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Trends and evolving arrival patterns through the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes

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DATA

Abstract: This chapter provides a descriptive analysis of migrant and refugee arrival trends in Italy and Spain from January 2018 to June 2019. The chapter explores major monthly trends in arrivals in 2018 and the first half of 2019, and indications of potential rerouting between the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) and Western Mediterranean Route (WMR) for certain nationalities. The key findings are:

- (a) From 2018 to the first half of 2019, the WMR was more active than the CMR, with a higher number of arrivals to Spain than to Italy in most months;
- (b) Simultaneously with a significant decrease in arrivals in both Italy and Spain in the observation period, possible rerouting from the CMR to the WMR was observed among certain nationalities over time, such as among Guinean and Malian migrants and refugees;
- (c) From the start of 2017 to August 2019, over 90 per cent of migration flows in West and Central Africa were intraregional or within the same country.²

4.1. Introduction

In 2018 and the first half of 2019, migrant and refugee³ arrival numbers to Europe continued a downward trend, following the peak in 2015 and 2016, and initial decline in 2017.

This chapter aims to provide a descriptive overview of mobility trends and possible shifts in routes⁴ taken by migrants and refugees travelling towards Europe along the CMR⁵ and the WMR⁶ during 2018 and the first half of 2019. The analysis tries to answer two main questions: (a) What were major monthly trends in arrivals in 2018 and the first half of 2019? (b) Is there any indication of potential shift between routes for certain nationalities? The main analysis time frame is January 2018–June 2019, but to better understand patterns in arrival trends in a broader context, comparisons with

¹ IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM).

² IOM, 2019a, 2019b; and compilation of available data by DTM.

³ In the context of this analysis, the phrase “migrants and refugees” is used to address sensitivities surrounding terms assigned to mixed migration groups and individuals.

⁴ In the context of this analysis, “route” is to be understood as the path taken by migrants or refugees in transit to Europe by sea.

⁵ In the context of this analysis, the CMR is to be understood as the route taken by arrivals in Italy by sea. While the CMR includes Italy as well as Malta, the chapter focuses primarily on arrivals to Italy only, as arrivals to Malta comprise only a fraction of the total arrivals on the CMR.

⁶ In the context of this analysis, the WMR is to be understood as the route taken by arrivals in Spain by sea.

2017 and 2016 arrival patterns are provided where relevant. While other studies in the field also investigate recent trends and potential shifts over time on the CMR and the WMR (MHub, 2019; MMC, 2018), the present chapter contributes to ongoing discourse and literature, in part, by extending the discussion on evolving patterns through the two routes to the first half of 2019, in relation to the questions addressed above.

Given the focus on overall trends along the CMR and the WMR, discussion of trends along the Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR) are largely outside the scope of this analysis. However, it is worth noting that the EMR remains the predominant route towards Europe in the period under review in terms of numbers of registered arrivals.⁷ Analysis develops a deeper focus on the WMR and the CMR, primarily because indications of potential rerouting among certain nationalities are more evident between the CMR and the WMR. In comparison with the CMR and the WMR, a largely different set of declared nationalities is observed along the EMR, and potential rerouting between the EMR to either the CMR or the WMR is not apparent.⁸

Routes that migrants and refugees take to reach Europe are influenced by a constellation of different factors, including adjustment to conditions and possibilities in transit countries, as well as policy changes and route closures in transit countries or intended destinations. This chapter is not trying to identify causes of possible shifts in routes or factors influencing migrants' decisions to take specific routes. Rather, it should be read as an overview of trends and possible shifts in those trends and between routes in the period under analysis.

The paper is structured as follows: First, general trends on the CMR and the WMR in 2018 and the first half of 2019 are discussed, along with an overview of key numbers and arrivals trends for each route. Second, an analysis of those nationalities which may have rerouted over time is given. Analysis of potential rerouting of certain nationalities focuses on nationals from West and Central Africa, as these nationals indicate most evident signs of possible shifts in routes. In 2019, as in 2018, Spain was the main arrival country for migrants taking the Western African and Western Mediterranean routes (IOM, 2019b). However, from the start of 2017 to August 2019, over 90 per cent of migration flows in West and Central Africa were intraregional or within the same country (*ibid.*).

4.2. Methodology

The chapter is based on arrivals data of migrants and refugees collected by national authorities and collated by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). These data do not represent total mobility trends into Europe. Given the descriptive analysis based on a specific period of time, observations and conclusions based on these data should be considered indicative rather than conclusive, and should not be understood as predictive of future trends.

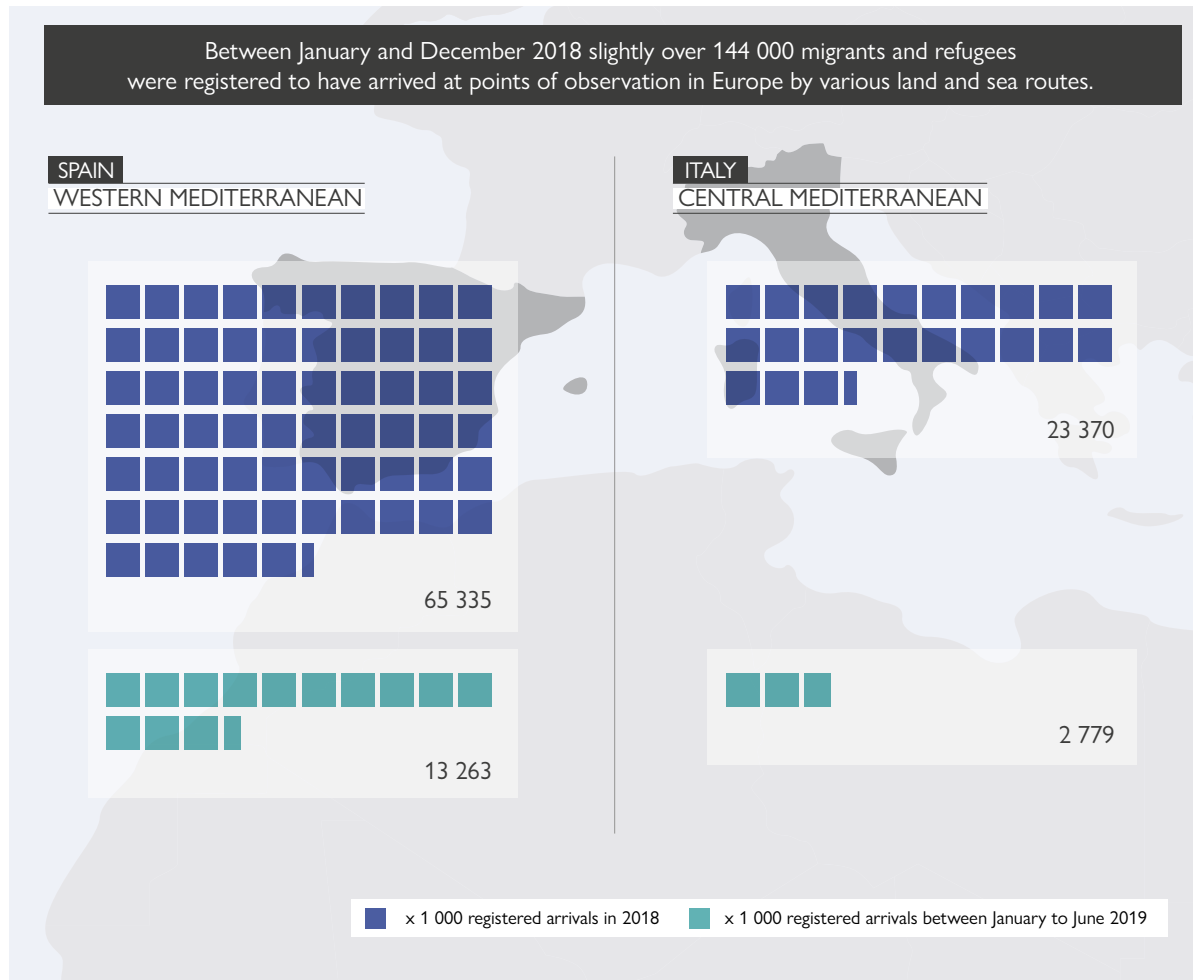
It is important to take note of data limitations and gaps affecting what the data can tell us about trends and possible shifts in routes along the CMR and the WMR. Data analysis is based on arrivals data from 2017 to the first half of 2019.⁹ Therefore, the trends analysed do not cover previous years and may not provide evidence of the larger shifts that have happened since 2015.

⁷ DTM, national authorities and IOM offices.

⁸ While there are some common, declared nationalities observed on all three routes, most declared nationalities observed on the EMR differ in comparison with those observed on the CMR and the WMR.

⁹ According to the compilation of available data by DTM, national authorities and IOM offices.

Figure 4.1. Registered arrivals by sea to Italy and Spain, 2018 and January–June 2019



Sources: DTM, national authorities and IOM offices.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

4.3. Overview of arrivals in 2018 and first half of 2019

From January to December 2018, slightly more than 144,000 migrants and refugees were registered to have arrived at points of observation in Europe by various land and sea routes. This is 23 per cent less than the number of arrivals recorded in 2017, when a little more than 186,700 migrants and refugees were recorded arriving at points of observation, reiterating that observed numbers of registered arrivals do not represent total mobility trends into Europe.¹⁰

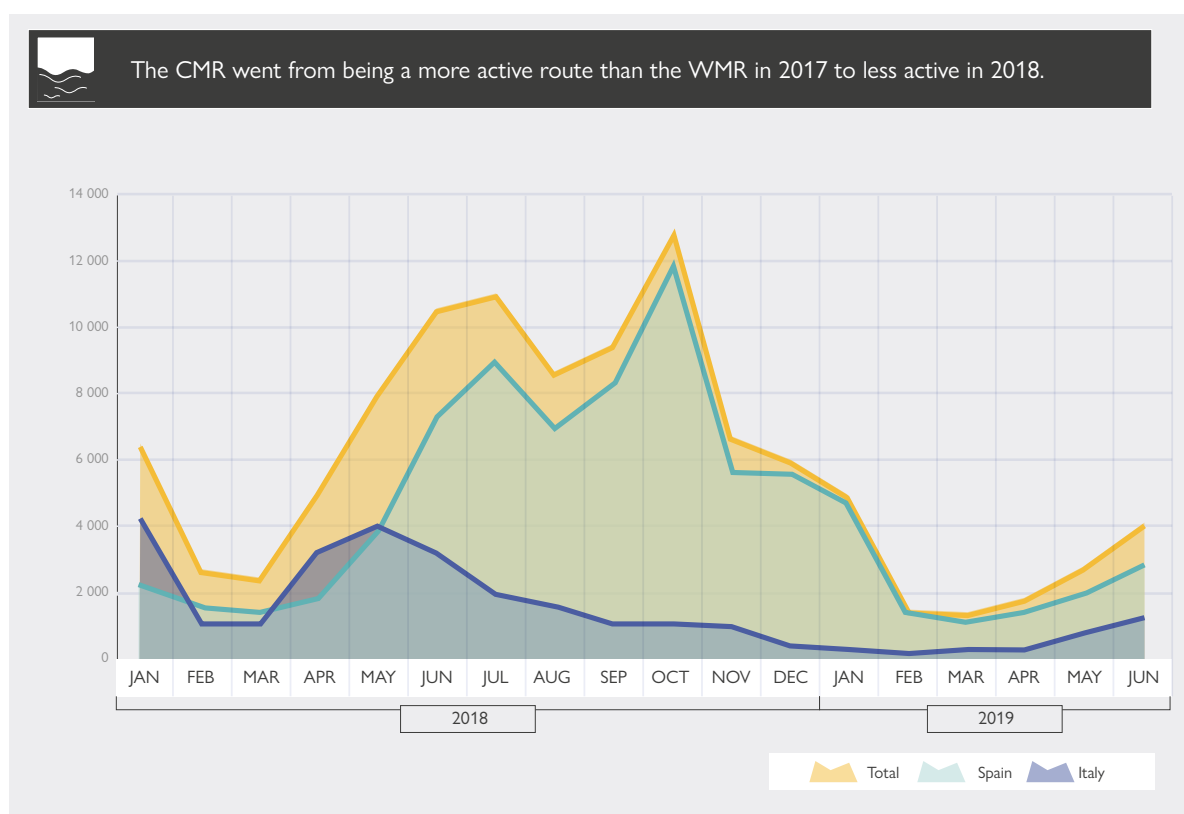
¹⁰ Arrivals numbers of migrants and refugees in 2017 and 2018 may be marginally higher due to slight adjustments in the observed number of migrants and refugees in Cyprus in the observed period.

However, in the period under review, there was an increased number of arrivals of migrants and refugees to Malta. At the end of December 2018, a total of 1,445 migrants and refugees were reported to have arrived in the country, and the increase continued into 2019, the highest number reported since 2013, when 2,008 migrants and refugees were registered arriving.¹¹

Simultaneously with the overall decrease in registered arrivals to Europe in 2018 and the first half of 2019, potential shifts were also observed in the main routes migrants and refugees took to reach Europe, a trend which becomes evident when looking at monthly arrival numbers to Italy (CMR) and Spain (WMR) in that period.¹²

The CMR went from being a more active route than the WMR in 2017 to less active in 2018. In the first half of 2017 (January to June), a total of 83,752 arrivals were registered in Italy. In contrast, a total of 23,370 arrivals of migrants and refugees were registered in 2018. In the first half of 2019, a total of 2,779 migrants and refugees were reported to have arrived in Italy. This constitutes a significant decrease of 83 per cent in comparison with the same period of 2018.

Figure 4.2. Monthly total registered arrivals by sea to Italy and Spain (January 2018–June 2019)



Sources: DTM, national authorities and IOM offices.

In turn, the WMR became more predominant than the CMR in 2018, with approximately 65,300 migrants and refugees arriving in Spain. The number of migrants and refugees who arrived in Spain in 2018 constituted a more than twofold increase compared with 2017, when just over 28,700 arrivals were reported. In the first half of 2019, there was a slight decrease in the number of migrants and refugees who arrived in Spain relative to the same period in 2018.

¹¹ While the total number of arrivals in Malta is relatively small in absolute numbers in comparison with the number of arrivals in Italy and Spain, it places pressure on services and communal infrastructure for a country with a total population of 483,530 individuals and few reception centres, with limited resources and capacity.

¹² According to the compilation of available data by DTM, national authorities and IOM offices. For a breakdown of registered arrival numbers to Italy and Spain per month (January 2018–June 2019), see annex.

4.3.1. Italy – Overview of arrival patterns

In 2018, arrival patterns to Italy noticeably fluctuated, showing a dip in the early months of 2018, followed by another rise through the spring months and subsequent decline in arrivals, which continued steadily throughout the second half of 2018 and early months of 2019.¹³ January had the highest figure of migrants and refugees arriving in Italy in 2018 (a little more than 4,000), followed by an immediate dip in arrivals in February.

By June 2018, the number of arriving migrants and refugees saw a decrease, which marked an overall declining trend throughout the remainder of 2018. Less than 400 individuals were reported to have arrived in December 2018, the lowest number of monthly arrivals in Italy in 2018.

Early 2019 showed no significant deviation in arrivals to Italy, and overall figures remained low. A little more than 2,700 migrants and refugees were reported in the first half of 2019. This is an 83 per cent decrease in comparison with the same period of 2018.

Worth noting, however is an increase in arrivals to Italy observed from April to June. Spring months tend to mark an increase in arrivals along the CMR in general, as a similar trend (increase in arrivals) could also be observed in May and June of 2018.

4.3.2. Spain – Overview of arrival patterns

In the early months of 2018, figures indicate the WMR was less active than the CMR, with partial rerouting from CMR to WMR not yet noticeable.¹⁴ For example, in January 2018, a total of 2,182 migrants and refugees arrived in Spain, just half the number of migrants and refugees who arrived in Italy in the same month. The number of migrants and refugees who arrived in Spain in following months – February and March – slightly decreased, and arrivals in Italy dropped to a comparable level. In April, the number of migrants and refugees who arrived in Italy again exceeded arrivals in Spain. However, by the end of June 2018, the number of arrivals to Spain significantly exceeded arrivals to Italy,¹⁵ which in turn began to see a steady decrease.

From June onwards, the WMR became consistently more active than the CMR, and the number of arrivals to Spain remained higher than the number of arrivals to Italy throughout the second half of 2018, as well as in the first half of 2019.

In January 2019, there were approximately twice as many registered arrivals in Spain compared with the same month of 2018. From March 2019, the number of migrants and refugees who arrived in Spain increased slightly each month. Despite this increase in arrivals in Spain during the first half of 2019, comparing figures from June 2018 and June 2019 still shows a significantly lower number of arrivals in June 2019 compared with June 2018.

4.4. National composition of migrants and refugees: potential rerouting

Fluctuations in arrival patterns according to national composition of registered migrants and refugees in Italy and Spain over time may indicate possible rerouting between the CMR and the WMR.¹⁶

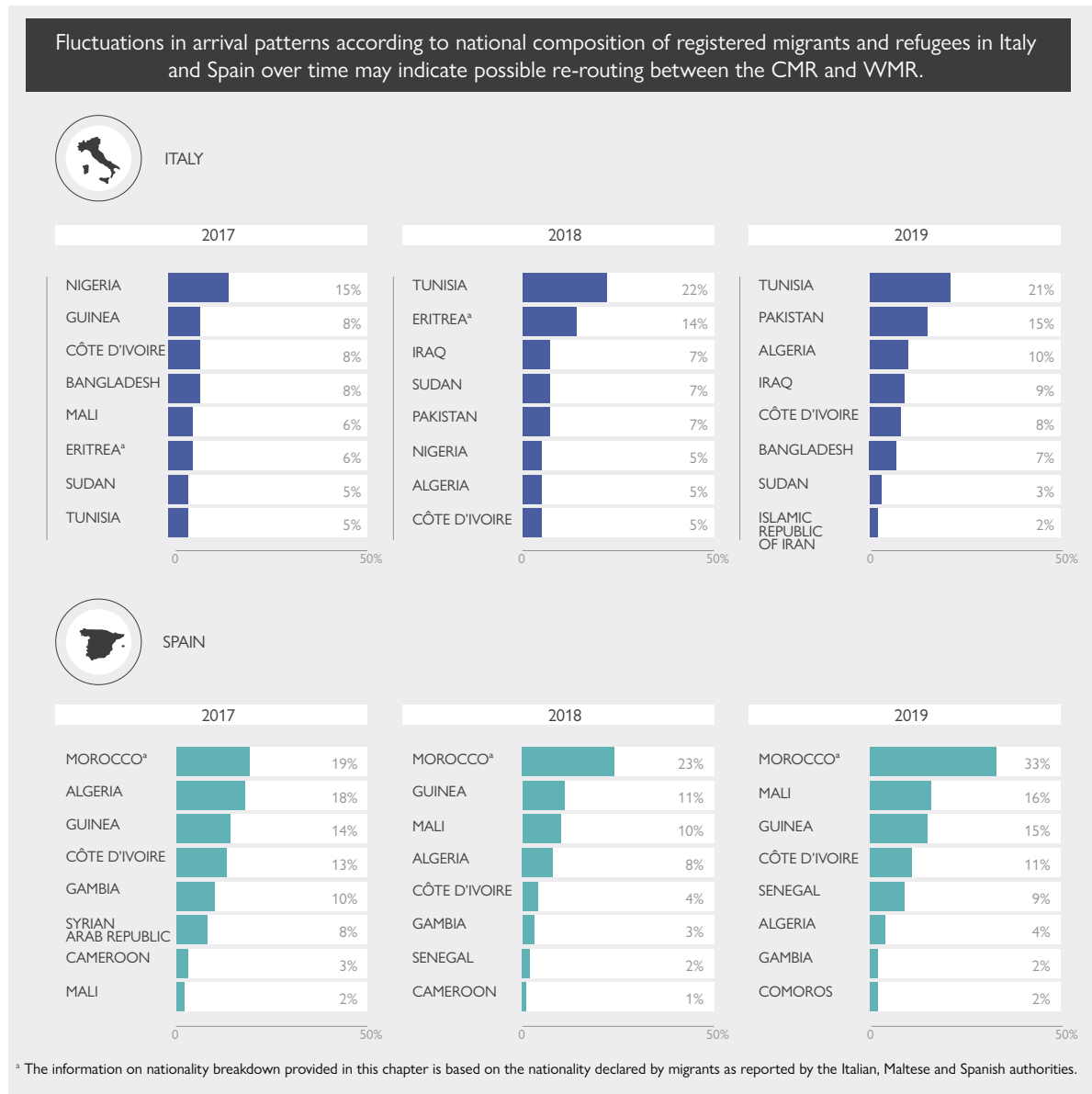
There were no significant changes in the main nationalities of arrivals in Spain from the first half of 2018 to the first half of 2019. Taking a broader time frame into account (as of 2017), the potential rerouting of some nationalities between the CMR and the WMR which started in 2018 and continued into 2019 becomes more apparent.

¹³ See annex.

¹⁴ See annex.

¹⁵ June 2018 is the month Spain's Government allowed the Aquarius rescue ship to dock in Valencia.

¹⁶ Findings are only indicative of potential trends in rerouting of discussed nationalities from the CMR and the WMR.

Figure 4.3. Top eight declared nationalities of arrivals to Italy and Spain (percentage of total arrivals per country) January 2017–June 2019

Sources: DTM, national authorities and IOM offices..

The nationalities analysed below are among the top declared nationalities of arrivals to Spain in 2017 which most clearly indicate a possible rerouting from the CMR to the WMR over time.

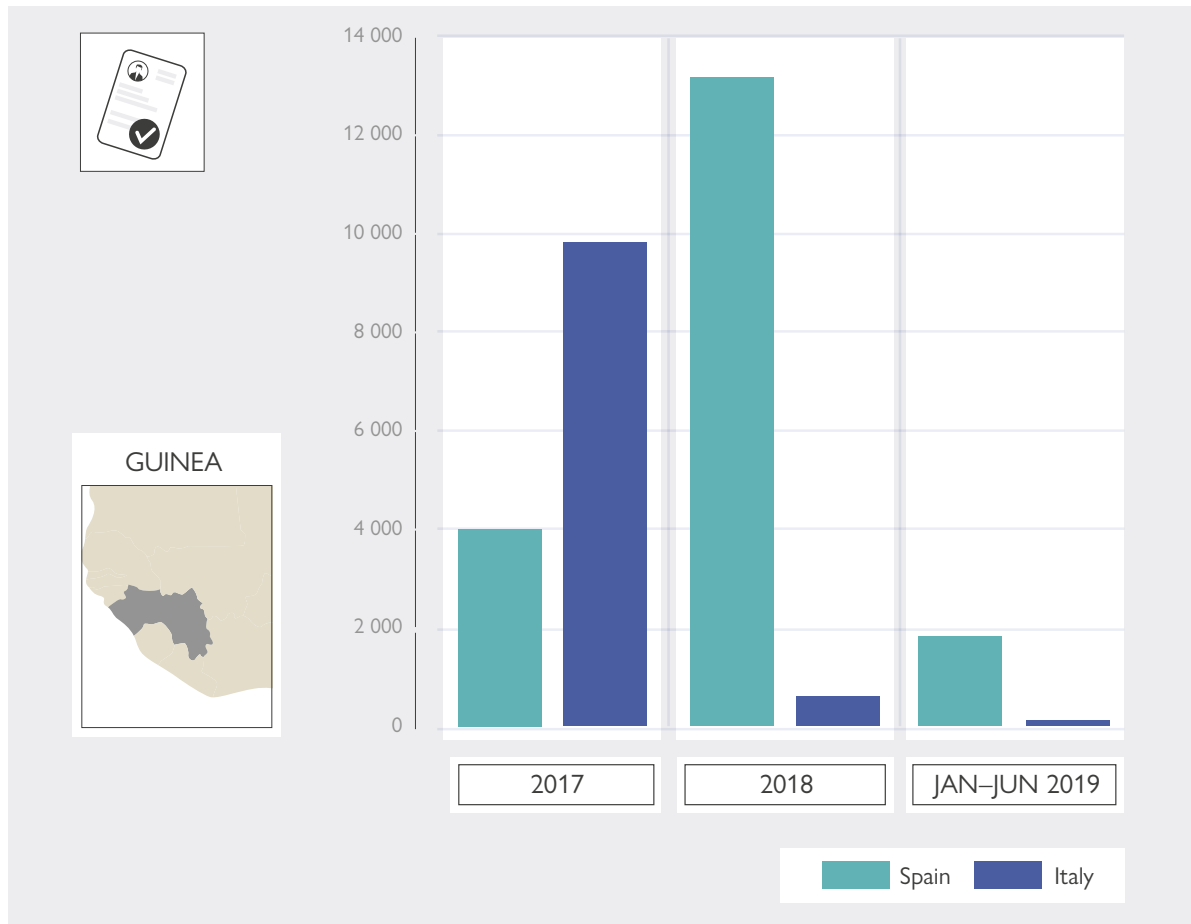
4.4.1. Guinean nationals

In 2017, Guinean nationals mainly arrived in Europe along the CMR. The total number of Guinean nationals who arrived in Italy in 2017 was approximately twice as large as the number of Guinean nationals who arrived in Spain.

The situation changed in 2018, when a larger number of Guinean nationals arrived in Spain compared with Italy. The absolute number of Guinean nationals who arrived in Spain was approximately eight times the number of Guinean nationals who arrived in Italy in 2018.

While there was approximately a twofold decrease in the absolute number of Guinean nationals who arrived in Spain in the first half of 2019 relative to the same period of 2018, the decrease is much more pronounced in Italy. The number of Guinean nationals who arrived in Italy in the first half of 2019 in comparison with the first half of 2018 decreased by 92 per cent. This suggests a more significant decrease in Italy compared with Spain, indicating that, while fewer Guinean nationals arrived in Europe in 2019 overall, there is a potential shift in route favouring WMR countries for Guinean nationals in the period under review.

Figure 4.4. Absolute number of Guinean nationals registered in Italy and Spain (January 2017–June 2019)



Sources: DTM, national authorities and IOM offices.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

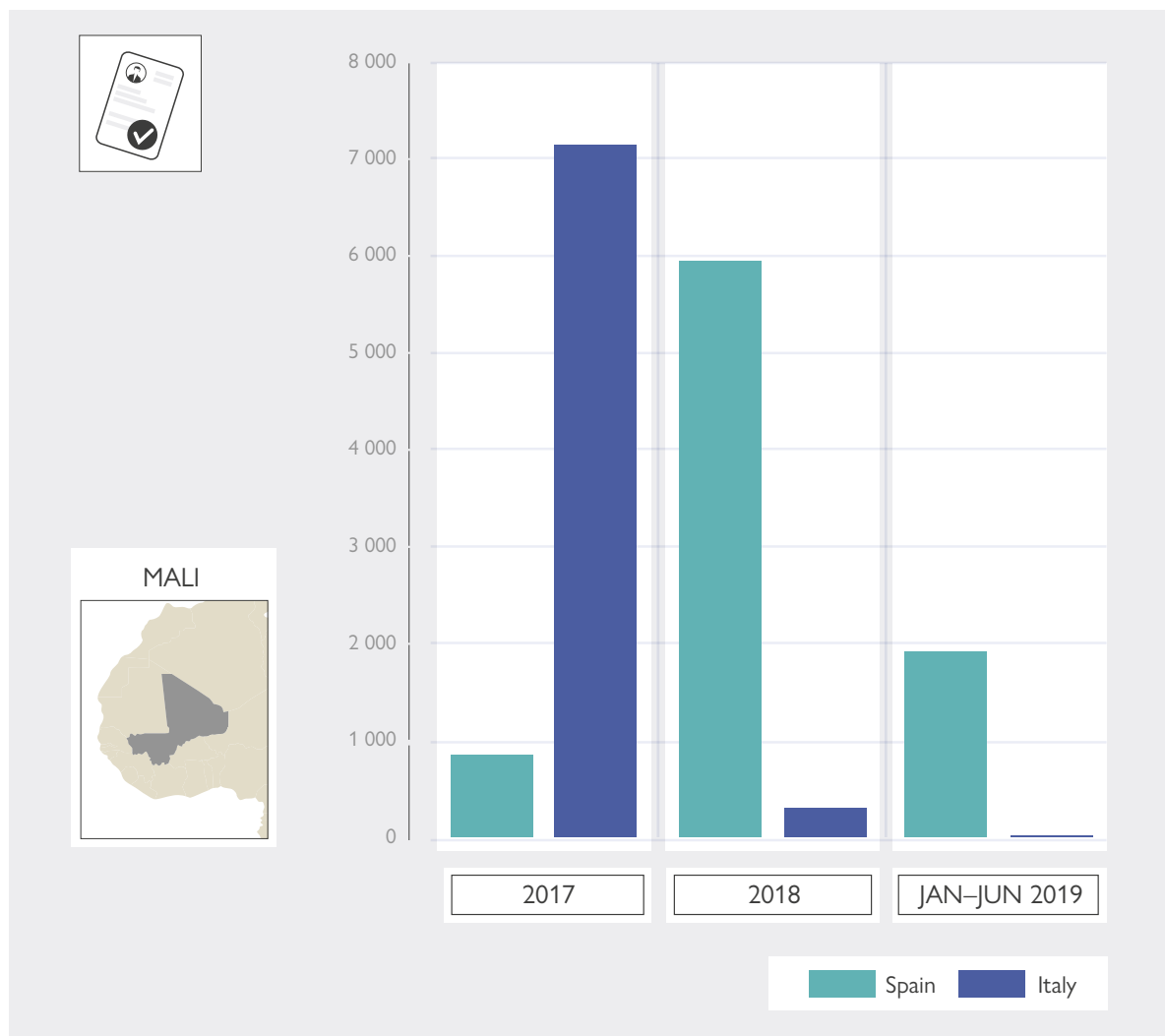
4.4.2. Malian nationals

In 2017, Malian nationals were arriving in Italy in larger numbers than in Spain. In absolute numbers, arrivals of Malian nationals in Italy were 11 times higher than in Spain.

In 2018, this trend began to shift, with a ninefold increase in the absolute number of Malian nationals who arrived in Spain, in comparison with 2017. At the same time, the number of Malian nationals who arrived in Italy decreased by 88 per cent. It is evident that the WMR became a more active route for Malian nationals in 2018, with the total number of Malian nationals who arrived in Spain being seven times higher than the number of Malian nationals who arrived in Italy in 2018.

Taking into account a much higher rate at which arrivals of Malian nationals were decreasing in Italy in comparison with Spain, it could be concluded that Malian nationals continued to primarily follow the WMR over the CMR in the first half of 2019.¹⁷

Figure 4.5. Absolute number of Malian nationals registered in Italy and Spain (January 2017–June 2019)



Sources: DTM, national authorities and IOM offices.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

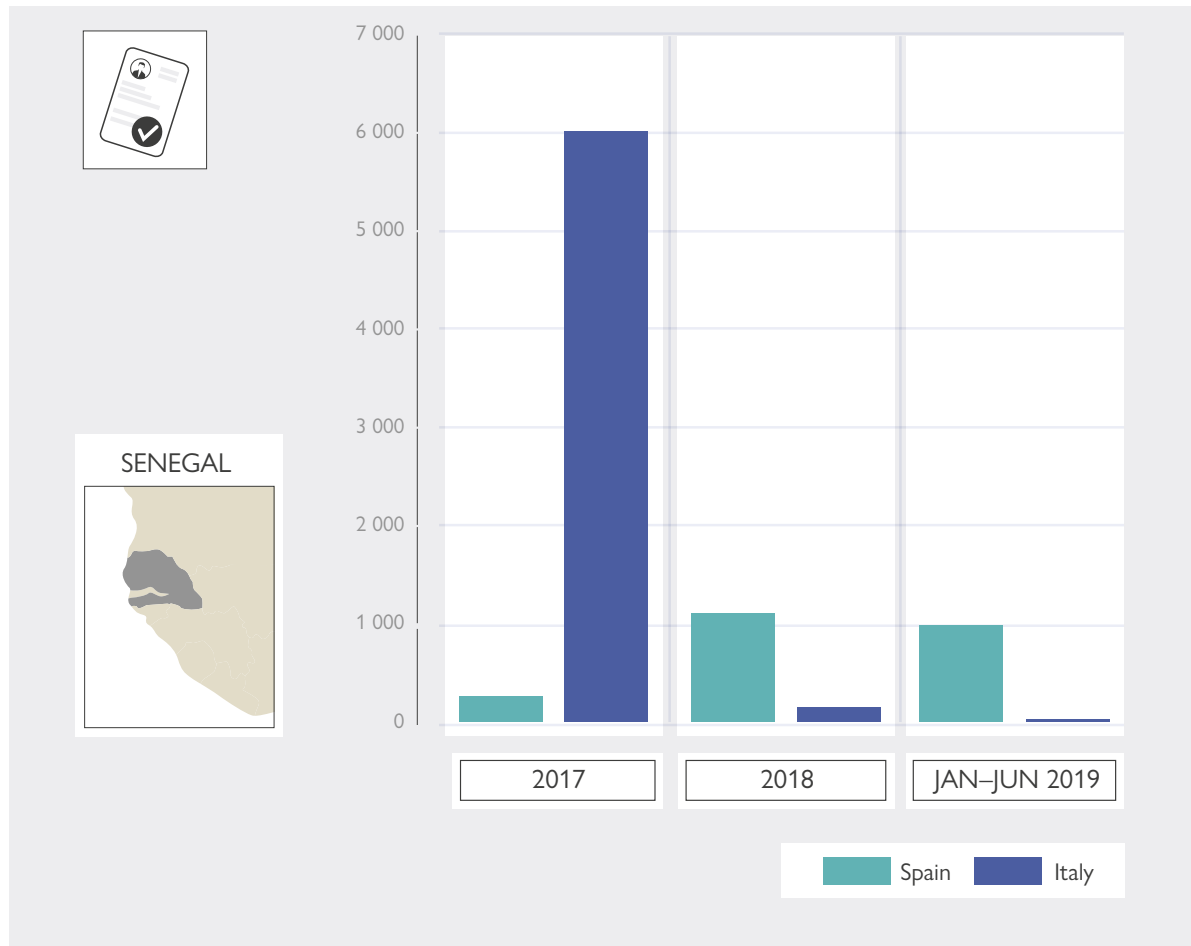
4.4.3. Senegalese nationals

In 2017, Senegalese nationals were the 10th most commonly reported nationality of arrivals in Italy, comprising 5 per cent of all arrivals in the country. In contrast, Senegalese nationals represented just 1 per cent of all arrivals in Spain the same year. In 2018, however, the WMR became a predominant route followed by Senegalese migrants and refugees, who were among the top eight nationalities of arrival in Spain that year.

¹⁷ In the first half of 2019, the absolute number of Malian nationals who arrived in Italy decreased significantly, by 96 per cent, in comparison with the same period of 2018.

The number of Senegalese nationals who arrived in Spain in 2018 was four times higher than in 2017, while the number decreased 22 fold in Italy in the same period. In the first half of 2019, the absolute number and the relative share of Senegalese nationals in Spain increased in comparison with the first half of 2018. In contrast, both the absolute number and relative share of Senegalese nationals decreased in Italy in the same comparison periods. These figures indicate Senegalese nationals partially rerouted from the CMR to the WMR, and the shift continued well into 2019.

Figure 4.6. Absolute number of Senegalese nationals registered in Italy and Spain (January 2017–June 2019)



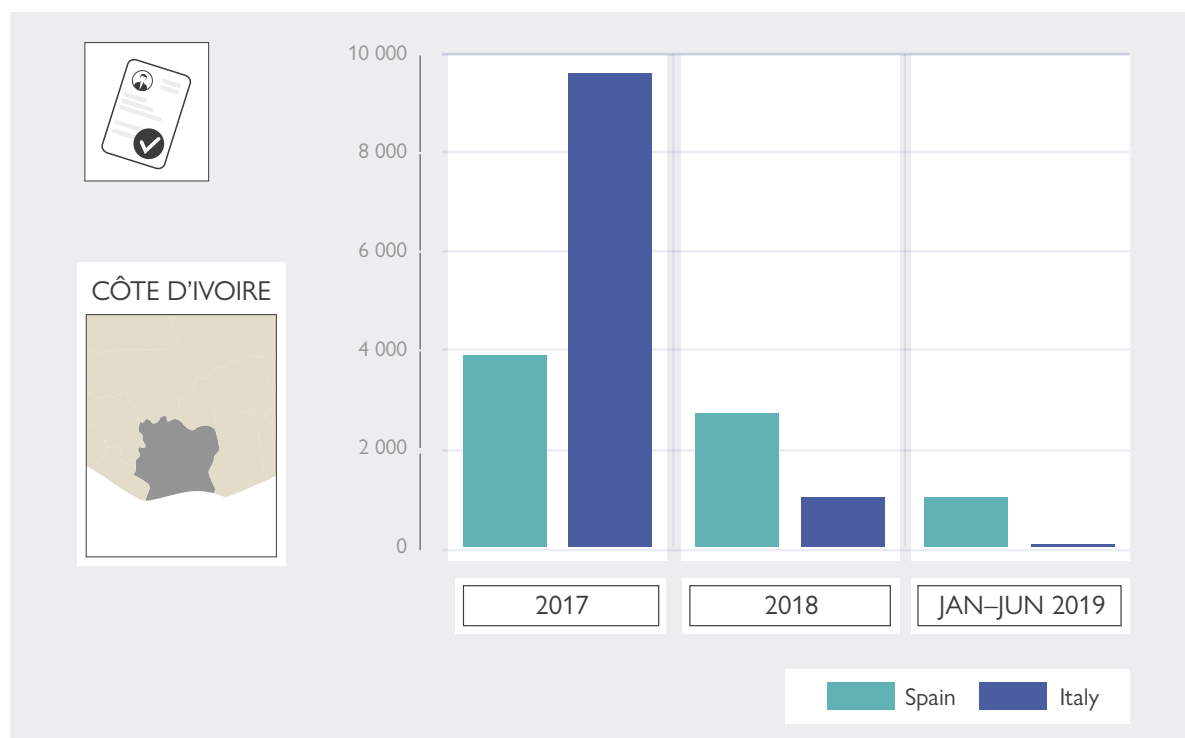
Sources: DTM, national authorities and IOM offices.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

4.4.4. Ivorian nationals

In 2017, approximately three times more Ivorian nationals arrived in Italy compared with Spain. The dynamic changed in 2018, when an overall decline was noted in both countries, and a larger number of Ivorian nationals arrived in Spain compared with Italy (approximately twice as many arrivals in Spain as in Italy). In 2019, the absolute number of Ivorian nationals to both Italy and Spain continued to decrease. The decrease, however, was more apparent in Italy, where arrivals dropped by 80 per cent in the first half of 2019 relative to the first half of 2018.

While evidence of potential rerouting among Ivorian nationals is less pronounced than shifting trends among Guineans and Malians, overall figures do suggest a potential shift from the CMR to the WMR among Ivorians in the period under review.

Figure 4.7. Absolute number of Ivorian nationals registered in Italy and Spain (January 2017–June 2019)

Sources: DTM, national authorities and IOM offices.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

4.5. Key messages

Key messages include the following:

- The year 2015 marked the highest number of registered arrivals of migrants and refugees to Europe in comparison with the following years up to June 2019. Within the context of this overall declining trend, the WMR became more active than the CMR, in terms of overall numbers of registered arrivals in Europe, through these two routes by the second half of 2018. This trend persisted until June 2019, while noting that in early 2019, the EMR became the most active of the three routes and remained the predominant route to Europe throughout the first half of 2019.
- Simultaneously with a significant decrease in arrivals of migrants and refugees in 2018 and the first half of 2019 in both Italy and Spain, possible rerouting could be observed among certain migrant and refugee nationalities represented in transit to Italy and Spain over time, a potential trend that is more pronounced among Guinean and Malian nationals, reiterating that, between the start of 2017 and August 2019, over 90 per cent of migration flows in West and Central Africa were intraregional or within the same country.
- Analysis on migration trends over time – together with existing and ongoing research on the mobility, vulnerabilities and needs of displaced and mobile populations – provides relevant data and information needed to better inform the decisions, programming and policymaking processes of national authorities, national organizations and humanitarian agencies, to enable them to provide these populations with better context-specific assistance.

Annex. Absolute number of arrivals registered in Italy and Spain (2018 to June 2019)

Month and year	Italy	Spain	Total
January 2018	4 182	2 182	6 364
February 2018	1 065	1 518	2 583
March 2018	1 049	1 284	2 333
April 2018	3 171	1 706	4 877
May 2018	3 963	3 937	7 900
June 2018	3 147	7 323	10 470
July 2018	1 969	8 940	10 909
August 2018	1 531	7 022	8 553
September 2018	947	8 399	9 346
October 2018	1 007	11 788	12 795
November 2018	980	5 648	6 628
December 2018	359	5 578	5 937
January 2019	202	4 612	4 814
February 2019	60	1 366	1 426
March 2019	262	1 036	1 298
April 2019	255	1 479	1 734
May 2019	782	1 972	2 754
June 2019	1 218	2 798	4 016

Sources: DTM, national authorities and IOM offices.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

- 2019a DTM data story: Migration Flows in West and Central Africa. Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). Available at <https://migration.iom.int/data-stories/migration-flows-west-central-africa>.
- 2019b Regional Mobility Mapping West and Central Africa. Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). Available at <https://displacement.iom.int/reports/west-and-central-africa-%E2%80%94-regional-mobility-mapping-august-2019?close=true>.

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)

- 2018 The “Shift” to the Western Mediterranean Migration Route: Myth or Reality? 22 August. Available at www.mixedmigration.org/articles/shift-to-the-western-mediterranean-migration-route/.

Mixed Migration Hub (MHub)

- 2019 Investigating evolving profiles, intentions, experiences and vulnerabilities of people on the move on Central Mediterranean and Western Mediterranean Routes in 2018. Available at www.mixedmigrationhub.org/mmtf-noah-research/.