

THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

Since 2014, the Eastern Mediterranean migration route has served as an important pathway for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants crossing to Europe from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. The Eastern Mediterranean route refers to the migratory route to Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria, primarily by way of Turkey. In addition, traffickers found new routes to transfer people from the Turkish and Lebanese coasts to Italy. Several people have been rescued in Greek waters, but many are missing.

According to the UNHCR, a total of 11,227 asylum seekers entered Greece via Turkey from January to September 2022, of which 6,663 arrived by sea and 4,594 by land. Most of these asylum seekers arrived in the Aegean Islands, and they are in majority from the Palestinian Territories, followed from Afghans and by those from Somalia, based on 2022 data. At the end of September 2022, some 6,414 refugees and asylum seekers have been registered on the Greek islands. However, transfers to the mainland are constant and the official population on the islands is around 4000 migrants and refugees lately.

Cyprus and Bulgaria have also experienced significant migration flows during 2022, with almost 12,000 and 10,000 new arrivals respectively (update 31 August). In both countries, there has been an increase in numbers of arrivals since the 2021, and the 2022 trend seems to mark even an increase over the previous year.

From the beginning of 2020, migrants have been attempting to reach Cyprus and Italy by sea also from Lebanon, as a consequence of the deteriorating economic situation there. The vast majority of them are Syrian refugees, with smaller numbers of Lebanese citizens and Palestinian refugees. According to the UNHCR, the number doubled in 2022 for the second year in a row, with 2,670 individuals departing from Lebanon in the first nine months of 2022.

During his trip to Greece and Cyprus in December 2021, Pope Francis declared: *“The Mediterranean, which for millennia has brought different peoples and distant lands together, is now becoming a grim cemetery without tombstones...Let us eradicate the prevailing mentality revolving around our ego and personal and national egoisms which determine every decision we take.”*

For further information:

Institutional Websites and NGOs

UNHCR - Mediterranean Situation 2022, Greece

<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>

IOM - Flow Monitoring (Europe)

<https://migration.iom.int/europe/arrivals#content-tab-anchor>

UNHCR - Greece Sea arrivals Dashboard (June 2022)

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94433>

MMC snapshot: Access to information among Afghans on the move towards Greece

<https://mixedmigration.org/resource/4mi-snapshot-access-to-information-among-afghans-on-the-move-towards-greece/>

Online Newspapers and Periodicals

L'ORIENT TODAY_ The new routes and rising numbers of would-be migrants leaving Lebanon

<https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1312253/the-new-routes-and-rising-numbers-of-would-be-migrants-leaving-lebanon.html>

INFO MIGRANTS_ Dozens missing as migrant boat sinks off Greek island

<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/42560/dozens-missing-as-migrant-boat-sinks-off-greek-island>

VOA_ Families Mourn as Scores Die on Lebanon Migrant Boat

<https://www.voanews.com/a/families-mourn-as-scores-die-on-lebanon-migrant-boat/6760122.html>

Pope Francis returns to Lesbos, Greece and pleads for action on migrant crisis

<https://www.npr.org/2021/12/05/1061607883/pope-francis-lesbos-greece-refugee-crisis>

AA, Number of asylum seekers on Aegean Islands drops by 76%: Greece

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/number-of-asylum-seekers-on-aegean-islands-drops-by-76-greece/2422746>