

Security costs:

How the EU's exclusionary migration policies place people on the move toward Italy and Greece at greater risk – a quantitative analysis

MMC Research Report, June 2022



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About MMC

The MMC is a global network, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America hosted in DRC regional offices, and a small global team in Geneva, engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of, and governed by, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis, and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

For more information on MMC visit:
www.mixedmigration.org

About ADMIGOV

This report, and the 4Mi surveys we used for the analysis, were conducted as part of the EU Horizon 2020-funded project "Advancing Alternative Migration Governance" (ADMIGOV). ADMIGOV aims to promote an alternative migration governance model and takes seriously the principles laid out in the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (2015), the New York Declaration (2016) and later UN documents. The project studies how alternative approaches to migration governance can be better designed and put into practice. However, rather than proposing a top-down study of existing migration policies, ADMIGOV studies the reality of existing policies and practices on the ground to improve migration governance in line with the principles set out by the UN. This is the unique analytical feature of ADMIGOV. It brings together analyses of migration governance in practice and in key times and spaces and relates them to the key structuring principles of migration governance as laid out by the UN. This is done to better understand the current gaps between principles and practices and to provide insights and recommendations for migration governance in the future.

For more information on ADMIGOV visit:
admigov.eu



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Executive summary

The findings in this study conducted by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) document the main protection risks faced by Asian and African migrants and refugees during their journeys along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR), the Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR), and the Western Balkan Route (WBR).

The CMR, the EMR, and the WBR each present their own specific protection risks, but also pose common challenges. Refugees and migrants who took part in MMC's 4Mi survey perceive their journey to Europe to be fraught with severe risks, including detention, physical and sexual violence, robbery, bribery/extortion, and even death. Children are believed to be exposed to similar protection risks, including detention. The most commonly reported perpetrators of abuse and crime vary by route, with militias most prevalent on the CMR, and state actors on the EMR and the WBR, although criminal gangs are frequently reported across all three routes. Smugglers are a source of concern among respondents but are seldom considered to be the main perpetrators of abuse. The CMR—and Libya in particular—is more frequently reported as dangerous. On the EMR and the WBR, migrants and refugees often indicate Turkey, Iran, and Greece as locations where protection incidents are more likely to occur. Our respondents adopt a number of strategies to mitigate the risks they expect to face, such as travelling in groups and carrying cash, the latter assumingly to avoid having to work to pay for their journeys, often in exploitative conditions, or to be able to pay their way out of trouble.

A closer scrutiny of the findings allows for an analysis with regard to the European Union's current approach to irregular migration across three major routes. Data suggest that this approach might be insufficient or even detrimental to migrants' and refugees' protection. The externalization of border controls to third countries such as Turkey, Libya, and Niger, more restrictive measures of entry implemented by EU Member States, and a shortage of legal pathways to Europe are likely to contribute to the prevalence of major protection risks faced or feared by 4Mi respondents. These measures place migrants and refugees at risk of arrest, detention, physical abuse, and deportation by EU Member States, and expose them to other abuses, often committed by the very actors that the EU entrusts with the task of protecting migrants and refugees—such as certain state officials within the authorities of transit countries—or by local armed groups.

In short, our analysis confirms that a securitized approach—one that often criminalizes refugees and migrants—in combination with a lack of legal and safe avenues of mobility, leads to a shrinking protection space for people on the move along key migration routes to and through Europe.

1. Introduction

There are obstacles to the collection and management of statistics and other quantitative data on mixed migration to Europe. It is therefore acknowledged that there is very little quantitative data on the subject. To fill this gap, since 2019, MMC has been conducting 4Mi surveys with migrants and refugees in Italy and Greece as part of the EU Horizon 2020-funded project “Advancing Alternative Migration Governance” (ADMIGOV).

What is 4Mi?

4Mi is MMC’s flagship data-collection project. Regional teams in West Africa, North Africa, East Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America collect and analyze data on mixed migration dynamics. Launched in 2014, 4Mi today consists of a network of around 120 enumerators in 15 countries. Stationed in known gathering points for refugees and migrants on commonly used routes, 4Mi enumerators use questionnaires to conduct in-depth structured surveys of people on the move on a continuous basis. These surveys provide indicative insights into the profiles, drivers, aspirations, decision-making, and experiences of refugees and migrants along mixed migration routes, including protection violations, the smuggler economy, and needs for information and assistance. More on 4Mi and its methodology can be found on the MMC [website](#).

The objective of 4Mi’s data collection is to understand why refugees and migrants leave countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria; what routes they take; and what challenges they face, with a particular focus on protection needs and on the most likely perpetrator of rights violations along the route.

Based on analysis of the 4Mi data, this chapter focuses on the protection challenges for people on the move along three migration routes toward Europe: the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR), the Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR) and the Western Balkan Route (WBR).

2. Research focus, objective, and scope

The objective of this study is to document the protection challenges facing people travelling the CMR (from East Africa and West Africa to Libya, and from there to Italy), the EMR (from Pakistan or Afghanistan through Iran, and from Syria, to Turkey, and from there to Greece) as well as the WBR (from Greece/Bulgaria to Italy through the Western Balkans) to Europe.

After an initial review of the literature regarding migration, European Union (EU) policy, and protection risks on these routes, the study provides an analysis of 4Mi data collected in Italy and Greece between 2019 and 2022 with a focus on the following nationalities:

- CMR: West Africans (including nationals of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo), Sudanese, and Bangladeshis
- EMR: Afghans, Syrians, Pakistanis, Congolese (Democratic Republic of Congo)
- WBR: Pakistanis who travel the Eastern Mediterranean route to Turkey and then travel across the Balkans to Italy.

Particular attention will be paid to the routes taken, the protection challenges faced by people on the move along these routes, where they occur, and who is most likely to perpetrate abuses.

Based on these insights, and a review of secondary sources, the study will also assess the extent to which the EU’s current approach to migration management—and its partnerships in origin and transit countries—helps prevent, mitigate, or stop identified risks and abuses. The findings will inform a series of recommendations for authorities, policy makers, and programming.

3. Methodology, sampling, and limitations

3.1 Mixed methods approach

This study adopts a mixed methods approach that entails the use of both quantitative and qualitative sources. MMC's unique 4Mi dataset provides primary quantitative data to better understand displacement trajectories and protection risks. This has been supplemented by secondary and qualitative data on:

- key facts and figures related to the three main migration routes (CMR, WBR, EMR);
- recent developments of the EU approach to migration management and partnerships; and
- protection risks and abuses affecting people travelling on migration routes to Europe.

Sources of secondary data include reports, factsheets and other material produced by international organizations and non-governmental organisations, and scholarly publications.

3.2 Sampling (for quantitative data)

Target population and sampling

The overall target population for this study is adult refugees and migrants who travelled along mixed migration routes and reached Europe (Italy or Greece). 4Mi utilizes purposive sampling, identifying key hubs where refugees and migrants gather to recruit participants there. These locations are determined by a mapping process, using direct observation, secondary data, and information from key informants. Specifically, under 4Mi's sampling criteria, survey respondents must be adults who have crossed a border and arrived in the country of survey (Italy or Greece) within the past five years and in the town of survey within the past two years and who are not on a return journey to their country of departure or origin. MMC's implementing partners recruited enumerators with language skills and community access to reach particular groups (nationalities commonly observed in the target countries, or where there were noted information gaps).

This study draws on 4Mi data collected between November 2019 and February 2022. It analyses survey questionnaires completed in Italy by 714 refugees and migrants who originate from across West Africa (549), Sudan (100), and Bangladesh (65) and 1,590 questionnaires completed in Greece by refugees and migrants from Afghanistan (954), Syria (321), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (140), and Pakistan (175). Data on the EMR and WBR includes an additional 129 surveys of Pakistanis conducted in Italy.¹

Understanding 'protection risks'

Protection risks are defined in the 4Mi survey as violations and abuses. They are categorized: as death, physical violence, sexual violence, detention, kidnapping, robbery, bribery/extortion, injury/ill-health from harsh conditions (e.g. weather), non-physical violence, and other. The survey primarily covers perceptions: participants are invited to report (up to five) dangerous places on their journey and to identify the kinds of dangers in each location and the perpetrators of these abuses. Participants are then asked one direct question about whether they personally experienced (or, in the case of death, witnessed) any of these kinds of abuse on their journey.

Limitations and mitigation measures

It is not possible to reliably estimate the size of 4Mi's population of interest, therefore MMC does not measure stocks, flows or volumes. Nonetheless, careful selection of sites for data collection, and setting of targets to achieve diversity in sampling, means that 4Mi data is highly indicative and provides good information on the overall perceptions and experiences of the target population.

Data collection during the Covid-19 pandemic

Restrictions on movement during the pandemic meant that data collection was suspended for a short period. When it resumed, movement restrictions were still in place and sampling methods were changed to enable participation by telephone. Sampling relied more strongly on referrals and required that participants had access to a phone.

1 People in the West African sample originated from the following countries: Nigeria (200), Mali (100), Côte d'Ivoire (65), Gambia (61), Senegal (51), Guinea (39), Ghana (9), Burkina Faso (7), Niger (6), Sierra Leone (5), Liberia (3), Togo (2), and Benin (1).

Timeline and location of data collection

As primary entry points to Europe for migrants and refugees travelling along mixed migration routes, Italy and Greece are ideal locations for exploring mixed migration to the continent. During the inception phase of this project, specific project locations within each country were carefully selected to ensure that the highest possible number of individuals who belong to the population of interest had a chance to be included in the sample.

Based on the above, in **Italy**, 4Mi surveys were collected in large cities (i.e. Rome, Turin) and strategic places for migration routes (i.e. Sicily at the southern border, and Ventimiglia at the border with France). The locations of data collection were re-assessed throughout the project, in order to match locations with mixed migration journeys. In **Greece**, data collection was carried out mostly in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Ioannina, which are transited by a large proportion of the refugees and migrants travelling through the country.

Data collection started in both countries in November 2019. It was suspended due to Covid-19-related restrictions from March 2020 to July 2020. For a period, data collection shifted to remote surveys (by phone) and sampling relied on referrals from third parties (enumerators received additional training to be able to do this). Data collection ended in December 2021 in Greece and February 2022 in Italy.

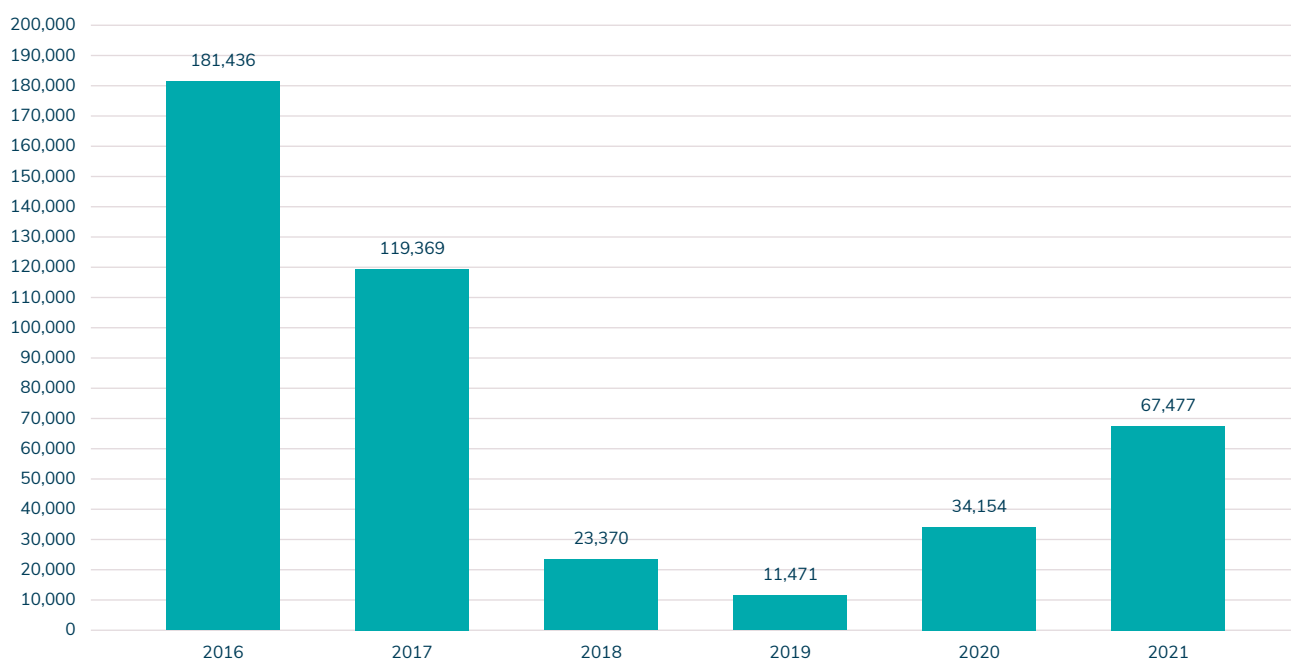
4. Background and context

4.1 Route-specific data

The Central Mediterranean Route

The CMR converges to Libya and other North African countries before crossing the Mediterranean Sea to the Italian and Maltese coasts. From January to March 2022, more than 6,000 migrants and refugees arrived in Italy by sea, having left embarkation points located in a few key areas along the North African coastline.² This was a very slight increase over the 5,900 arrivals registered in Italy during the same period in 2021. An sharp upward trend is already observed since the low of 2019, with some 67,477 arrivals in Italy registered over the course of 2021 (see Figure 1), although this is considerably fewer than the 100,000+ recorded every year between 2014 and 2017.³

Figure 1. Annual sea arrivals in Italy, 2016-2021



Source: [UNHCR Operational Data Portal](#)

² UNHCR (n.d.) [Operational Data Portal – Mediterranean Situation – Italy](#).

³ These figures do not take into consideration refugees and migrants who died en route nor those who returned or were pushed back by authorities before reaching Europe.

In terms of who is arriving, there has been a shift in the most common nationalities among arrivals to Italy since 2016 and 2017—when people from sub-Saharan Africa predominated—towards, more recently, a greater proportion of people from North Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Algeria and Pakistan were among the top five countries of origin at various points between 2018 and 2020.⁴ Tunisia has been among the top five since 2018, while Bangladesh and Egypt have also recently joined this list.

Figure 2. Top five nationalities of sea arrivals to Italy, 2016-2021

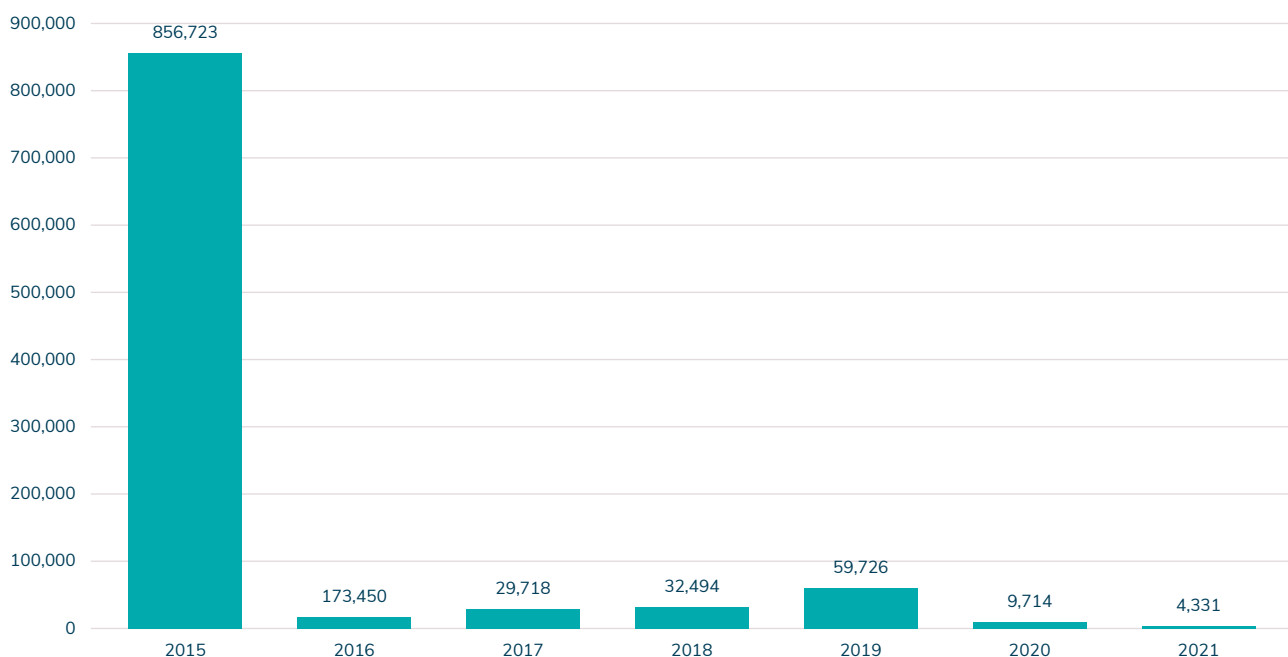
Rank	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
1	Nigeria	21% (37,551)	Nigeria	15% (18,153)	Tunisia	22% (5,181)	Tunisia	23% (2,654)	Tunisia	38% (12,883)	Tunisia	23% (15,671)
2	Eritrea	11% (20,718)	Guinea	8% (9,693)	Eritrea	14% (3,320)	Pakistan	10% (1,180)	Bangladesh	12% (4,141)	Egypt	12% (8,352)
3	Guinea	7% (13,345)	Côte d'Ivoire	8% (9,504)	Iraq	7% (1,744)	Côte d'Ivoire	10% (1,139)	Côte d'Ivoire	6% (1,950)	Bangladesh	12% (7,824)
4	Côte d'Ivoire	7% (12,396)	Bangladesh	8% (8,995)	Sudan	7% (1,619)	Algeria	9% (1,009)	Algeria	4% (1,458)	Iran	6% (3,915)
5	Gambia	7% (11,929)	Mali	6% (7,114)	Pakistan	7% (1,589)	Iraq	9% (972)	Pakistan	4% (1,400)	Côte d'Ivoire	6% (3,807)

Source: [Italian Ministry of the Interior, cruscotto statistico](#)

The Eastern Mediterranean Route

The EMR runs through Turkey to Greece. In sharp contrast to what was observed in 2016, substantially fewer sea arrivals have been registered in Greece since 2017, with just 4,331 recorded in 2021 (see Figure 3). The first quarter of 2022 seems to confirm this trend with fewer than 1,500 registered arrivals from Turkey into Greece.⁵

Figure 3. Annual sea arrivals in Greece, 2015-2021



Source: UNHCR Operational Data Portal

4 Forin, R. & Frouws, B. (2022) [What's new? Analysing the latest trends on the Central Mediterranean mixed migration route to Italy](#). Mixed Migration Centre; UNHCR (n.d.) [Operational Data Portal – Mediterranean Situation – Italy](#).

5 UNHCR (n.d.) [Operational Data Portal – Mediterranean Situation – Greece](#)

2015 and 2016 were peak years for arrivals to Greece, with the Eastern Mediterranean becoming the busiest transit zone into Europe for refugees and migrants. Most were Syrians and Afghans who embarked on the short sea crossing to Europe from Izmir, Bodrum, and other cities on the western coast of Turkey. The intensification of movement along this route has been attributed, in part, to the rapid escalation of and pessimistic outlook for the Syrian conflict after its outbreak in 2011 and to onward movement from neighbouring refugee-hosting states such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. The number of arrivals in Greece dropped considerably after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016.⁶

Since the early 2000s, the EMR has been a popular route for mainly Asian migrants and refugees seeking to enter Europe: Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq all feature among the top five countries of origin since 2016.⁷ However, in 2021, the proportion of Syrians decreased substantially. Afghanistan was the number one country of origin from 2018 to the first quarter of 2022. The proportion of migrants and refugees from the DRC grew until 2020, and in 2021, Somalia joined the list of most common countries of origin.⁸

Figure 4. Top five nationalities of sea arrivals in Greece, 2016-2021

Rank	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
1	Syria	47% (81,521)	Syria	42% (12,395)	Afghanistan	28% (9,007)	Afghanistan	40% (23,861)	Afghanistan	35% (3,417)	Afghanistan	20% (874)
2	Afghanistan	24% (41,628)	Iraq	20% (5,824)	Syria	24% (7,915)	Syria	27% (16,366)	Syria	23% (2,207)	Somalia	20% (862)
3	Iraq	15% (26,017)	Afghanistan	12% (3,441)	Iraq	18% (5,855)	DRC	7% (4,027)	Dem. Rep. Congo	10% (1,004)	Palestine	15% (661)
4	Pakistan	5% (8,672)	DRC	3% (984)	Dem. Rep. Congo	6% (1,848)	Iraq	6% (3,598)	Somalia	10% (923)	Iraq	7% (317)
5	Iran	3% (5,203)	Algeria	3% (856)	Palestine	5% (1,561)	Palestine	5% (3,196)	Iraq	4% (422)	Syria	7% (291)

The Western Balkan Route

The WBR leads onward from Greece to other EU countries further west and/or north. It is often used as a continuation of the EMR from Turkey and Greece. It transits Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Serbia, as well as Albania and Montenegro, via Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. The EU border control and management agency, Frontex, reports how the number of migrants and asylum seekers—mostly Syrians, Afghans, and Pakistanis—detected along this route reached a record number of over 764,000 in 2015.⁹ After that, the number of people detected on this route plunged: in 2018 fewer than 6,000 migrants and refugees were recorded on the WBR. Since then, however, detections have increased steadily, reaching 61,735 in 2021. Most of the refugees and migrants detected on this route since 2018 come from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Morocco, and, to a lesser extent, Iran.¹⁰

6 On 18 March 2016, the European Union signed an agreement with Turkey to curb migration through the Greek-Turkish border. Among other provisions, the plan foresaw and then implemented the return to Turkey of all those migrants "not applying for asylum or whose application has been found unfounded or inadmissible in accordance with the said directive [Asylum Procedures Directive]". See: European Council (2016) [EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016](#).

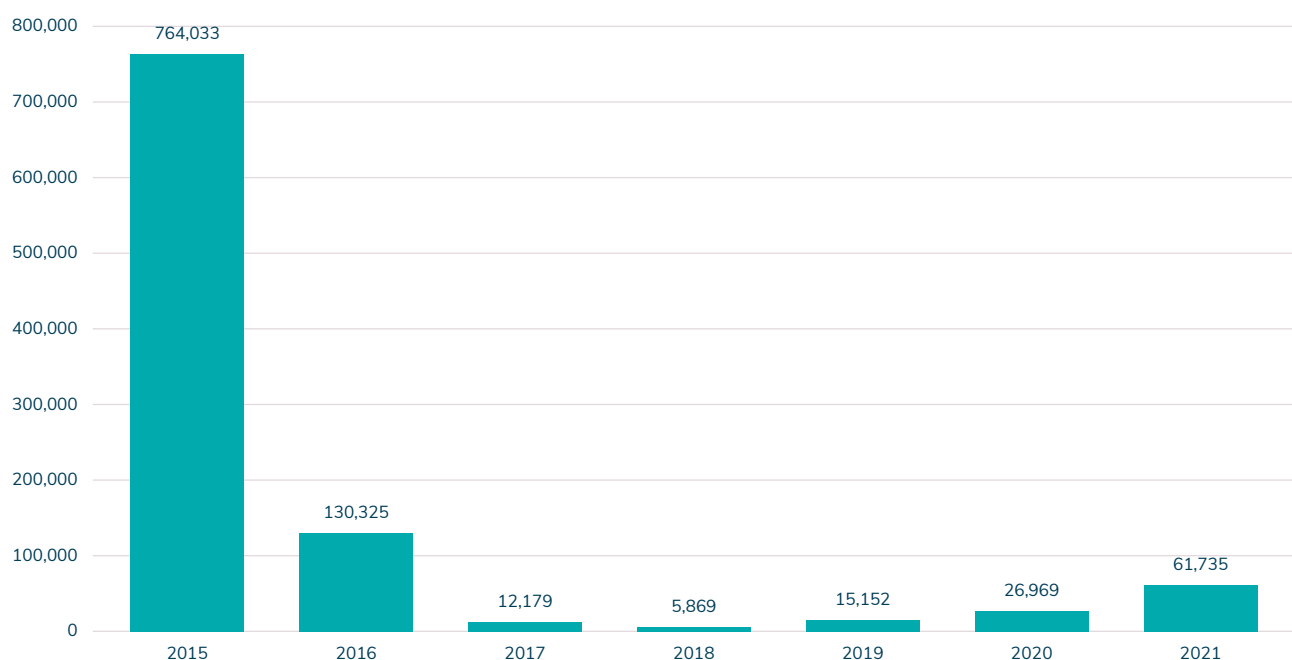
7 UNHCR (n.d.) [Operational Data Portal – Mediterranean Situation - Greece](#).

8 Ibid.

9 Frontex (n.d.) [Migratory Routes: Western Balkan Route](#).

10 UNHCR (2019) [Western Balkans-Refugees, asylum-seekers and other people in mixed movements \(as of end October 2021\)](#).

Figure 5. “Illegal” border crossings detected on the WBR, 2015-2021



Source: Frontex (n.d.) [Migratory Routes: Western Balkan Route](#).

4.2 EU approach to migration management and migration partnerships: recent developments (2018 – 2021)

The “migration crisis” of 2015-2016 exposed the challenges faced by European Union and its Member States in managing inward migration in an orderly manner. This resulted in the failure of Member States to agree on a more balanced distribution system (relocation) and in severe pressure on national capacities to accommodate and care for asylum seekers. Following these events, many Member States demanded improvements to the EU approach to migration—and, in particular, to its Common European Asylum System (CEAS)—in order to adapt EU regulations to the arrival of large numbers of migrants and refugees.¹¹ Although change was a priority for many, the road to sustainable reform of the system was, and still is, fraught with obstacles, including markedly diverging interests between Member States.¹² Being at the external border of the EU and closer to origin countries, southern Member States are the most common entry point for people travelling on irregular pathways and thus are under far more pressure to respond. Therefore they would more immediately benefit from a reform of the current regulations. Conversely, Member States in northern and eastern Europe have less interest in a permanent distribution model of asylum responsibility.

New Pact on Migration and Asylum

To advance the creation of a more efficient, fair, and sustainable migration system, in September 2020 the European Commission proposed a New Pact on Migration and Asylum. To accomplish its goals, the document builds upon three dimensions: boosting cooperation with countries of origin and transit; improving migration management at the EU’s external border; and establishing a more balanced and fair distribution system of asylum seekers among EU Member States.¹³ The New Pact pays particular attention to border controls. First, it stresses the importance of accomplishing an integrated border management system in order to ensure coherent implementation of the relevant legal, financial, and operational instruments and tools both within the EU and with external partners—especially through the modernization of the EU’s information system. Additionally, the New Pact emphasizes the need for tighter security measures through a budget increase to Frontex and an expansion of the latter’s operational staff across the main migration pathways to Europe.¹⁴

11 Council of European Union (n.d.) [EU Asylum Reform](#).

12 European Commission (2016) [Questions & Answers: Reforming the Common European Asylum System](#).

13 European Commission (2020) [Migration and Asylum Package: New Pact on Migration and Asylum documents adopted on 23 September 2020](#).

14 Tsourdi, L. (2020) [The New Pact and EU Agencies: an ambivalent approach towards administrative integration](#). EU Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy.

Since the presentation of the New Pact in 2020, negotiations have remained largely deadlocked. Member States are struggling to reach a common agreement on crucial issues, such as the establishment of fairer procedures for the regulation of migration into the EU zone. Failing to agree on a shared course of action, Member States have continued to act independently on irregular migration, finding a commonality of interest mostly in the pursuit of more effective border measures. Against this background, the Covid-19 pandemic has further disrupted efforts to provide legal and safe pathways for asylum seekers wishing to enter Europe.¹⁵ The EU response has concentrated on strengthening border controls, “introducing carrier sanctions to an unprecedented level, and [showing] indications of attempts to legalize non-entry policies through derogations from EU and international law”.¹⁶ The release of the European Commission’s Renewed Action Plan against Migrant Smuggling (2021-2025) on 29 September 2021 moves in this direction by consolidating an overwhelmingly security-based response to irregular migration.¹⁷

‘Externalization’ and cooperation with transit countries

The New Pact has not yet ushered in a new trend in migration management. If anything, current policy efforts remain focused on implementing a security-based approach, especially through partnerships in origin and transit countries. EU Member States have further pursued the tightening of border controls and the progressive externalization of asylum responsibilities to third countries. The apparent success—in terms of a reduction in the number of arrivals—of the EU-Turkey deal and the so-called “hotspots” persuaded the EU that this might be the most effective approach.¹⁸ The support to the Libyan coast guard, increased cooperation with Niger, and the proposed creation of regional disembarkation platforms for migrants outside the EU, have been further steps in this direction.¹⁹

The EU’s ambition to pursue the outsourcing and externalization of asylum application processes reflects an approach that has long become the rule in countries such as Australia and the United States: the “offshoring” of asylum and migration management to third countries. These measures are so entrenched within policy and political discourse in Europe that reforming the Dublin Regulation has been knocked off the top priorities in the ongoing restructuring of the CEAS.²⁰ The underlying logic is that there is no real need for a permanent distribution model of asylum responsibility if the numbers of new arrivals can be kept as low as possible—hence the need to reinforce border controls and externalize the process of asylum applications.

Even the recent proposal for a “whole-of-route” approach might not diverge substantially from this course of action.²¹ A crucial element of the Renewed Action Plan against Migrant Smuggling, the whole-of-route “combines international cooperation and coordination with our partners and between the Member States to break the business model of smugglers”.²² By looking at the different routes from a broad perspective and investigating the patterns and profiles of migrants along the whole route, the approach is intended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the routes, including migrants’ specific protection risks. In practice, the whole-of-route approach primarily manifests itself in the form of anti-smuggling operational partnerships with transit countries.²³

Border management in Europe

Concomitantly with the externalization of border controls and asylum responsibilities to third countries, the EU has tightened border controls along its southern and eastern borders. For example, along with partnering with Libya’s coast guard in intercepting and returning migrants and refugees to Libya, Europe has consistently rolled back search-and-rescue operations and criminalized NGOs involved in search-and-rescue on the basis that these could serve as a pull factor of migration, leading to soaring death rates at sea.²⁴ This was evident as search-and-rescue operations disappeared in the European Union Mediterranean naval force’s shift from Operation Sophia to Operation Irini in

15 Sanchez, G. & Achilli, L. (2020) [Stranded: the impacts of COVID-19 on irregular migration and migrant smuggling](#). European University Institute.

16 Mixed Migration Centre & Danish Refugee Council (2021) [Criminalizing mobility, securitizing borders, and preventing access to territory will not end dangerous journeys](#)

17 European Commission (2021) [A renewed EU Action Plan Against Migrant Smuggling \(2021-2025\)](#).

18 Proposed by the European Commission as part of the European Agenda on Migration of April 2015, the “hotspots” are first reception facilities designed to better coordinate EU agencies’ and national authorities’ efforts at the external borders of the EU—notably, Italy and Greece—in the identification, registration, and fingerprinting of migrants and refugees. European Parliament (2018) [Hotspots at EU external borders](#).

19 Carrera, S. Cortinovis, R. (2019) [Search and rescue, disembarkation and relocation arrangements in the Mediterranean Sailing Away from Responsibility?](#) CEPS.

20 The Dublin Regulation is the cornerstone of the EU asylum system, laying out the criteria for processing applications for international protection. Under the current legislative framework, the first EU country that asylum seekers enter is responsible for examining their asylum claim.

21 European Commission (2020) [Commission Work Programme 2020](#).

22 European Commission (2021) [A Renewed EU Action Plan Against Migrant Smuggling \(2021-2025\)](#).

23 Fallone, A. (2021) [Understanding the future of European Union counter-smuggling policy: the Renewed EU Action Plan Against Migrant Smuggling \(2021-2025\)](#). European University Institute.

24 According to recent studies, the “pull factor” claim is not supported by available evidence. See, for example: Cusumano, E. Villa, M (2021) [From “Angels” to “Vice Smugglers”: the Criminalization of Sea Rescue NGOs in Italy](#). European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research. On sea deaths: IOM (2021) [Deaths on Maritime Migration Routes to Europe Soar in First Half of 2021: IOM Brief](#).

2020.²⁵ While the primary focus of both sea operations is maritime law enforcement in the Mediterranean, Sophia was also tasked to provide emergency support to boats in distress and credited with rescuing around 50,000 migrants and refugees during its five-year mandate. Its successor, Irini, on the other hand, had not undertaken a single rescue in its first year.²⁶

Meanwhile, several EU Member States have not only steadily escalated their border security and pushbacks in recent years, but they have also subjected migrants and refugees to incarceration, systematic mistreatment, intimidation, and beating. In Greece, for example, these practices have reportedly become the norm among law enforcement officers.²⁷ The steady hardening of Greece's border policy since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement in 2016 has concretized through the increased use of new technologies such as thermal cameras, drones, sound cannons, and lie detector tests to deter migrants and remove them from Greek territories²⁸ as well as through pushbacks where refugee boats are intercepted at sea, with refugees put in life rafts and towed back to Turkish waters.²⁹ Most importantly, migrants and refugees continue to be held for extended periods in dangerous and degrading conditions. A number of studies and reports have clearly shown how detention has been a core aspect of a strategy put in place by the government of Greece (especially since 2015) to dissuade migrants from entering the country.³⁰ The practice of "chain pushbacks", starting from Italy, has meant that the country has systematically expelled migrants and refugees to Slovenia, from where they are forcibly deported to Croatia and thence to Bosnia.³¹ In Croatia, there are reports of law enforcement authorities brutally subjecting migrants and refugees to violence, humiliation, mistreatment, and even sexual assault.³²

4.3 Protection risks and abuses faced by people travelling on migration routes to Europe

Migrants and refugees fall victim serious protection incidents and human rights abuses during their journeys along routes to Europe. Studies and reports have also highlighted the discrimination affecting people on the move along the different routes, mainly related to nationality, language, and religion.³³ They show how certain vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied and separated minors, are particularly at risk of abuse, detention, exploitation, neglect, and violence.³⁴

The Central Mediterranean Route

A number of studies have reported multiple human rights abuses along the CMR, especially in Libya.³⁵ In a 2021 study on the routes towards the western and central Mediterranean sea, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that "extrajudicial killings, being left to die in the desert, torture including to extract ransoms, gender-based violence and exploitation, forced labour, forced marriage and other gross human rights abuses are among the many risks faced by people as they travel from West Africa or the East and Horn of Africa to and through North Africa".³⁶

The CMR is also the deadliest corridor for migrants and refugees. The length of the sea journey and the preceding desert route, the substandard quality of the boats, and political turmoil in Libya have all contributed to making the route a considerably more dangerous alternative to the EMR. More than 23,000 people have lost their lives attempting the CMR sea crossing since 2014 (over 5,000 in 2016 alone), while it is estimated that even more die on their journey through the Sahara Desert.³⁷ A joint report by UNHCR and the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) noted that around 1,750 people may have lost their life trying to cross the land routes to and through Libya and Egypt in 2018 and 2019.³⁸ The externalization of border controls seems to have increased the protection risks on migration routes, since the journeys

25 EUNAVFOR MED (n.d.) [Operation Irini](#).

26 Wallis, E. (2021) [Irini mission: one year, no migrant rescues](#). InfoMigrants.

27 Amnesty International (2021) [Greece: Violence, Lies, and Pushbacks](#).

28 Bathke, B. (2021) [In post-pandemic Europe, irregular migrants will face digital deterrents](#). InfoMigrants.

29 Christides, G. & Lüdke, S. (2020) [Greece Suspected of Abandoning Refugees at Sea](#). Der Spiegel; [ECRE \(2022\) Greece: Pushbacks Face Renewed International, Legal, Political, and Public Scrutiny](#).

30 Border Criminologies (2022) [Landscapes of Border Control: Greece](#). University of Oxford.

31 Danish Refugee Council (2021) [Push back of responsibility: Human Rights Violations as a Welcome Treatment at Europe's Borders](#).

32 Gall, L. (2020) [Violent pushbacks on Croatia border require EU action](#). Human Rights Watch.

33 Healy, C. (2019) [The Strength to Carry On: Resilience and Vulnerability to Trafficking and Other Abuses among People Travelling along Migration Routes to Europe](#). International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

34 UNHCR (2018) [Desperate Journeys – Refugees and Migrants Arriving in Europe and at Europe's Borders](#).

35 Amnesty International (2019) [Human Rights in Libya](#); Lichtenheld, A. (2020) [What makes refugees and migrants vulnerable to protection incidents in Libya? A microlevel study on the determinants of vulnerability to protection incidents](#). Mixed Migration Centre.

36 UNHCR (2021) [Routes towards the Western and Central Mediterranean Sea](#).

37 IOM (2022) [Missing Migrants Project, Note that MMC contributed data on deaths during migration journeys to this project until 2019](#).

38 Breen, D. (2020) ['On this journey, no one cares if you live or die': Abuse, protection, and justice along routes between East and West Africa and Africa's Mediterranean coast](#). UNHCR & MMC.

have been pushed underground, while those on the move are more exposed to violence and abuse by armed groups, criminal actors (including smugglers), and local authorities.³⁹

The Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan Routes

Compared to the CMR, there are perhaps fewer studies and reports documenting the main protection risks along the EMR and WBR. Nonetheless, various sources have reported that the means used to stem movement have exposed people to serious abuses and incidents such as forced labour and sex trafficking, physical violence, extreme weather conditions, disease, discrimination, and lack of legal aid, healthcare and housing.⁴⁰ Migrants and refugees face hardships not only during their journeys to Europe but also within Europe. According to a recent report by Protecting Rights at Borders (PRAB): “...since 2016, legal pathways for onward movement to the EU have been gradually limited, leaving an increased number of people stranded in limbo in Greece, Italy and in countries in the Balkans. Facing uncertainty around their status, access to rights and services, and limited integration options, refugees and migrants are continuously exploring perilous routes and turning to smuggling networks, avoiding institutional mechanisms”.⁴¹

In 2017, Frontex reported that risks had increased as “migrants can no longer rely on the transportation services provided by the authorities and need to bypass reinforced border-control measures”.⁴² In 2021, several reports were released documenting violent pushbacks in the Balkans and Aegean Sea.⁴³ On the EMR, Human Rights Watch reported in 2020 about Greek security forces and unidentified armed men detaining, (sexually) assaulting and robbing asylum seekers and then pushing them back to Turkey.⁴⁴ A group of NGOs called upon the Greek government in 2020 to investigate the pushbacks and collective expulsions, which it said were “often accompanied by violence”.⁴⁵ Initiatives such as PRAB⁴⁶ and the Border Violence Monitoring Network⁴⁷ continue to provide detailed reports on pushbacks and violence at borders on the EMR and WBR.

39 Brachet, J. (2018) [Manufacturing Smugglers: From Irregular to Clandestine Mobility in the Sahara](#). The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science; UNHCR (2021) [Routes towards the Western and Central Mediterranean Sea](#); OHCHR (2021) [Lethal Disregard: Search and rescue and the protection of migrants in the central Mediterranean Sea](#); Council of Europe (2021) [A distress call for human rights: the widening gap in migrant protection in the Mediterranean](#).

40 Qaisrani, A. (2019) [The Strength to Carry On: Resilience and Vulnerability to Trafficking and Other Abuses among People Travelling along Migration Routes to Europe](#). International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

41 PRAB (2021) [Pushing Back Responsibility, Rights Violations as a “Welcome Treatment” at Europe’s borders](#), p. 8. See also PRAB (2022) [When there’s a will, there’s a way to protection](#).

42 Frontex (2017) Western Balkans Quarterly: Third Quarter, July September 2016, Warsaw, Poland, p. 8.

43 Lighthouse Reports (2021). Unmasking Europe’s Shadow Armies; Amnesty International (2021). [EU: New evidence of systematic unlawful pushbacks and violence at borders](#).

44 [Human Rights Watch \(2020\) Greece: Violence Against Asylum Seekers at Border](#).

45 [Greece: Investigate Pushbacks, Violence at Borders](#).

46 <https://drc.ngo/our-work/resources/pushbacks/prab/>

47 <https://www.borderviolence.eu/>

5. 4Mi data analysis

5.1 Protection risks on the Central Mediterranean Route

This section draws on MMC's quantitative 4Mi data collection carried out in Italy between November 2019 and February 2022. It is based on surveys of 714 refugees and migrants who originate from across West Africa (549), Sudan (100), and Bangladesh (65).⁴⁸ It analyzes data on their profiles, journeys, main protection risks (both actual and perceived) and other factors that may have affected their mobility patterns.

5.1.1 Migration patterns

Respondents' profiles

Adults between 18 and 34 years old (92%) and males (86%) represent the large majority of the respondents. The gender mix changes according to the country of origin: 18% of West African migrants and refugees interviewed are women, while those from Bangladesh and Sudan are all men. 69% of respondents are Muslim, and 28% are Christian. Over 93% of respondents reported they were not travelling with children.⁴⁹ The composition of the sample is likely to be affected by the nature of the journey. It is plausible that predominantly young males embark on these journeys because the CMR has been reported to be particularly dangerous, especially for unaccompanied children, elderly people, and women.

A large majority of migrants and refugees surveyed had received at least some level of education, with secondary or high school education being the level most reported by West Africans (36%) and Sudanese (38%). Bangladeshis most often reported completing primary school (52%). More Sudanese respondents had obtained a university degree (9%), compared to 3% of West African and 2% of Bangladeshi respondents.

Most respondents (65%) reported having had an income in their country of origin. Among them, people reported working in agriculture, pastoralism, and fishing (27%) or having owned a small business (22%).

Some 40% indicated being asylum seekers and 19% refugees at the time they were surveyed, while 14% declared having no legal documents to stay in the country.⁵⁰ Temporary residents represented a minority of the sample (10%). Migration status distribution is quite similar between West African and Bangladeshi. Sudanese respondents, however, were different: 12% reported being asylum seekers and 7% refugees, while the large majority (75%) said they did not possess legal documents in Italy. This may be linked to Italy not being the final destination for most Sudanese (see below), and therefore perhaps they prefer not to begin any asylum process there. Among West Africans, there is an equal distribution of asylum seekers by gender (43% for both female and male respondents), but a large gender differential among refugees (45% of women and 20% of men).⁵¹

Routes taken

4Mi data show how the main land route used by West Africans starts from their country of origin, passing through either Mali or Burkina Faso to Niger, and on to Libya, which is the main point of departure across the Mediterranean into Europe. Almost all (98%) West African respondents transited Libya, 79% transited Niger, 32% Burkina Faso, and 31% Mali, with fewer transiting Algeria (20%) and Senegal (10%).⁵²

Some 41% of respondents indicated that they chose the route because they saw it as their only option, 36% because their smuggler chose it, and 17% because friends or family suggested it or were taking it.

48 The composition of the West African sample is as follows: Nigeria (200), Mali (100), Côte d'Ivoire (65), Gambia (61), Senegal (51), Guinea (39), Ghana (9), Burkina Faso (7), Niger (6), Sierra Leone (5), Liberia (3), Togo (2), Benin (1).

49 The sample of those who answered is smaller (553) because the question was introduced later on in the survey.

50 Data on migration status is partial because of survey modifications. This analysis is based on a sample of 472 (333 West Africans, 76 Sudanese and 63 Bangladeshi) interviewed in 2021 and 2022.

51 Note that status is self-reported. Respondents choose an answer option when asked about their current status.

52 A small minority of respondents report travelling through Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco before reaching Europe, and for 1% this data was not valid.

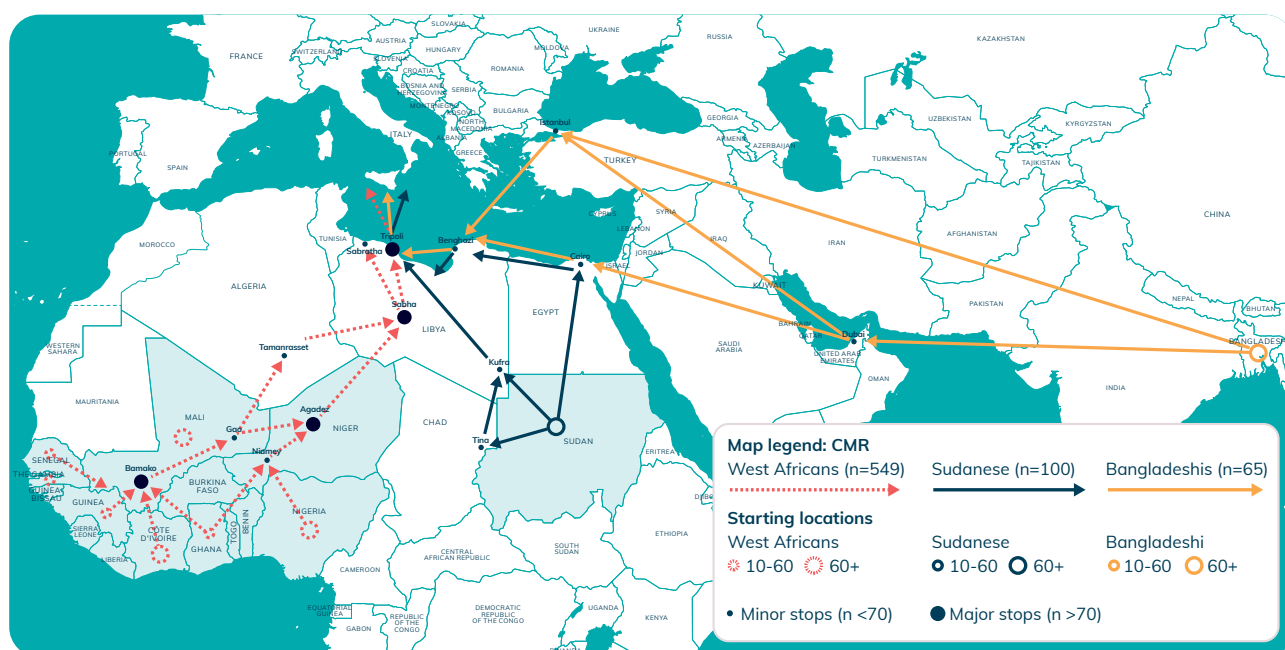
In the case of Sudanese respondents, almost all (98%) reported transiting Libya, with a minority first crossing through Chad (36%) or Egypt (16%).⁵³ A little over half (56%) chose their route because it was seen as the only option, 22% because it was the fastest, and 14% because their smuggler chose it.

Bangladeshi respondents take a very different journey, and 97% flew for at least part of it. All transit Libya, 69% travelled via the United Arab Emirates, 29% via India, 26% via Egypt and 14% via Turkey, with smaller numbers transiting other countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

Stops along the route

The most frequently cited reasons for stopping along the journey were waiting for transport, working to earn money to cover the costs of further legs of the journey, looking for smugglers to organize the next stretch of the journey, being detained, and resting.⁵⁴ However, the reasons for stopping appear linked to a number of factors, including the country of origin and gender of the respondents and the location in which they stopped.

Map 1. Routes taken, including main stops, along the Central Mediterranean Route

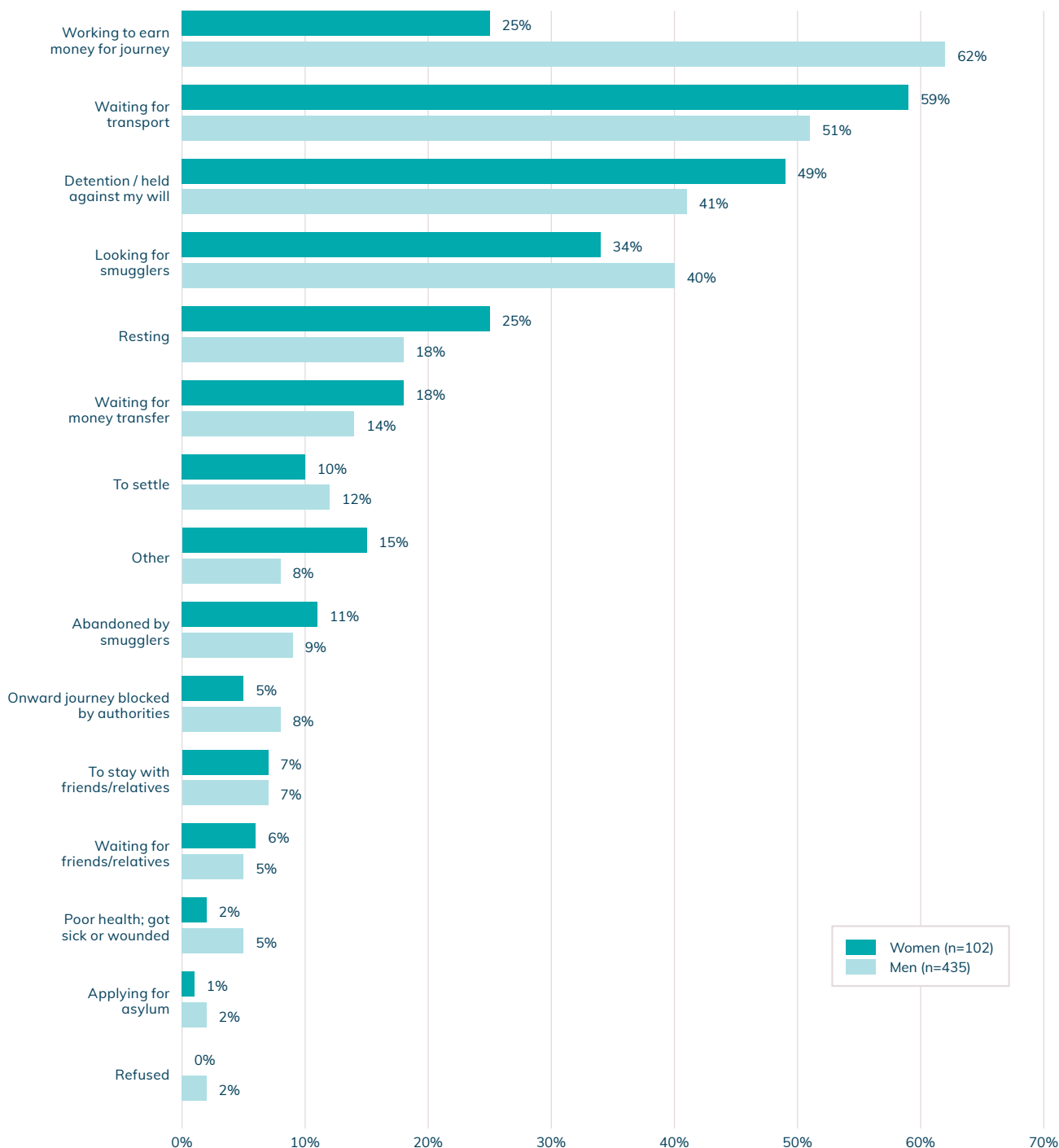


West African refugees and migrants more frequently report stopping at locations in Libya, followed by Niger and Mali, reflecting the proportion who transited these countries. The most common reason for stopping in Libya is detention: 37% of respondents say they stopped because they were detained. The other most common reasons reported were working to earn money to cover the cost of the next stretch of the journey (34%) and waiting for transportation (24%). West African women and men stopped to wait for transport, because they were detained, and to look for smugglers (see Figure 6). Men more frequently report working to earn money for the next stretch of the journey, at 62%, compared to 25% of women stopping to work.

53 One respondent left Egypt for Turkey, rather than Libya.

54 Respondents can provide the same answer multiple times, as they are asked why they stopped in different places. When looking at reasons for stopping in general, the map is calculated as the proportion of respondents who provide a particular response at least once.

Figure 6. Reasons for stopping on the CMR reported by respondents from West Africa



The most common stops in Libya are Tripoli (56% of respondents reported stopping here), Sabha (37%), and Sabratha (13%). Nearly half (49%) of West African respondents who stopped in Sabha said they did so because they were detained or otherwise held against their will.

Almost half (49%) of West African respondents stopped in Agadez in Niger, mainly to wait for transport (49% of those who stopped) and look for smugglers to organize the next stretch of the journey (34%). Nine percent of West African respondents stopped in Niamey, where they mostly waited for transport or worked to cover the next stretch of the journey; 16% stopped in Bamako to wait for transport or earn money for the next stretch of the journey; and 4% stopped in Gao, Mali, most often to rest and find the resources to continue the journey.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Note that not all respondents stopped in all countries, and that respondents can choose more than one reason for stopping.

The three most common stops identified by the 100 Sudanese respondents are in Libya: Tripoli (46%), Kufra (18%), and Benghazi (16%). They stopped mostly to work to earn money for the next stretch of their journey (26 of the 46 Sudanese respondents who stopped in Tripoli; 11/18 for Kufra; and 10/16 for Benghazi) or because they were detained or held against their will (18/46; 4/18; 6/16). Stops in Chad were far fewer, and most often due to waiting for transport, followed by earning money.

Bangladeshi respondents stopped in Tripoli (69%) and in Benghazi (31%). They stopped because they were detained or held against their will (17 of the 45 Bangladeshis who stopped in Tripoli; 5/20 for Benghazi), to work to earn money to continue the journey (16/45; 6/20), to look for smugglers (14/45; 5/20), or to settle down (12/45; 3/20). The other most common stop was in Dubai (38%), mainly to wait for transport.

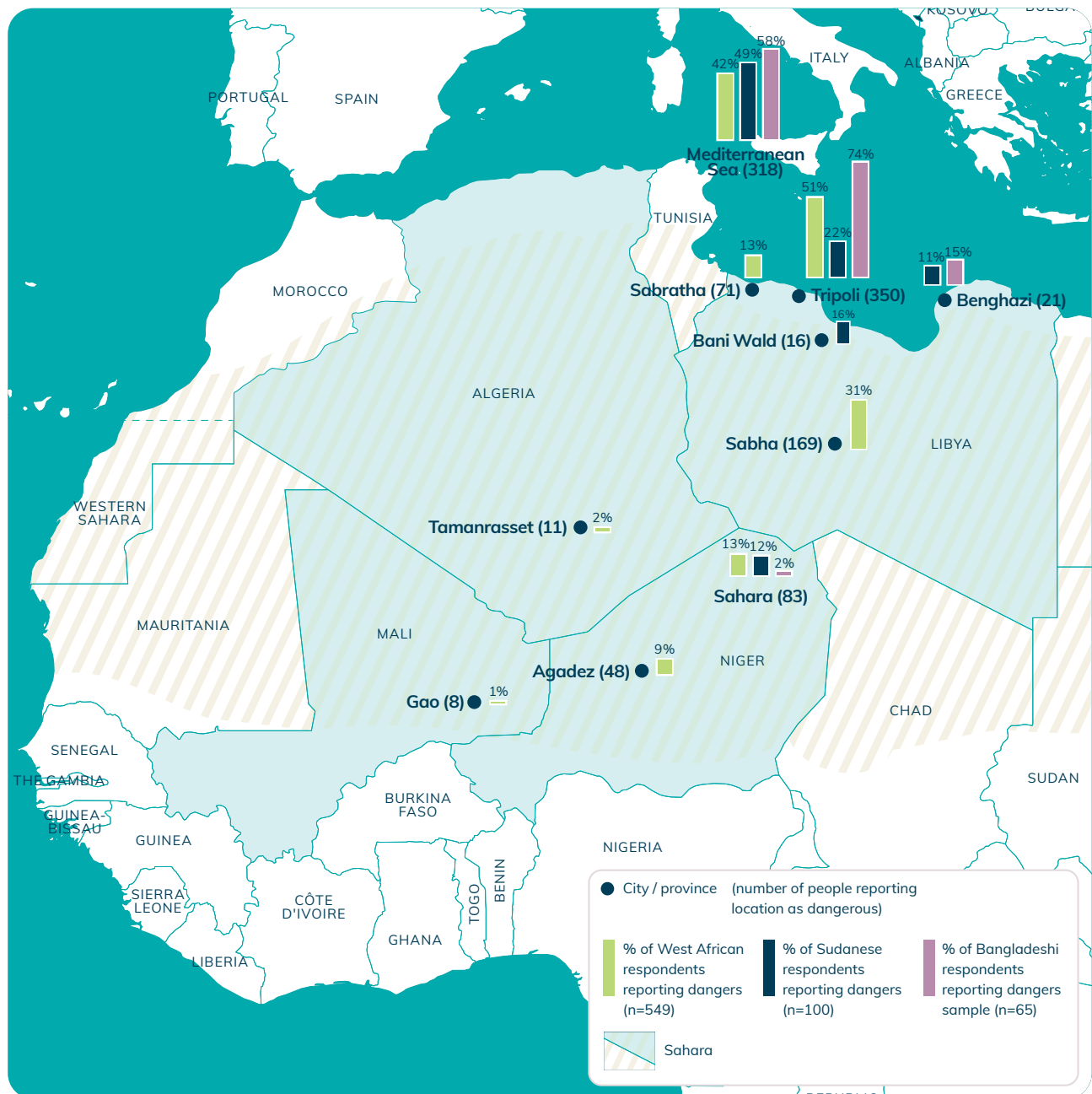
5.1.2 Protection risks

Dangerous locations

All respondents crossed the Mediterranean, which was reported as dangerous by 42% of West African respondents, 49% of Sudanese respondents and 58% of Bangladeshi respondents. In Libya, transited by 98% of all respondents, Tripoli is most often reported to be dangerous by all three groups. Among West Africans, the towns of Sabha and Sabratha are also commonly cited, while Sudanese name Bani Walid and Benghazi, though to a lesser extent. Locations in other countries are less frequently reported as dangerous, even when allowing for the smaller number of people travelling through them. In addition to Tripoli, Bangladeshis also reported Benghazi as dangerous.

The “Sahara Desert” is reported as dangerous less often than the Mediterranean Sea, but this is partly because it is more complex to analyse due to the different ways in which it is referred to. The analysis and data on the Sahara below only cover survey responses that specifically mention “Sahara”; where a respondent has named a more precise location within the vast desert, such as Sabha, that data is categorized under the relevant country (in Sabha’s case, Libya). If we add mentions of such locations to mentions of “Sahara”, Saharan locations are mentioned 380 times, more frequently than Tripoli (350) and the Mediterranean Sea (318).

Map 2. Dangerous locations on the Central Mediterranean Route, as perceived by 4Mi respondents



Main risks and abuses

West Africans report numerous dangers across locations along the CMR (see Figure 7).⁵⁶ Libya was reported by most respondents to pose several dangers, including physical violence, death, and detention; and sexual violence is more frequently reported there than in other locations. Death in the Mediterranean was reported as a risk by almost all respondents, and the perceived risk of death in the Sahara is also very high, with other risks also reported there. Mali, Niger, and Algeria are reportedly less dangerous, but many respondents still fear physical violence and death in those countries, although the small sample sizes for Mali and Algeria are cause for caution in interpretation.

⁵⁶ Respondents are asked about the dangers in each location and can provide more than one answer, or, if they so wish, no answer at all. Answer options are: death, physical violence, sexual violence, detention, kidnapping, robbery, bribery/extortion, injury/ill-health from harsh conditions, non-physical violence, other. Figures for countries or in general are calculated as the proportion of respondents who reported a certain kind of abuse at least once.

Figure 7. Perceived risks along the CMR reported by West African respondents, by country / area

	n	Death	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Detention	Kidnap-ping	Robbery	Bribery/ extortion	Injury / ill health / conditions	Non-physical violence	Other
Mali	21	62%	71%	5%	29%	38%	43%	29%	0%	10%	10%
Niger	91	52%	49%	14%	22%	34%	40%	18%	0%	8%	5%
Algeria	34	35%	62%	3%	32%	24%	44%	21%	0%	3%	9%
Sahara Desert	70	86%	44%	17%	19%	34%	29%	10%	3%	6%	6%
Libya	517	71%	81%	40%	70%	48%	46%	24%	0%	14%	1%
Mediterranean Sea	231	99%	9%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%

Note: 'Refused' were 1% or lower, except for Niger (3%).

The risk of sexual abuse among West African respondents is far more frequently reported by women than by men: 83% of West African female respondents reported this risk across the CMR, making it the second most common risk reported by women. In other categories, men and women reported risks in the same order: physical violence (83% of men and 84% of women); death (77% men and 63% women); detention (75% men and 60% women), kidnapping (51% men and 43% women) and robbery (53% men and 31% women).

Among Sudanese, despite not always taking the same route through the Sahara or Libya, or across the Mediterranean, perceived risks were similar, and dominated by a fear of death, followed by physical violence and detention in Libya, and injury or ill-health crossing the Sahara (see Figure 8; again, caution should be taken given small sample size).

Figure 8. Perceived risks along the CMR reported by Sudanese respondents, by country / area

	n	Death	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Detention	Kidnap-ping	Robbery	Bribery/ extortion	Injury / ill health / conditions	Non-physical violence	Other
Sahara Desert	12	83%	42%	0%	17%	42%	42%	0%	58%	0%	0%
Libya	96	70%	88%	3%	67%	45%	13%	14%	1%	0%	4%
Mediterranean Sea	49	98%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Note: Refused were all below 1%.

Of the Bangladeshis who indicated dangerous locations in Libya (95%), less than half considered they were at risk of death, but a large majority again mentioned physical violence and detention, as well as bribery/extortion. Almost all considered there to be a risk of death crossing the Mediterranean.

Figure 9. Perceived risks along the CMR reported by Bangladeshi respondents, by country / area

	n	Death	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Detention	Kidnaping	Robbery	Bribery/ extortion	Injury / ill health / conditions	Non-physical violence	Other
Libya	62	39%	74%	8%	69%	47%	53%	68%	13%	11%	3%
Mediterranean Sea	38	92%	8%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	5%	0%	5%

Note: Refused were all 1% or below.

Reports of sexual violence as a risk are very low among the Bangladeshi and Sudanese respondents, likely because such risks are more commonly reported by women, and all these respondents are men.⁵⁷

Self-protection strategies

The majority of people surveyed reported that they implement some strategies to protect themselves from crime and abuse (65% of West Africans, 60% of Bangladeshis and 79% of Sudanese). Such strategies varied among West Africans and Bangladeshis, with the most common being travelling in a group (31% and 25%, respectively). Sudanese mostly reported carrying cash (53%) to be able to avoid violations and abuse.⁵⁸

Experience versus perceptions of abuse and violations

Despite this, 51% of Bangladeshis, 23% of Sudanese, and 13% of West African respondents reported experiencing some form of abuse. (Note that a large proportion of those surveyed did not answer the relevant question.)⁵⁹ Of these, the main incidents reported by Sudanese were physical violence, detention, and witnessing death; for Bangladeshis they were detention, bribery/extortion, and physical violence; and for West Africans physical violence, detention, and bribery/extortion.

Specific risks for children

Migrants and refugees report six main types of exploitative practices and dangers that children on the move may face across the CMR: physical violence, death, kidnapping, detention, sexual violence, and robbery. Among 223 West African respondents, 71% mentioned the risk of physical violence, followed closely by death (69%). Among 24 Sudanese respondents, all reported the risk of death and 92% physical violence.⁶⁰

Perpetrators

The perceived perpetrators of abuses vary by location. In Libya, West African respondents consider criminal gangs and armed groups to be mostly responsible, followed by government officials and then smugglers (see Figure 10). In Mali it is most often armed groups, while in Algeria it is criminal gangs (but note the small sample size in both cases). In Niger—just before crossing the Sahara—and in the Sahara, most respondents consider smugglers to be the main perpetrators of abuses. In the Mediterranean, fewer indicate a culprit, but smugglers and officials are mentioned.

57 Note that sexual violence against men is often unreported, partly due to the stigma associated to this abuse. See, for example: Chynoweth, S. (2019) "[More Than One Million Pains](#)": Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys on the Central Mediterranean Route to Italy. Women's Refugee Commission.

58 This question was introduced during a survey revision, so the sample sizes are slightly different: West Africans, n=333; Bangladeshis, n=63; Sudanese, n=76.

59 This question is not mandatory, and participants are able to skip past it without even marking a response, given its sensitivity.

60 This question is only asked of respondents who are travelling with children, hence the small sample size.

Figure 10. Perceived perpetrators of abuses and violations on the CMR reported by West African respondents, by country / area

	n	Criminals /criminal gangs	Armed groups/ militias	Smug- glers	Govern- ment officials	Other migrants	Local people	Family members	Other	Don't know
Mali	21	38%	52%	24%	29%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Niger	91	43%	34%	52%	36%	10%	2%	0%	0%	3%
Algeria	34	50%	29%	29%	44%	9%	1%	0%	0%	3%
Sahara Desert	70	33%	29%	60%	23%	6%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Libya	517	65%	63%	46%	51%	12%	4%	0%	1%	4%
Mediterranean Sea	231	9%	6%	39%	37%	7%	0%	0%	0%	9%

Note: Refused all below 1%.

An even larger proportion (84%) of Sudanese respondents considered criminal gangs and smugglers to be the main perpetrators of abuses in Libya (see Figure 11). However, particularly in the case of Libya, respondents might not always be able to clearly distinguish between criminal gangs, militias, and smugglers, as criminal gangs and militias might be involved in smuggling, and smugglers involved in other criminal activities.

Figure 11. Perceived perpetrators of abuse and violations on the CMR reported by Sudanese respondents, by country / area

	n	Criminals /criminal gangs	Armed groups/ militias	Smug- glers	Govern- ment officials	Other migrants	Local people	Family members	Other	Don't know
Sahara Desert	12	50%	17%	25%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%
Libya	96	84%	36%	67%	6%	1%	2%	0%	1%	1%
Mediterranean Sea	49	10%	2%	82%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Note: 'Refused' all below 1%.

Libya was also the country with the highest percentage of mentions of criminal gangs as perceived perpetrators of risk among Bangladeshis (63%). However, smugglers appear to be considered less of a threat among Bangladeshis (29%), and militias had a similar score (35%).

Figure 12. Perceived perpetrators of abuse and violations on the CMR reported by Bangladeshi respondents, by country / area

	n	Criminals /criminal gangs	Armed groups/ militias	Smug- glers	Govern- ment officials	Other migrants	Local people	Family members	Other	Don't know
Libya	62	63%	35%	29%	44%	5%	3%	0%	0%	3%
Mediterranean Sea	38	0%	3%	26%	24%	0%	0%	0%	0%	11%

Note: 'Refused' at 3% for Libya and 5% for Mediterranean Sea.

5.2 Protection risks on the Eastern Mediterranean route and the Western Balkan Route

This analysis of the EMR is based on 1,590 surveys conducted in Greece between 2020 and 2021 with refugees and migrants who originate from Afghanistan (954), Syria (321), the DRC (140), and Pakistan (175), as well as 129 surveys conducted in Italy with Pakistanis who took this route (129). Data on the WBR draws from this sample of 129 Pakistani migrants and refugees interviewed in Italy.

5.2.1 Migration patterns

Respondents' profiles

Young adults between 18 and 24 and adults between 25 and 34 represent the most common age groups among respondents, with only 9% being aged 45 or above. Overall, the majority of migrants and refugees surveyed are men (64%) but gender breakdown is different according to nationality: the large majority of Congolese surveyed were men (83%), as were Pakistani respondents (88%), but the percentage drops to 60% in the case of Syrians and 55% for Afghans. Most respondents were travelling with children (56% across the full sample, 74% of all women, and 49% of all men), with the exception of Pakistanis who mostly reported to be travelling alone (81%).⁶¹ Some 83% of respondents were Muslim and 9% Christian.

Forty-four percent of respondents indicated being asylum seekers and 37% refugees, while 8% declared not having legal documents to stay in Greece or Italy. While the majority of Afghans, Congolese and Pakistanis said they were asylum seekers, over half of the Syrians reported refugee status.

The majority of the refugees and migrants surveyed have completed at least some education, although 23% had not completed any (including 34% of Afghans). Overall, a higher percentage of women held a university degree compared to men (14% vs 9% of men) but a larger share of women also had no education (29% vs 19%).

Among the 58% of people who reported earning an income before leaving their home country, women most often reported to have worked as civil servants/teachers (25%) while men were most often being engaged in a small business (25%).

The Pakistani respondents who had taken the WBR to Italy were slightly younger (91% were under 35), and almost all (94%) were travelling without children. Some 77% were asylum seekers, more than the full sample of Pakistani respondents.

Routes used

Eastern Mediterranean Route

Almost all (95%) respondents entered Greece through Turkey, but before the Turkey leg the picture varies considerably. Half of the respondents transited Iran, with other countries transited by much smaller percentages. Syrians mostly transited only through Turkey before reaching Greece. Two-thirds of Afghans crossed Iran—some of whom started their journey in Iran—while some also crossed Pakistan (24%). Pakistanis, like Afghans, primarily crossed through Iran (82%) before reaching Turkey. Almost all Congolese (98%) flew to Turkey, but some flew from other countries (26% transited Uganda, and 19% Tanzania, for example).

Afghan, Pakistani⁶² and Syrian respondents most often mentioned the same three reasons for selecting the route (with no noticeable difference between female and male respondents): the smuggler chose it (41%, 46%, 25%, respectively); it was the only option (31%, 39%, 28%); and family/friends suggested it/were taking it (26%, 27%, 30%). While more Congolese respondents reported that family/friends suggested it/were taking it (56%), they also mentioned that that it was the route they knew best (54%) or the cheapest (37%).

Western Balkan Route

Of the 129 Pakistani respondents surveyed in Italy, 126 started their journey in Pakistan, 88% crossed Turkey, and 67% crossed Greece. A majority crossed Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, with many also crossing Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia. Some travelled through other neighbouring countries, and a few reported having transited

61 This question was introduced later during data collection and asked of 782 respondents.

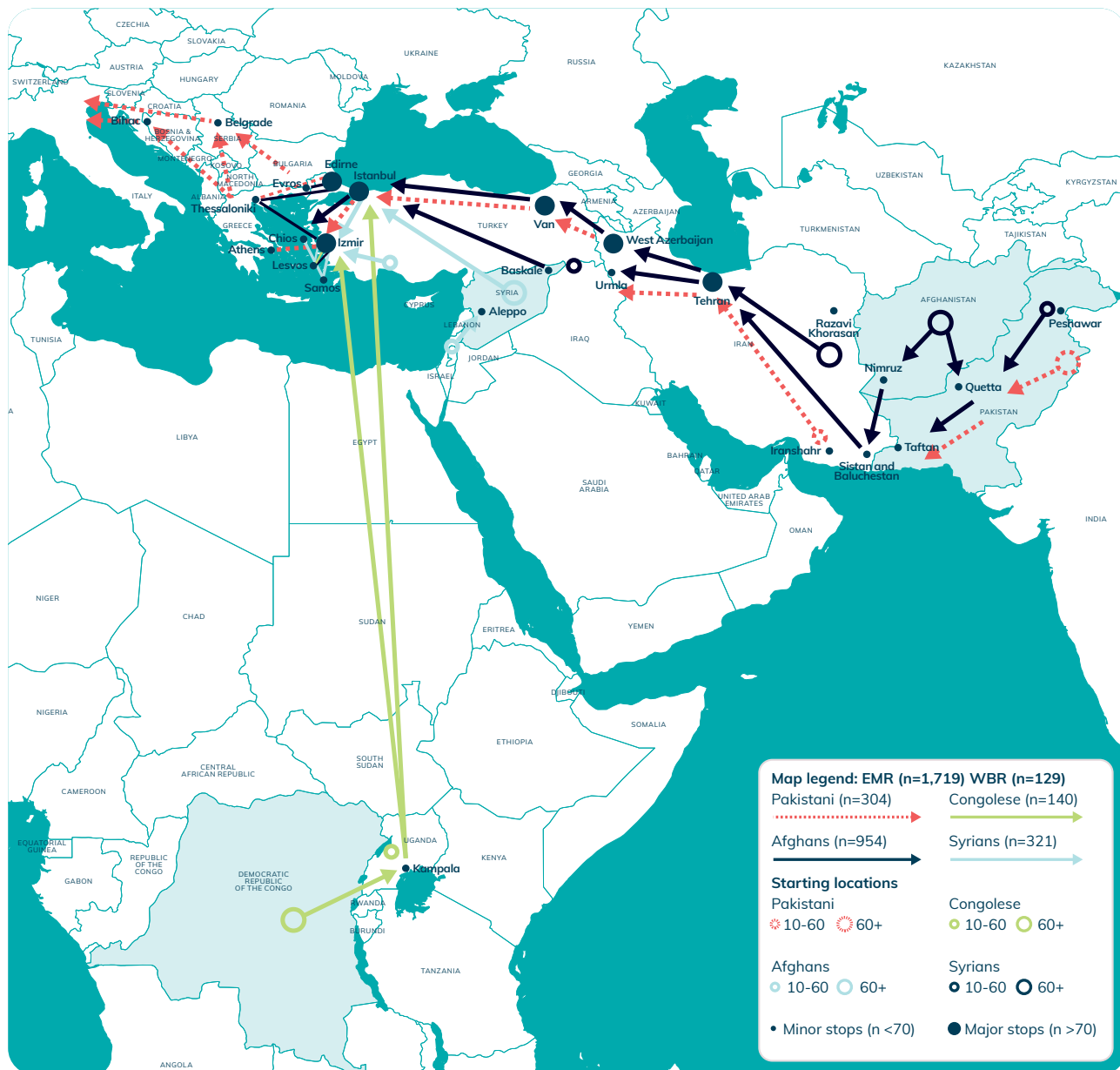
62 This refers to those Pakistanis interviewed in Greece only.

countries further north, including Hungary (11%) and Austria (7%), indicating a much more circuitous route. The main reasons mentioned for travelling to Italy across the Balkans were “the smuggler chose it” (40%), and “it was the only option” (34%).

Stops on the route

Most stops occurred in Turkey and then Iran—the countries most transited. Overall, the main reasons for stopping en route were waiting for transport, resting, and an onward migration journey being blocked by authorities.

Map 3. Reported location of stops along the EMR and WBR



Afghans most often report stopping in Turkey (96%) and Iran (72%). Stops in Turkey were most often in Istanbul (56%) or Van (32%). The most common reasons were to wait for transport (42%), especially in Izmir and Van, but also to rest (24%), particularly in Baskale and Van, or because the onward journey was blocked (most often mentioned by those who stopped in Izmir or Edirne), or to wait for money (mentioned by 30% of those who stopped in Istanbul). In Iran, respondents stopped most often in West Azerbaijan Province (39%) and Tehran (24%). The main reasons were to wait for transport (35%), to rest (27%), and because the onward journey was blocked (24%). The blocking of the journey was mainly at the border areas of Urmia and West Azerbaijan. Some 45% of those who stopped in Razavi Khorosan (86 respondents) did so to look for a smuggler. In Pakistan, fewer stops were reported. Of those who stopped in Balochistan, 68% said they were blocked from moving onward, and 60% of those who stopped in Quetta

said they were waiting for transport. Few stops were mentioned in Greece, and these were mainly to wait for transport (Kavala and Evros).

Three-quarters (76%) of Pakistani respondents stopped in Turkey, and 64% in Iran. They commonly stopped in Istanbul (50%) and in Tehran (37%). Reasons varied, with more reporting that they stopped to work. In Istanbul, the main reasons for stopping were to work (28%), wait for transport (24%) and look for smugglers (23%). The few stopping in Izmir were mainly blocked from moving onward, like other nationality groups. In Iran, Pakistanis similarly stopped in Urmia because the onward journey was blocked, and in Tehran it was to rest (60%) or to wait for money (32%). In Pakistan the most common stop was Quetta (to rest) and in Greece, a minority stopped in Athens or Thessaloniki, mainly to work.

Almost all Syrians (97%) reported stopping in Turkey, mostly in Istanbul (60%) or Izmir (32%), to wait for transport (31%) or rest (23%). Syrians who stopped in Izmir also did so because their onward journey was blocked (40%). In Greece, the most frequent reason for those who stopped (37% of respondents) was to apply for asylum (38%), in Lesbos, Chios or Samos.

Almost all (94%) Congolese respondents stopped in Istanbul to wait for transport, to rest or because the onward migration journey was blocked by authorities. Again, those stopping in Izmir (19%) mainly did so because their onward journey was blocked.

On the WBR, fewer stops were mentioned, with a minority (10%) of respondents reporting stopping in the Bosnia and Herzegovina city of Bihac, and 8% mentioning Belgrade, the Serbian capital. The most common reasons were looking for smugglers, waiting for transport, and blocked onward journeys.

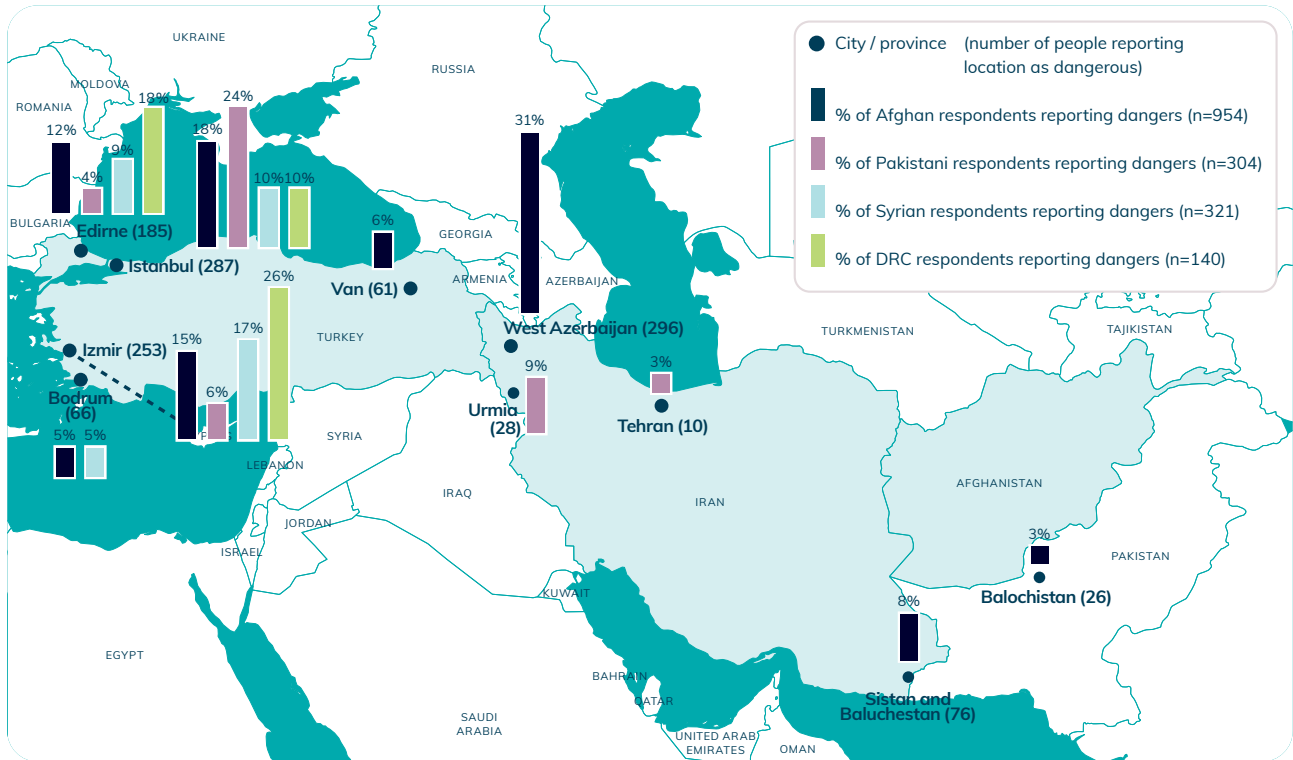
5.2.2 Protection risks

Turkey and Iran are the most frequently transited countries on the EMR-WBR. They are also far more frequently reported to be dangerous: Turkey is considered dangerous by 92% of Afghan respondents, 70% of Syrians, 68% of Congolese, and 57% of Pakistanis. Istanbul, Izmir, and Edirne were the locations in Turkey most often considered to be dangerous.

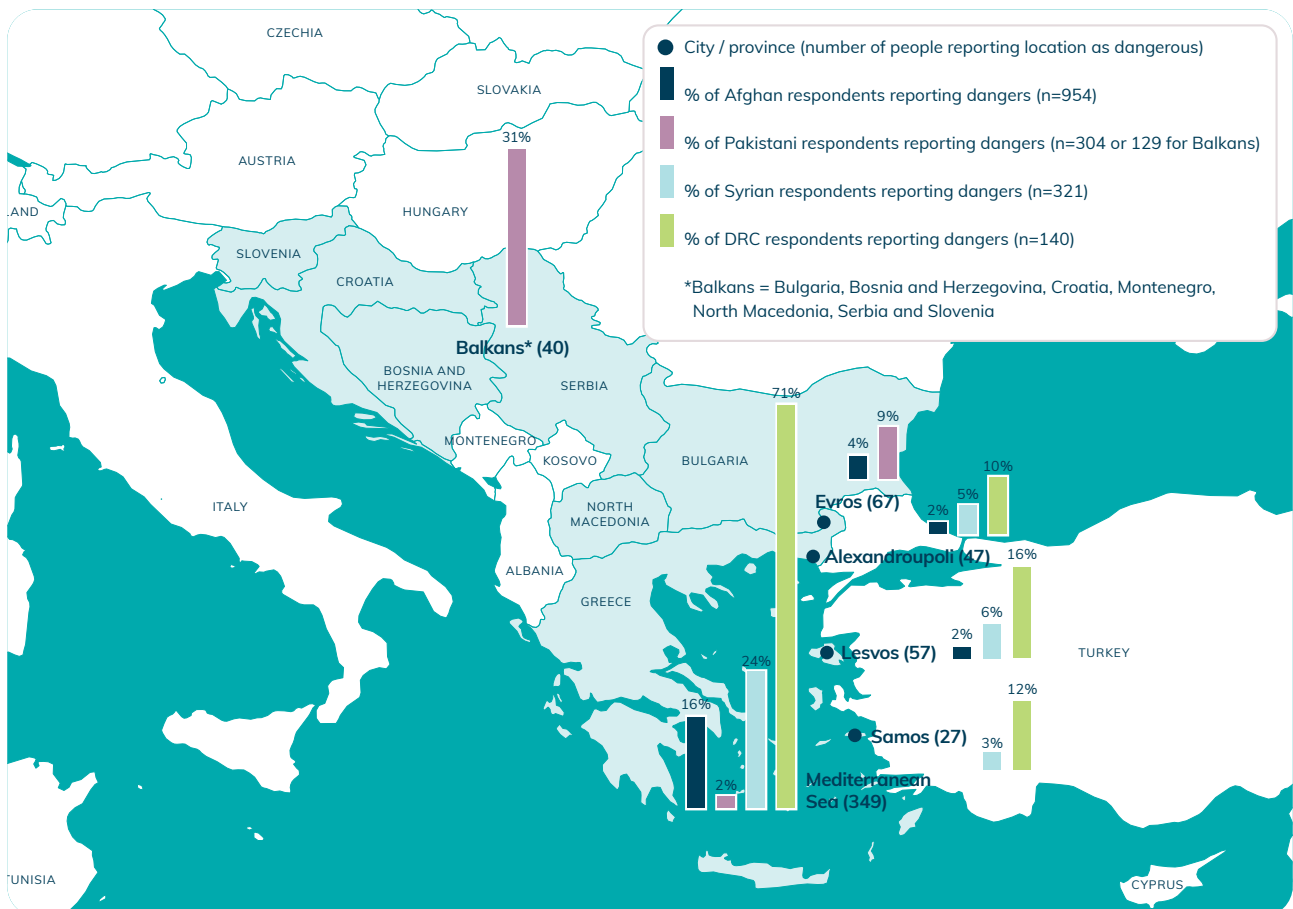
Iran is considered dangerous by 68% of Afghan and 68% of Pakistani respondents (with Afghans mostly reporting West Azerbaijan, and Pakistanis providing a range of less specific answers about locations). Greece itself is considered dangerous by 46% of Congolese, 29% of Pakistani, 26% of Syrian, and 13% of Afghan respondents. The Mediterranean is considered dangerous by 71% of Congolese, 24% of Syrians, 16% of Afghans and 7% of Pakistanis, percentages that are much lower than those for the much-longer and more dangerous Central Mediterranean crossing. The maps below (Map 4) indicate the most common reported dangerous locations, and the proportion of each sample citing them.

Map 4. Locations perceived as dangerous on the EMR and WBR

A



B



Main risks and abuses

Afghan respondents reported Turkey more frequently than other countries as a risky place (it was also the most often transited) for a range of incidents—mainly detention and physical violence, but also death, sexual violence, and robbery (see Figure 13). The risk of detention was the most mentioned in Bodrum (86% of those who found it dangerous) and Edirne (84%). Iran was more commonly perceived to pose a risk of death, alongside physical violence and detention: detention was reported among 73% of those who mentioned West Azerbaijan. Sistan and Baluchestan was considered to pose risks of detention (74% of those who reported it as dangerous), physical violence (71%), and kidnapping (63%). Sexual violence was frequently mentioned in Bodrum (58%) and Van (59%) in Turkey. It is interesting to note the range of perceived risks in the Mediterranean is broader than those cited on the CMR, and include detention and physical violence. Finally, it is worth noting that most of the “other” risks reported by Afghans in Greece were described as pushbacks at the border.

Figure 13. Perceived risks on the EMR reported by Afghan respondents, by country / area

	n	Death	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Detention	Kidnap-ping	Robbery	Bribery/ extortion	Non-physical violence	Other
Pakistan	89	48%	78%	35%	56%	44%	72%	1%	1%	11%
Iran	653	64%	66%	31%	65%	26%	52%	4%	1%	20%
Turkey	877	33%	53%	34%	69%	16%	35%	3%	0%	15%
Mediterranean Sea	150	96%	57%	7%	59%	1%	9%	3%	0%	4%
Greece	126	19%	69%	7%	38%	1%	56%	4%	0%	66%

Note: 'Refused' all below 1%. "Other" for Greece is mainly pushbacks at the border. The category 'injury / ill-health / conditions on the route' does not appear because it was not reported.

Syrian respondents reported risks in Turkey and Greece, but they perceived incidents such as physical violence and detention to be less common than Afghans did (see Figure 14). Syrian respondents reported physical violence in Greece and Turkey (52% and 43% of those who reported places in these countries as dangerous) and detention (43% and 59%). Risks of detention were reported to be high in Istanbul (79%) and Izmir (60%) in Turkey, and in Alexandroupoli (88%) in Greece.

Figure 14. Perceived risks on the EMR reported by Syrian respondents, by country / area

	n	Death	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Detention	Kidnap-ping	Robbery	Bribery/ extortion	Injury / ill health / conditions	Non-physical violence	Other
Turkey	226	29%	43%	8%	59%	4%	22%	13%	5%	5%	14%
Mediterranean Sea	77	79%	8%	0%	44%	3%	4%	3%	1%	4%	23%
Greece	83	17%	52%	8%	43%	2%	37%	8%	0%	2%	43%

Note: 'Refused' all below 1%. "Other" for Greece is mainly pushbacks at the border; other for Mediterranean is mainly shipwrecks.

By contrast, a large majority of Congolese respondents who reported Turkey as dangerous mentioned detention and physical violence, and their figure for physical violence in Greece was even higher (see Figure 15). Overall, Congolese reported more risks.

Figure 15. Perceived risks on the EMR reported by Congolese respondents, by country / area

	n	Death	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Detention	Kidnaping	Robbery	Bribery/ extortion	Injury / ill health / conditions	Non-physical violence	Other
Turkey	95	19%	64%	22%	85%	9%	53%	59%	21%	42%	7%
Mediterranean Sea	100	85%	45%	2%	73%	2%	18%	36%	24%	35%	3%
Greece	64	17%	92%	52%	48%	5%	72%	39%	0%	25%	6%

Note: 'Refused' all below 1%.

Pakistani respondents had a common concern about death in Iran as well as crossing the Mediterranean (see Figure 16). In Greece and the Balkans, the concern was more around physical violence, although, as for Afghans, a majority mentioned pushbacks and violations at the border to Greece (categorized as "other"). Detention was a fairly common concern across countries.

Figure 16. Perceived risks on the EMR-WBR reported by Pakistani respondents, by country / area

	n	Death	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Detention	Kidnaping	Robbery	Bribery/ extortion	Injury / ill health / conditions	Non-physical violence	Other
Iran	206	72%	45%	3%	34%	14%	24%	3%	1%	0%	27%
Turkey	174	28%	40%	9%	45%	25%	21%	3%	2%	1%	12%
Mediterranean Sea	22	82%	23%	0%	9%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%
Greece	88	13%	74%	1%	50%	1%	27%	0%	1%	1%	78%
Balkans	40	28%	78%	3%	40%	13%	43%	10%	10%	0%	5%

Note: 'Refused' all below 1%. "Other" in Greece mainly relates to pushbacks and confiscation of property.

Self-protection strategies

To protect themselves from abuse and crime during the journey, almost all respondents reported that they implement at least one risk mitigation strategy (95% of Afghans, 99% of Congolese, 97% of Syrians, and 90% of Pakistanis).

A majority of Congolese respondents mentioned planning their journey carefully (71%) as their main strategy, followed by looking for information and recommendations (66%), and stopping in places with trusted contacts (62%). Other groups used fewer strategies. Stopping in places with trusted contacts (41%) and keeping in regular contact with family (41%) were the strategies most frequently mentioned by Afghans; Syrians sought to keep regular contact with family (34%), but they also mentioned the importance of planning their journey carefully (35%) and looking for information and following recommendations (33%). Travelling in a group was most commonly mentioned by Pakistan respondents (38%), followed by regular contact with family (28%).

Experience of abuse and violations versus perceptions

Interestingly, compared to the high levels of perceived risks, the prevalence of experienced protection incidents reported by respondents from Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, and DRC on the EMR and WBR is relatively low, at 13% of all respondents (ranging from 2% of Afghans to 31% of Congolese, with Congolese reporting far more incidents).⁶³ The prevalence of reported protection incidents on the CMR is more than twice as high for the whole sample, suggesting that the EMR is indeed a less perilous route, at least among the sample surveyed for this study.

⁶³ Note that the question is not mandatory, given its sensitivity, so this does not give a precise indication of experience of protections incidents among respondents.

Specific risks for children

Respondents travelling with children reported a range of risks for children. Congolese reported the largest number of risks: 71% mentioned trafficking and exploitation, and 79% mentioned physical violence (n=112). Afghans travelling with children (n=712) reported physical (73%) and sexual (65%) violence, while Syrians (n=236) mentioned fewer risks, although 47% reported death and 37% physical violence. Pakistani respondents travelling with children (n=89) most frequently mentioned the risk of physical violence (57%), followed by death (45%) and kidnapping (46%), the last two particularly among those interviewed in Italy.

Perpetrators

Afghan respondents consistently reported state agents—such as border guards, immigration officials, police, and military personnel—as the main perpetrators of abuses (see Figure 17). Only in Pakistan was another group more frequently mentioned: criminals/gangs. In Turkey, a majority mentioned smugglers too, while armed groups/militias were also reported in the Mediterranean (60%), possibly related to the reports about unidentified armed men pushing back refugees and migrants at sea between Greece and Turkey, as described in the literature section.

Figure 17. Perceived perpetrators of abuse and violations on the EMR reported by Afghan respondents, by country / area

	n	Criminals/ criminal gangs	Armed groups/ militias	Smugglers	Government officials	Other migrants	Family members	Other
Afghanistan	35	31%	3%	14%	80%	0%	3%	3%
Pakistan	89	67%	45%	19%	65%	18%	0%	3%
Iran	653	47%	33%	32%	82%	19%	2%	4%
Turkey	877	40%	20%	55%	66%	33%	4%	0%
Mediterranean Sea	150	43%	60%	32%	81%	1%	9%	6%
Greece	126	13%	5%	9%	87%	13%	0%	6%

Note: 'Refused' and 'don't know' all 1% or lower.

Syrians also mentioned government officials more frequently, especially in Turkey, where they also often (42%) mentioned smugglers (see Figure 18).

Figure 18. Perceived perpetrators of abuse and violations on the EMR reported by Syrian respondents, by country / area

	n	Criminals/ criminal gangs	Armed groups/ militias	Smugglers	Government officials	Other migrants	Family members	Other
Turkey	226	20%	8%	42%	73%	15%	0%	0%
Mediterranean Sea	77	22%	21%	31%	62%	8%	0%	0%
Greece	83	29%	8%	6%	80%	29%	0%	0%

Note: 'Refused' and 'don't know' all 1% or lower.

Again, Congolese respondents more frequently mentioned a more diverse array of perpetrators, with a more frequent reporting of criminals and criminal gangs, smugglers, and other migrants, particularly in Greece (see Figure 19). This may relate to reports of inter-communal violence in migrant reception centres.

Figure 19. Perceived perpetrators of abuse and violations on the EMR reported by Congolese respondents, by country / area

	n	Criminals/ criminal gangs	Armed groups/ militias	Smugglers	Government officials	Other migrants	Family members	Other
Turkey	95	72%	31%	57%	91%	40%	0%	0%
Mediterranean Sea	100	60%	40%	64%	84%	25%	0%	5%
Greece	64	64%	13%	22%	59%	89%	0%	3%

Note: 'Refused' and 'don't know' all below 1%.

Pakistani respondents also reported government officials far more frequently as perpetrators of abuse, especially in Iran and Greece (see Figure 20).

Figure 20. Perceived perpetrators of abuse and violations on the EMR-WBR reported by Pakistani respondents, by country / area

	n	Criminals/ criminal gangs	Armed groups/ militias	Smugglers	Government officials	Other migrants	Family members	Other
Iran	206	17%	10%	19%	80%	2%	0%	7%
Turkey	174	12%	8%	47%	52%	7%	0%	9%
Mediterranean Sea	22	14%	9%	41%	45%	18%	0%	0%
Greece	88	5%	2%	3%	78%	2%	0%	8%
Balkans	40	25%	18%	20%	60%	13%	0%	10%

Note: 'Refused' and 'don't know' all 1% or below, except 3% 'don't know' for the Balkans.

6. Discussion

4Mi data shows that migrants and refugees perceive routes to Europe to be fraught with multiple dangers. Across the CMR, according to 4Mi respondents, the main risks are of death, physical violence, and detention (although this varies according to the location and the origin of respondents). Libya figures prominently: it is frequently reported as dangerous, and for a multitude of reasons.⁶⁴ Across the EMR and the WBR, we have a more heterogeneous pattern. There is a wider variety of type of incident, especially between different nationalities and locations. However, across the entire sample there was consensus in indicating Turkey as dangerous, and more with regard to the risk of detention than other places. While there are methodological reasons for Turkey and Libya being commonly mentioned (almost all members of each sample transited these countries), the extent to which they are reported as dangerous is still remarkable. Interestingly, these two countries are also the primary geographic focus in the EU's attempts to reduce the number of arrivals.

It makes sense that the perception of risks is higher than the actual experience of protection incidents across the routes. However, there is a difference between routes in reported experience. The proportion of respondents on the CMR reporting having experienced a protection incident was much higher than that of those who took the EMR or WBR, suggesting that the CMR is the more dangerous route.⁶⁵

It is logical to assume that the tightening of border controls by the EU, and the EU's partnerships with origin and transit countries to manage migration flows, have considerably lengthened 4Mi respondents' irregular journeys, thereby increasing the likelihood of their experiencing abuse or violations. Indeed, several studies have shown how the time spent on the move is concomitantly the cause and the consequence of multiple protection risks, be they merely perceived or actually experienced.⁶⁶ Most people travelling along mixed migration routes live in a state of transit for months or years as they attempt to reach their destinations. Being further away from their own social networks opens the way to new forms of exploitation and dependence and exposes migrants and refugees to the risk of abduction, physical and sexual violence, arbitrary arrest, and extortion at the hands of criminal groups, militias, and law enforcement in transit countries.

With regard to perpetrators of protection incidents along the CMR, two observations can be made: criminal gangs and militias are generally considered to be the most likely culprits. There are conflict zones in Mali and elsewhere where respondents are likely to encounter militias. Militias are operating in Libya, and the context there is such that, as previously noted, it is not often easy to distinguish between smugglers, armed groups, and criminal gangs. Smugglers are often perceived to be responsible for abuses in the Sahara and in the Mediterranean. Along the EMR/WBR, respondents do mention smugglers as perceived abusers, but more often report state authorities—in the form of military/police, government officials, or border authorities—as the main perpetrators of abuse and violence experienced during their journeys to Europe.

The EU's approach to migration towards Europe and the observed trends in this study

Indeed, although they dwarf the protection incidents experienced while on the move, 4Mi respondents' perceptions of protection risks echo what other studies and reports have observed: that abuses, violence, and death are common occurrence when migrants and refugees transit the countries where Europe's externalization policies are implemented—most notably Libya, Niger and Mali across the CMR, and Turkey in the EMR.⁶⁷ Against this background, the externalization policies of the EU and its Member States, and their partnerships with authorities in third countries, while arguably effective in terms of reducing arrivals to Europe along various migration routes, remain a cause of significant concern in terms of their ethical and financial costs and their impact on the protection of people on the move.

64 See also: UNHCR (2021) [Routes towards the Western and Central Mediterranean Sea](#).

65 Note that many respondents prefer not to answer this question, so there may be underreporting.

66 IMREF (2020) [Accessing the Most Vulnerable Migrants in Ouagadougou and Agadez](#); Jucker, J.-L. & Garver-Affeldt, J. (2020) [A Sharper Lens on Vulnerability \(West Africa\) A statistical analysis of the determinants of vulnerability to protection incidents among refugees and migrants in West Africa](#), Mixed Migration Centre.

67 UNHCR (2018) [Desperate Journeys – Refugees and Migrants Arriving in Europe and at Europe's Borders](#).

In fact, the current approach is highly likely to exacerbate migrants' and refugees' protection risks. Studies have indeed confirmed how these measures run counter to the international and human rights standards set out for the protection of people on the move. A case in point is Europe's ongoing collaboration with the Libyan coast guard to intercept and return large numbers of migrants and refugees to Tripoli, the city most often considered to be dangerous by 4Mi respondents, and one that human rights groups and international organizations have often mentioned in connection to severe forms of violence against, and the unlawful detention of, migrants and refugees. A 2021 report by Amnesty International, for example, highlighted that physical violence and other abuses in Libya had shown no indication of diminishing over the previous decade.⁶⁸

Migrants' and refugees' awareness of the protection risks across the CMR also indicate something else: that there is a sense that such risks might be unavoidable on these mixed migration journeys towards Europe. This is even more remarkable if we consider the fact that some of the nationalities in our sample—Bangladeshis in particular—for whom it would seem “easier” and safer to use the EMR, have opted to attempt the more dangerous crossing via the CMR from Libya to Italy. The question is therefore: why do our research respondents continue to use certain routes and locations, despite the many, known and very real, risks?

An explanation could be found in the fact that increasingly restrictive border controls and the lack of legal pathways leave migrants and refugees wishing to enter Europe with no other options. Greece is a case in point. Numerous reports and studies have demonstrated how the EU-Turkey Statement and tighter border controls across the WBR have stemmed the flow of people and exposed migrants to considerable protection risks by forcing them to take highly perilous routes.⁶⁹ Also the widespread tendency to indiscriminately incarcerate migrants entering the country for lengthy periods of time, in line with the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal, as well as the practice of pushbacks by the Greek coast guard might have led migrants and refugees to opt for the more dangerous, yet more available, paths to Europe.⁷⁰

Relatedly, the tightening of border controls increases refugees' and migrants' dependency on smugglers to circumvent border controls, with smugglers reducing the chances of apprehension by employing increasingly dangerous strategies, which ultimately increases the risks for concerned refugees and migrants. Such strategies include setting off on longer and therefore more dangerous routes across the sea and the desert, choosing unsafe points of embarkation and disembarkation, and abandoning people on vessels in rough seas.⁷¹

The findings of our study in relation to the most common perpetrators of abuse across the three routes raise questions about the consequences of the EU approach to migration for the protection of people on the move. The prominence of militias and armed gangs among the main perpetrators of abuse reported by 4Mi respondents who travelled the CMR is certainly explained by the fact that they crossed areas characterized by persistent political instability, conflict and insecurity, and the breakdown of the rule of law. Yet, the role played by militias and gangs in the protection risks faced by migrants and refugees cannot be disentangled from the EU's externalization policies or its interaction with local political economies. As noted in the previous section, Libya and Niger have been systematically engaged by the EU to stem migration flows and fight migrant smuggling and trafficking. In fact, local militias have sometimes become involved in fighting smuggling groups and/or intercepting refugees and migrants at sea and pulling them back to Libya.

To some extent, a similar logic can also be applied to EMR and the WBR. Across these two routes, respondents report not militia but individuals or elements within state authorities as the most common perpetrators of violence.⁷² While this is different, it is clear that certain state officials might target migrants and refugees for somewhat similar goals and motivations as in other countries across the CMR: stemming migration flows increasingly plays a role in local power dynamics and has become a way to secure support, funding, and resources from the European Union and its individual Member States. Experts, for example, have shown how the EU's agreement with Turkey in 2016 has encouraged local authorities to violate migrants' and refugees' rights, rather than offering them protection.⁷³

68 Amnesty International (2021) [‘No One Will Look for You’: Forcibly Returned from Sea to Abusive Detention in Libya](#).

69 Amnesty International (2017) [The EU-Turkey deal: Europe's year of shame](#).

70 Forin, R. & Frouws, B. (2022) [What's new? Analysing the latest trends on the Central Mediterranean mixed migration route to Italy](#).

71 Achilli, L. (2015) [The Smuggler: hero or felon?](#). European University Institute / Migration Policy Centre.

72 InfoMigrants (2021) [Illegal migrant pushbacks from Croatia to Bosnia captured on camera](#); Lighthouse Reports (2021) [Unmasking Europe's Shadow Armies](#).

73 Rankin, J. (2021) [EU plan to fund Turkey border control 'risks refugees' forced return'](#). The Guardian.

In sum, although it would be simplistic to claim that EU border policies alone create all the protection risks faced by migrants and refugees on the routes discussed in this study,⁷⁴ there seems to be a concerning alignment between the perpetrators our respondents most fear and the actors who have secured the funding allocated by the EU for migration management and the fight against human smuggling.

Finally, although 4Mi data show that smugglers do remain a considerable protection concern among people on the move to Europe, they are rarely among the most common perpetrators of violence, according to respondents. These findings might indicate that an EU approach overwhelmingly focused on securitization and the fight against human smuggling—an approach based on the argument that breaking the so-called business model of smuggling would ensure the safety of refugees and migrants by ending their perilous crossings of the Mediterranean—might not be as effective as portrayed in policy circles.⁷⁵

Most importantly, we have reason to believe that the fight against human smuggling substantially increases migrants' and refugees' protection risks. Empirical research shows that the intensification of law enforcement efforts across smuggling routes has at times strengthened the interdependence between human smuggling and human trafficking. For example, some migrants decided to voluntarily enter situations characterized by severe forms of exploitation (such as forced labour and sex trafficking), either to enhance their mobility or to increase their likelihood of survival in a context of protracted immobility.

7. Conclusions & recommendations

By contributing to existing knowledge about the protection risks encountered by refugees and migrants across the CMR, EMR, and WBR, analysis of 4Mi data offers a series of recommendations aimed at influencing policymakers and authorities with a view to improving Europe's migration management policies and, in particular, the full implementation of the objectives set out in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees. The EU and its Member States should:

- Provide detailed and evidence-based analyses of the impact of the EU's collaboration with third country partners on both human rights and local economies affected by the implementation of EU externalization measures. These analyses should be conducted on a case-by-case basis for all affected communities in each partner country;
- Support the sharing of information on perpetrators of rights violations among law enforcement actors at national and international levels, including outside of Europe, ensuring that all cooperation is undertaken in a manner consistent with international human rights and refugee law;
- Expand the collaboration with the Government of Turkey to increase its capacity in all provinces to properly carry out refugee status determination and provide international protection, while taking into account age- gender- and diversity-specific vulnerabilities and protection challenges (e.g. in the case of Afghans, single women with children and young men);
- Cease any assistance contributing to interception, return, and often detention of refugees and migrants in Libya, given that it is not a safe place. Also, ensure that no person will face the risk of inhumane and degrading treatment in Libya and support humanitarian programs that respond to the needs of the people;
- Open new channels of legal entry and reinforce existing ones by granting humanitarian visas, creating humanitarian corridors between transit countries and Europe, expanding Member States' resettlement programmes, and facilitating alternative legal routes—such as family reunification, university fellowships and scholarships, training programmes;
- Improve monitoring of deaths along migration routes to Europe by including more detail in data-collection efforts on cases of deaths along the route, be they at sea, in official detention centres, in the desert, or otherwise recorded by humanitarian actors.

74 Indeed, the very fact that government authorities are often mentioned by our respondents as top perpetrators of risks in Iran—a country where Europe has not still established partnerships—tells a much more complex story.

75 European Commission (2021) [A renewed EU action plan against migrant smuggling \(2021-2025\)](#).



The MMC is a global network, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America hosted in DRC regional offices, and a small global team in Geneva, engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

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