

Eastern Mediterranean

Situation in 2022

In 2022, there were about 42 800 irregular border crossings detected on the Eastern Mediterranean route. Syrians, Afghans and Nigerians were the top reported nationalities. Figures roughly doubled compared with 2021 yet remained below half of the figures in 2019.

Situation in 2021

In 2021, the number of arrivals to the EU via this route was 20 567, staying on the same level with the figures of the previous year.

While detections of illegal border crossings continue to drop in Greece, Cyprus experienced significantly stronger migratory pressure compared to previous years as arrivals to its shores doubled to around 12 350. This increase was linked to a higher share of Africans among the detected migrants.

Situation in 2020

The number detections of illegal border crossings plunged to 20 283 in 2020, only a quarter of the total of 2019.

Although the year began with a rise, the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions applied both in Greece and Turkey substantially reduced arrivals during the rest of the year.

Most of the irregular migrants detected on this route originated from Syria, Afghanistan and Turkey this year.

Situation in 2019

The Eastern Mediterranean was the most-used path to Europe in 2019 as the number of detections of illegal border-crossings jumped to 83 333, the highest total since 2016.

In the second half of the year, arrivals in the Eastern Aegean were the highest since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. Contrastingly, the pressure on the Greek and Bulgarian land borders with Turkey markedly eased and reported detections there fell by almost half when compared with 2018.

Afghans were the most commonly detected nationality with their number increasing by 167%, or by roughly 18 000 people in absolute numbers.

Aside from Afghans, migrants from Syria and Turkey were among the top three detected nationalities.

Situation in 2018

In 2018, the Eastern Mediterranean route registered 56 561 illegal border-crossings. The pressure was 34% higher than in the preceding year due to the rise in land crossings from Turkey to Greece.

Syrians were the most commonly detected nationality, followed by Afghans and Iraqis. The number of recorded Turkish migrants more than tripled from 2017 with 7 918 arrivals, making it the fourth most detected nationality.

Situation in 2017 and before

In 2017, there were 42 319 detections of irregular arrivals on the Eastern Mediterranean route. This was roughly on the same level with the previous year's figures due to the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement.

In 2016, 182 227 migrants were detected on this route, although a vast majority arrived in the first three months of the year. The number of migrants arriving on the Greek islands in the Eastern Aegean plunged starting in late March 2016, after the EU-Turkey statement that came into force in March 2016, in which Turkey agreed to secure its maritime and land borders and accept the return of irregular migrants from Greece. The statement largely removed the incentive for migrants to take irregular migration routes to Greece and has undermined the business model of people-smuggling networks.

Several measures introduced to prevent illegal border-crossing along the Western Balkan route also discouraged many from making the dangerous sea crossing to reach the Greek Eastern Aegean islands.

In 2015, 885 386 migrants arrived in the EU via the Eastern Mediterranean route – 17 times the number in 2014, which was itself a record year at the time. Throughout 2015, Frontex deployed an increased number of officers and vessels to the Greek islands to assist in patrolling the sea and registering the

thousands of migrants arriving daily. In December, the agency launched Poseidon Rapid Intervention after the Greek authorities requested additional assistance at its borders.

Most of the migrants on this route in 2015 originated from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

More information

More information about this migratory route is available in Frontex's [annual risk analysis reports](#). Frontex supports Greece with border control as part of Operation Poseidon and Operation Terra.

Illegal border crossings on the Eastern Mediterranean route in numbers.

