

OVERVIEW

# EUROPE 2015-2016 / REFUGEE CRISIS

CRISIS Migrations flows to Europe, 2015-2016

TOTAL ARRIVALS BY LAND AND SEA TO EUROPE<sup>1</sup> **1,046,599** in 2015  
**387,739** in 2016

SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSE

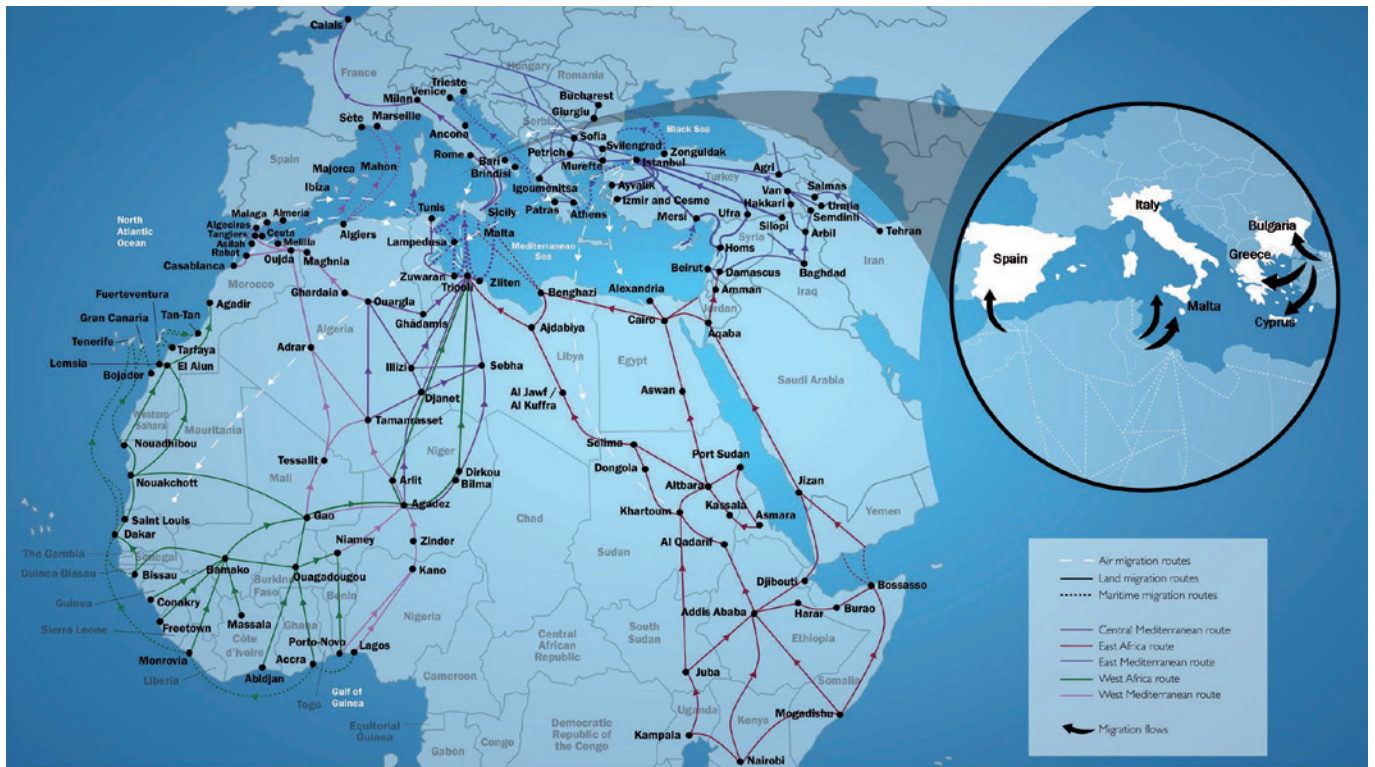
A massive influx of refugees and migrants through South-Eastern European countries resulted in an emergency in transit – as well as destination – countries between 2015 and 2016. However, migration towards Europe was not a new phenomenon. This overview focuses on the shelter coordination and response to this crisis in key locations, primarily Greece, the Balkans and Germany, where the majority of first arrivals to the EU, transit and final arrivals to destination were found.

COUNTRIES OF ARRIVAL IN EUROPE	NUMBER OF PEOPLE ARRIVING (1 Jan 2015 - 31 Dec 2016) <sup>1</sup>	NUMBER OF PEOPLE STRANDED (As of 31 Dec 2016) <sup>2</sup>
Italy	335,278	Not available
Greece	1,034,269	62,784
Bulgaria	47,136	5,560
Spain	17,091	Not available

COUNTRIES OF TRANSIT IN EUROPE	NUMBER OF PEOPLE ARRIVING (1 Jan 2015 - 31 Dec 2016) <sup>1</sup>	NUMBER OF PEOPLE STRANDED (As of 31 Dec 2016) <sup>2</sup>
FYROM*	478,004	137
Serbia	678,493	5,633
Hungary	430,690	460
Croatia	659,105	624
Slovenia	477,791	315

\* the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

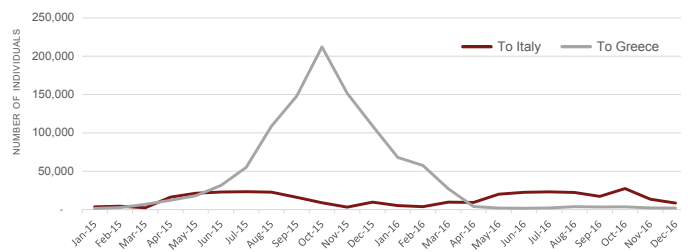


Migrant Routes: Mediterranean 2016 (Source: IOM - <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>)

TIMELINE

- 2011:** Arab Spring prompts start of increased migration from North and sub-Saharan Africa to Malta and Italy via the Central Mediterranean route. Start of conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and first population movements into neighbouring countries (Turkey and Lebanon).
- 2012:** Escalating flight of Syrian refugees into neighbouring countries (including Jordan, Iraq and Egypt).
- Apr 2015:** Start of "Balkan route" migration.
- Jun 2015:** UNHCR declares internal Level 2 Emergency for Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia.
- Aug 2015:** Start of open borders in Austria and Germany.
- Sep 2015:** Closure of Hungary's borders; arrivals to Croatia and Slovenia increase
- Oct 2015:** Peak monthly arrivals to Greece by sea.
- Mar 2016:** Closure of the migration routes through the Balkans due to re-activation of Schengen border regimes. EU-Turkey deal made to relocate new arrivals.
- Nov 2016:** 543% increase in stranded migrants in Bulgaria since March 2016<sup>3</sup>.

EASTERN AND CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN - MONTHLY ARRIVALS TO GREECE AND ITALY (2015 - 2016)



<sup>1</sup> IOM, as of 31 December 2016 (<http://migration.iom.int/europe/>). Data collated from national authorities, IOM and UNHCR.

<sup>2</sup> Stranded migrants are those who, for a reason beyond their control, have been unintentionally forced to stay in a country (European Migration Network).

<sup>3</sup> IOM, Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and Beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information – No. 30, 1 December 2016.



Many new arrivals to Europe in 2015-16 passed through the Balkans. Often, people were registered at border crossing points (Berkasovo Bapska, Serbia, Oct 2015).

**MIGRATION IN 2015**

Migration departing from North Africa towards Europe increased since 2011. However, since 2015, attention was focused on the emergency situation caused by large population movements into the Balkans<sup>4</sup> and Northern / Western European countries (via Turkey and Greece). Compared to the 219,000 people who arrived in 2014<sup>5</sup>, a 500% increase in total arrivals to Europe was seen in 2015. Ongoing and escalating conflicts were likely to account for the dramatic increase in numbers arriving to Greece, with 47% of arrivals coming from the Syrian Arab Republic, 24% from Afghanistan and 15% from Iraq. During the second part of 2015, arrivals to Greece by sea reached their peak. By the end of the year, 857,363 people arrived in Greece (compared to 153,842 to Italy). Arrivals did not decrease significantly over winter, despite harsh conditions at sea.

**MIGRATION IN 2016**

Arrivals to Italy in 2016 (total: 181,436<sup>6</sup>) increased 18% from 2015, mostly via the Central Mediterranean route. Migrants and refugees originate from a number of different countries in North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and the Horn of Africa<sup>7</sup>, with a small proportion from the Syrian Arab Republic (less than 1%)<sup>8</sup>.

Greece saw a 79% decrease in cumulative arrivals<sup>9</sup>, totalling 176,906 in 2016, inverting the trend from 2015. The reactivation of the standard Schengen border arrangements in March 2016 closed the borders of several transit countries, to stem the flow of people. Combined with an agreement between the European Union (EU) and Turkey in March 2016

**Note:** It is impossible to adequately provide detailed information on the wide-ranging and varied responses across the region, given the geographic scope of this overview, alongside the political complexities and administrative variances of each country involved. Therefore, the main focus of this overview is the Greece-Balkan-Germany route, as it is more relevant to the context of the publication and the case studies that relate to it – i.e. the set up and evolution of (emergency) humanitarian shelter response – than the more established and longer-term responses in Italy, Malta and Spain, for example.

to return migrants and asylum seekers to Turkey, this led to a significant decline in arrivals by sea to Greece.

As of December 2016, the total number of migrants and refugees stranded in Greece and the Balkans was 75,031. In Greece, all new arrivals were restricted to the islands, until asylum status (or safe relocation to Turkey) could be established.

**COORDINATION AND RESPONSE**

Initially, the authorities and humanitarian responders in Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia were **addressing a dynamic situation of populations in transit**. This required temporary accommodation and mobile and lightweight assistance at strategic points, as people continued their journey northwards. Assistance often comprised distribution of NFIs, emergency shelter, establishment of collective shelters in existing buildings or in tents and Rubb Halls, and adaptation of buildings and sites to allow basic services and facilities to be provided in areas of transit.

As border closures and restrictions on movement came into force in early 2016, **longer-term assistance was required to adapt to more static populations** in numerous locations across Greece and countries on the Balkan route. For example, reception centres were consolidated and expanded, to allow the closure of other ad-hoc transit areas, and services and facilities in these sites were improved, through upgrades and rehabilitations, such as the installation of heating, insulation, water networks and sanitation.



In Greece, many refugees were accommodated in tented camps. In summer, tents had to be shaded, also by building metal-framed structures (Elliniko, Athens).



Many refugee camps in Greece were either upgraded from tents or built from the start with containers (Left: Kara Tepe camp, Lesvos. Right: Eleonas, Athens).

## GREECE

Emergency support needs in Greece remained high in 2016. Formal and informal settlements, including refugee camps, were negotiated and established, with other accommodation and shelter options being explored. There was a high level of technical capacity already present, as well as a desire from Greek civil society to be at the forefront of the response<sup>10</sup>. Pre-registration of arrivals occurs in Reception and Identification Centres (formerly called “hotspots”) on the islands of Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos, rather than direct transferral to the mainland. Surveys indicate that people prefer to be transferred to alternative accommodation in urban centres, such as Athens or Thessaloniki. During the first-wave of arrivals, refugees and migrants with greater financial means attempted to leave Greece quickly, while more vulnerable populations had to remain, mainly in urban areas<sup>11</sup>. Those with financial resources chose to improve their shelter situation by finding alternative private accommodation, for instance. **In 2016, occupancy far outstripped capacity on the islands**<sup>12</sup> and, towards the end of the year, capacity to absorb arrivals became **limited also on the mainland**. Approximately 51,000 places were available in various forms of accommodation in December 2016, leaving a shortfall of 11,000 places.

In 2016, Greece therefore evolved from a transit country into a longer-term hosting location. The majority of sites on the mainland were government-built, emergency, tented settlements, intended for temporary use. They soon went over capacity, with limited services that did not meet minimum standards and were located away from urban centres<sup>13</sup>, increasing dependency on multisector assistance. **While the government took on the primary duty of providing shelter and services to camps, gaps in service provision emerged** – particularly for persons with specific needs and vulnerabilities. At the time of writing, additional and expanded sites were being planned, with the evacuation of spontaneous settlements in public parks and squares foreseen.

By the end of 2016, **21,057 reception places were created in Greece for relocation candidates** to other EU countries, when the capacity in 2015 was about 1,200<sup>14</sup>. During 2016, this programme was expanded to other people seeking asylum in Greece, prioritizing the most vulnerable and embracing other forms of accommodation than formal camps, including

apartments, hotels and “matchmaking” refugees with host families. The provision of this type of accommodation included service delivery in compliance with applicable Greek laws and regulations. **Local NGOs and community-based organizations also engaged in alternative shelter support** to refugees and migrants. These organizations either rented a hotel, which provided the services, or a building and rehabilitated or adapted it, with services provided by the residents themselves, or the organization’s volunteers.

The sector also started identifying **opportunities for mid- to long-term shelter solutions within the existing building stock**, including the use of public-private and market-based initiatives. For example, the use of holiday homes and apartments (approx. 30% of buildings in Athens are vacant), or renovations to older buildings. Another idea was the conversion of public and commercial buildings to residential accommodation, with expedited procedures to obtain permission for a change of use and negotiations over rent.

A Shelter-NFI Sector Working Group was established in March 2016 in Greece, to facilitate inter-agency coordination of response activities for refugees and migrants. The main activities were:

- 1) Coordinating with relevant government bodies and all other sectors.
- 2) Validating, promoting and monitoring of the use of technical guidance and minimum standards, across all shelter and NFI interventions.
- 3) Building local and national capacity to understand humanitarian needs with regard to shelter and NFIs.
- 4) Exploring appropriate shelter and site planning designs for longer-term solutions within sites.
- 5) Pursuing an integrated urban shelter strategy to promote alternatives to camps, by capitalizing on existing building stock.

At the regional field level, there were two hubs: Attica / Central Greece and Thessaloniki. Each of the five main reception islands had their own working group hub. **The Working Group developed a number of technical guidance documents**, including minimum standards and procedures on shelter shading structures, NFIs and distributions, heating solutions, site planning standards, shelter upgrading and communal kitchens.

By the end of 2016, at national level, the coordination structure was modified, to better reflect the operational needs of the refugees and migrants and to facilitate stronger communication with relevant governmental counterparts. Thus, Shelter merged with WASH, while NFI split to standalone as one working group. The intention for 2017 was for NFI, cash and food to merge as

<sup>10</sup> Greece Mainland Needs Assessment Report, NRC, March 2016.

<sup>11</sup> CRS, Refugee and Migrant Emergency in Europe: City of Athens Shelter Analysis, June 2016.

<sup>12</sup> NRC Rapid Assessment for out-of-camp housing and education, July 2016.

<sup>13</sup> CRS, Refugee and Migrant Emergency in Europe: City of Athens Shelter Analysis, June 2016.

<sup>14</sup> UNHCR Greece: Weekly Accommodation and Relocation Update 3 January 2017.

a “Basic Assistance” Working Group, while shelter and WASH would remain combined at all coordination levels<sup>15</sup>.

### THE BALKAN ROUTE

With the sealing of Hungary’s borders in September 2015, increasing numbers of migrants arrived in Croatia and Slovenia from Serbia. **Transit and reception centres started to be established at the multiple entry, transit and exit points.** Available facilities at these crossing points were put to temporary use as registration points and accommodation, but conditions were very basic, providing only protection against the elements, NFIs, food distribution and emergency medical services. As these camp-like sites were mostly not suitable for winter conditions, **alternative transit areas had to be developed** to provide registration and other services, such as medical assistance, psychosocial support, family reunification, food, separate showers, mother-baby centres and child friendly areas, alongside meeting other minimum standards, such as covered space and WASH. **Changing transport arrangements for incoming populations** (from train to buses) succeeded in reducing the need for such numerous and dispersed facilities. In urban centres, some of the migrant population were living in unofficial sites, such as abandoned buildings, or sleeping rough.

However, the number of people transiting through the Balkans was under-estimated, as many did not register. The majority aimed to travel through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia, onwards to Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia. Shelter needs in 2015 were for safe, temporary shelter along transit routes, particularly at border crossings, boat crossings and registration sites, where bottlenecks would form and people would remain stranded for significant periods of time. A major challenge in 2016 remained ensuring protection from the severe winter weather in the region, as well as the provision of more suitable overall conditions for longer-term accommodation and integration.

### GERMANY

At the end of August 2015, Germany opened its doors to Syrian asylum seekers, no matter in which EU country they had set foot before. There were up to 60,000 new arrivals per week in September 2015 (figures decreased to 21,000 in January 2016 and plummeted to 700 in August 2016<sup>16</sup>), most of whom travelled through Austria and entered Germany in the state of Bavaria.

Once in Germany<sup>17</sup>, populations on the move were received at reception centres at border towns, typically for only a few days before being relocated to mid-term accommodation. Before the opening of reception centres, first accommodation for newly arriving refugees and migrants was ad hoc, ranging from sports halls and unused buildings, but also including people sleeping in train stations, or even in the open.

In order to provide adequate shelter for almost one million refugees and migrants who arrived during 2015, a number of interventions were mobilized:

- Winterizing existing accommodation;
- Re-purposing of existing buildings as collective centres;
- Construction of Rubb Halls / large tents as collective centres;
- Erection of family-sized tents;
- Installation of infrastructure and communal facilities;

<sup>15</sup> 2017 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RRMRP)

<sup>16</sup> German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, <http://www.bamf.de/EN>

<sup>17</sup> This overview focuses on Germany, as it was the main destination country and because the following case study A.42 deals with the set-up and operation of a reception centre near the Austrian border. Other destination countries include Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands and Norway.



Along the Balkans route, migrants and refugees were assisted with transport to and between transit or registration centres (Croatia, October 2015).

These evolved into mid-term accommodation sites run by a number of organizations, in order to provide support during the asylum application process. Long-term accommodation for accepted asylum seekers was ideally seen as a general social housing scheme. The government emphasized integrating the refugees as soon as possible, instead of risking the creation of “refugee ghettos”. Therefore, long-neglected social housing programmes were reactivated, funded by the communes and the federal government. Since there had been a shortage of affordable housing in most of major German cities for years, the aim was to benefit both the refugees and the hosting communes.

### LOOKING FORWARD / CHALLENGES

In early 2017, short-, mid- and long-term accommodation options in Greece, countries along the Balkan route and in destination countries were being explored, through a scaling-up of construction, upgrading and expansion of facilities and sites. However, the attainment of suitable, durable, solutions for those already in Europe and those that continued to arrive – both in terms of legal status and more immediate basic needs – remained a higher-level political issue, which usually takes time to resolve in each hosting country and within the EU.

Advocacy for clear, coordinated and consistent long-term strategies to address the needs of migrants, refugees and host populations continued. However, the challenges faced across Europe were rising, as **intended temporary shelters became a longer-term** norm for many people. **Tensions** between some host communities and migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, **escalated in many countries** in Europe, occasionally resulting in violence and destruction of shelters and settlements. Frustration was also felt for the long registration waiting times and the deterioration of living conditions. While camp-like solutions often seemed to be preferred, sites varied greatly in service-provision, standards and conditions. Some governments were slow in assigning sites and expanding capacity in alternative locations, to enable a transition to mid-term accommodation, while asylum or relocation procedures are underway. In addition, **lack of coordination and resources** led to gaps in service provision, such as winterized accommodation and safe cooking provision.