

FACTS AND FIGURES

Risking death to cross the Mediterranean



Illustration: Syrian refugee children

Photo: NRC Lebanon/Sam Terling

Migration from poor countries is increasing, and a growing number of people are displaced by war and conflict. At the same time it is becoming more difficult to legally enter or seek asylum in the EU. This causes thousands of desperate people to embark on a dangerous journey across the Mediterranean.

RECORD NUMBERS:

In 2014, more than **221,000** people entered the EU irregularly by crossing the Mediterranean. This is more than three times as many as in 2013. The largest group were Syrians (101,500), followed by other large groups included nationals from Eritrea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Mali and Kosovo. Italy alone received 170,100 asylum seekers arriving by sea. That is approximately four times the number registered in 2013, when Italian authorities recorded 43,000 arrivals.

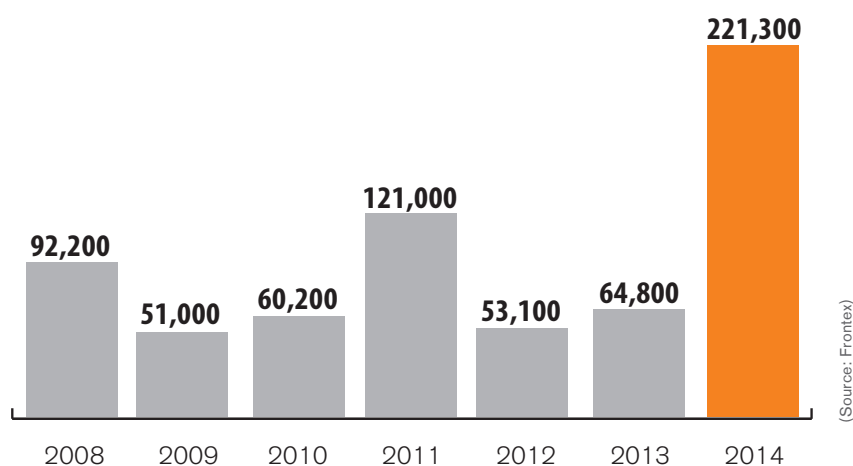
DEADLIEST YEAR:

2014, was also the deadliest year with more than **3,400** migrants drowning in the Mediterranean. Many more are not accounted for.

THE ROUTES:

Since 2011, the **Central Mediterranean** route has been the main route used by smugglers to enter the EU. Migrants depart from the northern coast of Libya and more recently Egypt, towards the south of Italy and Malta.

Over the last years, the migration flow across the central Mediterranean basin has increased substantially, first following the Arab Spring in 2011, and more recently because of the Syrian crisis combined with political instability in Libya. Many smugglers carry out their criminal activities from Libya, where government control is very limited.



(Source: Frontex)

Number of people irregularly entering the EU by crossing the Mediterranean.

*) Figures for Eastern Mediterranean route (23 299) are only available until end of November.

The **Eastern Mediterranean** route, the second most used smugglers route, has evolved over time, showing the increasing importance of arrivals by sea from Turkey to Italian, Greek and Cypriot shores. This route is primarily used by Syrian and Palestinian asylum seekers, as well as by Afghans, Iraqis and increasingly African nationalities.

170,100 arrived in Italy by sea*

150,000 rescued by
Mare Nostrum in one year

20,000 missing in the past 14 years

5,000 rescued by Norwegian ships*

3,400 drowned*

**in 2014*

TRENDS:

People smugglers are finding new routes to Europe and are employing new methods in order to exploit desperate people trying to escape war and conflict.

The last decades we have seen a mixed flow of migrants trying to enter EU-countries by sea. In 2014, for the first time **people from refugee producing countries accounted for almost 50 per cent of the total.**

A second new trend is the use of larger cargo ships. For the last decade the vast majority of migrants arrived during the spring and summer months in ramshackle former fishing boats or in large rubber dinghies.

However, in autumn 2014, people smugglers started using large decommissioned and abandoned cargo ships for transporting migrants and refugees across the sea. The larger vessels enable traffickers to ship larger numbers of people and **operate throughout the winter.** 2014 was the year that people-smuggling by sea became a year-round business.

Another recent trend is an **increase in rescue operations involving commercial ships.**

Last year, commercial ships rescued more than 40,000 lives in the Mediterranean. In September and October 2014, almost 30 per cent of all migrants rescued at sea were picked up by commercial ships.

SEARCH AND RESCUE:

In October 2013, the Italian Ministry of Defense launched the search and rescue operation **Mare Nostrum** as a response to the increased number of drownings. The operation was carried out by Italian naval vessels, covered an area of 70,000 square kilometres operated close to the Libyan coast. This operation saved more than 150,000 migrants and arrested 330 alleged smugglers, before the mission ended in December 2014.

In November 2014, the EU launched operation **Triton** under the joint border control agency Frontex. While Mare Nostrum was a search and rescue mission operating in international waters, Triton is mandated to patrol EU's borders, and does not have the capacity to police 2,5 million square kilometres of the Mediterranean. Triton's budget, 2.9 million Euros a month, is only one third of what Italy spent on operation Mare Nostrum. In the first two and a half months Triton saved some 15,000 migrants and arrested 57 alleged smugglers in 2014.

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