

# CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN SEA INITIATIVE



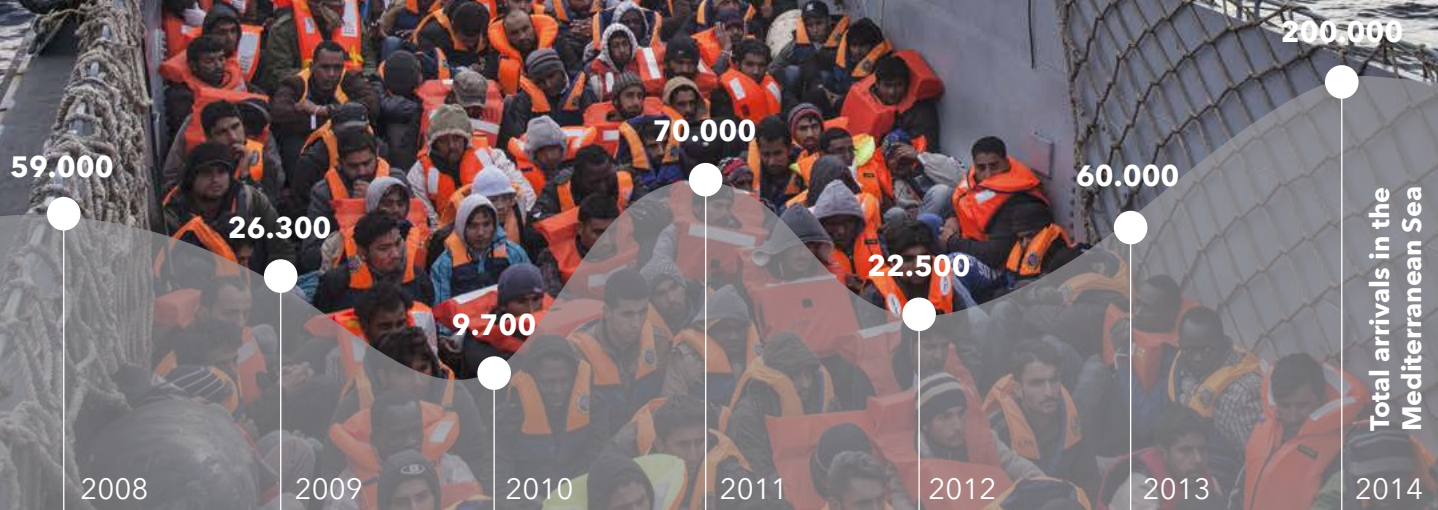
## SO CLOSE YET SO FAR FROM SAFETY

The events unfolding in Syria, Iraq, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and elsewhere, are reminders that the need for international protection of refugees is as urgent as ever. With few opportunities to enter Europe by regular means, thousands of people threatened by persecution and serious human rights violations in their home countries are taking dangerous sea routes.

The ever increasing death toll in the Mediterranean Sea and the increasing number of refugees and migrants risking their lives in rickety boats are a wake up call for joint European action, based on solidarity, burden-sharing and protection to those fleeing persecution and violence.

Updated December 2014

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Total arrivals in the Mediterranean Sea



# CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN SEA INITIATIVE (CMSI): URGENT AND COLLECTIVE ACTION NEEDED TO SAVE LIVES

The dramatic situation at Europe's sea borders demands urgent and concerted action, with the overall objective of saving lives, CMSI includes **12 concrete steps** with this aim.



## STEPS WITHIN THE EU

1. Strengthen rescue at sea. Ensure that the long-established tradition of rescue at sea is upheld, maintaining strong capacity for search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean including with the support of the European Union (EU) and its Member States.
2. Encourage commercial shipmasters to undertake rescue where required. Steps must be taken to minimize financial and other costs for those engaged in such operations.
3. Establish more effective and predictable identification of places of disembarkation.
4. Enhance reception facilities, and establish additional facilities with access to urgent care and assistance, with particular attention to those with specific needs.
5. Establish profiling and referral mechanisms, including access to fair and efficient asylum procedures for those in need of international protection.
6. Ensure access to durable solutions for persons found to be in need of international protection.
7. Provide support for the timely return in safety and dignity of those found not to be in need of international protection.

## STEPS IN COLLABORATION WITH COUNTRIES OF TRANSIT AND FIRST ASYLUM

8. Reinforce the gathering, analysis and sharing of data on movement by sea in the Mediterranean.
9. Further develop capacity and institution building in countries of transit and first asylum, including protection strategies.
10. Increase mass information programmes along transit routes aimed at informing people of the risks of onward movement. Engage in a dialogue with community-based diaspora organizations.
11. Increase legal alternatives to irregular dangerous movements. These could include increasing resettlement quotas and access to humanitarian visas. States can also facilitate family reunification, use private sponsorship schemes, and student and employment visa programmes.

## STEPS IN COLLABORATION WITH COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

12. Continue to support relief and development programmes to address humanitarian, human rights and development needs.

*"Europe's response needs to be a truly collective effort, one that offers safer ways to find protection while maintaining a strong capacity to rescue people at sea. If it fails, many more lives will be lost at Europe's doorstep."*

António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

More refugees and migrants are arriving and  
**DYING AT EUROPE'S DOORSTEPS...**

So far in **2014, over 200,000** refugees and migrants have arrived by sea in the Mediterranean, compared to 60,000 in 2013.

Italy has received over **160,000 arrivals in 2014**, at the astonishing pace of 14,700 arrivals per month or over **480 arrivals each day**, most of them rescued by Italy under the operation Mare Nostrum, which is ending.

In 2014 around **40,000** people arrived by sea in Greece, almost a 300% increase compared to 2013.

UNHCR estimates that around **3,400 people have died** or have gone missing at sea so far in 2014, around **2,800 since the beginning of July**.

Almost half of the people arriving in 2014 are from **Syria** and **Eritrea**.

The number of Eritreans and Syrians arriving by sea so far this year in Italy alone has increased by almost 280% and 240%, compared to the same period in 2013.

An increasing number of women, children and elderly embark on these journeys.

So far in 2014, **over 23,800 children** have arrived to Malta and Italy by sea, including at least **12,000 unaccompanied**.

Data as of November 2014

## **SURVIVAL AND LOSS: A YOUNG SYRIAN WOMAN'S DEADLY VOYAGE TO EUROPE**

*John Psaropoulos in Athens, Greece contributed to this story*



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Nineteen-year-old Doa al Zamel fled her home in Syria in the hope of finding safety and a better future; she ended up desperately fighting for her life in the Mediterranean Sea and losing her fiancé. She still relives the trauma of September 10, when an unidentified vessel rammed into the smuggler's trawler that was carrying Doa and more than 500 other people, including many women and children. The vessel quickly sank off the East coast of Malta; there were just 11 survivors.

Four days after the trawler set sail, it was stopped by another boat. "The people on it asked us to stop. They threw pieces of metal and wood at us and swore at our captain," recalled Doa. "Our boat refused to stop and they circled us and rammed us. They waited until we had sunk and they left."

The trawler sank in minutes. "Some people grabbed ropes hanging from the ship's masts to save themselves. Some were cut to pieces by the propeller when they fell into the water. Most drowned," Doa said.

Doa found herself in the water with some 100 survivors. She grabbed an inflatable ring and looked around for her fiancé. For three days, the survivors floated in the Mediterranean without food or drinking water and gradually they started to die.

People began to ask Doa to take care of their children. A man with his one-year-old granddaughter handed over the child. "Then a mother came with an 18-month-old baby girl and a six-year-old boy and asked me to take care of the baby and I kept it too. I watched the grandfather and the mother and her son die."

Doa said the goal of saving the two babies increased her determination to survive. She was rescued by a Liberian-flagged vessel: "The one-year-old baby died just as we were about to be picked up" and taken to Crete island. The other child rallied and recovered.

**SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR FROM SAFETY**



## WHERE ARE PEOPLE COMING FROM?

People who crossed the Mediterranean in 2014 came from more than 40 countries around the world on three different continents. In the last two years, almost half of the arrivals in the Mediterranean were people coming from Syria and Eritrea. In addition, people from Somalia and Iraq are also arriving by sea in search of safety.

From January to October 2014, more than 60,000 Syrians, including almost 10,000 children, arrived by sea. In the same period almost 35,000 Eritreans arrived by sea in the Mediterranean, including 3,380 unaccompanied children. The rest of the nationalities include people from a number of African countries, Afghanistan, and an increasing number of Palestinians fleeing Syria and most recently from Gaza.

A Syrian mother sits on a deck of the Italian vessel, Verga, with her young children. They were rescued from a fishing boat carrying 219 people while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea from Libya.

© UNHCR / A. D'Amato

## FORCED DISPLACEMENT AT THE CENTRE OF SEA ARRIVALS

The majority of those rescued at sea and arriving in Europe are fleeing war, violence and persecution, including many women and children. The link between the rise in forced displacement to over 51 million people and the increased number of people attempting to find safety in Europe is undeniable. In addition, the deterioration of the situation in countries where refugees were residing is contributing to force more people to move onwards. More people have been resorting to crossing the Mediterranean Sea due to more restrictive border control measures, which makes it more difficult for those needing protection to access the EU by land to seek asylum. Many refugees and asylum-seekers find themselves without

legal and safe alternatives and often rely on smugglers, making themselves even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, sometimes detained for long periods of time. In this context, women and children are at greater risk.

## THE DEPARTURE POINT: FORCING MORE PEOPLE TO FLEE

Most of the people arriving in Europe are departing from Libya. In 2013, out of 43,000 arrivals in Italy, more than 27,000 departed from Libya. This trend has increased in 2014. The deterioration of the situation in Libya is also forcing more people to take the risk of traveling in unsafe vessels in the hands of criminal organizations.



31%

Syrians  
60,051

18%

Eritreans  
34,561

16%

Others  
31,055

10%

Sub-Saharan  
20,549

5%

Afghans  
10,201

5%

Malians  
8,928

4%

Nigerians 8,928

3%

Gambians 6,827

3%

Somalis 6,394

3%

Palestinians 5,074

2%

Bangladeshis 4,362

Data as of end of October 2014

## UPHOLDING THE TRADITION OF RESCUE AT SEA: SAVING THE LIVES OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS AT SEA

With growing numbers of people undertaking the perilous Mediterranean Sea crossing, UNHCR reiterates the fundamental importance of search and rescue operations at sea. It is critical to have in place effective search and rescue operations, which are safe and incur minimum risks for those being rescued.

UNHCR welcomed the Italian Navy operation, Mare Nostrum, which rescued over 150,000 of refugees and migrants since it began in October 2013 in the aftermath of two major tragedies. UNHCR also recognizes the rescue at sea efforts made by many commercial vessels.

The number of people crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe in unseaworthy boats began to increase in June and July last year – before the Mare Nostrum operation was launched – pointing to the increasing level of desperation among many of those involved, who are fleeing war, persecution and violence, including from Syria. The number of arrivals and deaths at sea has also significantly increased on the route to Greece.

UNHCR has expressed concerns over the ending of Mare Nostrum without a similar European search and rescue operation to replace it. This will undoubtedly increase the risk for those trying to find safety in Europe, and could lead to more refugees and migrants perishing at sea.

On 1 November, Frontex launched a new Operation, Joint Operation Triton. This operation does not aim at and will not replace Mare Nostrum. The Joint Operation focuses primarily on border surveillance, though it may contribute to rescue efforts.

The collective response needs to maintain a strong capacity to rescue people at sea. It is critical that the long-established tradition of rescue at sea is upheld by all.



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### NIZAR: DREAMS SHATTERED, BUT HOPES FOR A SAFER AND BETTER FUTURE

by Iosto Ibba,  
UNHCR Rome

In 2014, nearly one-fifth of those rescued at sea have been disembarked in the province of Syracuse, home to a major military and commercial port.

Among them was a Syrian family: father, mother and four children. Nizar, the eldest child, has just turned 18 years old, and his face is red, burnt by four days of sun beating down on the boat. He had no suitcases or bags. In his hand he has only two documents, the identification number given by the Italian authorities, and his passport.

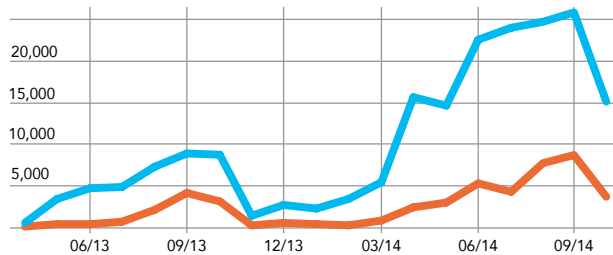
Nizar and his family lived in Libya for more than a year and a half, and spent five days at sea trying to reach Europe. "Our tragedy started two years ago, when our aunt was kidnapped," said Nizar, "we will not have peace until we find out what happened."

For two years, Nizar and his family did not give up and remained in the country despite the war raging around them. Then they realized that there was nothing more to be done, and they left.

Now, on the dock of the Augusta port, the certainty of arrival in Europe seems to choke back the thought of leaving part of their family in Syria. Nizar, like his brothers, attended an international school, dreaming to go to college and maybe to get to visit other countries. He would have never guessed that his first experience out of Syria would be like this, not at this price and conditions.



## Sea Arrivals to Italy: Syrians and all arrivals, March 2013 - October 2014



## TAKING TO BOATS: SYRIAN REFUGEES' EXODUS BY SEA

An increasing number of people fleeing the Syrian conflict are seeking safety in countries beyond the immediate region that has come under enormous strain from the increasing number of refugees fleeing the conflict. As of November 2014, some 3.2 million Syrian refugees have been registered in Syria's neighbouring countries. UNHCR has long been calling for increased support to the life saving operations, which remain largely underfunded, and increased solidarity with these host countries and host communities. Against this background, many are embarking on long and dangerous journeys to reach safety in Europe. The number of Syrians taking to boats in the Mediterranean, mostly departing from Libya, but also Egypt and Turkey, has continued to increase.

At the end of 2011, a few months after the outburst of violence in Syria, an estimated 320 Syrians arrived by sea to Italy. Although still relatively low, Syrian arrivals peaked at 580 at the end of 2012. At the end of 2013, Syrian arrivals to Italy numbered 11,307, making them



the largest group of arrivals, a jump from 20th place just two years earlier and an increase of 1,800% with respect to the same period a year earlier. This trend continued in 2014, as of the end of October, 36,351 Syrians arrived in Italy, representing nearly a seven-fold increase over the same period last year. In addition, around 23,200 Syrians arrived by sea in Greece. This makes Syrians the number one population arriving by sea in the Mediterranean.

Many Syrians arriving by sea in the Mediterranean are coming with entire families, including small children, elderly parents and grandparents. Family groups represent a significant part of Syrian movements towards Europe. As of the end of October 2014, 9,770 Syrian children have arrived to the coast of Italy up from 3,600 in 2013. Children, in particular small children, are more at risk of perishing at sea if their boat capsizes because they may not know how to swim, and, if traveling alone, may not have someone looking out for them. We have witnessed countless children disembarking from the boats that have rescued them, some in their parents' arms, many hiding trauma suffered during the trip, all of them shouldering a burden of fear and insecurity at far too early an age.

## IN THE QUEST FOR FAMILY AND SAFETY IN EUROPE

The fear of a grinding conflict in Syria that had already scattered his family across Europe left Ahmet\* no choice. "I was born in Homs and I wanted to live here until the end," the 55-year-old football coach says. "But this vicious war left us no other choice but to leave all behind."

Ahmet and his wife, daughter and son sailed on a flimsy boat: "For the sake of my children's future we had to take the risk."

Italy was the promised destination. From there, they would move on to Germany to unify with his brothers and two eldest sons. But smugglers abandoned the boat with 339 people off the coast of Cyprus.

Like Ahmet, many others were aiming to reach family members in other European countries. "I put myself in the death boat to see my children," says a 50-year-old Palestinian woman. "We are grateful to the Cypriot authorities who saved us but we need to live with our families."

Others without family members in other European countries were also adamant to make their way to other European countries. So far, very few survivors have applied for asylum. Most of them are reluctant to do so out of fear that their application for asylum in Cyprus will remove their reunification prospects with family in other EU Member States. Others are concerned that by lodging an asylum claim they would be unable to bring their family members left behind in Syria because of the restrictive family reunification policies in Cyprus.

\*Names changed for protection reasons

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