

4 mixed migration routes to Europe

about 76,600 women and girls arrived in Europe in 2018-2020

1,100 female migrants and refugees surveyed

This brief presents an overview of available data on migratory trends to Europe through the Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean routes and the Western African Atlantic route between 2018 and 2020, with a focus on women and girls. It is based on data collected by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) on arrivals by sea and by land in Spain (WMR/ WAAR), Italy and Malta (CMR), Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria (EMR), on migrants' transits through the Western Balkan region, and on Flow Monitoring Surveys collected by DTM, to present a brief profile of women and girls on the move to Europe over the past three years.

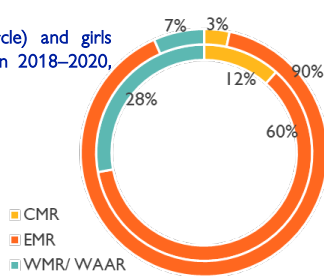
Recent arrivals in Europe of migrant women and girls

In 2020, a total of **99,475 migrants and refugees arrived** in Europe by sea and by land through the **Eastern (EMR), Central (CMR) and Western (WMR) Mediterranean routes** and the **Western African Atlantic route (WAAR)**.¹

This is 23 per cent less than the 128,536 arrivals registered in 2019, and 33 per cent less than the 147,683 registered in 2018. Although the disaggregation by gender and age is not always available for country-level data on arrivals in Europe, according to available statistics from national authorities **the share of adult women on total arrivals is approximately 14 per cent overall**. This means that out of the 375,694 arrivals by sea and by land registered between 2018 and 2020 along the three Mediterranean routes and the WAAR, about **58,800** are women. At the same time, children represented 24 per cent of all arrivals to Europe between 2018 and 2020 on average. Again, data on children that is disaggregated by gender is not always available, but according to the most reliable data from national authorities and other UN agencies the share of girls among children ranged from around 6 per cent on the CMR,² to about 11 per cent on the WMR/WAAR and 38 per cent on the EMR. This would mean a total of some **25,800 girls arrived by sea and by land in Europe between 2018 and 2020**, which is less than one third (28%) of the almost 91 thousand children that arrived in Spain, Italy, Malta, Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria in those years.

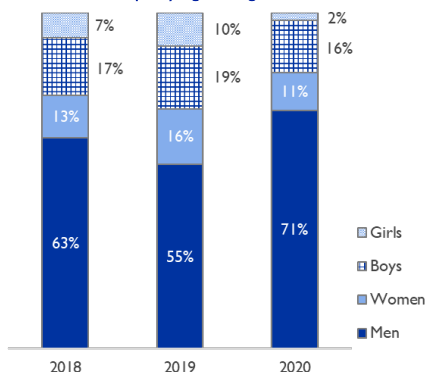
Overall, **the number of women and girls** registered at arrivals by sea and by land in Europe between 2018 and 2020 is **about 76,615 or 20 per cent** of total arrivals.

Share (%) of women (inner circle) and girls (outer circle) arrived in Europe in 2018–2020, by route



women and girls are **20%** of arrivals in Europe in 2018-2020

Arrivals in Europe by age and gender, 2018–2020



Trends over time and by route are quite varied. Most women and girls registered at arrival over the past three years reached Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean route (70%), most of them reaching Greece and especially in 2018 and 2019, while the rest arrived in Spain via the WMR and WAAR (21%) and in Italy and Malta through the CMR (9%).

In addition, the **yearly trend of arrivals of women and girls** reflects the decreasing trends in overall arrivals, with most female migrants and refugees arriving in 2019 (44%) and 2018 (38%) and less in 2020 (18%). This is particularly due to two concurrent trends. First, over the three years there has been a **decrease in arrivals to Greece** (-79% between 2019 and 2020) and along the EMR, a route where female migrants usually represented a significant share of all arrivals (more than one third) as families with children are more common on this route. Second, the **increase in arrivals registered in Italy and Spain** in 2020 (+198% and +29% respectively, compared to 2019) is made mostly of adult men travelling alone through the CMR, the WMR and the WAAR.

Official information on nationalities by gender is often not available. **The main nationalities of women and girls** arriving in Italy and Malta over the three years are Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Eritrea,³ Somalia and Guinea. In Spain, the main nationalities are reported to be Mali, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Morocco and Cameroon. On the EMR, the main nationalities of female migrants are believed to be Syrian Arab Republic, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Women and girls in transit in the Western Balkan region

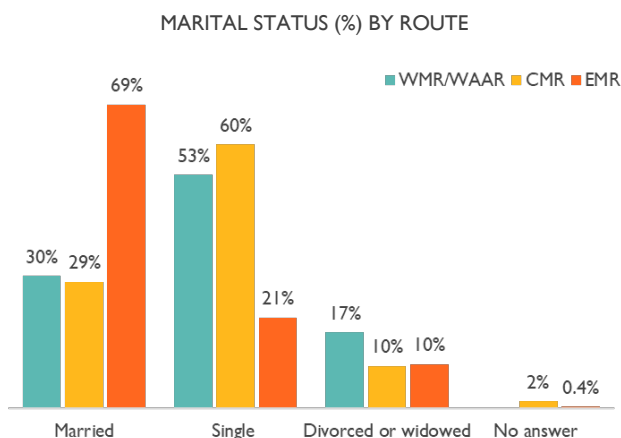
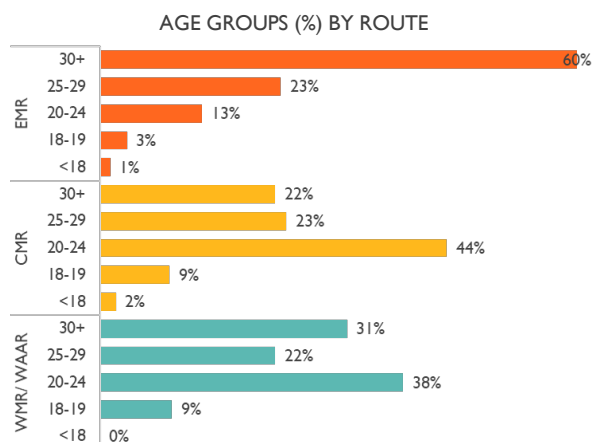
According to available data from national authorities and IOM offices, **113,927 migrants and refugees** were registered while **transiting** borders within the Western Balkan regions in 2020.⁴ The number of migrants and refugees transiting through the Western Balkans decreased slightly (-2%) in comparison with 2019 (116,104), however increased significantly (+96%) compared to 2018, when a total of 58,101 individuals were registered upon entry into Albania,⁵ Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Kosovo.*

Disaggregation of transit data by gender and age is not available for most countries. From available information for Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, only around 1-2 per cent of all registered migrants and refugees apprehended at borders were female over the past three years. This would mean about 5-6 thousand women transiting across the Western Balkans between 2018 and 2020, assuming that the share of women is similar across countries in the region. Nevertheless, the share of women and of girls among children could be higher due to under-reporting of these groups in official counts and statistics.

1. See the IOM's DTM [Mixed Migration Flows to Europe, Quarterly Overview \(October - December 2020\)](#) and the [DTM Mediterranean geoportal](#).
 2. See the interagency factsheets "Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe - Overview of Trends" for [2018](#), [2019](#) and [mid-2020](#) jointly published by IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF.
 3. Information on nationality is based on declaration by migrants to national authorities.
 4. The total figure presented here is an indication of the transits within the Western Balkans, but it can include double counting of the same person registered while crossing multiple borders in the region.
 5. For Albania, data are available for 2 Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs), one in the Gjirokastra and one in the Shkoder region. Information on other entry points is not available.
 * References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

The **Flow Monitoring Surveys (FMS)** are part of the IOM's DTM activities in the Mediterranean region, which started in October 2015 and are conducted within the framework of IOM's research on populations on the move through the Mediterranean and Western Balkan Routes to Europe. Surveys are analysed to provide information on profiles, transit routes, and vulnerabilities of the respondents. Between 2018 and 2020, data collection took place in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Spain. There were **1,100 female respondents**, representing 13 per cent of the total sample (8,769). The main findings are presented by route: 446 surveys in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Montenegro and North Macedonia for the EMR, 355 surveys in Spain (WMR/ WAAR) and 299 surveys in Italy (CMR).

A profile of migrant women and girls⁵ surveyed by DTM in Europe in 2018-2020

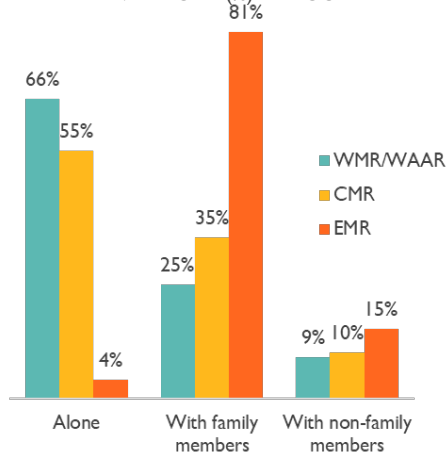


Most of the 446 female respondents on the EMR (83%) were 25 years of age or above, with the rest being between 20 and 24 years (13%), between 18 and 19 years (3%) or between 14 and 17 years (1%). Of the 355 female respondents in Spain, more than half (53%) were between 20 and 24 years of age and the remaining 9 per cent were between 18 and 19 years. In Italy, half of the sample (50%) was 25 years old or older, 43 per cent were between 20 and 24 years, 9 per cent were between 18 and 19 years and the remaining 2 per cent were adolescents.

Overall, girls between 14 and 17 years of age were only 1 per cent of the sample (13 interviews).

Over half of the female respondents interviewed in Italy (60%) and Spain (51%) reported they were single, while less than a third reported being married (29% in Italy, 32% in Spain) and the rest being either divorced or widowed (10% in Italy and 17% in Spain). On the other end, the majority (69%) of migrants interviewed along the EMR reported that they were married, with the rest of them being single (21%), divorced or widowed (10%).

TRAVEL MODE (%) BY ROUTE



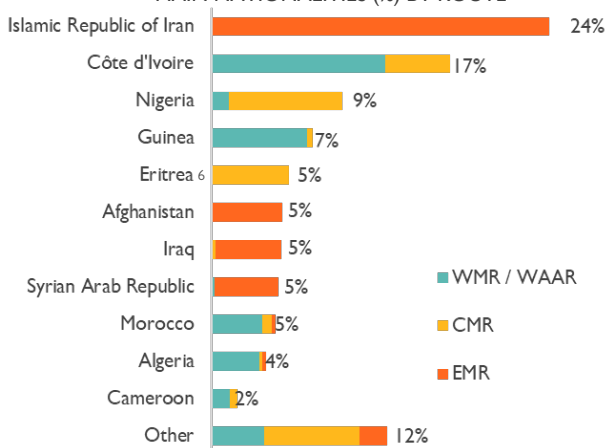
Most female respondents in Spain and Italy reported that they travelled alone (63% and 55%, respectively), while approximately one third reported having travelled with at least one family member (28% of respondents in Spain, 35% in Italy).

The vast majority (81%) of respondents interviewed on the EMR reported that they travelled with at least one family member, and only 4 per cent of those met in North Macedonia, Montenegro, Greece and Albania reported having travelled alone. Travelling with non-family members was reported by 15 per cent of female migrants on the EMR, 10 per cent of them on the CMR and 9 per cent of them on the WMR/WAAR.

5. Results reflect interviews with respondents who self-identified as women/girls.

6. Information on nationality is based on the nationality declared by migrants to national authorities.

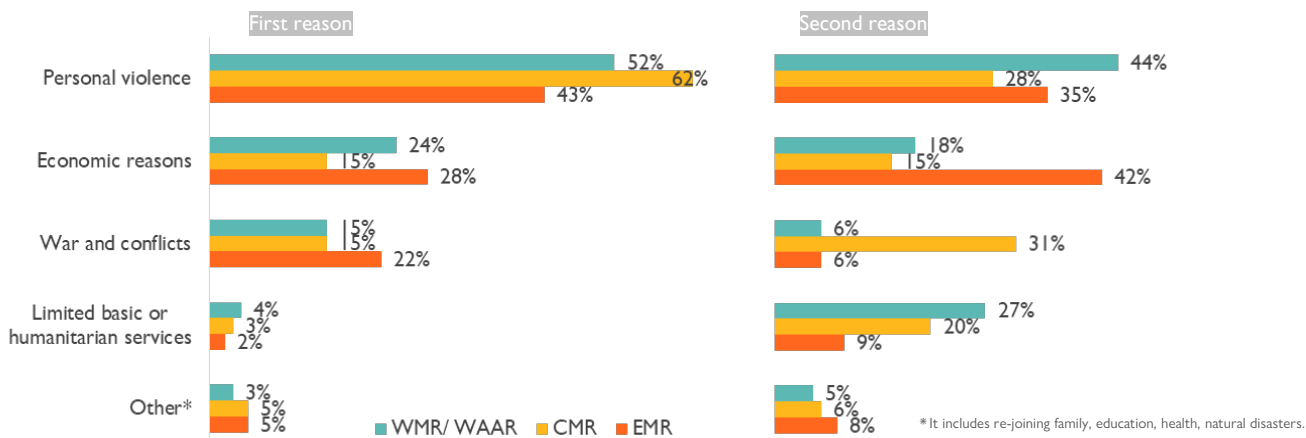
MAIN NATIONALITIES (%) BY ROUTE



Forty-two nationalities are represented in the total sample of 1,100 female migrants interviewed in 2018-2020. Overall, Iranian women alone represented 24 per cent of the sample, followed by respondents from Côte d'Ivoire (17%) and Nigeria (9%), but the main nationalities differ greatly by route.

On the EMR, most respondents were from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic (94% of female respondents on that route). On the WMR/ WAAR, most female respondents were from Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Morocco and Algeria (80% of female respondents on the route). In Italy, Nigeria, Eritrea,⁶ Côte d'Ivoire, Tunisia and Somalia represented three quarters of all female respondents (75%).

MAIN REASONS FOR LEAVING THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN (%) BY ROUTE



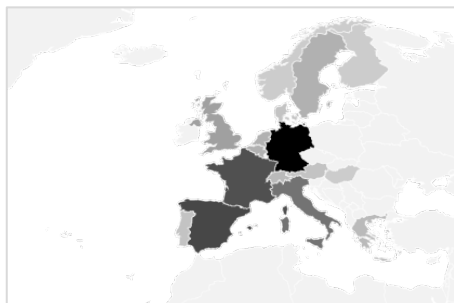
The reasons to migrate are manifold and complex to disentangle and can change over time. The survey asked respondents what were the two most important reasons for leaving the country of origin, allowing for a closed set of options.⁶

Less than half (43%) of female respondents on the EMR reported that they left their origin country due to threats or personal violence, followed by economic reason (28%), war and conflicts (22%), and limited access to basic or humanitarian services (2%). Female migrants travelling along the WMR or WAAR and who were interviewed in Spain reported that they have left their country of origin due to personal violence in 52 per cent of the cases, to economic reasons (24%), war and conflicts (15%), limited access to basic or humanitarian services (4%). In Italy, almost two thirds (62%) of female respondents reported having left their country of origin due to personal violence (62%), followed by economic reasons or war/conflict (15%, each), limited access to basic or humanitarian services (3%).⁷

Overall, more than half (51%) of all 1,100 female respondents reported fear of violence or actual personal violence suffered as a primary reason for leaving, a share that is 17 percentage points higher than those among male respondents (33%) in the whole sample.

In the case of personal violence suffered, respondents were asked to specify which type threat or violence they faced. The label “personal violence” includes a wide range of circumstances from domestic violence to inheritance issues, from discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs, sexual orientation or gender identity to opposition to un-approved marriages or threats of persecution. In 2020 only, COVID-19 related reasons were intertwined with economic reasons as some economic sectors in the origin countries have suffered from various mobility restrictions implemented to contain the pandemic both in origin, transit and destination countries.⁸

INTENDED COUNTRY OF DESTINATION AT THE TIME OF THE SURVEY (%) BY ROUTE



This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

WMR / WAAR		CMR		EMR	
Spain	53%	Italy	55%	Germany	49%
France	32%	France	13%	Europe	21%
Unknown	8%	Germany	7%	France	7%
Europe	2%	Europe	6%	Greece	4%
Germany	2%	United Kingdom	6%	Belgium	3%
Italy	1%	Unknown	4%	Sweden	3%
Other	1%	Other	9%	Other	13%

Most frequently mentioned intended countries of destination vary across routes. Along the EMR, almost half (49%) of female respondents reported Germany as the preferred destination, followed by Europe in general (21%), France (7%), Greece (4%), Belgium (3%), Sweden (3%) and other European countries. In Spain, most respondents (53%) declared they were willing to remain in Spain at the time of the interview, while 32 per cent had the intention to reach France, 8 per cent did not know and the remaining mentioned other European countries.

Similarly, most respondents (55%) in Italy declared their intention to remain in Italy, while the other 13 per cent reported France as the intended destination, followed by Germany (7%), United Kingdom (6%) and other European countries.

MAIN REASONS FOR CHOICE OF INTENDED DESTINATION

Overall, some main reasons for the choice of the intended destinations were reported similarly by female respondents across all routes: 30 per cent of the whole sample reported that the choice was guided by the appealing socio-economic conditions of the destination country (30%), while others mentioned the fact that it was the only choice available given the circumstances (21%), that the choice was made due to safety reasons (16%), or because they had some relatives (14%) or a network of co-nationals (6%) at the intended destination.

6. The options are: Sudden onset of natural disaster, Slow environmental change, War/conflict/Targeted violence, Limited access to basic services (school, healthcare, transportation), Economic reasons, Education (higher levels), Marriage, Family formation or family reunification, and (in 2020 only) COVID-19 related reasons.

7. It is worth noting that women and girls/adolescents travelling along the CMR, and especially those from Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, are frequently reported to be at risk of abuse and

exploitation during the journey ([here](#)) and to be victim of trafficking once arrived in Europe ([here](#) and [here](#)) according to IOM's previous research and direct assistance at landings.

8. For information on COVID-19 mobility restrictions implemented by country and impacts on mobility, kindly refer to the IOM's portal: <https://migration.iom.int/>

WOMEN AND MIGRATION: some general recommendations

Gender influences reasons for migrating, who migrates and to where, how people migrate and the networks they use, opportunities and resources available at destinations, and relations with the country of origin.⁹ Risks, vulnerabilities and needs are also shaped in large part by one's gender, and often vary drastically for different groups.

The roles, expectations, relationships and power dynamics associated with a specific gender, gender identity/expression and/or with a specific sexual orientation, significantly affect all aspects of the migration process, and can also be affected in new ways by migration.

Female migration can advance gender equality by empowering migrant women, but can also increase vulnerabilities and put migrant women at risk of discrimination and violence, in particular those who are undocumented.¹⁰

It is therefore crucial, among other initiatives to:

- Support activities aimed to recognize the contribution of migrant women and girls (in all their diversity) into the development of States, and a greater understanding of migration as a phenomenon with gender implications;
- Ensure women are active participants in the design and implementation of migrant centred initiatives and promote a gender-based perspective at all stages;
- Enable conditions to facilitate the recognition of skills and qualifications of women and girls, and allow access to education and vocational training;
- Include cross-cultural support mechanisms and initiatives to better enable access to social, health and economic rights, justice and protection of migrant women and girls;¹¹
- Ensure returns are carried out in safety and dignity, with particular attention to the specific needs of women and girls and in accordance with international human rights laws;
- Ensure the protection of the rights of migrant women and girls, which are particularly vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation;
- Enable conditions to protect women and girls of the risks inherent to smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings;
- Address trafficking in persons¹² as a highly gendered crime, and support transregional cooperation to break the chain of trafficking and ensure the protection of victims.



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Photos:

A Somali woman with her child, rescued in the Central Mediterranean in 2019 and relocated from Italy to France on 2020, Rome. © IOM Italy July 2020.
The welcome board of the Hotspot in Pozzallo, Sicily, where migrants and refugees are placed after disembarkation. Pozzallo. © IOM Italy November 2020.

9. According to IOM's [World Migration Report of 2020](#), it is estimated 272 million people living in a country other than their countries of birth, of which 52% of international migrants are male and 48% are female.

10. [General comment No. 2 \(2013\)](#) on the rights of migrant workers in an irregular situation and members of their families, (CMW/C/GC/2).

11. UN Women, [Policy Brief Leaving no one behind: Access to social protection for all migrant women](#), 2020.

12. ICAT, [Issue Brief: the Gender Dimensions of Human Trafficking](#), 2017.