

Italy

February 2021

Almost 90 persons were reported dead or missing at sea while crossing the Central Mediterranean in February. UNHCR called for a **stronger search and rescue mechanism**.

UNHCR's mission in northern Italy highlighted how the **scarcity of assistance and information services in land border areas** leads many vulnerable refugees to sleep rough, risking their safety.

The UNHCR - National Asylum Commission **Guidelines on Trafficking** were cited in a recent landmark judgment extending protection to asylum-seeking victims of trafficking.

KEY INDICATORS (FEBRUARY 2021)

2,918

Sea arrivals assisted and informed about asylum procedures by UNHCR staff following disembarkation (Source: UNHCR)

4,501

Inquiries received and followed-up through UNHCR partner **ARCI toll-free number** (Source: ARCI)

96

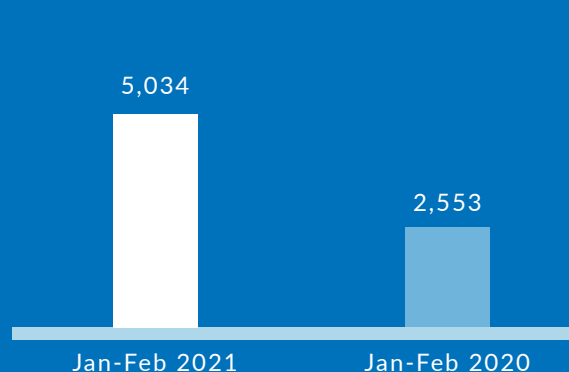
Individuals received **medical assistance and psychosocial counselling** from UNHCR partners (Source: MEDU)

Sea arrivals in 2021 by disembarkation site



Sea arrivals

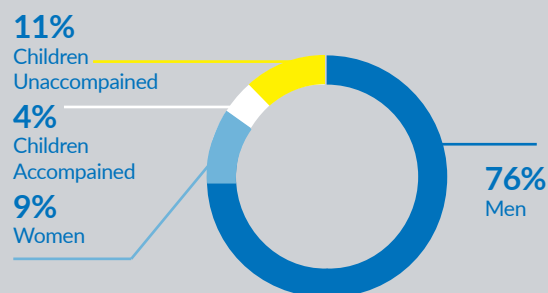
POPULATION OF CONCERN



Source: Ministry of Interior. In addition to sea arrivals, Italy also receives land arrivals and air arrivals. This chart focuses on sea arrivals, as per official figures provided by the Italian Ministry of Interior.

Sea arrivals by gender and age

POPULATION OF CONCERN

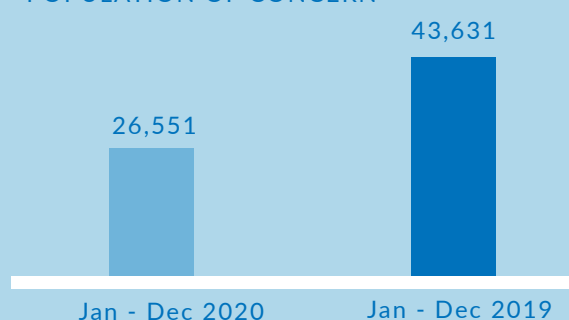


Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100% exactly.

Source: Ministry of Interior. In addition to sea arrivals, Italy also receives land arrivals and air arrivals. This chart focuses on sea arrivals, as per official figures provided by the Italian Ministry of Interior. Gender breakdown for children is not available.

Asylum applications

POPULATION OF CONCERN



Source: Ministry of Interior. Please note that the chart refers to the latest available data.

- **Access to territory (sea arrivals).** In February, **3,995 refugees and migrants arrived in Italy by sea**, a significant increase over the same month in recent years. Over half of February 2021 sea arrivals (57%) departed from Libya, while 36% embarked in Tunisia, 5% in Algeria and 2% in Turkey. It is estimated that an additional 2,300 persons departed from Libya in February intending to cross the Mediterranean Sea but were intercepted by Libyan authorities and returned to Libya. Increasing departures in February may be linked to improved weather conditions and are likely to continue in the coming months. In February, most sea arrivals originated from Tunisia, Côte d'Ivoire, Bangladesh and Guinea. The vast majority (2,500) disembarked in Lampedusa and, to a lesser extent, in Porto Empedocle, Augusta and Pantelleria.¹ During the month, the Lampedusa hotspot accommodated new arrivals beyond capacity, prior to their transfer to Red Cross-managed ferries or to onshore facilities for quarantine purposes. Three additional quarantine ferries were made available by the authorities to respond to increasing arrivals, for a total of five operating by the end of the month. Mindful that higher sea arrivals could impact the sustainability of quarantine arrangements on ferries and have implications for reception capacity in facilities across Italy, **UNHCR is advocating for contingency planning and the identification of onshore alternatives for quarantine, particularly for unaccompanied children, to ensure an adequate response to refugees and migrants arriving by sea** and to their specific needs, while also considering the needs of local communities. UNHCR staff in sea arrival areas regularly attend disembarkation procedures, including from quarantine vessels, following up on cases requiring specific attention. They also continue to liaise with the Red Cross with regard to the identification of persons with specific needs aboard quarantine ferries to ensure that adequate provisions are made for them. In February, **UNHCR delivered the first of a series of monthly online workshops to Red Cross personnel working aboard quarantine ferries**, focusing on the provision of information to new arrivals. Also, UNHCR child protection staff **addressed the cases of unaccompanied children who were mistakenly identified as adults** after disembarkation, liaising with the authorities to ensure that adequate reception options and services are provided to them.
- In February, NGO vessels Aita Mari, Astral, Ocean Viking and Sea Watch 3, as well as Italian authorities and commercial vessels engaged in multiple operations to rescue refugees and migrants in distress in the Central Mediterranean. Despite these efforts, 89 refugees and migrants died or went missing at sea during the month. This year so far, over 170 persons were reported dead or missing while attempting to cross the Central Mediterranean. UNHCR staff in disembarkation areas collected testimonies from shipwreck survivors and liaised with organizations such as MSF and the Red Cross to ensure that adequate psychological support was provided to them. In a joint press release issued following a shipwreck on 20 February in which at least 41 people were known to have drowned, UNHCR and IOM **remarked that saving lives must be a priority for the European Union and the international community**, reiterating that Libya is not a safe port and that rescued individuals should not be returned there. UNHCR also called on the international community to strengthen its efforts to offer viable alternatives to refugees and migrants, preventing dangerous journeys at sea.
- **Access to territory (land arrivals).** Refugee and migrant movement across South-East Europe is growing in importance as land arrivals via the Italy-Slovenia border have been on the increase over the last year, with over 4,000 intercepted in 2020². While arrivals are usually lower in the winter, they are likely to pick up in the coming months. Indeed, **decreasing numbers of land arrivals were reported crossing the Italy-Slovenia border near Trieste and Gorizia** in February,³ while rather large groups were reportedly intercepted crossing the border near Udine. Notably, a group of 135 persons, comprising 11



UNHCR staff attending the disembarkation from the Vos Triton vessel in Porto Empedocle. Photo ©UNHCR

¹ For further information on sea arrivals in Italy, please refer to the Italy page of the UNHCR data portal, available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5205> (last access 4 March 2021)

² Source: border police. Please note that data refers to interceptions by border police only and does not include interceptions by other authorities.

³ Please note official data is unavailable.

Eritrean women entered Italy via Udine in the second half of the month. Many persons arriving by land across the Italy-Slovenia border are in need of international protection. **Increasing numbers of Eritrean nationals** who reached Italy by land via South-East Europe were recently met by both UNHCR and partner organizations near the Italy-Slovenia border, but also in major cities in northern Italy, such as Milan. The fact that Eritreans are now using this route is a new development, as refugees and migrants travelling along the Balkan route more commonly originate from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Middle Eastern countries. Many unaccompanied children from Afghanistan are known to reach Italy travelling along this route. In February, 14 NGOs [urged](#) the Italian authorities to cease readmissions of refugees and vulnerable migrants, including unaccompanied children, to Slovenia and called on the authorities to implement age assessment procedures in compliance with relevant guarantees for self-declared children, including the ban on expulsion. **UNHCR, together with its partners, continues to monitor the situation at the Italy-Slovenia border, as well as reported cases of readmission, and advocates for better reception infrastructure** adequately addressing the needs of new arrivals.

- A shift in the profile of individuals transiting through border areas in north-western Italy such as Ventimiglia and Oulx was reported, with a significant presence of refugees and migrants who arrived via the Italy-Slovenia border and an increase in families with young children, in addition to individuals from Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and various other sub-Saharan African countries. As observed by the **UNHCR Representative to Italy, the Holy See and San Marino, Chiara Cardoletti, during her February mission to Piedmont and Liguria**, shelters, as well as assistance and information services in areas bordering France are missing, leading to numerous vulnerable individuals sleeping rough and relying on civil society and NGOs for support. **UNHCR is working to support the government**, in collaboration with local authorities and partner organizations, **to improve the capacity of assistance and information services at land borders**, in order to promptly identify persons with specific needs, including those in need of international protection.⁴

- **COVID-19.** While Italy's COVID-19 vaccination plan is being implemented and vaccines administered to priority groups, **UNHCR has regularly collaborated with the so-called Tavolo Immigrazione Salute (TIS), a forum of NGOs dealing with migration and health related issues** in which UNHCR participates as an observer. In early February, TIS [shared](#) with the Minister of Health its recommendations on ways to ensure that potentially vulnerable and marginalized groups – such as asylum-seekers who have not yet accessed the national health system, stateless persons, undocumented migrants and persons living in large reception facilities or in informal settlements – can access COVID-19 vaccinations. While the law provides for the inclusion of all persons who are present on the Italian territory in the vaccination plan, regardless of their legal status, the unavailability of documentation attesting to a person's registration with the national health system may de facto limit the possibility to book and access vaccinations. To ensure that refugees have access to up-to-date information on COVID-19 prevention measures and vaccinations, **partner ARCI, in collaboration with UNHCR, has developed a dedicated webpage** in the context of the [Juma Map](#) project.⁵



⁴ See also C. Cardoletti in Domani, *L'Unhcr: L'Italia intervenga ai confini del nord per aiutare i migranti*, available at <https://www.editorialedomani.it/fatti/unhcr-litalia-intervenga-ai-confini-del-nord-per-aiutare-i-migranti-xxcctypx> (last access 4 March 2021)

⁵ To read stories on the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of refugees in Italy, see also D. Guush, *Fantastica routine: il virus ci ha liberato della vita programmata*, in Domani, available at <https://www.editorialedomani.it/fatti/fantastica-routine-il-virus-ci-ha-liberato-della-vita-programmata-j9kszevb> and J. Khoury, *Fantastica routine: contro il Covid-19 guardiamo il bicchiere mezzo pieno*, in Domani, available at <https://www.editorialedomani.it/fatti/fantastica-routine-contro-il-covid-19-guardiamo-il-bicchiere-mezzo-pieno-tv8frwcq> (last access 4 March 2021)

- **Asylum procedures.** In collaboration with Arcigay and the local Territorial Commission for international protection, UNHCR delivered **training on asylum claims based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sexual characteristics** (SOGIESC) to Ministry of Interior caseworkers in Forlì. This is part of UNHCR's ongoing capacity development efforts aimed at further improving the response to LGBTI persons also in the context of first-instance asylum interviews. On 10 February, UNHCR also participated in an [online roundtable](#) on asylum claims based on SOGIESC organized by [Accademia Diritto e Migrazioni](#) and the [SOGICA Project](#), discussing Italy's response to SOGIESC claims, together with academics and practitioners.
- **Child protection.** In the first two months of 2021, 578 unaccompanied children arrived in Italy by sea. As of 31 January, 6,634 unaccompanied children – who arrived in Italy by sea, land and air – were accommodated in dedicated facilities across the country: almost all of them (97%) were boys, and 68% were aged 17.⁶ On 25 February, UNHCR in collaboration with UNICEF and with the support of ARCI cultural mediators ran a **live chat on the principle of the best interest of the child** which was attended by approximately 3,000 young persons. The session ran through [U-Report On The Move](#), a digital platform asking poll questions allowing young refugees and migrants in Italy to speak out anonymously about issues and decisions that matter to them. It aimed to explain what the best interest principle is and how we can ensure that it is fully respected.
- **Gender-based violence.** Lack of data as well as of trained staff and cultural mediators in key locations, including at arrival points, together with insufficient budgeting are said to negatively impact the identification of women who have survived or are at risk of GBV in the context of asylum procedures. In February, UNHCR launched a new [web page](#) on **trafficking in human beings**, specifically citing UNHCR efforts to support trafficking survivors in Italy, including through the development, jointly with the National Commission for the Right to Asylum, of Guidelines for the Identification and Referral of Victims of Trafficking in the context of asylum procedures. These Guidelines were recently cited in an important [decision](#) by the Italian Court of Cassation that recognized that an asylum-seeking victim of trafficking may be granted a complementary form of protection when she explicitly denies having experienced trafficking, but the interviewer identifies clear indicators of trafficking in her account.
- **Integration.** In February, UNHCR met with university staff, civil society organizations and refugee-led organizations to develop recommendations and advocacy strategies on the following topics stemming from the [Manifesto on Inclusive University](#): **recognition of foreign degrees, scholarships, social and academic inclusion and integration with local communities**. In the context of the [Welcome](#) project, UNHCR renewed its efforts to engage companies willing to hire refugees so as to contribute to their integration in Italy. UNHCR also addressed reported **difficulties faced by refugees in opening bank accounts** due to delays in the issuance of identity cards linked with the COVID-19 pandemic and banks' failure to accept residence permits or travel documents as valid identity documents. The inability to open a bank account makes it impossible for many refugees to receive wages or welfare benefits.
- **Fundraising.** In February, UNHCR raised **1,6 million Euros from private donors** in Italy, totalling 3,3 million Euros since the beginning of the year. The major private donor in Italy contributing to UNHCR operations worldwide this month was Gruppo Hera.

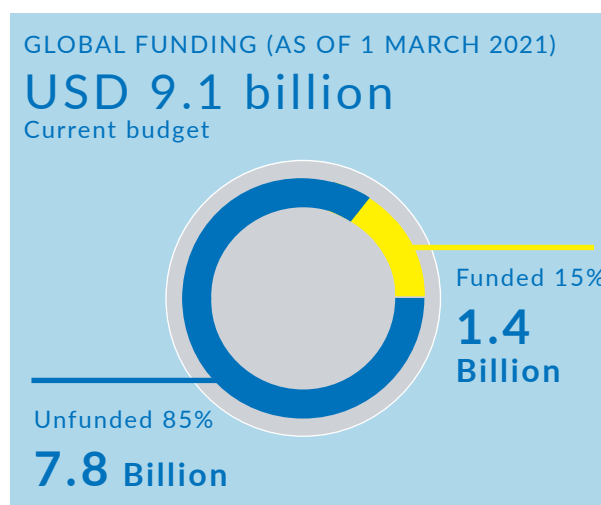
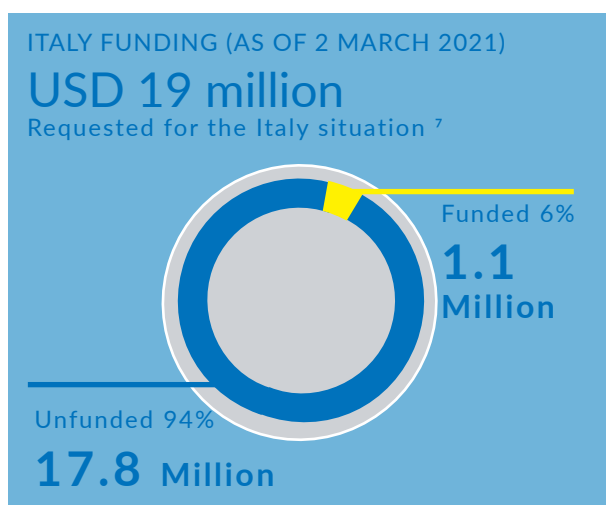
PartecipAzione 2021: call for applications is open



The fourth edition of the PartecipAzione programme was launched in February. The Programme, run by UNHCR and partner Intersos, offers empowerment and capacity development opportunities to refugee-led organizations in Italy, through training, networking opportunities and small grants. Over the last three years, 33 associations have successfully benefited from PartecipAzione. The call for applications is open until 21 March. Click [here](#) to read the UNHCR press release (in Italian). For further information, see the programme's [web page](#).

⁶ Ministry of Labour, *Report mensili MNSA*, January 2021 (latest available data), available at <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/minori-stranieri/Documents/Report-MSNA-mese-gennaio-2021.pdf> (last access 4 March 2021)

Financial information



UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have contributed to this operation as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with broadly earmarked and unearmarked funds.

UNEARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.

Norway 80 M | **Sweden** 66.9 M | **Netherlands** 36.1 M | **Denmark** 34.6 M | **Germany** 22.1 M | **Switzerland** 16.4 M | **Private donors Spain** 13.3 M | **Ireland** 12.5 M | **Belgium** 11.9 M

Algeria | Armenia | Canada | Costa Rica | Estonia | Finland | Iceland | Luxembourg | Malta | Monaco | Montenegro | New Zealand | Portugal | Republic of Korea | Saudi Arabia | Singapore | Thailand | Turkey | Uruguay | Private donors

CONTACTS

Elisabetta Dolzan, Senior Reporting Assistant, dolzan@unhcr.org

Cristina Franchini, External Relations Associate, franchin@unhcr.org

LINKS

UNHCR data portal Mediterranean situation - UNHCR Italy - Twitter - Facebook - Global Focus

⁷ Unearmarked funding is allocated and reallocated multiple times during the year to allow UNHCR to fund prioritised activities. The contributions earmarked for Italy shown above are combined with an indicative allocation of the softly earmarked and unearmarked contributions. This allocation respects different levels of earmarking.