

# The Central Mediterranean route: Deadlier than ever

## 1 in 23 die in the Mediterranean in the first five months of 2016

During the first five months of 2016, 1 in every 23 migrants has died attempting the journey across the Central Mediterranean to Europe. This represents a drastic worsening of the death toll. Since the beginning of 2014, the overall ratio of deaths to the number of migrant crossings has been 1 in 50. For 2015, it was 1 in 53. This ratio of deaths to attempted crossings worsened further in April and May 2016 when 1 migrant died for every 17 attempted crossings. This was 5 per cent of the total number of people who attempted the journey across the Central Mediterranean during these two months. These estimated figures, using the same methodology and sources since the beginning of 2014, indicate an increasingly deadly route, despite the widespread media attention and public and policy awareness of this continuing humanitarian disaster.

This briefing aims to achieve the following: (a) examine the available data on rising numbers of deaths and

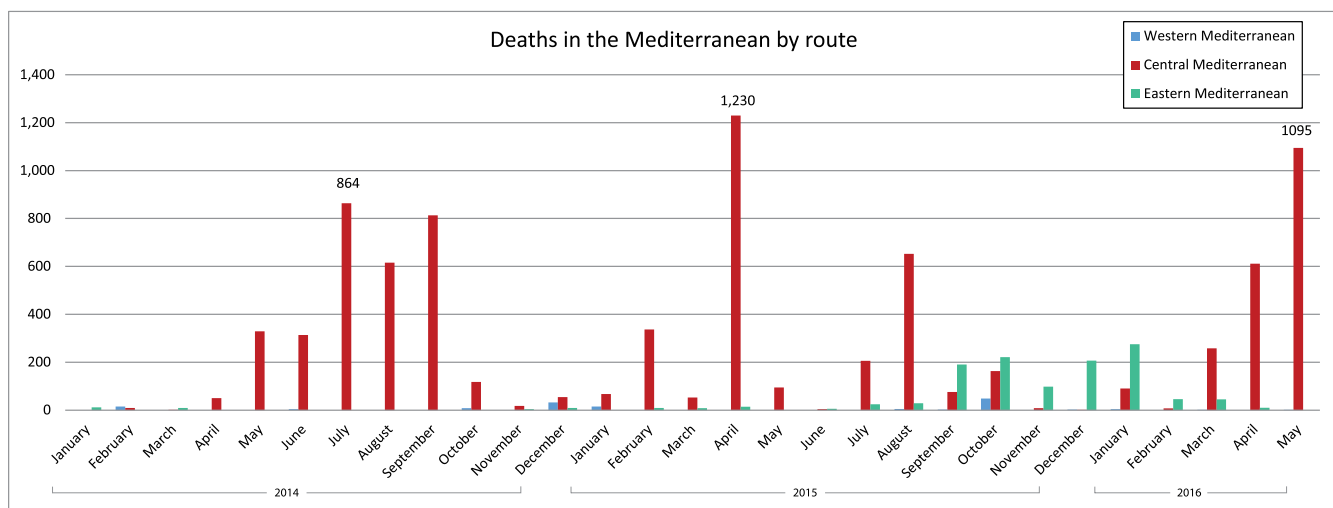
arrivals; (b) analyse the changing routes towards the departure points for this dangerous sea journey into Europe; and (c) investigate how patterns and trends have changed during the period between January 2014 and the end of May 2016.

## HOW MANY MIGRANTS HAVE DIED?

### Monthly totals of deaths in the Central Mediterranean, January 2014–May 2016

Figure 1 indicates the deaths and disappearances by month on each Mediterranean route. Compared to other routes, death while attempting to cross the Central Mediterranean occurs at disproportionately high levels to the number of people attempting the crossing. Since 2014, 17 of every 20 migrant deaths in the Mediterranean have occurred on the Central Mediterranean route, which accounts for just over a quarter of arrivals during the same period. For every 50 migrants who have attempted the dangerous crossing since 2014, 1 has died. Recent months have become

**Figure 1: Migrant deaths and disappearances in the Mediterranean by route, January 2014–May 2016**



more deadly, however; more people have died in the Central Mediterranean in the first five months of 2016 than the equivalent period in any other year. Similarly, the ratio of deaths per attempted crossing has more than doubled from 2015 to the first five months of 2016, from 0.18 per cent of crossings to 0.43 per cent. This represents a shift from 1 death in 53 attempted crossings to 1 in 23 on this route.

### Largest incidents in the Central Mediterranean, 1 January 2014–31 May 2016

In the Mediterranean from 2014 to the end of May 2016, 9,492 people are estimated to have died or are thought to be missing. Within these total numbers, more than 20 incidents since 2014 have each resulted in over 100 deaths, totaling 6,406 dead and missing. All these incidents took place along the Central Mediterranean route (Figure 2). These large shipwrecks make up more than half of all deaths in the Mediterranean, with overloading of the boats, rather than bad weather, being thought to be a significant causal factor.

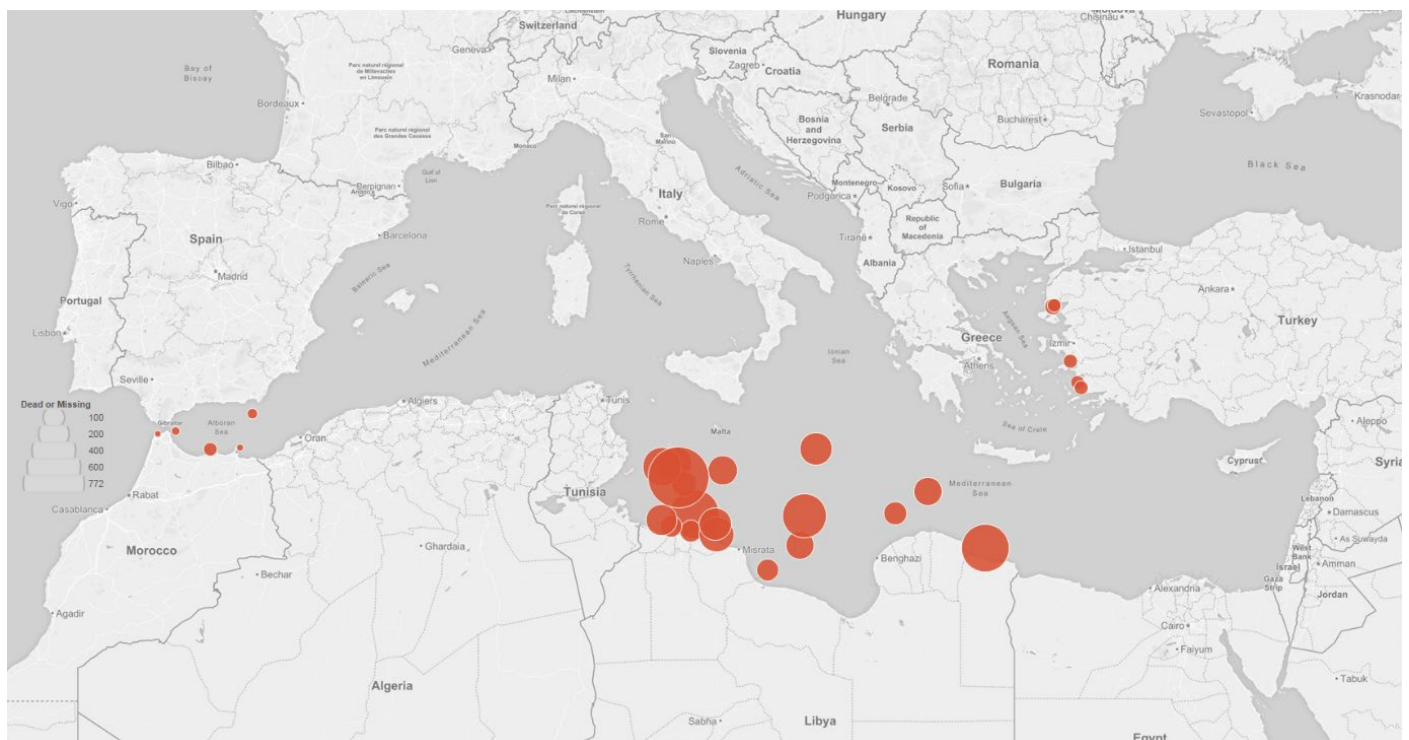
When hundreds of migrants die during shipwrecks, many bodies are never recovered. It is estimated that more than 6,000 bodies remain unrecovered in the

Mediterranean from incidents between 2014 and May 2016. Reports of large numbers of bodies being washed up on the shores of North Africa indicate that shipwrecks occur without leaving any traces. In July 2015, more than 100 bodies were found in Tajoura, Libya, with no major shipwreck having been recorded for three months previously. Smaller numbers of bodies have been found on the shores of Libya and Tunisia, with no reports of a shipwreck, on more than half a dozen occasions. It is likely that the Central Mediterranean route is even more deadly than already reported.

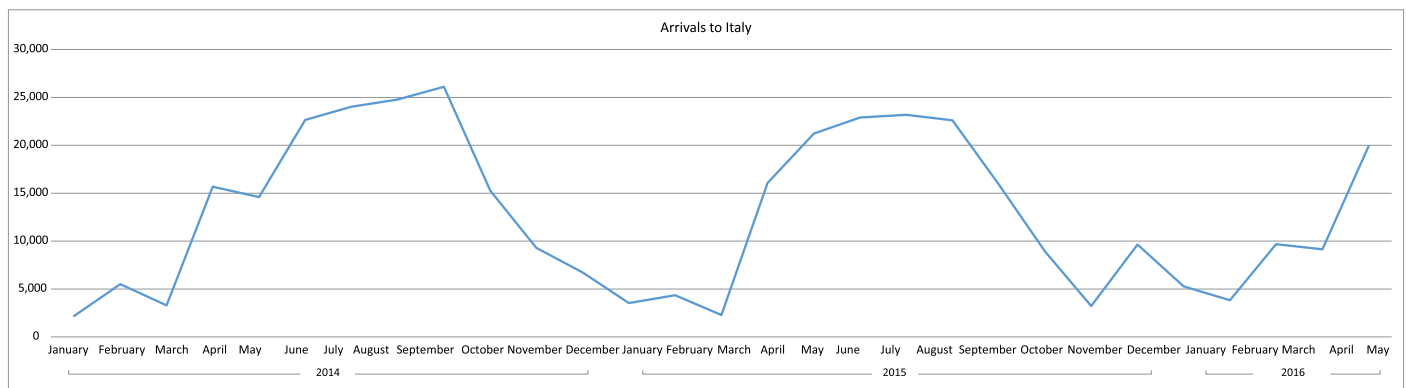
### ARRIVALS

The increased numbers and ratio of deaths to attempted crossings of the central route accompany what appears to be a very recent rise in arrivals. Since the end of 2013, more than 300,000 people have arrived in Europe via the Central Mediterranean route from North Africa to Italy and Malta (most arriving in Italy). In 2014, there were 170,100 arrivals, as conflicts in Europe's immediate vicinity escalated. In 2015, numbers arriving via this route fell to 153,842, while 847,930 migrants and refugees reached Greece across the Eastern Mediterranean. Following the unprecedented spike in arrivals in 2014, numbers fell by 9.5 per cent in 2015. This was mainly

Figure 2: Incidents with highest reported migrant fatalities by route, January 2014–May 2016



Source: Missing Migrants Project.

**Figure 3: Monthly arrivals to Italy, January 2014–May 2016**

Source: IOM Italy.

due to the instability in Libya, which made the country more dangerous for migrants and led to higher numbers across the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup> Figure 3 indicates the monthly breakdown of arrivals in Italy from January 2014 to May 2016.

It is now known that in the first five months of 2016, 47,851 migrants arrived in Italy. This was in total almost the same number as for the equivalent period in 2015 (47,452). However, a significant change occurred in April, when – for the first time since May 2015 – more people arrived in Italy than in Greece. Since March 2016, arrivals in Greece have fallen by 90 per cent compared with May 2015. April and May 2016 saw 29,474 arrivals in Italy, compared to 5,661 arrivals in Greece. These figures show that the number of migrants attempting this route is rising again.

### Numbers of women arriving in Italy increased in 2015

As the total number of arrivals have risen, the proportion of women appears to be increasing. In 2015, the number of women arriving in Italy via the Mediterranean totaled 21,434, an increase from 18,180 in 2014. Women made up 14 per cent of arrivals to Italy in 2015, compared with 10 per cent in 2014.

1 A. Malakooti, *Migration Trends in the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots* (Altaï Consulting for IOM Middle East and North Africa Regional Office, Cairo, 2015). Available from [http://publications.iom.int/system/files/altai\\_migration\\_trends\\_across\\_the\\_mediterranean.pdf](http://publications.iom.int/system/files/altai_migration_trends_across_the_mediterranean.pdf)

### Arrivals of children fell as the proportion of unaccompanied minors remained the same

The pattern of arrivals of children is mixed. The number of minors travelling to Italy via the sea borders fell between 2014 and 2015, from 26,122 to 16,478, including (respectively) 13,026 and 12,360 unaccompanied minors. While the overall proportion of children fell from 15 per cent to 11 per cent during these two years, there is also an indication of higher numbers of unaccompanied minors, as their proportion of the total stayed the same, at around 8 per cent.

### Falling numbers in the Eastern Mediterranean, rising numbers of arrivals on the Central Mediterranean route

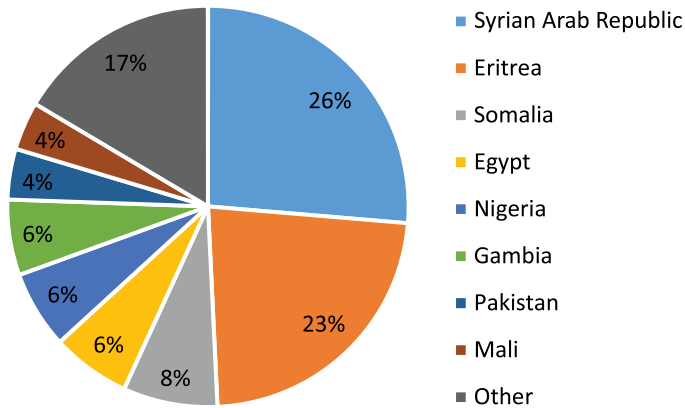
In 2015, the number of arrivals in Italy via the Central Mediterranean fell for the first time since 2012, due in large part to the rise of the Eastern Mediterranean as the predominant route used by Syrian migrants. Though Eritrean arrivals increased in 2015 to 25 per cent of the overall flows, the number of Syrians fell to 7,448, which is 5 per cent of the total arrivals in Italy that year. During the same period, 499,495 Syrians arrived in Greece via the Eastern Mediterranean.

### Changing suite of countries of origin

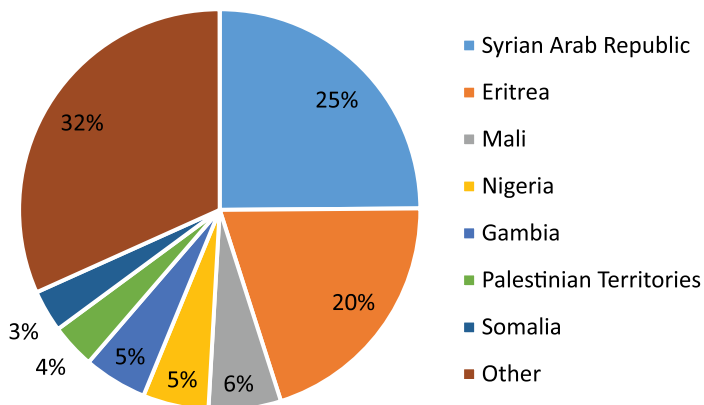
In addition to the changing situation for Syrians, arrivals in Europe via the Central Mediterranean have seen a shift in the suite of other countries of origin since 2010. Before 2012, most migrants who arrived in Italy via the Mediterranean were from North Africa; between 2010 and 2012, Tunisians made up at least 15 per cent of

**Figure 4: Country of origin of migrant arrivals in Italy, 2013–2015**

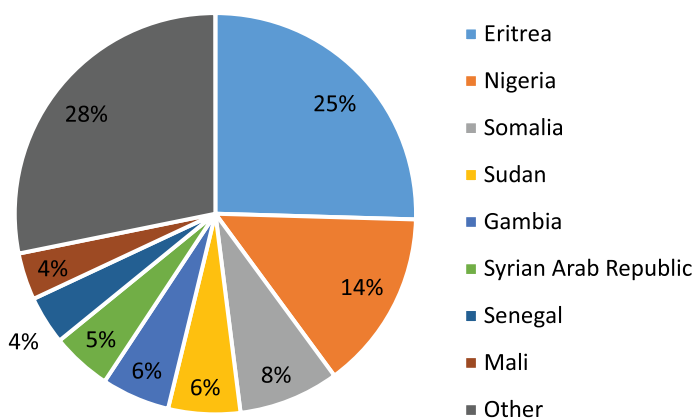
2013: 42,925 arrivals to Italy



2014: 170,100 arrivals to Italy



2015: 153,842 arrivals to Italy



Source: IOM Italy.

these flows. Arrivals in Italy then more than doubled in 2013, in large part due to the arrival of 11,307 Syrians and 9,834 Eritreans, representing respective increases from 582 and 1,612 in 2012.

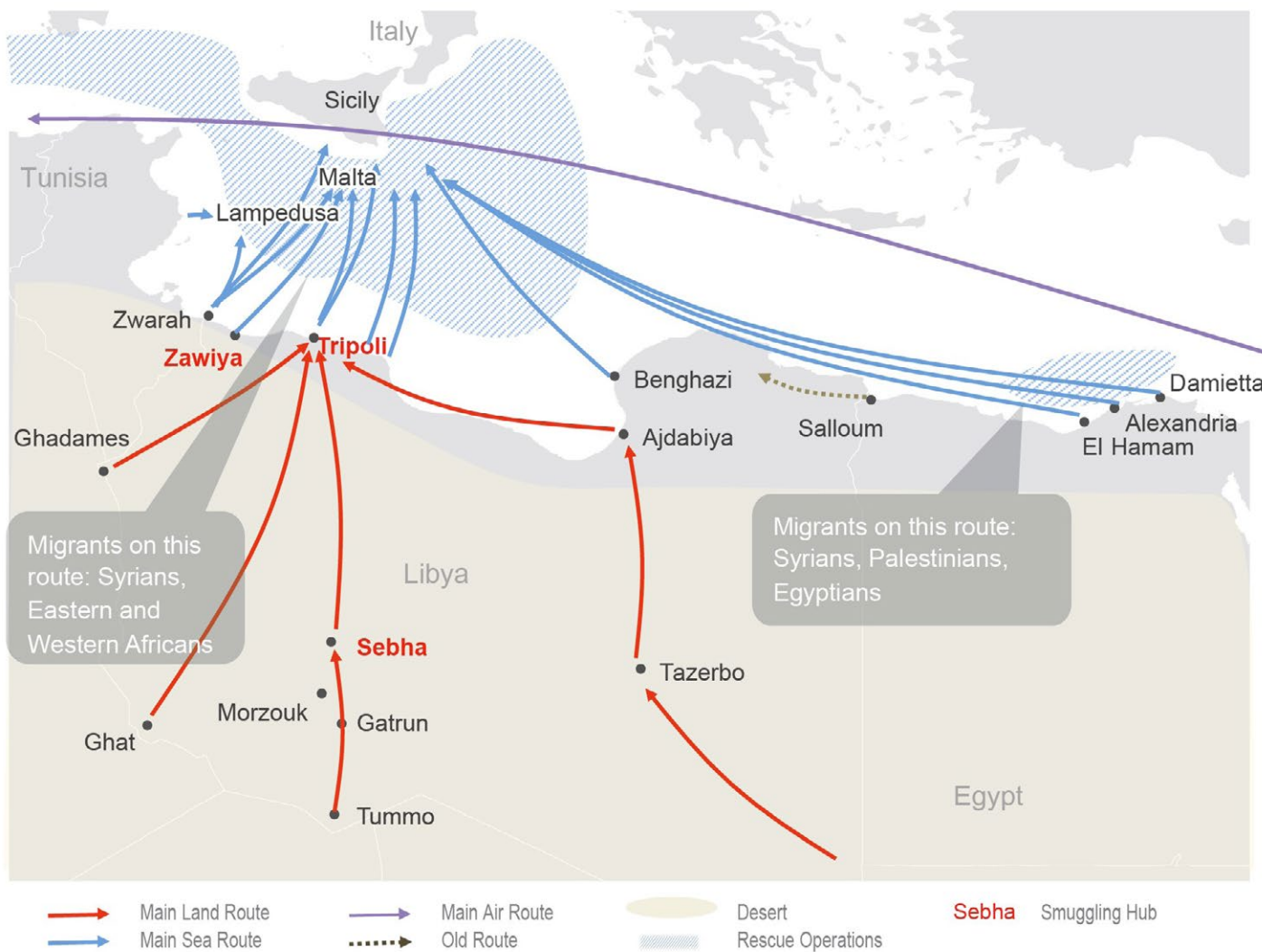
In the following year, 2014, numbers crossing the Central Mediterranean increased again, this time triple the number of the previous year. Despite the overall increase in numbers, the distribution by major countries of origin remained largely the same. In 2014, 42,323 Syrians comprised 25 per cent of the numbers arriving in Italy, compared to 26 per cent in 2013. Similarly, 34,329 Eritrean migrants represented 20 per cent of arrivals in Italy in 2014, the same proportion seen the year before. Fewer Egyptians arrived in 2014 and 2015 than in 2013, when they comprised 6 per cent of arrivals in Italy. Contrastingly, significant numbers of Sudanese arrived in Italy in 2015, making up 6 per cent of the flows. Similarly, Nigerian arrivals increased in 2015, from less than 6 per cent of the total in 2013 and 2014 to nearly 15 per cent of arrivals in Italy in 2016 (Figure 4).

#### ROUTES FROM NORTH AFRICA TO EUROPE

Migrants arriving in Italy from Libya are predominantly from East Africa, West Africa and the Syrian Arab Republic, though numbers from the Syrian Arab Republic fell in 2015 and 2016. Historically, the rise in number of arrivals via the Central Mediterranean route was first associated in 2014 with an increase in the number of North African departure points to Europe. The majority of boat departures from North Africa occurred from the Libyan coast, with additional departure points in Tunisia and Egypt. The main boat departure points from Libya in 2014 and 2015 were beachheads within 50 km of Tripoli, including Zwarah and Zawiya. Some migrants also depart from Benghazi. The major departure points from Egypt are around Alexandria, between El Hamam to the west and Damietta to the east. Boat arrivals to Italy from Egypt were mainly Eritreans, Palestinians, Egyptians and Syrians, though again the number of Syrian migrants decreased in 2015 and 2016. The frequency of use of these departure points is thought to depend on the level and intensity of border control operations at different points on the northern coast.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Map 1: Main migration routes from North Africa to Europe



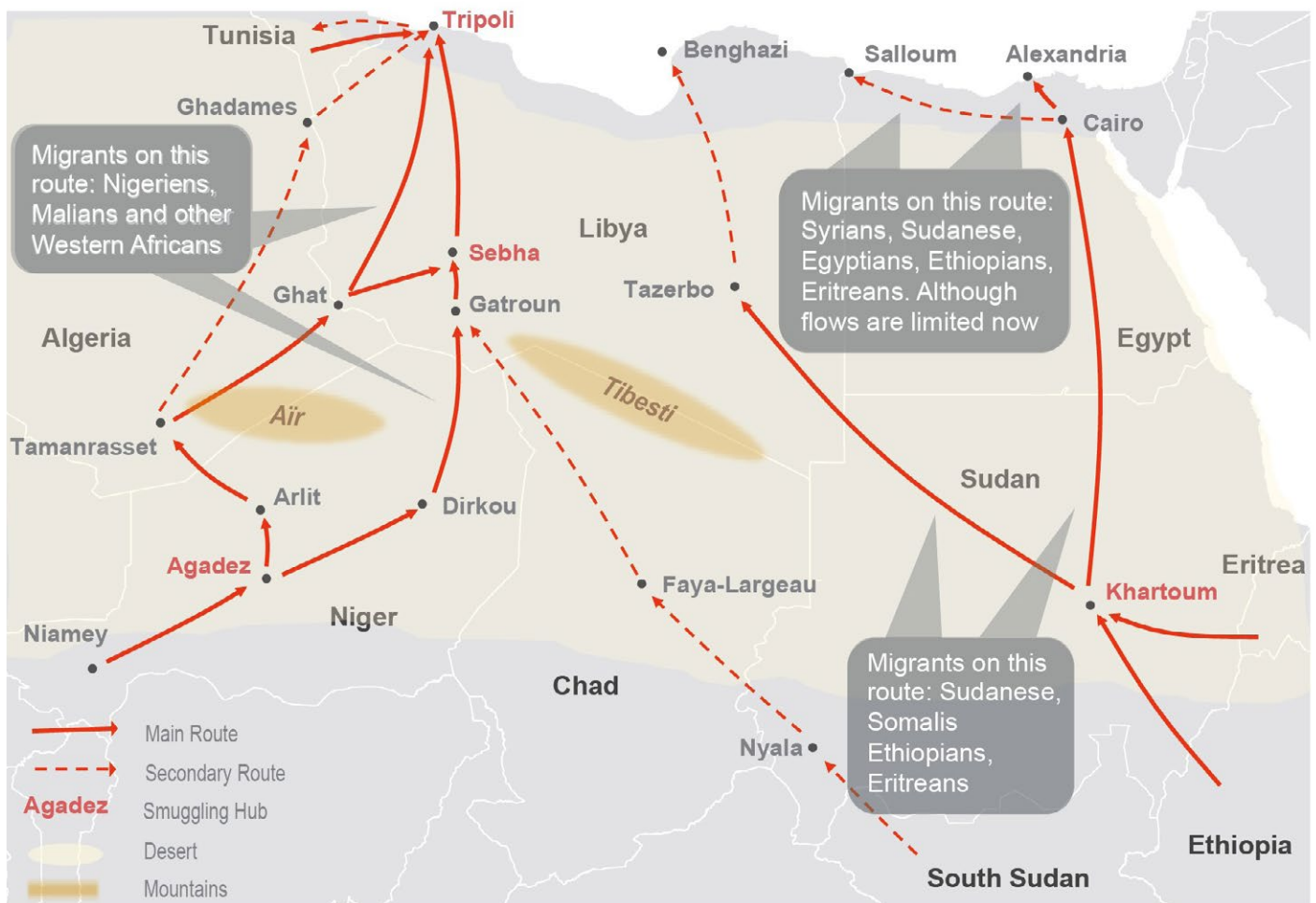
Taken from 'Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots' by Altai Consulting/IOM

Source: Malakooti, 2015.

Historically, some Syrian migrants arrived by air to Algeria, Egypt and Libya, which previously had no visa requirements for Syrians. The numbers of Syrians travelling by air into Libya decreased during the 2014 crisis, but has since risen again. However, Egypt and Algeria now require visas from Syrian passport holders, which stopped these movements. Generally, the number of Syrians who arrived in Italy in 2015 and the first quarter of 2016 were much lower than preceding years, due to the increasing difficulties of travel to North Africa and the comparative ease (until recent months) of the Eastern Mediterranean crossing.

### ROUTES TO NORTH AFRICA TOWARDS THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN

Libya is traditionally the main country of departure on the Central Mediterranean routes, although Egypt has become a more common transit point in recent years. There are several major routes into Libya. Migrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan travel from the east, through the Horn of Africa, to Khartoum and then to Libya via its south-eastern borders. Another migratory route is through Chad to Sebha, in South-western Libya. Nigerian, Malian, and other Western African migrants take the routes through Niger, which

**Map 2: Main migration routes to North Africa on the Central Mediterranean route**

Taken from 'Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots' by Altai Consulting/IOM

Source: Malakooti, 2015.

lead north to Libya either directly or via Algeria. There is also a route from Egypt to Libya via Salloum that is taken by fewer migrants than on the other routes to Libya. This route is frequented by Egyptians, Eritreans, Ethiopians, Sudanese and Syrians.

Libya is traditionally the main country of departure on the Central Mediterranean routes, although Egypt has become a more common transit point in recent years. There are several major routes into Libya. Migrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan travel from the east, through the Horn of Africa, to Khartoum and then to Libya via its south-eastern borders. Another

migratory route is through Chad to Sebha, in South-western Libya. Nigerian, Malian and other Western African migrants take the routes through Niger, which lead north to Libya either directly or via Algeria. There is also a route from Egypt to Libya via Salloum that is taken by fewer migrants than on the other routes to Libya. This route is frequented by Egyptians, Eritreans, Ethiopians, Sudanese and Syrians.

## Conclusions

The available data on routes towards the Central Mediterranean and on deaths and arrivals indicate that since the end of March 2016, there have been rising numbers both of arrivals and deaths, with an increase in the number of large incidents and an unprecedented death toll for the last week of May 2016. This briefing seeks to inform policymakers and the general public of this change, in the context of previous and emerging European Union and national government policy interventions. The deadly events taking place in the Mediterranean are increasingly concentrated in the Central Mediterranean, a route that has become more significant with the effective closure of the Eastern Mediterranean route and the overland Western Balkans route, the implementation of the European Union–Turkey agreement, the relative porosity of borders in Libya and the increasingly dangerous conditions for the migrants living there. All these factors are thought to drive and influence the desperate choices made by migrants, along the various routes to the Central Mediterranean and which result in the increased number of arrivals on this route. With the closure of the Eastern Mediterranean route and the extreme dangers posed by the Central Mediterranean crossing, the numbers presented here seem to support warnings from officials and commentators of a major humanitarian crisis.

## Note on data used in this brief

Timely data on migration are often scarce, making it difficult for decision makers to develop effective migration policies. The creation of the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) in Berlin, Germany, is IOM's response to growing calls for comprehensive data on global migration trends. This series of data briefings is a step towards better analysis and communication of available data, which is needed to promote a better understanding of migration.

The data used in this brief are based on methodologies developed to maximize accuracy and timeliness. Data on migrant arrivals are collected by IOM from national sources on registrations – in this brief, the Italian Ministry of the Interior and the Hellenic Coast Guard – and take into account government sources and local estimates from IOM staff on the ground. Data on migrant deaths are sourced from IOM's Missing Migrants Project, which collates information from national authorities, media reports, non-governmental organizations and local estimates from IOM staff. However, it is important to keep in mind that because of the irregular nature of migration discussed in this briefing, it is not possible to have precisely accurate numbers. All numbers used in this briefing should be seen as approximations, which nonetheless reflect the scale and trends of migration.

For further reading, see: A. Malakooti, *Migration Trends in the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots* (Altai Consulting for IOM Middle East and North Africa Regional Office, Cairo, 2015). Available from <http://publications.iom.int/books/migration-trends-across-mediterranean-connecting-dots>

## About

### GMDAC

In response to growing calls for better data on migration, and better use and presentation of migration data, IOM has created a Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC). Located in the heart of Berlin, Germany, the Centre aims to provide authoritative and timely analysis of data on global migration issues as a global hub for data and statistics on migration.

### Data Briefing Series

The GMDAC Data Briefing Series aims to explain what lies behind the numbers and the data used in migration policy and public debates. The Briefings explain what “the numbers” indicate about movements of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, on a range of topics for policy across the globe.

The way the data are presented has an important influence on public perceptions of migration in Europe and the development of policy. The Series will serve to clarify, explain and exchange specialist knowledge in an accessible format for wider public and policy audiences, for capacity-building and evidence for policy. Briefings will be of interest to expert, as well as lay audiences, including journalists, students, local authority and city planners and lawyers.

### Authors

Julia Black, Consultant, Missing Migrants Project, GMDAC

Ann Singleton, Senior Adviser, GMDAC

Arezo Malakooti, Senior Research and Data Analyst, GMDAC

## Contact information

For more information about the Data Briefing Series, please contact the editors:

### Frank Laczko

Director of GMDAC

Tel.: +49 30 278 778 23

Email: [flaczko@iom.int](mailto:flaczko@iom.int)

### Ann Singleton

Senior Adviser, GMDAC, and

Senior Research Fellow, University of Bristol

Email: [ann.singleton@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:ann.singleton@bristol.ac.uk)

### Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Taubenstr. 20-22 D- 10117 Berlin, Germany

Tel.: +49 30 278 778 22

Fax: +49 30 278 778 99

Please visit the GMDAC website for publications, resources, and events: <http://gmdac.iom.int>

*This material has been funded by UK Aid from the UK government; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.*

*The opinions expressed in this briefing are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the briefing do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers and boundaries.*



17 route des Morillons, P.O. Box 17, 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland  
Tel.: +41 22 717 9111 • Fax: +41 22 798 6150 • E-mail: [hq@iom.int](mailto:hq@iom.int) • Website: [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)