year tens of thousands of people cross the sea from the Horn of Africa to Yemen, risking their lives at the hands of smugglers. Most decide to go to Yemen in the hope of being able to continue to the Gulf States or Europe. UNHCR produced the Dangerous Crossings song with the support of prominent musicians from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Egypt to discourage people from embarking on perilous journeys. During late 2017, UNHCR launched the regional roll-out of the campaign in the Horn of Africa, which comprised the production of powerful video testimonies from survivors of trafficking and smuggling. The campaign is ongoing through TV, radio, social media and billboards. In 2018, the campaign will feature grassroots activities in refugee camps and villages in Ethiopia and Djibouti. Focus-group discussions, theatre performances, screening of video testimonies will be conducted as well as engaging refugee and local media.
19. In Hudaydah, UNHCR trained 40 coastguards through its partnership with the UNHCR-supported Migration and Refugees Studies Centre in Sana’a.

South East Asia

20. Many of the nearly 700,000 Rohingya refugees who have fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar since August 2017 did so by boat, either across the Naf River or skirting the **Bay of Bengal**, leading to capsizes that killed over 200 refugees. Refugee movements out of Myanmar to countries other than Bangladesh were largely overland, with the exception of three vessels carrying a total of 140 Rohingya refugees who departed from the central townships of Rakhine State, Myanmar, and were allowed to disembark in Malaysia and Indonesia in April 2018. Some of these refugees said they were intercepted at sea by Myanmar and Thai authorities, and that as many as 10 other refugees originally travelling with them had died or gone missing at sea.

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<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Djibouti%20Inter%20Agency%20Operational%20Update%20Response%20to%20Yemen%20Situation%20%5BENG%5D%20-%20March%202018.pdf>

The 84 refugees who did arrive in Indonesia disembarked in accordance with Indonesia's 2016 Presidential Regulation Concerning the Handling of Foreign Refugees.

21. Large-scale maritime movements of refugees and migrants to countries other than Bangladesh otherwise remained disrupted. Despite the political commitments made by all Bali Process member states in their March 2016 Bali Declaration on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons, and Related Transnational Crime, the Indonesian Presidential Regulation is the sole legal commitment in South-East Asia to rescue and disembark refugees in distress. With the support of UNHCR, IOM, and UNODC, the third meeting of the Bali Process Task Force on Planning and Preparedness in March 2018 focused on the development of national plans of action to respond to maritime movements, and as one outcome will develop a contact list of search-and-rescue and other operational personnel in the region. UNHCR also helped to develop and facilitate a training program for Asia-Pacific officials on responding to mixed movements that was piloted in October 2017 by the Bali Process at the UNITAR CIFAL centre in Jeju, Republic of Korea.

Caribbean

22. There is a growing number of asylum-seekers and refugees arriving in the **Caribbean**, with diverse profiles and travel patterns, and originating from over 50 countries worldwide in 2017. While mixed flows of refugees and migrants by sea continued to be evident in the Northern Caribbean, there was a notable increase in arrivals by sea to the Southern Caribbean in 2017, as a result of outflows from Venezuela.
23. Throughout the Caribbean, 100 maritime incidents involving over 2,800 persons were recorded in 2017. These incidents involved refugees and migrants from over 10 countries of origin, principally Haitian (57%), Cuban (19%), and Venezuelan (13%), nationals. The number of Cuban nationals involved in incidents at sea in 2017 decreased by 87%, while the number of Venezuelan nationals increased more than tenfold. Further, while the number of incidents recorded in 2016 and 2017 respectively indicated a decrease of almost 75%, the number of persons reported deceased and missing increased by 25%.
24. The second technical meeting of the Caribbean Migration Consultations (CMC) was hosted by the Bahamas in 2017, with the participation of 18 countries, CARICOM, the CARICOM Implementing Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS), IOM and the Bahamas Red Cross, consolidating the CMC as forum to identify and address persistent challenges, set up viable recommendations and exchange best practices. States discussed screening, protection safeguards, emergency responses to natural disasters, and evacuations, agreeing on the importance of information sharing. The meeting also informed the first triennial review of the 2014 Brazil Plan of Action,² on its chapter dedicated to Solidarity with the Caribbean, which highlighted the importance of regional cooperation to ensure effective and rights-based responses to mixed flows in the region. The third technical CMC meeting will be held in late 2018 in Aruba.

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² Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action: A Framework for Cooperation and Regional Solidarity to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees, Displaced and Stateless Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean, 3 December 2014, www.refworld.org/docid/5487065b4.html.