



## Unpacking a rapidly changing scenario:

migration flows, routes and trajectories across the Mediterranean

Unravelling the Mediterranean Migration Crisis (MEDMIG)

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Heaven Crawley, Franck Duvell, Nando Sigona, Simon McMahon, Katharine Jones



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



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Heaven Crawley

Franck Duvell

Nando Sigona

Simon McMahon

Katharine Jones

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## Key findings

In 2015 over one million people crossed the Mediterranean to Europe in search of safety and a better life. Thousands died along the way. The MEDMIG project seeks to better understand these unprecedented movements in the region by examining the journeys, motivations and aspirations of refugees and migrants in Italy, Greece, Turkey and Malta.

### Who is on the move?

2015 marked the sharpest rise in sea arrivals to the EU with a four-fold increase from 2014.

Significant differences have developed in the magnitude and composition of the flows along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes. There has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of people moving through the Eastern Mediterranean into Greece but little change from 2014 on the Central Mediterranean route to Italy.

The composition of flows has changed considerably, most notably the rapid decline in the arrival of Syrians into Italy who went from 24% of arrivals in 2014 to just 5% in 2015. This contrasts with Greece where Syrians make up 56% of all sea arrivals. The rate of deaths or missing people (number of deaths or missing per 1000 people) in the Mediterranean has fallen significantly in 2015 when compared with the preceding year.

The migration of single family members through the Central Mediterranean route stands in stark contrast to the increasing migration of families crossing the Aegean from Turkey to Greece. Within our sample of 500 refugees and migrants the proportion of people travelling with their children is significantly higher on the Eastern Mediterranean compared with the Central Mediterranean route.

Two thirds of our respondents have a secondary school or university education. For those arriving in Greece the level rose to 78%, of whom a third has a university education. Nearly three quarters (72%) of people were in employment before making the journey to Europe, and the proportion

is significantly higher among those arriving in Greece (87%) than those arriving in Italy (60%)

### Why are people moving?

Although the increase in the scale of flows is partly associated with the deteriorating situation in Syria, it should be remembered that the drivers of migration to Europe are complex and multi-faceted.

84% of sea arrivals in 2015 came from the world's top 10 refugee producing countries, with Syrian nationals representing just over 50%. This means that the so-called 'migration crisis' can be more accurately described as a crisis of refugee protection.

Our emerging findings challenge ideas about the relationship between so-called 'push' and 'pull' factors which underpin many of the responses to increased migration. Within our sample, mixed motivations are an important feature of individual migrant journeys.

Changes to migration policies and increased border controls have led to protracted and fragmented journeys and make it increasingly difficult for people to safely and legally access protection and employment.

Refugees and migrants have only partial information about migration policies in particular countries and decisions about where to go are usually made ad hoc, along the route.

### Flows, journeys and trajectories

Migration across the Mediterranean in 2015 has conventionally been perceived as one coherent flow. This is challenged by our emerging findings which indicate that both the nature of migration patterns and their magnitude reflect the merging of several flows.

Migration into Europe is made up of distinct 'sub-flows' from many countries and regions and includes individuals with diverse trajectories. These flows merge in Turkey and Libya,

## Key findings (cont.)

and it is this merging which partly explains the magnitude and continuation over recent months.

People's migration trajectories are varied. Many people have previously been displaced or have been migrating for long periods of time. These longer trajectories are important in understanding the dynamics of migration into and through Europe.

## Policy implications

There have been policy failures in response to the movement of people across the Mediterranean. This is in part due to weaknesses of implementation, but policy failures also reflect flawed assumptions about the reasons why people move, the factors that shape their longer-term migration trajectories and their journeys to Europe.

The vast majority of people migrate across the Mediterranean by boat because they believe that their lives are in danger and/or that there is no future for themselves (and their children) in countries of origin and transit.

Deterrence policies without access to protection, resettlement or humanitarian assistance will simply drive demand for the services of smugglers who can facilitate access and will push people into taking ever more risky routes into and within Europe.

There is no evidence that search and rescue operations create a so-called 'pull effect'.

There is a need for nuanced, tailored and targeted policy responses which reflect diverse, stratified and increasingly complex flows.

## Unpacking a rapidly changing scenario: migration flows, routes and trajectories across the Mediterranean

Since September 2015 a team of researchers led by the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University working in collaboration with University of Birmingham's Institute for Research into Superdiversity and the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society at Oxford University in the UK and partners in Greece (ELIAMEP), Italy (FIERI), Turkey (Yasar University) and Malta (People for Change Foundation), has been undertaking research into the migration crisis at the borders of Southern Europe.

In 2015 an estimated 1,011,712 people crossed the Mediterranean to Europe in search of safety and a better life<sup>1</sup>. 3,770 are known to have died trying to make this journey<sup>2</sup>. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Department for International Development (DfID), the MEDMIG project examines the dynamics, determinants, drivers and infrastructures underpinning this recent migration across, and loss of life in, the Mediterranean.

This research brief provides an overview of the research that has been undertaken to date. It summarises our emerging findings in relation to the dynamics of the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes, as well as the characteristics of those on the move and their journeys and trajectories. The brief also reflects on the implications on policy at the local, national and EU levels.

### Our project

Although large scale migration in Europe is nothing new, events over the last year have triggered a multi-faceted refugee, border, humanitarian and political crisis. Migration policy is currently driven by moral panic, patchy knowledge and broad assumptions about the people at the heart of the story: refugees and migrants themselves. There is a grave lack of knowledge about their motivations, aspirations and about the journeys and processes by which they come to arrive in the EU.

Our project aims to **better understand the processes which influence, inform and shape migration by speaking directly with those who crossed the Mediterranean in 2015 and with the numerous state and non-state actors who create opportunities and constraints along the way.** It provides the first large-scale, systematic and comparative study of the backgrounds, experiences, routes and aspirations of refugees and migrants in four European countries. Our team of researchers was based in the field from September to December 2015, observing events as they unfolded. During this time we interviewed **500 refugees and migrants** travelling via the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes: 205 in Italy (Sicily, Apulia, Rome, Piedmont, Bologna) and 20 in Malta (Central Mediterranean route); 220 in Greece (Athens, Lesbos) and 60 in Turkey (Izmir, Istanbul) (Eastern Mediterranean route). We also interviewed **more than 100 stakeholders**, including politicians, policy makers, naval officers and coastguards, representatives of international, non-governmental and civil society organisations, as well as volunteers to gain broader insights into the experiences and journeys of the refugees and migrants with whom they come into contact.

These four countries enable a comparison of the backgrounds, experiences and aspirations of those using different routes and contribute to better understanding the ways that nationality, economic status and education, gender, ethnicity and age shape the journeys and experiences of refugees and migrants. This also enables us to investigate how migration flows respond to changing political opportunities and policy openings led by national governments and EU-wide initiatives. Within these countries the project employed a **purposive sampling strategy to ensure that the backgrounds and demographic characteristics of respondents were broadly reflective of wider trends.**

<sup>1</sup> See IOM (2016) Mixed Migration: Flows in the Mediterranean and Beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information 2015. Geneva: IOM (GMDAC) <http://doe.iom.int/docs/Flows%20Compilation%202015%20Overview.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean>. This is most likely an underestimate as many bodies are never recovered. This figure does not include those who died before arriving at the shores of the Mediterranean to make the crossing to Europe

## The dynamics of the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes

While irregular crossings in the Mediterranean to reach Europe have been growing for a number of years, **2015 marked the sharpest rise in sea arrivals to the EU with a four-fold increase from 2014**. Deaths at sea also reached record levels with over a 7.5% increase in people recorded as missing, believed drowned compared with the previous year. At least 30% of those who died were children.

But these headline figures conceal a rather more dynamic picture.

Over the course of 2015 **significant differences developed in the magnitude and composition of the flows along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes**. In Greece there was a rapid and largely unanticipated growth of arrivals from Spring 2015, whereas along the Central Mediterranean route arrivals dropped by 13%, from around 150,000 in 2015 compared with 170,000 in 2014. These differences reflect changes in the drivers of migration to Europe and the geographical proximity of the Greek islands to Turkey, a country to which millions of Syrians have fled due to the ongoing conflict in their country.

On the two routes there are **remarkably different profiles in terms of country of origin, gender and age** for 2015.

According to UNHCR data, of the 850,000 people arriving in Greece by sea in 2015, over 90% came from the world's top 10 refugee producing countries with 56% being Syrian nationals<sup>3</sup>. Aside from Syrians, most of those arriving in Greece are refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq<sup>3</sup>. This means that the so-called 'migration crisis' can be more accurately described as a crisis of refugee protection.

The proportion of women and children travelling via the Eastern Mediterranean route also increased significantly during the course of the year, rising from 27% in September 2017 to 60% by March 2016<sup>4</sup>.

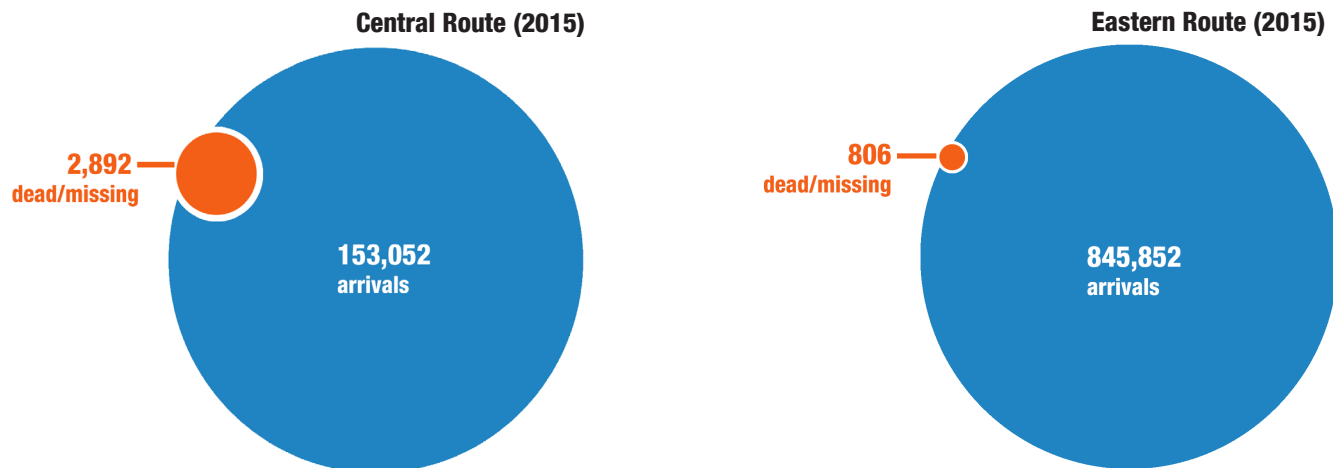
Although the numbers arriving in Italy are not dramatically different in scale to those seen in 2014, **the composition of flows has changed considerably**. There has been a rapid decline in the presence of Syrian nationals who went from 24% of arrivals in 2014 to just 5% in 2015. While Eritreans were the largest single nationality group in 2015, it is the presence of young single men from a wide range of African countries that truly characterises the Central Mediterranean route in 2015. The range of countries from which people travel is more diverse than in Greece, and includes Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Gambia, Bangladesh, Mali and Senegal as well as Syria<sup>5</sup>. The relative absence of Syrians in Italy has had important implications in relation to the Italy's position in the EU's refugee crisis, for example concerning Italy's involvement in the EU relocation scheme.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR (2015a) World At War – UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/5683d0b56.html>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>

<sup>5</sup> See <http://doe.iom.int/docs/Flows%20Compilation%202015%20Overview.pdf>

## Deaths and Missing Persons in the Mediterranean 2015



At the same time, the increase in the number of people moving through the Eastern Mediterranean coincides with **declining numbers of persons dead or missing during journeys across the Mediterranean in 2015 compared with the preceding year**. The mortality rate (the relationship between arrivals and fatalities) has declined considerably, from 16 missing or dead people for every 1000 sea arrivals in 2014, to 4 in 2015. Monthly data on those who are missing or dead by route suggests that this can be attributed to two main factors. One is the strengthening of search and rescue capabilities through the Triton Plus operation along the Central Mediterranean route. This came in April 2015 following the deaths of up to 850 people when the boat carrying them sank 60 miles off the coast of Libya<sup>6</sup>. The other is the increase in journeys across the shorter, and comparatively less dangerous, Aegean route from roughly the same period.

The danger associated with the journey across the Mediterranean reflects a complex relationship between routes, policies and smuggler strategies. The impact of policies on the riskiness of journeys can be seen in the context of the Aegean in particular: many of those we spoke to expressed concern that increased efforts to reduce the number of boat crossings to Greece were leading smugglers to send boats at more dangerous times, for example at night or in poor weather conditions, when rescue attempts were less likely to be successful. The increase in the mortality rate of the Eastern Mediterranean route since January 2016 raises questions about the impact of changing search and rescue practices, the militarisation of migration control and

the occasional, but seemingly increasing criminalisation of volunteers and NGOs working on the Greek islands.

The other significant, and related, difference between the two routes concerns the **mechanics of arrival**, with so-called spontaneous arrivals *de facto* disappearing from the Central Mediterranean route to be replaced by sea rescue operations. Our research shows that this has enabled Italy to develop a more managed approach to replace with those crossing the sea than that seen in Greece. It involves the distribution of new arrivals between a number of Italian ports and, in turn, a range of reception and processing centres. This explains, at least in part, why the journeys of those crossing the Mediterranean from Libya to Italy have captured rather less media and public attention. In addition, the Italian's government's decision to disembark almost all persons rescued in the Central Mediterranean in Italy explains why the number of sea arrivals in Malta has been so low in comparison to previous years (just 106)<sup>7</sup>.

In contrast the Eastern Mediterranean route has been characterised unless very recently by the absence of a formal reception and rescue system. Arrivals of large numbers of people on the beaches of the Greek islands which are closest to the Turkish beaches have been spontaneous and the numbers have fluctuated significantly on a daily basis depending on the operations of the Turkish police and coastguard, weather conditions and wider geo-political factors, including EU policy negotiations with the Greek and Turkish governments.

<sup>6</sup> See [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/un-says-between-800-and-850-migrants-died-in-boat-capsizing-off-libya/2015/04/21/a8383770-e803-11e4-9767-6276fc9b0ada\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/un-says-between-800-and-850-migrants-died-in-boat-capsizing-off-libya/2015/04/21/a8383770-e803-11e4-9767-6276fc9b0ada_story.html)

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2015-10-18/local-news/Italian-MEP-asks-Brussels-about-secret-Malta-Italy-migrants-for-oil-deal-6736143776>

Images of an uncontrolled situation in Greece and the onward journeys of people travelling through the Balkans and into the countries of Northern Europe (particularly Germany and Sweden) have not only captured the public imagination but have created significant challenges in terms of humanitarian assistance and appropriate policy responses, culminating most recently in the closure of the Macedonian border<sup>8</sup> and the deal between the EU and Turkey to limit flows and accept returns in exchange for €6 billion euros and visa liberalisation<sup>9</sup>.

## Who is on the move?

The differences in the composition of flows between the Central Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean routes are reflected in the characteristics of our research respondents. Although our sample is not intended, and does not claim, to be representative, **the country of origin of those who were interviewed broadly reflects the characteristics of those moving through the different routes.**

In Greece our respondents come from nine different countries of origin: the largest proportion originates from Syria (45%), followed by Afghanistan (20.5%) and Iraq (13.5%). A further 10% come from Eritrea. Mirroring the marked diversity of countries of origin among sea arrivals, respondents from Italy came from 21 different countries and the largest groups in our sample are from Nigeria (20.5%), Gambia (20%), Ghana (10%), Pakistan (7.5%) and Eritrea (6.5%).

In terms of age, gender and whether people are travelling with their children we also see differences in each of the case study countries, some of which reflect broader trends. Just over two thirds (65%) of those who we interviewed were aged 18-29 but the proportion was higher in Italy (76%) than in Greece (55%), reflecting the fact that those arriving in Greece are more likely to be older and travelling in family groups.

There are also significant differences between the two routes in relation to those travelling with and without children. Across the sample as a whole, 39% have children and 17% are travelling with their children on the journey. However, the **proportion of people from our sample travelling with their children is significantly higher on the Eastern Mediterranean compared with the Central Mediterranean route.** Of those travelling to Europe via Turkey to Greece 41% have children, of whom half (50.5%) have their children travelling with them. This trend appears to be increasing: in the latter stages of our fieldwork in Greece we noticed that respondents referred more frequently to family members who were already in Northern Europe suggesting that a new wave of refugees is starting to join family members who have travelled previously. By contrast whilst around a third (31%) of those travelling from Libya to Italy and Malta have children, the vast majority (88.5%) have left them behind, usually with other family members. **The migration of a single family member through the Central Mediterranean route stands in stark contrast to the increasing migration of families across the Aegean.**

Although just 13.5% of those we interviewed were women the percentage was slightly higher in Greece (17%). The low proportion of women in the sample is partly because men are more likely to make the long and risky journey to Europe than women, particularly the journey through Libya and from there to Italy<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, it also reflects the fact that men more commonly put themselves forward to be interviewed about the family's experiences when travelling with wives, daughters and mothers.

Our study shows that regardless of their country of origin, those crossing the Mediterranean had lives which included experiences of education and employment both before and sometimes during their journeys. **Two thirds of our respondents have a secondary school or university education. For those arriving in Greece the level rises to 78%, of whom a**

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/6b4bd41e-c68f-11e5-808f-8231cd71622e.html#axzz41qPsDgFm>

<sup>9</sup> See <http://fortune.com/2016/03/17/eu-turkey-migrant-crisis-deal-disaster/>

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/five-explanations-to-why-the-majority-of-refugees/>



**third has a university education.** This finding is in line with research conducted by UNHCR which similarly found that most Syrians coming to Greece were students<sup>11</sup>. Our initial analysis also indicates that **nearly three quarters (72%) of people were in employment before making the journey to Europe, and the proportion is significantly higher among those arriving in Greece (87%) than those arriving in Italy (60%).**

This is most likely a reflection of the countries from which the respondents originate and the corresponding opportunities that had previously been available to them. Thus, refugees and migrants to Greece are generally better-educated and from higher socio-economic groups than in Italy.

## Why are people moving?

Whilst helpful in providing a sense of the scale of the flows and an insight into their composition, numbers alone do not tell the real stories behind the journeys of those on the move.

**The drivers of migration to Europe are complex and multi-faceted.**

The reason for the increase in flows across the Mediterranean over recent years lies, in large part, with the conflict in Syria. Although it began in March 2011, the conflict has escalated over the past five years and drawn in countries within and outside the region. It is also closely associated with the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

But Syria is not the only country in which there is conflict and human rights abuse. In the past five years, multiple conflicts have erupted or reignited: there have been eight in Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, north eastern Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and this year in Burundi), three in the Middle East (Iraq and Yemen as well as Syria), one in Europe (Ukraine)

and three in Asia (Kyrgyzstan and in several areas of Myanmar and Pakistan). Eritrea has recently been described as one of the world's fastest-emptying nations as a result of forced conscription on the one hand and poverty on the other<sup>12</sup>. Those fleeing conflict, civil unrest and persecution are joined by those moving for reasons of food insecurity (northern Mali and northern Nigeria) and unemployment (rest of Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Niger, Senegal). In 2014 three quarters of refugees came from just ten countries, several of which are geographically proximate to Europe<sup>13</sup>.

The presence of **mixed migration flows**, of people sometimes from one and the same country but with different motivations moving together in groups, has long been recognised as a feature of migration to Europe. However, the emerging findings of our research suggest that this process is even more complex than previously assumed. In particular, **understanding the reasons why people move has been complicated by changes to migration policies and increased border controls which make it increasingly difficult for refugees and migrants to safely and legally access protection and work.** The result is increasingly protracted and fragmented journeys during which the circumstances of an individual or family can change, sometimes repeatedly<sup>14</sup>.

Many of those who participated in our research told us that they had been forced to move as a result of conflict, human rights or persecution, others that they had moved primarily for economic reasons. For some both conflict and economic reasons had motivated the decision to leave their home. Many Syrians, for example, told us that whilst they had left their country because of the war it was the

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.unhcr.org/5666ddda6.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.wsj.com/articles/eritreans-flee-conscription-and-poverty-adding-to-the-migrant-crisis-in-europe-1445391364?alg=y>

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR (2015a) World At War – UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014, <http://unhcr.org/556725e69.html>

<sup>14</sup> See also Collyer, M (2015) Conditions and Risks of Mixed Migration in North East Africa, MHub (North Africa Mixed Migration Task Force), [www.mixedmigrationhub.org/resources/mmtf-noah-research](http://www.mixedmigrationhub.org/resources/mmtf-noah-research)

damage that had been done to the economy that had ultimately forced them to leave: they were simply unable to make a living and feed their families. Iraqis similarly reported that joblessness and the search for employment had been the primary motivation for the decision to leave, but these experiences cannot be understood outside of the ongoing conflict in the country.

Our research also identified people from minority regions in a number of countries, including Hazaras from Afghanistan, Kurds from Iraq, Kurds from Syria, as well as marginalised social groups such as divorced women or orphans, for whom the reasons for leaving were different to those for other groups.

Some of the difficulties experienced by policy makers in responding appropriately to the Mediterranean migration crisis have been caused by the assumption that it is possible to differentiate easily between those who can be categorised as ‘refugees’ and those who are ‘economic migrants’. But the emerging findings of our research also suggest that for many of those on the move the motivation for movement changes over time in response to the circumstances in which they find themselves. Many of those arriving in Italy, for example, come from countries in Africa in which it has proved very difficult to make a living. They left in order to work and some had done so for many years before being forced to move on due to conflict, persecution or discrimination. In other words, **mixed motivations are a feature of individual migrant’s experiences and not just of migration flows.**

**Our emerging findings also challenge ideas about the relationship between so-called ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors which underpin many of the policy responses to increased migration.**

It is frequently assumed that refugees and migrants are drawn towards particular countries by favourable policies relating to employment, welfare, education or housing. This assumption presupposes that people who move know and understand the nuances of migration policy and practice across a wide range of European Member States and that they can interpret, and make sense, of the implications of what are often rapidly changing policies for their particular

individual and/or family circumstances, the country they come from, their experience and qualifications and their relationships with others.

Finally, it appears from our initial analysis that **refugees and migrants have only partial information about migration policies in particular countries.** The decisions about where to go are also made *ad hoc* along the route, and more often than not are based on a number of intervening variables and opportunities that arise on the journey or are communicated to them by agents and smugglers. We will be exploring this issue further through a more detailed analysis of the data.

## Flows, trajectories and journeys

The irregular movement of people into Europe in 2015 has conventionally been perceived as one coherent flow. This perception is challenged by the emerging findings of our research which indicate that **both the nature of migration patterns and their magnitude are the product of a merging of several flows.** Moreover whilst public attention has been captured by particular crossings or border points, notably the crossing of the Mediterranean and Aegean seas and various border points along the Balkan route, **our research has found that many interviewees had already been displaced or were migrating for longer periods of time. These longer trajectories are equally important in understanding the dynamics of migration into and through Europe.**

As noted above, movements through Turkey into Greece are dominated by Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis whilst through Libya to Italy the populations are more diverse and include Eritreans, Nigerians, Gambians, Somalis, Sudanese and many others. But within these flows we have identified diverse trajectories, partly representing ‘sub-flows’. There are Syrians coming directly from Syria but there are others who left the Gulf countries where they had been labour migrants and others who were living as refugees in Lebanon or Turkey. Afghans may come directly from Afghanistan but also from Iran where often they have been residing for many years or from Turkey where they were previously living.

Eritreans may come directly from Eritrea but also from Sudan or Egypt or Rwanda (but indirectly via Israel) having spent a period of time working in these locations. Some Palestinians have previously been living in Syria, or indeed were born there but denied citizenship and have now been displaced for a second time. Some of those travelling from Libya had been living there as labour migrants or refugees for months if not years and were not necessarily transiting through that country, as is too often assumed.

**Thus migration patterns into Europe consist of separate ‘sub-flows’ from many countries and regions and include individuals with diverse trajectories. These flows merge in Turkey and Libya, and it is this merging which partly explains the magnitude and continuation over time of the European refugee crisis.**

Our initial analysis indicates that **there are significant differences in the duration of the journey to Europe between those arriving through the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes.** For more than half (56%) of those crossing from Turkey to Greece, the journey time from the country of origin to arrival in Europe has been less than three months: for more than a third (37.5%) it is less than one month. By contrast just 1% of those arriving in Italy left their country of origin less than a month previously. **For nearly half (46%) of those travelling through the Central Mediterranean route the journey to Europe is part of a longer trajectory lasting more than a year: the comparable figure for those travelling through the Eastern Mediterranean route is 26%.**

Varied particular journeys between different sites connect refugee and migrants’ broader trajectories across Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Egypt, Mali and elsewhere. They are often not simple or straightforward, but rather evolving over different legs and separate stages, some regular and others irregular. They may also involve diverse modes of transportation including walking, taxis, buses, trains, trucks, boats, ferries and planes, each with specific challenges and risks.

Finally, the emerging findings of our research **challenge the often simplistic depiction of facilitators as ruthless smugglers who are routinely endangering the lives of refugees and migrants.** Almost all irregular journeys are facilitated by mostly local service providers (‘smugglers’). They can be found in the different sites on the journey, but also located on social media. Smuggling is based on a demand-supply mechanism and as long as there is demand certain agents will deliver. Fees seem negotiable and to have dropped since 2014. In the case of the journey from Turkey to Greece, they are often only paid upon (safe) arrival and discounts may be offered to groups and families. Whilst there are many stories of violence and death on the journey, it is also clear that many smugglers provide the only opportunity to secure access to Europe in the absence of safe and legal routes for protection and work.

## Policy issues

Multiple conflicts in Europe’s neighbourhood have triggered the arrival of an unprecedented number of people who have crossed the Mediterranean in search of protection and an opportunity to rebuild their lives. Whilst this was not unexpected, the EU was nevertheless taken by surprise. Repeated failures at coherently and cohesively dealing with the unfolding situation have triggered a multifaceted crisis: a refugee crisis, a crisis of border controls, a humanitarian crisis and even a geopolitical crisis within the EU itself.

The EU has developed a mixture of policies which aim to address root causes, reinstate an orderly process of registration and reception and ensure responsibility-sharing between Member States. The EU has made efforts to facilitate peace talks in Syria, give development aid to migrant-sending countries (the Khartoum process), enhance border controls (the EUNAVFOR operation as well as NATO and Frontex), tackle people smugglers (EU Action Plan), improve registration procedures (‘hotspots’), resettle (from transit countries), relocate (from Italy, Greece and Hungary) and disperse across Member States (reforming the Dublin III Regulation), improve and/or accelerate asylum



procedures (in Greece and Germany respectively), to have migrants readmitted (to Turkey) and returned (e.g. to Afghanistan). Meanwhile, Turkey has introduced work permits for Syrians as part of a €6 billion deal with the EU to improve social conditions, which it is hoped will reduce the flows through the Eastern Mediterranean route. Most recently the EU has announced that all those arriving irregularly into Greece will be returned to Turkey.

Nonetheless after no fewer than five emergency summits and numerous bilateral discussions, a solution to Europe's refugee crisis remains elusive. Many of the failures which have dominated media and public debate over recent months are failures of implementation. As these mount up, states have acted unilaterally and in regional blocs to build fences and keep people out.

Our analysis sheds light on the complexity of migration flows across the Mediterranean. It shows how they vary in terms of magnitude and composition across routes and over time. Our route-based analysis reveals significant diversity in terms of socio-economic, gender and age profiles between the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes, but also points to intra-route variations over time. It reveals significant variations in terms of the drivers of migration and the logistics and duration of journeys. It also begins to unpack the dynamic relations between the drivers, opportunity structures and barriers to migration factors at various points along the journey.

**To address such diverse and composite flows requires a coherent policy response that is also nuanced, tailored and targeted.**

Deterrence policies aiming at immobilising people in countries

of origin or transit without concomitant access to protection, resettlement or humanitarian assistance will simply increase the extent of human suffering. **The absence or slow realisation of safe and legal access to protection (resettlement or family reunification) increases the demand for illicit services, and thus also the exposure of migrants to smugglers and crime:** it pushes people into taking ever more risky routes into and within the EU.

Search and rescue operations contribute significantly to the prevention of death. This is illustrated by the rapid decrease in fatalities in the Central Mediterranean since April 2015, not to mention during the Italian Mare Nostrum Operation in 2014. Cutting back on such measures inevitably has the opposite effect, as early evidence of the increasing danger along the previously safer Aegean crossing shows. At the same time, a decrease in migration along the Central Mediterranean route, despite the presence of enhanced rescue operations there, demonstrates clearly that **search and rescue operations do not create a pull effect.**

Finally, **the extent to which policies which are intended to deter refugees and migrants can have the effect that is intended or assumed is challenged by the *ad hoc* and dynamic decision making processes of the people on the move.** In particular, early evidence of informal family-reunion flows across the Eastern Mediterranean route run counter to restrictions on family reunion introduced recently in countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Germany.

## Further information

Further information about the MEDMIG project, past and forthcoming events and future outputs together with contacts details for all of the team members can be found on our website [www.medmig.info](http://www.medmig.info)