

OVERVIEW

In the first three months of 2021, some 4,600 refugees and migrants crossed the sea from Libya to Europe, a 53% increase compared to the same period in 2020. As in previous years, many of those taking this route had international protection needs or other specific needs on account of their personal circumstances or experiences during the journey, including in Libya, due to having been victims of trafficking, gender-based violence, or being unaccompanied children.

In addition, 4,800 refugees and migrants who departed from Libya by sea were also disembarked in Libya in the first three months of 2021, mostly following interceptions or rescues by the Libyan Coast Guard.¹ UNHCR continues to advise against returns to Libya, which is not a safe place for disembarkation.²



4,600 refugees and migrants crossed the sea from Libya to Europe between January and March 2021 vs. **3,000** in the same period last year

ARRIVALS TO ITALY AND MALTA

Some 4,500 refugees and migrants have arrived in Italy from Libya so far in 2021, a 143% increase compared to the same period last year. This includes 1,500 persons who arrived in March 2021. So far this year, 61% of all sea arrivals in Italy had departed from Libya.³

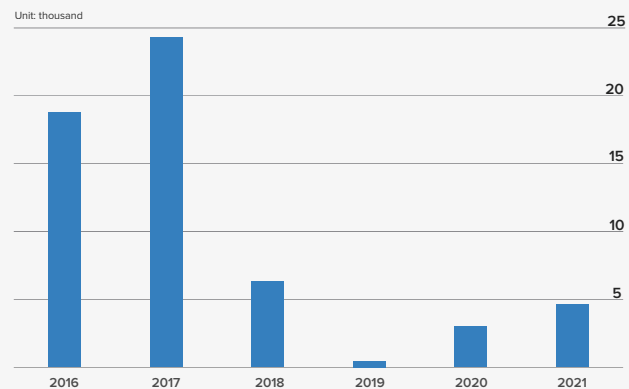
A further 65 refugees and migrants have disembarked in Malta so far in 2021, a 94% decrease compared to the same period last year. All of these persons arrived in February (none in January or March).

NATIONALITIES AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

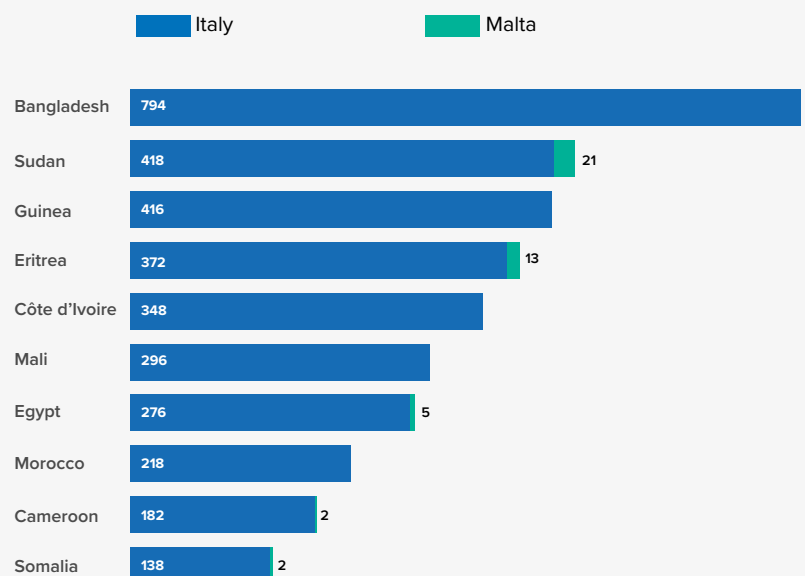
According to available information, so far in 2021, Bangladeshis, Sudanese and Guineans have been the primary nationality groups of arrivals in Italy, and Sudanese, Eritreans and Syrians the primary nationality groups of arrivals in Malta. Some 74% of all arrivals so far have been men, 21% children (most of them unaccompanied) and 5% women.

This, however, does not always accurately represent the primary nationalities departing from the Libyan coast, as Sudanese, Malians and Guineans have been the primary nationality groups disembarked in Libya this year.⁴

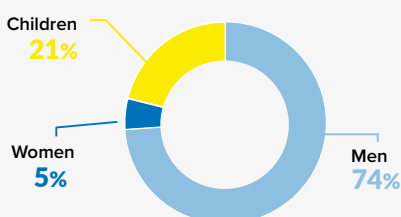
Arrivals by sea to Europe from Libya (January to March)



Most common nationalities arriving in Italy and Malta after departing from Libya (January to March 2021)



Demographic breakdown (January to March 2021)



RESCUE AT SEA

UNHCR remains concerned about the lack of search and rescue capacity off the Libyan coast. For example, in the Libyan Search and Rescue Region (SRR),⁵ the vast majority of interventions have been performed by the Libyan Coast Guard with few alternatives available. This means that most refugees and migrants rescued or intercepted in this region are disembarked in Libya and subsequently transferred to detention, including shipwreck survivors. The gaps in search and rescue capacity also entail risks that refugees and migrants may not be rescued and could potentially perish at sea.⁶

Of all persons rescued or intercepted in the Libyan SRR so far in 2021, 75% have been rescued or intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard and General Administration for Coastal Security, resulting in their disembarkation in Libya. Only 25% of those rescued in this region have been disembarked in a place of safety, mostly after interventions by NGOs.

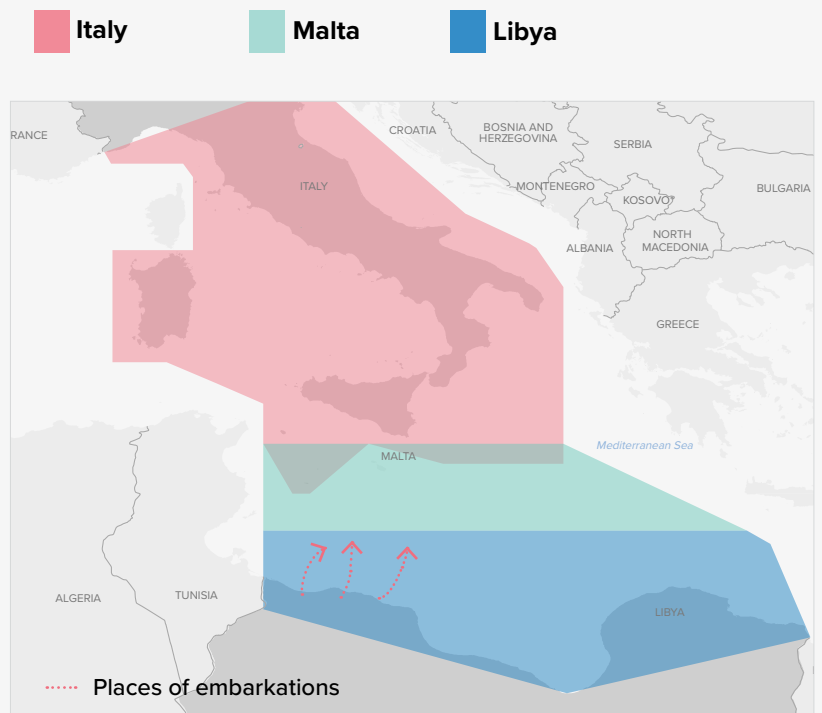
In 2021, in addition to those rescued by NGOs or merchant vessels in the Libyan SRR, some 43% of refugees and migrants who have reached Europe from Libya travelled some 140 nautical miles to reach the Italian SRR where most were then rescued by Italian authorities, compared to 7% in the same period last year. This means that people are travelling much farther and spending more time at sea than in previous years when more search and rescue capacity was available in international waters off the Libyan coast.

DEAD AND MISSING AT SEA

So far this year, at least 162 refugees and migrants have died or gone missing at sea after departing from Libya, compared to 98 in the same period last year.⁷ Of these, the majority (74%) were reported to have died or gone missing within the Libyan Search and Rescue Region.

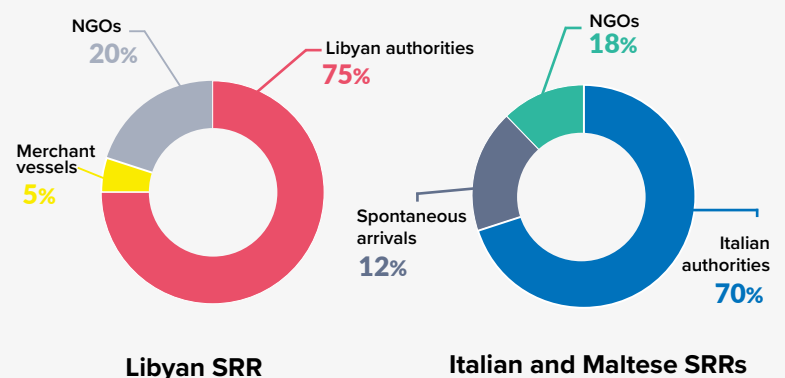
More needs to be done to save lives in the Central Mediterranean, including by enhancing search and rescue capacity, strengthening protection in countries along routes to Libya, addressing root causes of displacement and increasing access to safe and legal pathways.

Search and Rescue Regions



The search and rescue regions depicted are as per the coordinates listed by the International Maritime Organization – (<https://www.imo.org/>). Includes Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 [1999]). The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Rescues or interceptions in SRRs by type of actor (January to March 2021)



¹ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/86060>. In addition, some 127 refugees and migrants were disembarked in Tunisia after rescue by Tunisian authorities.

² <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5f1edee24.html>

³ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/85997>

⁴ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/86060>

⁵ The establishment of an SRR means that, in line with obligations arising from international maritime law, a State commits to coordinating search and rescue operations within the region and exercises primary responsibility when the rescue takes place within its SRR to ensure cooperation and coordination for disembarkation. However, international maritime law does not prescribe where persons rescued in that region must be disembarked as long as the port is safe and disembarkation is effected as soon as reasonably practicable.

⁶ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/1/600837294/iom-unhcr-shipwreck-libya-claims-40-lives.html>

⁷ Figures included as dead and missing are compiled from a variety of sources, of which the quality and reliability can vary. Every effort has been made to ensure that all statistical information is verified, and figures on dead and missing at sea represent conservative estimates of a number that could possibly be higher than reported. The numbers of dead and missing in the UNHCR data relate to the incidents for which UNHCR has received a sufficient level of detail.