

RESEARCH REPORT

From Syria to Spain

Syrian Migration to Europe via
the Western Mediterranean
route between 2015 and 2017

November 2017

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more effective
humanitarian action

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Executive Summary

In 2017, Spain has seen a new surge in arrivals of refugees and other migrants to its shores. As of 31 October, the country recorded 21,304 irregular entries, twice as many as the same period in 2016. With this increase, the profile of arrivals has changed, as increasingly people from the Middle East – the majority of whom are Syrians – travel to Spain.¹

Though the Western Mediterranean route is now being considered as a new entry point into Europe, the evidence base for such claims remains limited.² Little is known about the Syrians who migrate to Spain in particular. In this study, REACH, in the framework of the Mixed Migration Platform (MMP), seeks to increase understanding of the routes Syrians have taken to Spain between 2015 and 2017, why they chose these routes, and why they choose Spain as their entry point to Europe. Additionally, the study seeks to examine protection concerns of Syrians along the route to Spain in Algeria and Morocco, and to shed light on the future intentions of Syrians once they reach Spain.

The study is based on in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with 60 Syrians who arrived in Spain between 2015 and 2017. Syrians who arrived in the country both irregularly³ and regularly⁴ were included in the study, with 45 and 15 respondents respectively. Data collection took place between 9 and 31 October in six locations across the country, which were selected on the basis of their hosting large populations of recently arrived Syrians. The six locations comprised the Spanish enclave of Melilla, Madrid, Valencia, Malaga, Seville and Cordoba.

Routes

Syrians who reached Spain through legal pathways

Respondents who entered Spain legally arrived in the country through two legal pathways. First, respondents arrived through resettlement from Lebanon, Jordan or Turkey, where they had lived for several years prior to being resettled to Spain. Second, individuals who had travelled through the Eastern Mediterranean sea route to Greece were relocated from there to Spain through the EU emergency relocation scheme.⁵

Of the respondents who arrived in Spain through resettlement, none had aimed to reach Spain or Europe when they left Syria, with their original intention being to settle in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon or Turkey. Among relocation candidates, one out of three respondents had left Syria with the intention of going to Europe.

Syrians only knew about relocation and resettlement programmes from official information channels, such as UNHCR or other humanitarian organisations. Resettlement candidates had been informed about this opportunity by UNHCR when they registered for other kinds of support. Relocation candidates received the information through official channels in the camps in which they were living in Greece. Only one respondent reported knowledge of legal pathways from personal connections, which were reportedly trusted more than humanitarian organisations.

¹ UNHCR, Spain Arrivals Dashboard, accessed 30 November 2017.

² See e.g. Hauswedell, Charlotte (2017) Surge in migrant arrivals in Spain, DW, 18 August 2017; Wise, Peter (2017) Spain closes in on Greece as a destination for migrants, Financial Times, 11 August 2017.

³ Individuals who entered the country irregularly are those who did not have a valid visa or other permit when crossing the border into Spain.

⁴ Those who entered regularly refers to those who entered through legal pathways such as resettlement, family reunification, study, work or humanitarian visas.

⁵ European Commission, DG Home Affairs (2017), Member States' Support to Emergency Relocation Mechanism, 2 November 2017.

Syrians who reached Spain irregularly

Interviewed Syrians who reached Spain irregularly had followed two routes, both via North Africa. First, through Morocco and Algeria, where individuals had worked for several years prior to deciding to travel to Spain irregularly via the land border between Morocco and the Spanish enclave of Melilla. Second, transiting through Mauritania and Mali to Algeria and Morocco, a route which became more common when Algeria introduced visa requirements for Syrian nationals in spring 2015.

Among interviewees who reached Spain irregularly, a majority aimed to start a life in either Algeria or Morocco, often building on pre-existing social and economic ties in the region. All respondents who reached Spain irregularly had spent three years or more in North Africa prior to deciding to move to Spain.

Changing visa regimes in the North African region influenced Syrians' irregular routes to Spain. The introduction of visa requirements for Syrian nationals in Algeria in March 2015 led to an increase in the use of smugglers when crossing the border into Algeria. As a result, among respondents who could not afford to pay a smuggler to move through Algeria, travelling through the Saharan desert via Mali and Mauritania became more common as it was less expensive. Travelling through the desert also made the journey more dangerous.

Secondary factors influenced onward migration of Syrians residing in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa to Europe: most respondents reported that over time their living situation in transit became untenable. Reasons for the deterioration of living conditions included the inability to access residence permits in their country of choice, labour exploitation that was often tied to respondents' irregular situation, and limited access to sustainable livelihoods and public services.

Syrians who entered Spain irregularly could easily access information on the route from North Africa to Spain in Algeria or Morocco. All participants had personal contacts who had previously travelled to Europe via that route or who knew someone who did. This made information on the journey easily accessible.

None of the Syrians interviewed would have travelled to Europe via Libya. All considered the central Mediterranean boat crossing to Italy too dangerous. The route via Spain was considered comparatively safe.

Protection risks for irregular migrants in Algeria and Morocco

Syrians living in Algeria or Morocco with no access to documentation for legal stay are exposed to labour exploitation and other forms of violence. One third of Syrians who had reached Spain irregularly had suffered labour exploitation in Algeria or Morocco. Respondents had reportedly worked very long hours for little money, worked under hazardous conditions or completed jobs without being paid at all.

All participants who had reached Spain irregularly had at some point of their journey engaged the services of a smuggler. While using a smuggler did not necessarily put individuals at risk, it did heighten their exposure to potential exploitation as smugglers were able to take advantage of respondents' irregular situations.

The irregular border crossing between Algeria and Morocco was the most perilous part of the journey to Europe. Interviewed Syrians reported being robbed and experiencing physical violence and exploitation. Protection-related incidents reported at the border crossing between Morocco and Spain included family separation and police violence.

Intentions

Participants in this study did not presume that Spain was a transit country to other EU countries. Respondents who had reached Spain both irregularly and through legal pathways had little information on Spain as a destination. Reportedly, they were open to staying in the country, as they considered what they knew of Spain as similar to Syria in terms of culture and weather conditions. However, most raised concerns about their ability to find work in Spain, which was regarded as a precondition to stay and build a life in the country.

Satisfaction about the outcome of resettlement and relocation was mixed among respondents. Some reported that the information they had prior to departure and the expectations it raised did not match the experience of the country once they arrived.

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Routes	2
Syrians who reached Spain through legal pathways	2
Syrians who reached Spain irregularly	3
Protection risks for irregular migrants in Algeria and Morocco	3
Intentions.....	4
Introduction	7
Analytical Framework	9
Methodology.....	11
Challenges and limitations.....	13
The Journey from Syria to Spain	15
Leaving Syria	15
The main routes to Spain.....	19
Routes used by Syrians who reached Spain irregularly	21
Routes used by Syrians who reached Spain through legal pathways	23
Influencing factors in deciding to go to Spain	26
Deterioration of life in transit.....	26
Information sources.....	27
The alternative Libya	28
Arriving in Spain.....	29
Arriving irregularly via land in Melilla.....	29
Arriving via resettlement or relocation.....	30
Reception system for asylum seekers and refugees in Spain.....	31
Protection Risks in Algeria and Morocco.....	31
Lack of access to documentation	31
Labour exploitation.....	32
Protection risks during border crossings.....	33
Intentions Once in Spain	35
Syrians who reached Spain irregularly.....	36
Syrians who reached Spain through legal pathways.....	36
Factors shaping Syrians' migration intentions.....	37
Conclusion.....	40
Annex 1: List of Participants.....	43

Figures

Figure 1: Intended region of destination upon departure from Syria.....	15
Figure 2: Intended region of destination upon departure from Syria by Syrians who entered Spain irregularly and through legal pathways	16
Figure 3: Migratory intentions of Syrians who arrived in Spain between 2015 and 2017.....	35
Figure 4: Migratory intentions of Syrians by type of entry in Spain	36
Map 1: Sites of data collection in Spain with number and type of interview	13
Map 2: Intended first country of destination upon departure from Syria.....	16
Map 3: Overview of main routes used by Syrians who reached Spain irregularly	20
Map 4: Overview of main routes used by Syrians who reached Spain through legal pathways	21
Map 5: A Syrian man's journey from Syria to Spain via Algeria and Morocco.....	22
Map 6: A Syrian man's journey through Mauritania and Mali to Spain.....	23
Map 7: A Syrian family's journey to Spain, resettled from Turkey.....	25
Map 8: A Syrian family's journey from Greece to Spain via the EU relocation scheme.....	25
Table 1: Respondents by mode of entry to Spain.....	19
Box 1: How life in transit shaped a Syrian family's decision to apply for resettlement in Lebanon.....	27
Box 2: Decision making process of a Syrian man living in Algeria to move to Europe.....	28
Box 3: How legal pathways can prevent irregular migration.....	29
Box 4: The land border between Nador, Morocco, and Melilla, Spain.....	30
Box 5: When legal pathways do not work: Family Reunification.....	33
Box 6: Recounting the border crossing between Algeria and Morocco.....	34
Box 7: Resettlement and relocation through the lenses of Syrians in Spain.....	38

Introduction

For decades, Spain has served as an entry point for the irregular migration of refugees and other migrants into Europe. After arrivals peaked in 2006, when 39,180 individuals entered Spain irregularly via the Canary Islands,⁶ arrivals drastically decreased to a yearly average of 7,194 between 2007 and 2015.⁷ The year 2017, however, has witnessed a new surge in arrivals with 21,304 recorded irregular entries as of 31 October 2017.⁸ With this spike, the personal profile of people arriving has changed: while historically mostly West and North African single men travelled along the Western Mediterranean route (via Spain) to Europe, since 2015 a growing number of people from the Middle East have been using the route, the majority of whom are Syrian.⁹

As of 31 October 2017, 8.6% of all irregular arrivals to Spain were Syrians.¹⁰ Syrians tend to travel to Spain via land and mostly in families: in 2017, 72% of all irregular Syrian arrivals were women and children who had travelled by land to Melilla, one of Spain's two enclaves in North Africa (the other being Ceuta) and the main entry point into the country for Syrians.¹¹

In light of the closure of the Eastern Mediterranean route to Europe in the spring of 2016,¹² and the sharp decrease in arrivals along the Central Mediterranean route to Italy,¹³ Spain has been considered by some as the new gateway to Europe for refugees and other migrants.¹⁴

However, beyond the overall increase in arrivals, the evidence base for such claims remains limited.¹⁵ Little is known about the reasons behind the rise in Syrian arrivals, the routes Syrians take to Spain or the protection risks they encounter along the way. Syrians who arrive in Spain are likely to have crossed countries such as Morocco and Algeria - both historically countries of destination for labour migration from Syria, but also countries which have seen a recent deterioration in living conditions for Syrians, due to changing visa requirements and a more difficult economic environment.¹⁶ Information about the routes taken by Syrians to Spain and the protection concerns they are exposed to along the way is crucial for a more nuanced understanding of this 'emerging route' into Europe, to allow humanitarian actors and policy makers to tailor their response accordingly, both in Europe, as well as in so-called transit countries, such as Morocco and Algeria. At the same time, as irregular arrivals of Syrians to Spain persist, alternatives to irregular movement, such as legal pathways to migration, are becoming available. Between 2015 and 2017, these included, among others, the EU relocation scheme¹⁷ and the EU resettlement programme.¹⁸ However, whether the experiences of the journey and the intentions for their future in Spain are different between individuals who arrived regularly or irregularly is unknown. This presents a crucial information gap,

⁶ Ministry of Interior, Balance de 2015. Lucha contra la Inmigración Irregular, and Lanni, Alessandro (2016), A political laboratory: how Spain closed the borders to refugees, *Open Migration*, 26 February 2016.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ UNHCR, Spain Arrivals Dashboard, accessed 30 November 2017.

⁹ De Haas, Hein (2006) Trans-Saharan Migration to North Africa and the EU: Historical Roots and Current Trends, Migration Policy Institute; Colon, Jose (2015) Now Syrians scale fence at Spain's African 'fortress', *Al-Jazeera*, 30 December 2015; UNHCR (2017) Spain Arrivals Dashboard, May 2017.

¹⁰ UNHCR, Spain Arrivals Dashboard, accessed 30 November 2017.

¹¹ UNHCR (2017) Spain Arrivals dashboard, May 2017. According to Frontex 824 irregular crossings by Syrians between January and June 2017 (based on author's own calculations).

¹² Kingsley, Patrick (2016) Balkan countries shut borders as attention turns to new refugee routes, *The Guardian*, 9 March 2017.

¹³ ANSA, Italy: sharp fall in migrant arrivals, 15 August 2017.

¹⁴ See e.g. Hauswedell, Charlotte (2017) Surge in migrant arrivals in Spain, *DW*, 18 August 2017; Wise, Peter (2017) Spain closes in on Greece as a destination for migrants, *Financial Times*, 11 August 2017.

¹⁵ See also: McMahon, Simon (2017), Is Spain really facing a new migration crisis?, *The Conversation*, 25 August 2017.

¹⁶ See e.g. on Morocco: UNDP, Information Note for Syrians to apply for Asylum in Morocco, September 2015; on Algeria: Gustafsson, Jenny (2016), The displaced: Ramadan for the 43,000 Syrians in Algeria, *The Nation*, 9 June 2016.

¹⁷ European Commission, DG Home Affairs (2017), Member States' Support to Emergency Relocation Mechanism, 25 September 2017.

¹⁸ European Commission, DG Home Affairs (2017), Relocation and Resettlement, 6 September 2017.

as legal pathways to Europe are often heralded as one of the key recommendations in the government response to irregular migration, yet the experiences of individuals who were able to participate in such schemes are hardly ever explored.

In this study, REACH, in collaboration with the Mixed Migration Platform (MMP), seeks to address these information gaps and explore the routes Syrians have taken into Spain between 2015 and 2017, why they chose these routes, and why they chose Spain as their entry point into Europe. Additionally, the present study seeks to examine protection concerns of Syrians along the route to Spain and to shed light on their future intentions once they reach the country.

Analytical Framework

Approach

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the migration routes, protection concerns and intentions of Syrians who arrived in Spain between 2015 and 2017.

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. What are the main routes through which Syrians have arrived in Spain and why have Syrians increasingly used the Western Mediterranean route into Europe between 2015 and 2017, compared to before?
2. What are the main protection concerns for Syrians en route to Spain in the key transit countries of Algeria and Morocco?
3. What are the future [migratory] intentions of Syrians in Spain?

In line with the research questions outlined above, theoretical concepts based on established migration theory lay the foundation for the design and analysis of the study.

Explaining the routes of Syrian migration to Spain

According to migration scholar Hein De Haas, the decisions people make about mobility result from: (i) the capability to move (or to stay), i.e. the material, social and human resources they are able to mobilise and, (ii) the aspiration to move, *wanting to go elsewhere*.¹⁹ Building on this framework, and drawing on a recent study on the journeys of refugees and other migrants to Europe,²⁰ the factors which shape the decision to migrate can be divided between three levels:

- 1) **Micro-level:** refugees' and other migrants' economic resources, access to information and the material costs of the journey, as well their perceptions of the economic environment in the intended country of destination;²¹
- 2) **Meso-level:** the facilitating or undermining role of social capital and the migration industry,²² in the form of fixers' and smugglers' offers of possible routes and destinations, and adherence to the initial agreement on destination with refugees and other migrants;²³
- 3) **Macro-level:** security and conflict along the routes; weather conditions; border surveillance and push-back policies; changes in countries' political systems or visa regimes; the role of migration-specific (access to international protection, risk of deportation) and migration-relevant policies (health, education, access to employment etc.) in transit countries.²⁴

These factors influence an individual's decision to move or stay in the first place, as well as decisions about secondary movements – what to do after the first destination

¹⁹ Bonfanti, Sara (2014) Towards a Migrant-Centred Perspective on International Migration: The Contribution of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, *Social Work & Society*, vol. 12(2) 2014.

²⁰ Kuschminder Katie et al. (2015), *Irregular Migration Routes to Europe and Factors Influencing Migrants' Destination Choices*, Maastricht School of Governance.

²¹ Ibid. and de Haas, Hein (2014) "Migration theory: Quo vadis?" in International Migration Institute, Working Paper 100 / DEMIG Project Paper No. 24, November 2014.

²² The migration "industry" is defined as "the clusters and networks of travel agents, lawyers, bankers, labour recruiters, brokers, interpreters and housing agents, as well as human smugglers and traffickers, which have an interest in and tend to facilitate the continuation of migration" in de Haas (2010), *The Internal Dynamics of Migration Processes: A Theoretical Inquiry*, in *The Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 36(10), 29 June 2010.

²³ Intended as the "social relation itself, and the resources accessible through those social relations" in Bourdieu, Pierre (1986), *The forms of capital*, *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. Ed J Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press.

²⁴ Kuschminder, Katie et al. (2015), *Irregular Migration Routes to Europe and Factors Influencing Migrants' Destination Choices*, Maastricht School of Governance; Hagen-Zanker, Jessica and Richard Mallet (2016) *Journeys to Europe. The role of policy in migrant decision-making*, ODI Insights, February 2016.

is reached – as the journey unfolds. As such, they were included in the design of the questionnaire.

Protection risks en route to Spain

The definition of protection used for this study is in line with that of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which refers to protection as “*all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law, i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law*”.²⁵

More specifically, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP)²⁶ identifies the following violations and deprivations that cause protection needs, which have been considered in this study:

- Deliberate killing, wounding, displacement, destitution and disappearance.
- Sexual violence and rape.
- Torture and inhuman or degrading treatment.
- Dispossession of assets by theft and destruction.
- The misappropriation of land and violations of land rights.
- Deliberate discrimination and deprivation of health, education, property rights, access to water and economic opportunity.
- Violence and exploitation within the affected community.
- Forced recruitment of children, prostitution, sexual exploitation and trafficking, abduction and slavery.
- Forced or accidental family separation.
- Arbitrary restrictions on movement, including forced return, punitive curfews or roadblocks which prevent access to fields, markets, jobs, family, friends and social services.
- Thirst, hunger, disease and reproductive health crises caused by the deliberate destruction of services or the denial of livelihoods.
- Restrictions on political participation, freedom of association and religious freedom.
- The loss or theft of personal documentation that gives proof of identity, ownership and citizen’s rights. Attacks against civilians and the spread of landmines.

Intentions of Syrians in Spain

According to migration scholar Jørgen Carling, once refugees and migrants have reached a destination, the intentions²⁷ about what to do next, whether to stay or move onward, are affected by the interplay between individual preferences and social constructions of intentions.²⁸

²⁵ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2016), Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, 21 September 2016.

²⁶ Slim Hugo and Andrew Bonwick (2005), Protection. An ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies.

²⁷ Carling adopts the word *aspiration* to indicate an individual’s desire to migrate. For the purposes of this study, and to avoid confusion among different theoretical understandings of the concept of *aspiration*, the study refers to *intentions*, which in Carling’s words “reflect both the desire and the realism of migration”.

²⁸ Carling, Jørgen (2014), The Role of Aspirations in Migration, Paper presented at Determinants of International Migration, *International Migration Institute*, University of Oxford, 23–25 September 2014.

In other words, an explanation of the intentions of people on the move must look, on the one hand, to the individual's perception of life at the present location, and expectations about life elsewhere; on the other, to the personal and transnational networks, the economic and political context, the social norms and the structural conditions shaping the trajectories of people's journeys.²⁹

For the purposes of this study, the socio-institutional environments affecting the formation of refugees' and other migrants' intentions is analysed through the lenses of: (i) local networks, (ii) transnational networks and (iii) institutional contexts.³⁰

While local networks refer to the social support that individuals receive in Spain – networks of friends and family – transnational networks refer to the links Syrians may have in other countries, which may shape their intention to go elsewhere. This may be the case for individuals with family or friends in another EU country, a factor that could shape their intention to reach said country. The institutional context refers to the services available to an individual in a given country, the individual's access to employment, as well as the individual's perception of life in Spain. These, in turn, can be influenced – among other factors – by cultural considerations, as well as the social network the individual relies on in Spain and elsewhere.

Methodology

Findings draw on primary data collected through 60 in-person, semi-structured, qualitative in-depth interviews with Syrian nationals (45 of whom had entered Spain irregularly and 15 through legal pathways) and 12 key informant interviews with migration experts in Spain. Data collection took place between 9 and 31 October 2017 in six cities across Spain - the Spanish enclave of Melilla, Madrid, Seville, Cordoba, Malaga and Valencia - identified on the basis of information from key informants and secondary sources on the presence of Syrians in the country.³¹ Interviews were conducted by fully trained REACH enumerators in the respective respondents' mother tongue (Arabic, Spanish) and took place in reception centres, informal gathering sites and other public spaces.

Population of interest

Respondents were purposively sampled on the basis of the below criteria:

1. Respondents had to be of Syrian nationality and had to have arrived in Spain between 2015 and 2017.
2. Respondents were divided into two groups:
 - a) Syrians who entered Spain irregularly via North Africa (mainly Morocco and Algeria);
 - b) Syrians who accessed legal pathways (mainly through European Union relocation and resettlement schemes) to enter Spain.

Syrians who arrived in Spain irregularly were included in this study to shed light on the experiences of Syrians traveling along the Western Mediterranean route to Europe. Through their inclusion it was possible to explore the reasons which may have led to the increase in irregular arrivals of Syrians via the Western Mediterranean route between 2015 and 2017. Syrians who entered Spain regularly through legal pathways were included in order to improve understanding of the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Wissink Marieke, Franck Duvell and Anouka van Eerdewijk (2015), Dynamic Migration Intentions and the Impact of Socio-Institutional Environments: A Transit Migration Hub in Turkey, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

³¹ UNHCR, Spain Mediterranean Arrivals Dashboard, accessed 26/10/2017.

routes they undertook to reach Spain and their future intentions once on the Spanish territory, particularly in comparison with Syrians who arrived irregularly.

Respondents (who arrived in Spain alone or with their families) were all adults and were asked to respond on behalf of their household if they travelled to Spain with their family (33 cases). In 27 cases, respondents had arrived in Spain alone.

Secondary data review

An initial secondary data review was carried out to identify information gaps and adapt the research focus and methodology of the study accordingly. The secondary data review also informed the design of indicators, data collection tools, the analysis framework and the triangulation of findings.

Primary Data Collection

Primary data collection was realised through:

- 1) Twelve interviews with key informants identified among migration experts and practitioners in Spain, Spanish authorities, inter-governmental organisations, national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and community-based organisations. The information collected through key informants allowed for the identification of sites for data collection and the fine-tuning of research questions and analytical methods.
- 2) Sixty semi-structured qualitative interviews with Syrian nationals which included both closed and open questions.

Map 1: Sites of data collection in Spain with number and type of interview



Data collection sites included official reception centres (*centros de acogida de refugiados*), spaces offered by NGOs involved in the reception of asylum seekers and refugees and informal gathering sites. Data collection activities were realised in full compliance with Spanish legislation, and respect for the rights of respondents was ensured through the systematic expression of informed consent prior to interviews. Interviews were always conducted on a voluntary and anonymous basis. Data was analysed using qualitative analysis software (Atlas TI). Interviews were coded as data collection was ongoing. This allowed for the identification of emerging themes during data collection. No new themes emerged in the last week of data collection for both populations of interest (Syrians who arrived to Spain through legal pathways and Syrians who arrived irregularly).

Challenges and limitations

- The methods used by this study are qualitative and sampling was purposive. Findings therefore cannot be generalised for all Syrians who arrived in Spain between 2015 and 2017.
- All findings are based on self-reported information only. Recall bias is possible, especially when accounts of the journey date back several years.
- Although field teams included female enumerators, female respondents were underrepresented. While female respondents were invited to take part

in the study, females generally only participated as members of a family rather than as individuals. As such, women's views may be underrepresented.

- All respondents who arrived in Spain through legal pathways did so via relocation or resettlement. Individuals who may have arrived through other legal pathways (i.e. student visa or work visa schemes) were excluded from this study as they could not be found at the time of data collection.
- The chapter on protection concerns in Algeria and Morocco refers only to the experiences of Syrians who arrived in Spain irregularly, as they had lived in or transited through Algeria or Morocco. However, this does not mean that Syrians who arrived in Spain through legal pathways had not experienced any protection concerns in other countries.
- The majority of Syrian respondents were identified through networks of reception centres, NGOs and other agencies which offer support to refugees and other migrants. This means that the most vulnerable individuals who live in Spain irregularly and do not access services offered by these NGOs may be underrepresented.
- The views and experiences of Syrians who may have arrived in Spain and directly continued their journey irregularly to other countries may also be underrepresented in this study.
- In some cases, not all respondents provided answers to all questions. Where data was available on fewer than the total 60 individuals, this has been highlighted in the relevant report sections.

A note on terminology

Transit - The term 'transit' holds the connotation of an individual 'passing through' on his or her way to another destination. For the purposes of this study, however, the term 'transit' signifies the period of time that passed between respondents leaving Syria and reaching Spain. This does not mean that the respondents' destination was necessarily Spain or that they themselves, at the time, understood their lives in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as in 'transit'.³²

Smuggling – The term 'smuggling' is defined as the "procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident" in Article 3 of the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, GA/RES/55/25 of 15 November 2000.³³

³² For a more in-depth discussion on the term 'transit' in research on migration please consult Duvell, Frank (2012), Transit migration: A blurred and politicised concept, *Population, Space and Place*, vol. 18(4) 2012.

³³ UNODC, United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the Protocols thereto, accessed 14/11/2017.

Findings

The aim of this study was to explore the routes taken by Syrians leaving Syria and reaching Spain, the protection risks they encountered along the way and their intentions once in Spain. The presentation of findings is organised accordingly: the first chapter outlines the journey from Syria to Spain, presenting the routes taken by Syrians who reached Spain irregularly and respondents who reached the country through legal pathways, respectively. The second chapter portrays the main protection concerns encountered in Algeria and Morocco, specific to the experience of Syrians who reached Spain irregularly.³⁴ The third chapter presents Syrians' intentions once in Spain.

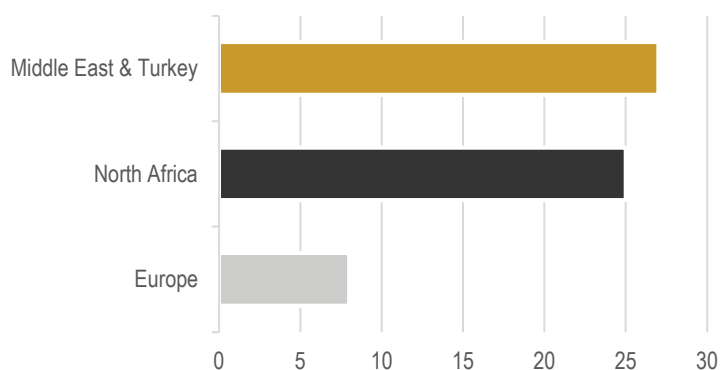
The Journey from Syria to Spain

Leaving Syria

All respondents but one left Syria upon or after the onset of the civil war in Syria in 2011. The only individual who had left Syria before the onset of the civil war had moved to Algeria in 2009 for work and had found himself unable to return to his native Kobane due to the city's siege in 2014.

Upon leaving Syria, the majority of respondents intended to stay in the Middle East, Turkey or North Africa. Out of 60 respondents, 26 aimed to stay in the Middle East and Turkey and 26 in North Africa. A comparatively low number of eight individuals intended to reach Europe when they first left Syria.

Figure 1: Intended region of destination upon departure from Syria



Note: Sample size n=60

The most reported first countries of destination in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region were Lebanon, reported by 16 individuals; Algeria, reported by 13 respondents; and Morocco, reported by nine individuals. Among individuals who aimed to go to Europe, almost half were hoping to reach Germany.

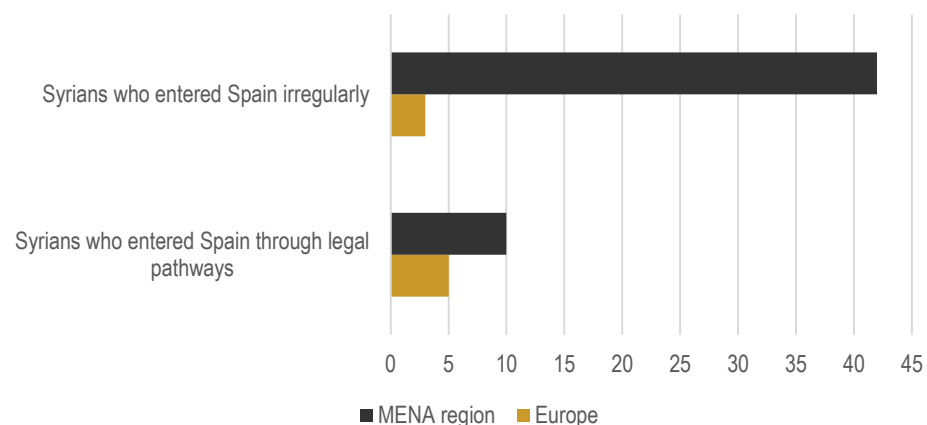
³⁴ This is because the focus of this study is on protection risks encountered by Syrians in Algeria and Morocco. All respondents who had been in these countries had reached Spain irregularly. For further information please consult the methodology section.

Map 2: Intended first country of destination upon departure from Syria



The intended regions of destination were different among individuals who had subsequently entered Spain irregularly and those who arrived in Spain through legal pathways. Among those who had later accessed legal pathways to Europe, one third reported that upon departure from Syria they had aimed to reach Europe. In contrast, among respondents who had reached Spain irregularly, only three out of 45 had aimed to reach Europe when leaving Syria. This suggests that individuals who entered Spain irregularly had not initially anticipated going to Spain. Instead, they changed their mind over their destination once outside Syria, often because of the conditions they found in transit.

Figure 2: Intended region of destination upon departure from Syria by Syrians who entered Spain irregularly and through legal pathways



Note: Syrians who entered Spain irregularly n=45; Syrians who entered Spain through legal pathways n=15

Among those who entered Spain through legal pathways, Syrians who had been relocated from Greece were much more likely to have intended to reach

Europe when they left Syria. Half of respondents who were relocated from Greece had wanted to reach Europe when they left home. In comparison, none of the respondents who had been resettled to Spain from Lebanon, Turkey or Jordan had wanted to reach Europe when they left Syria.

At the same time, reasons for choosing a certain destination were similar among respondents who had reached Spain irregularly and those who had reached the country through legal pathways. The Middle East and Turkey were attractive destinations for respondents irrespectively of how they later entered Spain; reasons for migrating to these countries included the proximity to Syria and existing social ties.

While all participants who had first intended to live in North Africa had later reached Spain irregularly, their reasons for migrating there were similar to those of individuals who stayed in the Middle East and later reached Spain through legal pathways. The sub-chapters below present the main reasons for individuals migrating to the three regions of destination: (1) the Middle East including Turkey, (2) North Africa and (3) Europe.

Destination Middle East & Turkey

The MENA region hosts the largest proportion of Syrian refugees worldwide. In total, more than five million Syrian refugees are registered by UNHCR in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.³⁵ Among them, three million live in Turkey alone, followed by more than one million in Lebanon³⁶ and more than 650,000 in Jordan.³⁷ At the onset of the conflict in Syria, the region was the first point of relocation for many Syrians due to the proximity to home and longstanding social ties with neighbouring countries.

Respondents who left Syria with the intention to stay in the Middle East or Turkey did so primarily due to the proximity to home and their hope that they would be able to return soon. Two thirds of participants who had first intended to stay in Lebanon reported that the proximity to Syria was an important factor in their decision to go there.

*"I left Syria in 2012 because the war was making the situation difficult and dangerous to live in Homs. I went to Lebanon because it was the closest country to my home town, the easiest to reach and also the easiest to come back from in case the war was over."*³⁸

Some respondents who first intended to stay in the Middle East or Turkey also thought about the ability to work in their new destination or of family and friends they would find there. This was particularly reported among individuals who first moved to Turkey, Iraq or the United Arab Emirates.

*"I decided to go to Turkey because I had friends who were living there and they told me it was better than Lebanon for work."*³⁹

The majority of respondents whose first destination was in the Middle East or Turkey tended to remain in their first destination for several years. This was particularly common among respondents who were later resettled to Spain: all

³⁵ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, last updated 05 November 2017.

³⁶ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, last updated 30 June 2017.

³⁷ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, last updated 05 November 2017.

³⁸ Irreg_4.

³⁹ Irreg_2.

individuals who had been resettled from Lebanon had lived there for three years or more.

Destination North Africa

North Africa has been a destination for Syrians long before the onset of the civil war in Syria in 2011. Morocco has traditionally been a destination for Syrian labour migrants, who would mainly find work in agriculture and well-drilling.⁴⁰ This means that when the crisis in Syria erupted many Syrians had already been living in Morocco for at least five to ten years, spoke the Moroccan Arabic dialect and had a Moroccan spouse.⁴¹

Similarly, Syrian migration to Algeria dates back to the 1960s to 1980s, when medium- and highly skilled Syrian migrant workers responded to the Algerian labour-market shortages and established their presence in the country.⁴² After a consistent decline, labour migration to Algeria increased in the 2000s. Between 2000 and 2012,⁴³ 3% of all work permits issued to foreign citizens from the Algerian government went to Syrian nationals working in the sectors of construction, oil, mechanic and electric industries, water and gas.⁴⁴ **As of 2010, Syrians represented the third largest group of foreign nationals holding commercial licenses in the country.**⁴⁵

As such, with the eruption of the conflict in Syria, existing ties in the region made North Africa an attractive destination for Syrians. As of August 2016, Morocco hosted 2,753 Syrian refugees, representing 66% of the entire refugee population in Morocco.⁴⁶ According to UNHCR and government estimates, as of November 2017 more than 43,000 Syrians live in Algeria, most of whom arrived before the spring of 2015.⁴⁷

Among respondents interviewed for this study, almost half intended to stay in North Africa. The majority intended to stay in Algeria, followed by Morocco and, to a lesser extent, Libya and Egypt. All respondents who had first intended to stay in North Africa later entered Spain irregularly.

When asked about the reasons for migrating to North Africa, more than half of the participants reported that they were hoping to find work in the region. Respondents aiming to reach Algeria in particular often reported that employment opportunities played an important role in the decision to go there. Also, until March 2015, Syrians were able to enter Algeria without a visa, making the country an accessible destination for Syrians leaving before that date, as reported by one third of respondents.

"I left Syria with my family, my wife and two children, who were eight and 10, in 2012. We knew people in Algeria who had moved from Syria to Algeria to work as professors at [a] university and were given Algerian residency after a short time and then citizenship. We were hoping we could do the same."⁴⁸

Among Syrians who had first aimed to reach Morocco, existing family relations were the most reported reason for migrating there. In three out of nine cases,

⁴⁰ UNHCR (2015), Information Note on Syrians Applying for Asylum In Morocco, September 2015.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Musette, Mohamed and Nourredine, Khaled (2012), L'Algérie, pays d'immigration ?, Hommes et Migrations, 1298.

⁴³ In 2012, Algeria issued more than 50,760 work permits.

⁴⁴ Fargues, Philippe and Christine Fandrich (2014), The European Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis What Next?, Migration Policy Centre Research Report 2012/14.

⁴⁵ Musette, Mohamed and Nourredine, Khaled (2012), L'Algérie, pays d'immigration ?, Hommes et Migrations, 1298.

⁴⁶ UNHCR (2016), Les réfugiés au Maroc, 21 September 2016.

⁴⁷ Gustafsson, Jenny (2016), The displaced: Ramadan for the 43,000 Syrians in Algeria, The Nation, 9 June 2016.

⁴⁸ Irreg_33.

respondents' wives were Moroccan nationals living in Syria, which made Morocco an attractive destination, as Syrians could rely on family support in the country. Others reportedly wanted to go to Morocco because it was perceived safe and still similar to their culture in Syria, unlike Europe.

*"In 2011, the problems started and people encouraged me to leave. We found going to Morocco the most logical thing to do at the time: my wife had citizenship there and I applied for a visa, which after some delay I managed to get."*⁴⁹

Destination Europe

The majority of respondents who had left Syria with the aim of reaching Europe had reached Spain through relocation from Greece. Most had travelled to Greece in spring 2016, when the Eastern Mediterranean sea route was a major entry point for refugees and other migrants aiming to reach Europe.

Respondents had arrived on the Greek islands after the implementation of the EU Turkey Statement in March 2016, which inhibited further movement along the Western Balkans route and left individuals stranded in Greece.⁵⁰

Those who had certain destinations in Europe in mind upon departure from Syria usually had family members they wanted to reach in those countries.

*"We left our house in Idlib in February 2016 while bombs and missiles were literally falling on our heads. [...] Our aim was to reach Germany via the Western Balkans route, as my brother had done [a] few months before us; we wanted to reach him when we left."*⁵¹

The main routes to Spain

Syrians who aim to seek asylum in Spain can reach the country in two ways: first, irregularly, via the so-called Western Mediterranean route transiting through Algeria and/or Morocco, and second, through humanitarian pathways, such as relocation and resettlement.

The majority of respondents in the present study had reached Spain irregularly, 45 out of 60; 15 had reached Spain through legal pathways.

Table 1: Respondents by mode of entry to Spain

Irregular entries		Legal pathways	
Land border with Spanish enclave of Melilla	Other	Relocation	Resettlement
43	2	6	9
45		15	

The majority of respondents who entered Spain irregularly arrived via the land border between Morocco and the Spanish enclave of Melilla (43 out of 45).

While other irregular entry points for refugees and other migrants to Spain exist (including the land border between Morocco and the Spanish enclave of Ceuta further west of Melilla, and the sea crossing from Morocco or Algeria to mainland

⁴⁹ Irreg_42.

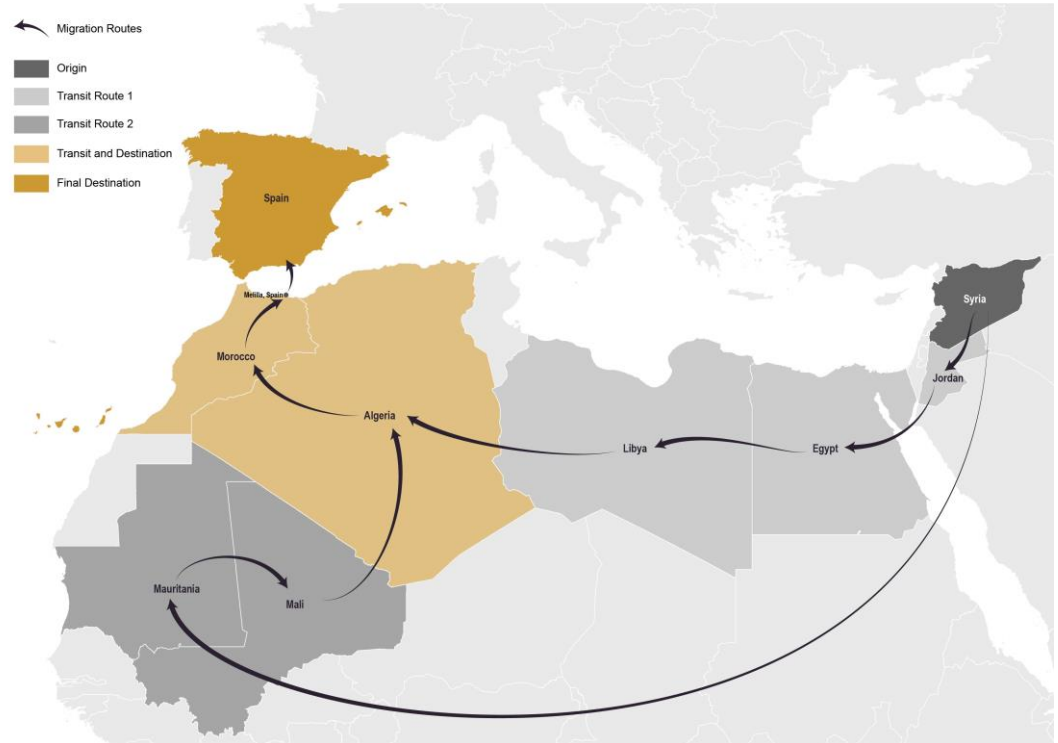
⁵⁰ BBC (2016), Migrant Crisis: The EU-Turkey deal comes into effect, BBC, 20 March 2016.

⁵¹ Reg_12.

Spain), key informants confirmed that this is the preferred route for Syrians. According to key informants, this is likely due to the fact that Melilla is close to the border with Algeria, through which Syrians transit on their way to Spain, and crossing by land is perceived as being safer than crossing by sea.⁵²

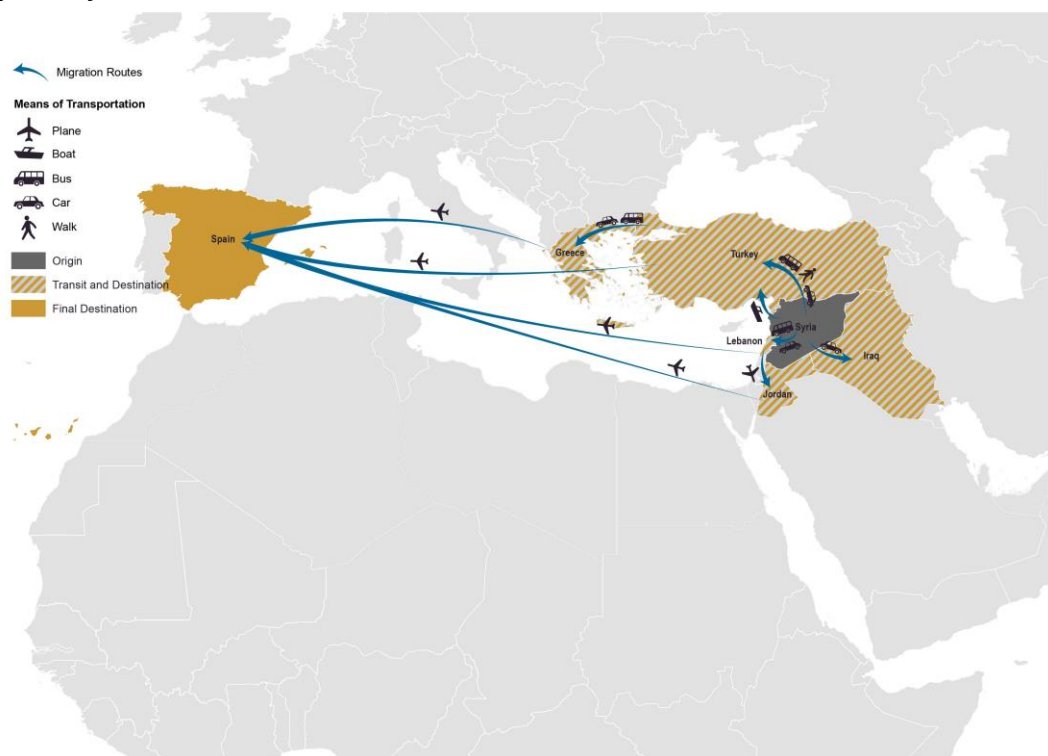
Two respondents had reached Spain by first arriving via sea to Greece and then continuing their journey irregularly.

Map 3: Overview of main routes used by Syrians who reached Spain irregularly



⁵² Please note, however, that 30 of the respondents were interviewed in Melilla, which further explains the high representation of this route in the sample of Syrians who entered Spain irregularly.

Map 4: Overview of main routes used by Syrians who reached Spain through legal pathways



Two thirds of respondents had spent three years or more living outside Syria in the Middle East and North Africa before reaching Spain. This was comparable among respondents who reached Spain irregularly and those who entered the country through legal pathways. Most commonly, respondents moved between several countries within the MENA region before reaching Spain; the most frequently reported destinations where respondents spent six months or more were Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco and Turkey.

Routes used by Syrians who reached Spain irregularly

Syrians applying for asylum in Spain enjoy a high likelihood of receiving subsidiary protection and a residence permit in the country.⁵³ However, they need to be on Spanish territory to claim asylum.⁵⁴ **As Syrian nationals need to present a visa to legally enter Spanish territory – a prerequisite to board a commercial flight or boat to Spain – travelling irregularly is often the only way to reach Spain and claim asylum.**⁵⁵

On average, respondents who reached Spain irregularly crossed six to eight different countries before arriving. This suggests that individuals who entered Spain irregularly had not initially anticipated going there. Instead, they changed their mind over their destination once outside Syria, often several times, because of the conditions they found in transit. The number of countries crossed heightened the costs of the journey and respondents' exposure to risk, as is often the case when crossing several borders irregularly.

⁵³ In the year 2016, the recognition rate for Syrian nationals receiving subsidiary protection in Spain lay at 90%. Recognition rates for refugee status were reportedly much lower. Source: CEAR, Informe 2017: Las personas refugiadas en España y Europa, 2017.

⁵⁴ **NB:** According to art. 38 of the Spanish asylum law, individuals are entitled to apply for asylum or request humanitarian visas at Spanish embassies and consulates abroad, as these qualify as Spanish territory. However, in practice, Spanish embassies and consulates have not been accepting applications by Syrian nationals abroad since at least 2015 (Source: Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, No Protection at the Border, 2015).

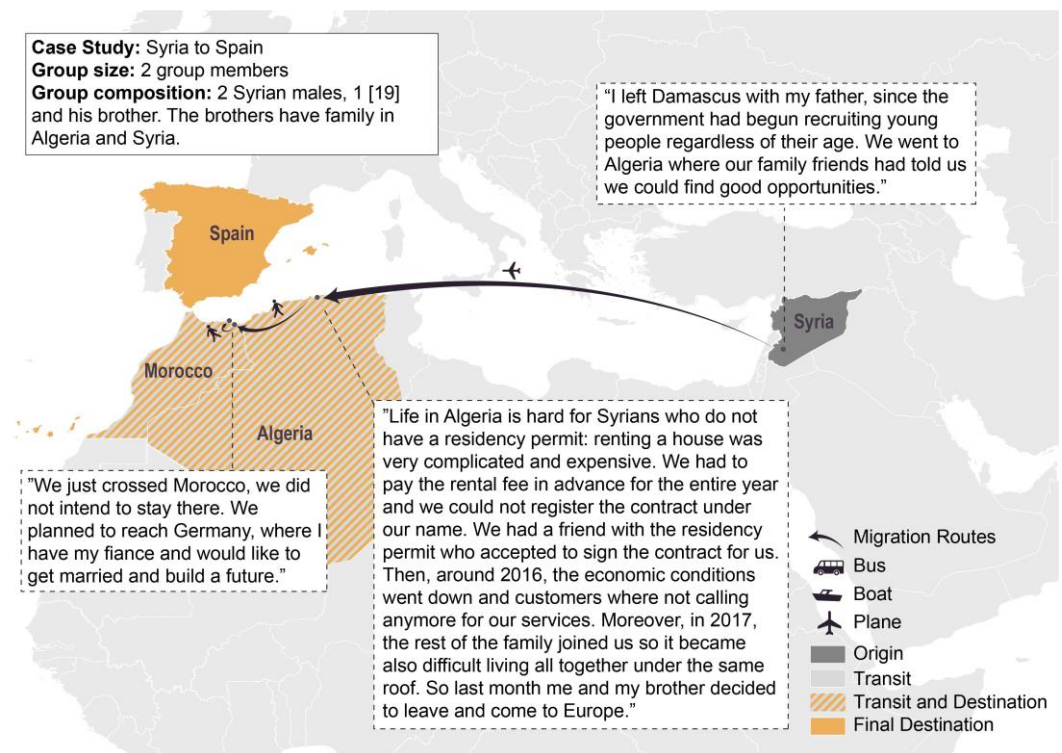
⁵⁵ **NB:** Since 2014 at the land border between the Moroccan city of Nador and the Spanish enclave of Melilla Syrians have been allowed to directly claim asylum at the border post of Spanish authorities on the Spanish side of the border. For more information, please refer to the chapter 'Intentions of Syrians once in Spain'.

Participants who reached Spain irregularly had usually taken one of two main routes: either the individual moved to North Africa from Syria or another Middle Eastern country and worked in the region for several years until she/he decided to travel to Spain irregularly via the land border between Morocco and the Spanish enclave of Melilla, or the individual lived for several years in the MENA region and, upon deciding to move to Europe, travelled through the Malian and Mauritanian desert to enter Algeria and from there to Morocco and Spain.

From North Africa to Spain

The vast majority of respondents who later entered Spain irregularly had lived in Algeria or Morocco for a prolonged period of time before deciding to reach Spain irregularly. Among the 26 respondents who had lived in Algeria for six months or more, the majority had lived there for two years or more; a few individuals had lived in Algeria for between one and two years. Among respondents who lived in Morocco, one third had stayed in the country for two years or more.

Map 5: A Syrian man's journey from Syria to Spain via Algeria and Morocco

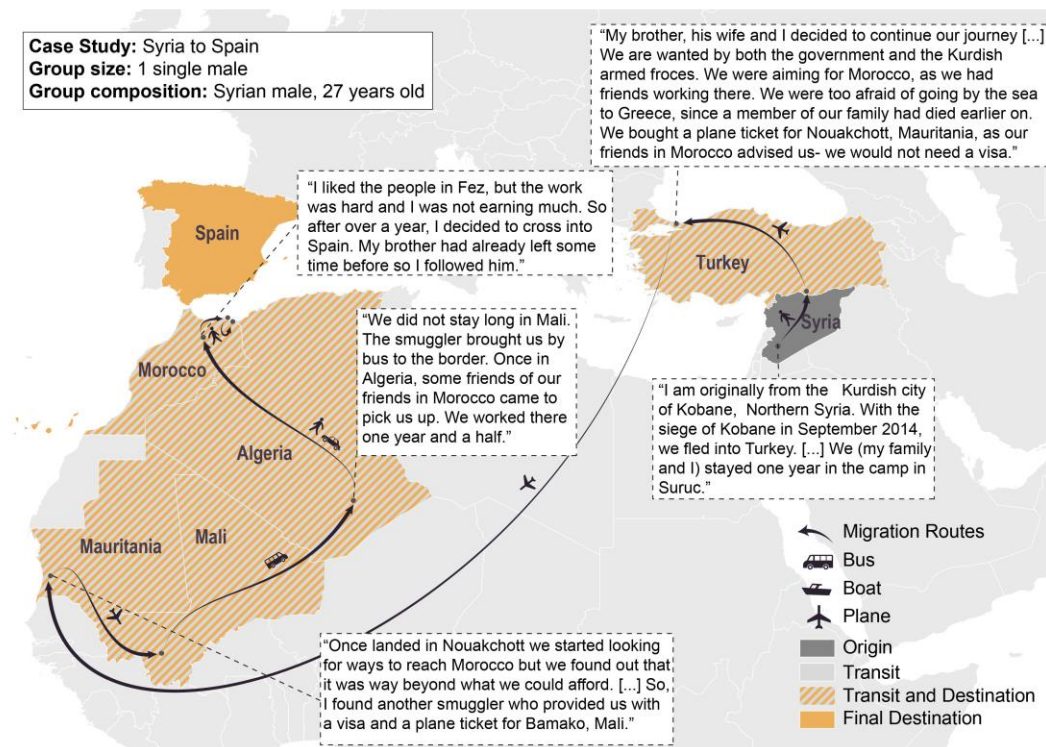


Through Mali and Mauritania to Spain

All respondents who had travelled through Mali and Mauritania had done so after March 2015, when Algeria imposed visa restrictions on Syrian nationals travelling to or through Algeria and Syrians were henceforth unable to enter Algeria legally. In these instances, individuals aimed to reach Morocco or Algeria but were unable to enter either country legally and therefore opted for the journey through the Malian and Mauritanian desert instead. Due to the dangers associated with this route, only three respondents out of 60 travelled this way.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ On Mali and Mauritania as transit countries for Syrian nationals also see: Guilbert Kieran (2016), *Stuck in limbo, Mauritania's Syrian refugees dream of the West*, Reuters, 2 March 2016.

Map 6: A Syrian man's journey through Mauritania and Mali to Spain



Routes used by Syrians who reached Spain through legal pathways

In response to the rise in irregular arrivals of Syrians to Spain and Europe and the risks individuals expose themselves to by travelling irregularly, a number of extraordinary pathways for admission of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers have been introduced in the EU. The following alternatives to irregular movement exist at both a Spanish and a European level:

- **The EU emergency relocation scheme** establishes quotas for the relocation of asylum seekers who arrived in Greece and Italy between September 2015 and September 2017 whose applications are to be processed by a third EU Member State. As of 2 November 2017, 1,286 asylum seekers had been relocated to Spain out of the legal commitment of 9,323 places.⁵⁷
- **The EU resettlement scheme** allows refugees who were granted asylum in a third country to be safely relocated and access international protection in one of the EU Member States. After establishing an initial resettlement programme with Jordan in 2014, Spain began a separate programme with Lebanon and one with Turkey, in which it aims to resettle a total of 1,379 individuals by December 2017.⁵⁸
- **Work permits** were granted to 81 Syrian nationals in Spain in 2016.⁵⁹ This included temporary stay permits for 27 individuals in the fields of research, high skilled labour, employment in transnational services, investment, entrepreneurship, development and innovation and as EU Blue Card holders. One hundred and nine long-term residence permits were given to Syrians on the basis of employment in 2016.⁶⁰
- **Study permits** are granted to non-EU citizens who have been formally admitted to a Spanish educational institution and have the economic

⁵⁷ European Commission, DG Home Affairs (2017), Member States' Support to Emergency Relocation Mechanism, 2 November 2017

⁵⁸ Key informant interview, Madrid 2017.

⁵⁹ This category includes work permits for: research, highly-skilled work, employment in transnational service, investors, EU Blue Card, entrepreneurs, research, development and innovation.

⁶⁰ Gobierno de Espana, Portal de Inmigración, accessed 11/11/2017.

capacity to support their stay in Spain.⁶¹ In 2016, 119 study permits were granted to Syrians (45 women and 74 men), a slight increase compared to the number of study permits granted to Syrians in 2011.⁶²

- **Exceptional visas:** In 2016, 16 temporary residence permits were granted on humanitarian grounds and 11 for cases of *arraigo social* (“social ties”).⁶³
 - *Arraigo social* allows non-Spanish nationals to regularise their stay in Spain upon proof of having continuously resided on Spanish territory for three years, having had a work contract for at least one year, and having existing family ties in Spain or a certificate proving their level of social integration.⁶⁴
 - *Humanitarian visas* are foreseen by Spanish national legislation and issued in exceptional circumstances to provide vulnerable non-EU nationals, such as victims of discrimination, domestic violence, and people with serious health concerns, with temporary residence in Spain.⁶⁵

Among respondents interviewed in this study, six individuals and their families had been relocated from Greece to Spain under the EU Relocation scheme. Nine households had reached Spain through resettlement. Of these nine, six had been resettled from Lebanon, two from Turkey and one individual from Jordan.⁶⁶

Resettlement

Individuals who had been resettled to Spain had spent on average between one to three years in either Lebanon or Turkey. None had intended to go to Europe when they left Syria. On average, they had crossed two countries between leaving Syria and arriving in Spain. All individuals who had been resettled from Lebanon had lived there for three years or more. Among those resettled from Turkey, all had lived in the country for a minimum of two years.

⁶¹ Gobierno de España, Portal de Inmigración, accessed 11/11/2017.

⁶² Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social (2017), Extranjeros con autorización de estancia por estudios en vigor, 30 June 2017.

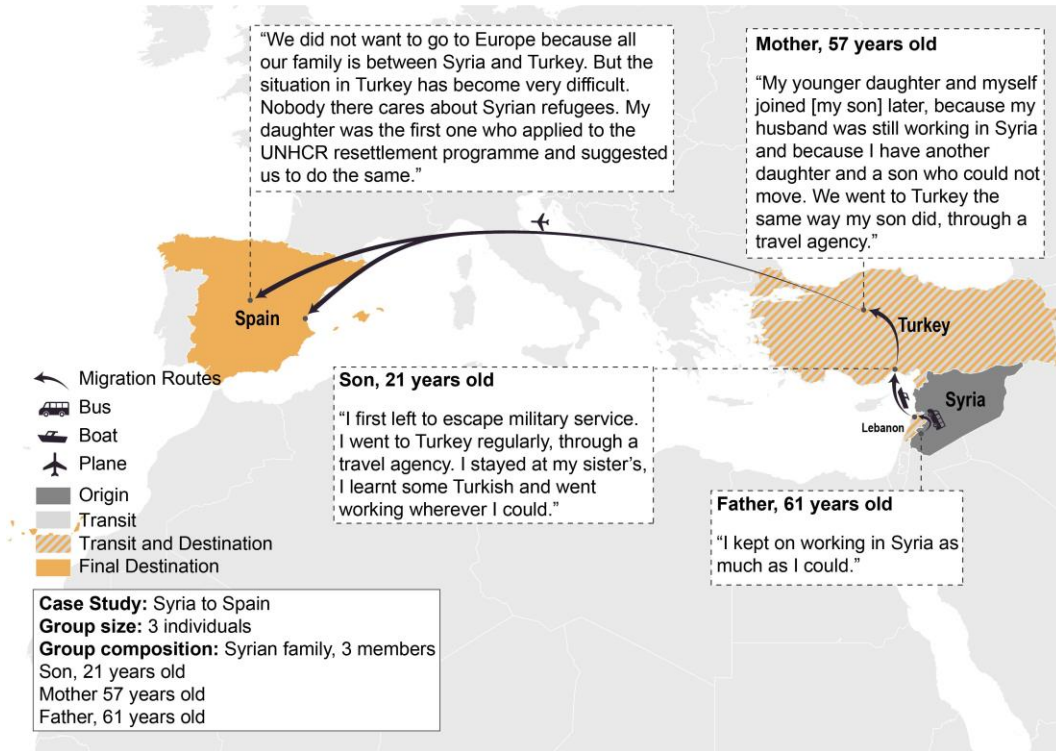
⁶³ Figures here refer to residence permits granted for international protection and humanitarian reasons including: humanitarian visas and collaboration with authorities, national security or public interest, victims of gender-based violence and organised crime and victims of human trafficking.

⁶⁴ Gobierno de España, Portal de Inmigración, accessed 11/11/2017.

⁶⁵ Ministry of Employment and Social Security (2017), Autorización residencia temporal por circunstancias excepcionales por razones humanitarias.

⁶⁶ Please note that the above list is not an exhaustive list of humanitarian pathways open to Syrians to go to Spain. Other pathways include work and study permits and exceptional permits, such as the so-called ‘arraigo social’, which allows Syrian nationals to regularise their status in the country if they fulfil a set of criteria.

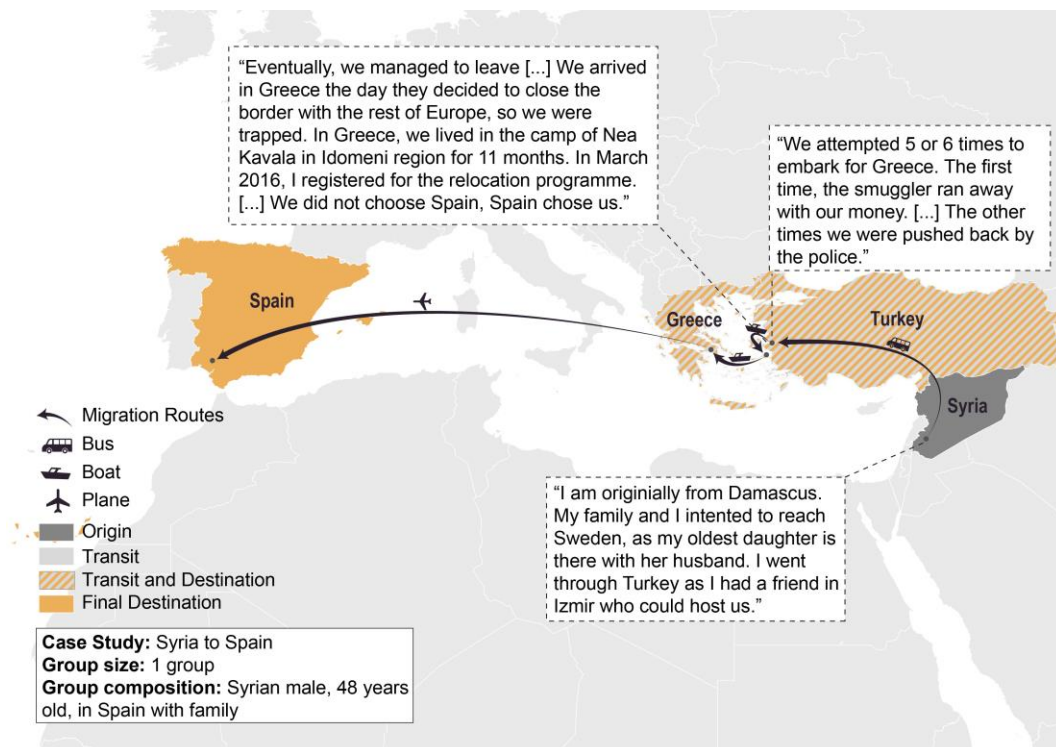
Map 7: A Syrian family's journey to Spain, resettled from Turkey



Relocation

Respondents who were relocated from Greece had usually spent less time in the MENA region after leaving Syria, as the majority intended to reach Europe when they left. Respondents had spent periods of between several months and one year in Greece before being relocated to Spain. When they signed up for the relocation programme, participants did not know which country would select them; they could not choose their country of destination.

Map 8: A Syrian family's journey from Greece to Spain via the EU relocation scheme



Influencing factors in deciding to go to Spain

Three main factors played a role in participants' final decision to move to Spain. First, the deterioration of Syrians' situation in transit. Second, the encounters respondents had in their everyday lives which made information on the journey to Europe easily accessible. Third, respondents' awareness of the poor security situation in Libya and the dangers of crossing via sea, persuading respondents that the Western Mediterranean route would be the safest and preferable way to reach Europe.

The influencing factors which shaped the decision to move on were comparable between participants who had reached Spain irregularly and those who had reached the country through legal pathways.

Deterioration of life in transit

Most Syrians reported that over time, often after several years, their living situation in transit deteriorated to the point of becoming untenable. Reasons for the deterioration of living conditions included the inability to obtain residence permits, labour exploitation, often tied to respondents' irregular situation in the country, and limited access to sustainable livelihoods and public services.

Among those who travelled irregularly to Spain, the difficulty of living in Morocco or Algeria regularly directly affected the decision to move onward. In Algeria, the change in visa regulations for Syrian nationals as of March 2015 affected many respondents who were living in the country and were henceforth unable to renew their residency, thus remaining in the country irregularly. This also impacted respondents' ability to access public services, such as healthcare as well as their ability to legally rent housing or access regular employment. In Morocco, even though there have been regularisation campaigns of individuals living in an irregular situation in the country, including Syrians,⁶⁷ respondents often reported that they had not been able to regularise their status, which exposed them to labour exploitation with no recourse to the law.

*"In Casablanca, we lived all together in a two-room flat for nine people. My husband was working, but he did not have a contract, because he did not have regular papers to stay in Morocco. He was doing occasional work, but it often happened that after doing the job, he was not paid."*⁶⁸

Lack of legal documentation also meant that children could not go to school. As one respondent recalled his life in Algeria aged 14:

*"My mother had initially planned to enrol me in a school in Algeria. However, this was impossible since all my school certificates were lost in the conflict in Idlib. Also, I was not legal in Algeria. So, I could not go to school and continue my studies. Instead, I found a job as a clerk in a shop and started working."*⁶⁹

Among those who had been resettled from Lebanon, Turkey or Jordan, two thirds of respondents reported that the situation in transit influenced their decision to take part in the resettlement scheme to go to Europe. Difficulties faced included a lack of livelihoods opportunities and limited economic support, discrimination and limited access to education and specialised healthcare.

⁶⁷ Schuettler Kirsten (2017), A second regularization campaign for irregular immigrants in Morocco: When emigration countries become immigration countries, World Bank People Move Blog 13 January 2017.

⁶⁸ Irreg_3.

⁶⁹ Irreg_24.

Box 2: How life in transit shaped a Syrian family's decision to apply for resettlement in Lebanon

"We were living in Beqa'a valley in Lebanon as we had found a house through an uncle, but the rent was too expensive. The settlement resembled a camp. Life in Lebanon was hard. I [the husband] was working irregularly in an electricity workshop, but was underpaid and irregular, and I had to enter through the backdoor to avoid controls.

Our children were going to school, but they were not learning. Schools in Lebanon work on a double shift schedule, this way Lebanese students who are taught in the mornings receive a better education, while Syrian children are neglected. My second son, who is nine years old, can neither read nor write. I tried myself to teach him. On top of that, violence against Syrians on the part of the Lebanese was common.

We kept our hope to return to Syria until, in 2016, we were told that our house had been completely wiped out under the attacks. At that point we realised there would not be any possibility of return. Given the poor conditions in Lebanon and the fact that we had lost any hope of coming back to Syria after our house was bombed, we applied for resettlement."⁷⁰

All respondents who had been relocated from Greece arrived there with the intention to migrate elsewhere in Europe. As such, when the Greek border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (fYRoM) closed, impeding refugees' and other migrants' onward movement, and respondents received an offer to relocate to Spain, they took this as an opportunity to leave.

"We were told that the process could take around three months and that we could be relocated to any country in Europe and that in case we refused we would have to wait until another country picked us. So, when they offered us Spain we took it."⁷¹

Information sources

Respondents who later entered Spain irregularly easily accessed information on the different routes to Europe. More than half of the participants who reached Spain irregularly reported that they received information on the journey to Spain from people they met outside Syria in the cities they were living in. This reinforced their decision to leave.

"I started to consider the idea of coming to Europe in Algeria, where I met other Syrians who were planning to travel to Europe. In Morocco, while working in Rabat, I met a Syrian family planning to go to Spain through Melilla. That is when I eventually made the decision to move forward."⁷²

Forty out of 45 individuals who reached Europe irregularly had been in contact with Syrians who were already in Europe, and who had advised them on the route to take. In the majority of cases these were (extended) family members, who had travelled along the same route in the recent past.

Among respondents who had entered Spain through resettlement, the information provided to them by UNHCR on the resettlement scheme influenced their decision to accept the offer to go to Spain. Almost half of the respondents who reached Spain via resettlement reported that they had not

⁷⁰ Reg_8.

⁷¹ Reg_14.

⁷² Irreg_1.

considered going to Europe before being given this opportunity by UNHCR. In these cases, individuals had gone to an UNHCR office to register for support and had been informed about this opportunity there.

“We knew about UNHCR from other Syrians who were living in Dara’a, our hometown. At first, we only registered because of economic support and for the sponsorship scheme offered by UNHCR to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. When my son registered, he was told about the option of resettlement. This is when we first thought about it [going to Europe].”⁷³

Respondents who had reached Spain through the EU’s relocation scheme had received information on the scheme once in Greece by humanitarian organisations and volunteer groups. As none of the respondents had intended to stay in Greece when they first arrived, all reported that they registered for the scheme as an alternative to travelling onwards to other EU countries irregularly.

Box 2: Decision making process of a Syrian man living in Algeria to move to Europe

“After leaving Syria I spent two years in Algeria working for a Syrian gas company. I had an important role in the company, yet I was not given much money, even though the company is Syrian and I was hired with a regular contract. I was working extra hours and six days per week, but I was paid 700 USD a month. This sort of exploitation started when the Algerian government started requiring a visa for Syrians to enter and stay in the country. At that point, the company understood that the Syrian employees were trapped and had no alternative to that job, so they started underpaying us and treating us differently than the rest of the employees.

I felt like [I was] in prison there, so in February 2016 I decided to leave the country. I wanted to go to Germany to stay with my brother. I found out that the best way to reach Europe was through Morocco. Fifty percent of the Syrian employees in the company went that way, so it is very well known.

I did not consider the route through Libya, as I know that there is a war there and the security situation in the country is very bad.”⁷⁴

The alternative of Libya

All respondents were well informed about the security situation in Libya. Most mentioned the hazardous sea crossing from Libya to Italy as a further incentive to travel via the Western Mediterranean route and cross via land to Spain. Only one respondent had reportedly first gone to Libya aiming to cross by sea, but changed his mind once he saw how dangerous the sea crossing was. None of the respondents reported considering reaching Europe via that route.

“I would have never chosen to go to Italy by boat leaving from Libya, it is too dangerous and 90% of the people who go that way die at sea. It is not even an option I considered.”⁷⁵

Finally, among respondents who already lived in the North African region, geographical considerations played a role in the decision to reach Europe via Spain:

⁷³ Reg_4.

⁷⁴ Irreg_2.

⁷⁵ Irreg_22.

“My family did not want to go to Europe when we first moved to Morocco, so there was no reason for us to go to Libya. When I decided to go to Europe after four years of living in Morocco, it was much easier for me and my wife to go to Melilla, rather than going to Libya and then cross the sea.”⁷⁶

Box 3: How legal pathways can prevent irregular migration

Legal pathways, such as resettlement and relocation, aim to resettle vulnerable individuals in safe countries through legal channels and thereby lower the likelihood of individuals migrating irregularly. Here is one story of a family who were able to take advantage of the resettlement scheme from Turkey to Spain:

“Life in Turkey became very hard [during the] two years that we were living there. There was no work anymore and the rent of the flat had increased, so it became harder and harder to go on [with] everyday life. Also, only one of our children was accepted in school and our older son, who has special needs, was not helped in any way.

We registered with UNHCR one year after our arrival to have access to the resettlement programme. After four years they called us.

Had it not been for UNHCR’s resettlement program, we would have eventually left Turkey irregularly, because we really had no future there and even the present was very hard to deal with. We would have tried to reach Greece on a boat, as my husband’s cousin who is now in Germany did.

Instead, we left on a flight to Spain in October 2017.”⁷⁷

Arriving in Spain

Two thirds of Syrians interviewed arrived in Spain between May and October 2017. One third of respondents had arrived in Spain more than six months ago. The arrival procedure for those who had reached Spain irregularly via land in Melilla differed from the procedures that respondents went through who had arrived in Spain through legal pathways.

Arriving irregularly via land in Melilla

As Moroccan authorities impede irregular migrants from leaving the country, refugees and other migrants wait in the Moroccan town of Nador for an opportune moment to cross the border with Spain. Many Syrians resort to smugglers to buy fake documents and cross the border as Moroccan nationals from the region of Nador, as Moroccans from the area can commute to Melilla without having a passport. Individuals from Sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand, are systematically blocked by the police from approaching the border and have no other means but to climb the six-metre, three-layer fences that divide the Spanish enclave from the Moroccan territory or to reach Spain by boat. In recent years, several sources have reported cases of pushbacks at the border operated by the Spanish authorities, mostly against Sub-Saharan African migrants.⁷⁸ In March 2015, this practice was formalised through an amendment to Spain’s Aliens Law introducing the possibility of ‘rejecting at the border’ (*rechazos en frontera*) all individuals

⁷⁶ Irreg_15.

⁷⁷ Reg_8.

⁷⁸ See for example: Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes (2016) No protection at the Border, Amnesty International (2016), En Tierra de Nadie, and UNHCR, Noticias de España, 13 March 2015.

found to be crossing irregularly the land borders between Morocco and Ceuta or Melilla.⁷⁹

Once they arrive in Melilla, Syrians can lodge their asylum request with the border police and formalise it in the presence of a police officer or personnel from the Office for Asylum and Refuge (*Oficina de Asile e Refugio – OAR*). They are hosted by the Centre for Temporary Reception (*Centros de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes – CETI*) before entering the official asylum reception system in mainland Spain.⁸⁰

Box 4: The land border between Nador, Morocco, and Melilla, Spain

Crossing the border between Nador and Melilla was described as relatively easy by some respondents and as much more difficult by others. The majority of participants engaged the services of smugglers, who would walk with them or advise on the time and place to cross. However, some also crossed individually, without external support. Here, two respondents recount their experiences crossing the border:

“I was travelling alone. I crossed the border with Moroccan workers – there are a lot of people living in Nador who go to Melilla to work every day. I just passed through and no one from the Moroccan border police stopped me nor checked my documents, because I looked like one of the workers. When I approached the Spanish police, I gave them my passport and was sent to the office to claim asylum.”⁸¹

In contrast, a Syrian national and his Moroccan wife recounted a very different experience:

“Crossing the border between Nador and Melilla was really difficult for us. We had to try multiple times. We went from Kenitra to Nador by train, which costs 20 euro per person and takes nine hours. We tried to cross the border, but the police beat me and pushed me so [hard] that I could hardly move for 10 days.

We decided to go back to Kenitra, paying 20 euro each, and stayed there for 10 days, after which we tried again. We took the train for the third time, 20 euro each, and tried to cross [with the help of a] smuggler. We were given the phone number of a smuggler by a Syrian person we know. This smuggler asked 650 euro to [help] us both cross the border. We stayed at a hotel for two nights, then we went to the border and managed to cross. The smuggler gave my wife the ID of a Moroccan woman who had residency in Spain, which allowed her to go through.”⁸²

Arriving via resettlement or relocation

Once individuals are selected and accept the offer of resettlement or relocation, they are booked on a flight directly to mainland Spain. Upon arrival, individuals are directly integrated into the Spanish reception system and sent to different reception centres across the country. Resettlement candidates who were recognised refugees in their last country of residence are granted international protection. Relocation candidates have their asylum application processed by the Spanish authorities, just as individuals who entered the country irregularly do.

⁷⁹ Manzanedo Negueruela et al. (2016), No protection at the Border, Jesuit Refugee Service and University Institute of Migration Studies, University of Comillas.

⁸⁰ Irregular migrants can be transferred to humanitarian shelters, when vulnerable, or to immigration detention centres (*Centro de Internamiento de Extranjeros - CIE*)

⁸¹ Irreg_33.

⁸² Irreg_7.

Reception system for asylum seekers and refugees in Spain

Upon lodging an asylum claim,⁸³ if the asylum request is admitted by the Office for Asylum and Refuge, the applicant receives a red card (*tarjeta roja*) certifying that he or she is an asylum seeker. Applications are examined on a monthly basis by the Inter-Ministerial Commission of Asylum (*Comisión de Asilo y Refugio*, CIAR), which provides recommendations for the final decision by the Ministry of Interior.⁸⁴ Once the individual is a recognised asylum seeker, she or he is entitled to reception, which falls under the responsibility of the Ministry for Employment and Social Security, and is provided through four governmental facilities (*Centros de Acogida a Refugiados – C.A.R.*) based in Madrid, Seville, Mislata and Alcobendas, by the Red Cross, CEAR (*Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado*) and ACCEM (*Asociación Comisión Católica Española de Migración*) and recently by other NGOs across Spain.⁸⁵ Assistance and financial support to asylum seekers and refugees are strictly provided for 18 months and can be extended to a maximum of 24 months for vulnerable cases.^{86 87}

Protection Risks in Algeria and Morocco

This section focuses on the protection risks participants encountered in Algeria and Morocco, countries of both destination and transit for respondents who had later reached Spain irregularly.⁸⁸ The most reported protection concerns in both countries were inability to access documentation, labour exploitation and protection risks tied to irregular border crossings from Algeria to Morocco and from Morocco to Spain.

Lack of access to documentation

Lack of access to documentation in both Algeria and Morocco was the most common protection concern reported by respondents. The vast majority of individuals who had initially moved to either Morocco or Algeria had planned to settle there. Therefore, the inability to live there legally was a key issue.

Among respondents who lived in Algeria for six months or more, the majority were not able to reside in the country legally. Of respondents who had lived in Morocco for six months or more, more than one third reported that they were not able to access residence or other types of permits to remain in the country legally.

“Being in Algeria without residency makes life impossible for whatever thing you have to do. You have no rights. You cannot rent a house, register your children, [or] even work!”⁸⁹

Without access to documentation to reside in the country legally, respondents had to live off the radar of authorities, with no recourse to the law. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this affected all areas of respondents’ lives.

Families were unable to register their new-born babies as they could not legally access hospitals. As a result, three respondents reported that at least one of their children did not have a birth certificate, rendering them stateless. Also, respondents

⁸³ Please note that, besides at the land borders in Melilla and Ceuta, it is also possible to lodge an request within one month at any police station, at the Office for Asylum and Refuge (*Oficina de Asilo y Refugio - OAR*) or at any Foreigners’ Office (*Oficina de Extranjeros*), or Detention Centre for Foreigners (*Centros de Internamiento de Extranjeros – CIE*) in mainland Spain.

⁸⁴ Defensor del Pueblo (2016) *El Asilo en España. La Protección Internacional y los Recursos del Sistema de Acogida*, July 2016.

⁸⁵ Among them: Provienda, Red Acoge, Cepaim, La Merced, Adoratrices and others.

⁸⁶ *El Diario*, Los refugiados denuncian “la rigidez” del sistema de acogida estatal, 17 February 2017.

⁸⁷ Queipo de Llano, Magdalena and Jennifer Zuppiroli (2016), *Country Report Spain*, Asylum Information Database, 31 December 2016.

⁸⁸ Please note that this study focuses on the protection concerns faced by Syrian nationals living and transiting through Algeria and Morocco, specifically. As in the sample of the study only individuals who arrived in Spain irregularly had lived or transited through Algeria or Morocco, the protection risks faced by Syrians who reached Spain through legal pathways are underrepresented. However, this does not mean that these individuals did not face any protection concerns. Please see the methodology section for further information.

⁸⁹ Irreg_9.

were not able to rent a house legally without residency in the country. Landlords would offer flats at inflated rates and in very poor condition. In such cases, individuals could be evicted from their homes at extremely short notice with nowhere else to go.

Labour exploitation

One third of respondents reported having worked under exploitative conditions in Algeria or Morocco. This was usually tied to the lack of legal documentation: without legal residence in the country, individuals were exposed to working under poor conditions and were forced to accept any work offer they received. Respondents reported working long hours for very low pay, completing a work assignment and not being paid at all or working under dangerous conditions without appropriate safety measures.

"In Morocco, we were exploited for three years, [we were] underpaid and [we] liv[ed] in very poor conditions, to the point that our daughter could not live with us. We were living in the same restaurant where we were working, in a room in the back. There was no space for her to stay and it was not a situation in which a girl could live."⁹⁰

Young men who had travelled to Morocco or Algeria alone were particularly vulnerable to working in highly physically demanding jobs under unsafe conditions. This was because young men had often gone to these destinations in the hope of finding employment and, upon realising that they were not able to work regularly, still sought to make a living, mostly in physically demanding work, such as in water drilling or gas refineries. As one respondent recalled:

"I moved to Batna in Algeria to work for a company drilling water wells. The work was hard and they did not pay much. Often they did not pay us. After a while, I could not do this work anymore."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Irreg_36.

⁹¹ Irreg_21.

Box 5: When legal pathways do not work: Family reunification

According to the EU Directive on the right to family reunification,⁹² individuals who are granted international protection in an EU country are entitled to family reunification. However, since the surge of arrivals of refugees and other migrants to the EU in 2015, procedures to access family reunification have become increasingly lengthy. Some countries have limited the right to family reunification.⁹³

While signifying a breach of the directive on the right to family reunification, lengthy or difficult access to family reunification can put individuals and their families at risk by making the irregular way to Europe more attractive. Here, one respondent who was a recognised refugee in Belgium recalls his story:

"I was granted political asylum three months after I arrived in Belgium. After my first year I asked for family reunification for my wife and children, which was a long and expensive process. I paid a lot of money, in fact, to get the documents from Algeria and to translate them all, 300 euro overall. Nothing was coming out of my request; my lawyer told me it would take between two to three years. So in August 2017 I decided to go back to Morocco, meet my wife and children and try to bring them to Spain through Melilla like I had done before.

I flew to Melilla and then crossed the border irregularly- even as a recognised refugee, because I am Syrian, I would not have been allowed to enter. I spent 230 euro for my flight and 1250 euro for my wife and children to fly from Algeria to Morocco. We spent two weeks there trying to cross.

In order to cross the border we needed 1200 euro for my wife and children to pay the smuggler. I had to ask my family in Europe to lend me some money, because I did not have enough to cover all these expenses. We crossed all together in late August and luckily no one checked us because we had paid the smuggler.

Ever since we arrived in Melilla, I have been renting a flat, since I am not allowed to live in the CETI reception centre with my wife and children. My wife had her interview with the police few weeks ago and now we are waiting.

They are telling us that family reunification is difficult, even within the EU. But I have to go back to Belgium, otherwise I lose my monthly financial support.

I do not know what to do next."⁹⁴

Protection risks during border crossings

The vast majority of respondents had crossed an international border irregularly at some point during their journey. Of those who did, all of them relied on the services of smugglers at some point. While engaging the services of a smuggler does not *per se* put an individual at risk, it does heighten their likelihood of being exploited. Respondents frequently reported that smugglers altered the conditions of the 'deal' halfway through the journey by, for example, asking for more money or leaving the group earlier than expected, and thereby putting the individual in danger. As one participant recalling the border crossing from Algeria to Morocco explained:

⁹² European Commission, Directive on the right to family reunification, 22 September 2003.

⁹³ See e.g. Reuters, Fewer migrants entitled to join family in Germany: study, 19 October 2017.

⁹⁴ Irreg_4.

“We agreed with the two smugglers – one on each side of the border – beforehand: 500 USD each. We agreed that we would only pay them after we reached Morocco. [...] When we finally managed to cross the border, there were other men waiting for us. They told us they had not received the money from the smuggler and that we would have had to pay 500 USD extra each to reach Nador. They were blackmailing us and threatening us, but we were in the middle of nowhere with nowhere else to go. In the end we paid 600 USD, the last money we had.”⁹⁵

Respondents crossing between Algeria and Morocco in particular reported the risk of being robbed or exploited by third parties, who took advantage of individuals’ vulnerable situation when crossing the border:

“Just when you enter Morocco [from Algeria] it is very dangerous, because people can recognise you as Syrian and they can try to kidnap you or beat you to steal money off you. It happened to people who were crossing the country with me by foot: some of them were taken, beaten up and robbed. We managed to escape.”⁹⁶

Box 6: Recounting the border crossing between Algeria and Morocco

All individuals who crossed the border between Algeria and Morocco engaged the services of a smuggler. All recounted this as the most perilous part of their journey. Here a young man aged 18, originally from Kobane, recounts his experience of the border crossing between Algeria and Morocco:

“The smuggler brought us to the border by car at night, he dropped us there and walked with us [for] four hours in the darkness, far away from the police check point. It was all dark, there were no lights, so it was difficult to see and know where to go. We had to cross a seven metre deep trench and pass under barbed wire. Once in the trench, we walked to cross it and then found someone throwing us a rope to climb up at the end of the trench. Once we managed to cross the border, we found a car on the other side that brought us to Oujdah, the Moroccan village close to the border.

There used to be another way to cross, still irregular, but less dangerous, so that women and children could cross as well. Now that way is closed, so when we went some families actually turned back because they [could not] manage. This was the hardest part of my journey.”⁹⁷

Among respondents crossing the land border between Nador, Morocco, and Melilla, Spain, the greatest concerns were about family separation and police violence. Respondents who travelled with families reported being advised by smugglers to cross separately from their children, so as to increase the likelihood of crossing successfully. In these cases, the child would be given to a Moroccan woman, as Moroccan women were less likely to be checked at the border. The child’s parents would cross separately. This was particularly problematic as, when children would cross separately from their parents, once on the Spanish side of the border, the child is registered as unaccompanied and even when the parents reach the child shortly after, Spanish legislation requires a DNA test to ascertain the relation between the child and its parents. While parents understood the need for this procedure, the testing could last one month or more, during which time the child was hosted in a reception centre for minors, separated from his or her parents with limited visiting

⁹⁵ Irreg_35.

⁹⁶ Irreg_6.

⁹⁷ Irreg_13.

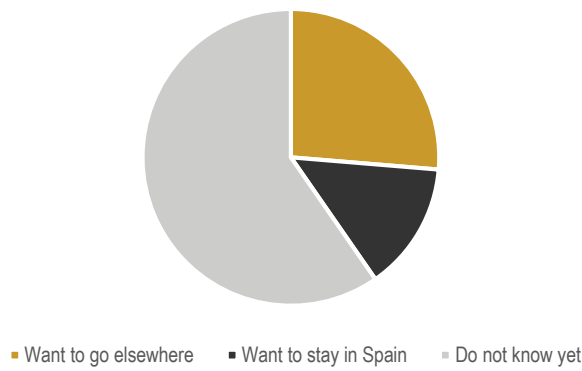
hours. This caused significant distress to the families and delayed their onward travel to mainland Spain.⁹⁸

Respondents also repeatedly reported witnessing police hitting migrants who attempted to cross the border to Spain irregularly. In five cases, respondents reported that they had been hit by police officers when they attempted to cross the border to Melilla irregularly.

Intentions Once in Spain

The majority of Syrian respondents who arrived in Spain between 2015 and 2017 did not have a strong preference towards moving onward or staying in Spain. When asked whether they intended to move onwards in the coming 12 months, a majority of participants reported that they did not know yet, a quarter wanted to move onward and eight out of 60 intended to stay in Spain.

Figure 3: Migratory intentions of Syrians who arrived in Spain between 2015 and 2017⁹⁹

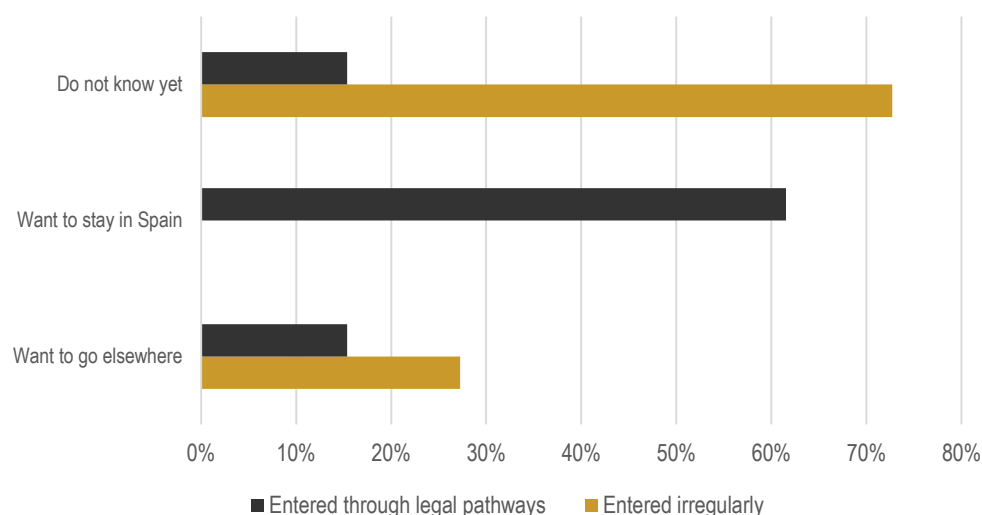


Note: Sample size n=57

The intentions of Syrians who reached the country irregularly and those who arrived in Spain through legal pathways, however, differed. Syrians who entered irregularly were much more uncertain about whether to stay in the country, compared to Syrians who had reached Spain through legal pathways.

⁹⁸ This practice was also confirmed by key informants and has been recorded in studies focusing on the protection risks at the border between Nador and Melilla, see for instance Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes (2015), No Protection at the Border, and Amnesty International (2016), En Tierra de Nadie.

⁹⁹ Please note that not all individuals responded to the questions on 'Intentions once in Spain', which is why the sample size in this chapter is slightly lower than elsewhere (N=57).

Figure 4: Migratory intentions of Syrians by type of entry in Spain

Note: Proportions refer to data available for 44 out of 45 Syrians who entered irregularly, and 13 out of 15 Syrians who entered through legal pathways in Spain.

Syrians who reached Spain irregularly

The vast majority of Syrians who reached Spain irregularly did not know whether they wanted to stay in the country or move somewhere else. Contrary to the widespread assumption that Spain is a transit country for Syrians wanting to reach other destinations in Europe, individuals reported that they first wanted to see the situation in Spain before deciding whether to stay or continue onward. All respondents who entered irregularly, and for whom data is available, reported being uncertain about their migration intentions, with 10 individuals expressing the possibility of going elsewhere depending on conditions encountered in the upcoming months in Spain.¹⁰⁰

The lack of clear migration intentions among newly-arrived Syrians who had entered Spain irregularly was found to be linked to the respondents' need to better understand the general conditions and procedures in Spain and their awareness of legal restrictions on their mobility. Firstly, as participants had arrived recently, they reported wanting to check their expectations about economic support and access to job opportunities and education against the realities in Spain. Secondly, a large majority of new and irregularly arrived respondents had just arrived in Melilla and were at the very beginning of their asylum process. Hence, incomplete information on access to documents and procedures seemed to limit respondents' ability to develop clear migration intentions. Finally, as all respondents were registered in Spain as their first country of entry in the EU, knowledge of how the Dublin regulation works¹⁰¹ was referenced as a factor that might hinder onward mobility.

Syrians who reached Spain through legal pathways

The majority of respondents who had reached Spain through legal pathways intended to stay in Spain for the foreseeable future. Some respondents reported not knowing yet whether to stay in Spain or not and only one individual intended to go elsewhere in Europe.

¹⁰⁰ N=32.

¹⁰¹ As a general rule, the EU Dublin regulation establishes that an individual has to apply for asylum in the first country of arrival and registration in Europe.

*"I have heard from other Syrians inside CETI that the process to claim asylum should take around one month. As for the conditions, I wait to see what the conditions are in Spain in terms of jobs and education in order to make a decision to move onward. So, for now I am not thinking of other countries yet."*¹⁰²

Factors shaping Syrians' migration intentions

The factors which shaped respondents' reasons to stay in Spain or continue their journey were found to be comparable between individuals who reached Spain irregularly and those who arrived through legal pathways. The most reported factors influencing individuals' migration intentions were (1) local and transnational networks, (2) culture, language and weather and (3) the institutional support available in Spain.

Local and transnational networks

Counting on networks of family and acquaintances locally or outside of Spain was often reported among factors affecting Syrians' migration intentions. Out of the four cases where respondents had family or friends in Spain, three respondents expressed their intention to stay in the country. Similarly, where respondents had family members elsewhere in Europe, they were likely to want to move elsewhere (among people who entered irregularly, this was found for seven people out of 15).

*"I might stay in Spain or go to France, it depends on the opportunities for progress that I can find there. In general, I have heard from other Syrians that Spain is poor and conditions are better in France, but I will see, I could also reside in Spain and go visit my wife in France."*¹⁰³

¹⁰² Irreg_5.

¹⁰³ Irreg_27.

Box 7: Resettlement and relocation through the lenses of Syrians in Spain¹⁰⁴

Applicants to legal pathways find out about their destination only at the end of the selection process. The excerpts below show how the process works, and how expectations about Spain are shaped.

Access to resettlement and relocation

Almost all respondents in this study learned about the possibility of applying for relocation or resettlement from UNHCR in Lebanon, Turkey or Jordan. A 22-year old Syrian man relocated from Greece explains: *"I registered with the UN who informed people in the camp of the relocation programme. I was told we could be relocated anywhere in Europe. After three months [...] they told us about Spain."*¹⁰⁵ In a couple of cases, respondents were informed about resettlement by UNHCR sometime after registration, as in the case of a 22-year-old man resettled from Lebanon: *"When I was in Lebanon, after two years I registered with UNHCR for help, but not for resettlement. I was called by UNHCR [...] and they informed me that we had been considered for resettlement. I did not know that that was a possibility before I received that call."*¹⁰⁶

After registration, applicants are called for a resettlement interview with UNHCR to decide on the admissibility of the case and submission to possible receiving countries.¹⁰⁷ As reported by a Syrian family resettled from Turkey: *"We registered in Turkey and had the interview with UNHCR after two months, in which they informed us that they were going to send our case to the embassies of different countries and would let us know when and which country would accept our case. After some time, they told us Spain had accepted our case and we had the first interview with the Spanish embassy in Ankara four months after that."*

In one third of the cases, the resettlement process took two years or more, which respondents felt was very long. In the meantime, the personal circumstances of individuals had changed. One respondent recalled that, by the time UNHCR called him, his family had already moved on to Turkey. The individual was resettled alone.

After relocation applications are filed by eligible asylum seekers, a list of possible matches with pledged places is sent to EU Member States for approval. Applicants cannot choose their destination, but preferences based on language, family or social ties can be taken into consideration.¹⁰⁸ A Syrian family recalls: *"After we registered for the relocation programme, we were transferred to a hotel in Mytilene, where we stayed for one month. Then, we were moved to Athens [...] for another month. After all these [moves], they told us that we could go to Spain. We had asked to be sent to Germany because we have family members there, but they offered us Spain instead."*¹⁰⁹

Information about Spain and expectations

Once the destination is communicated to applicants for resettlement and relocation, they receive information about the transfer procedures and living conditions at the destination, as explained by the Syrian family above: *"Before leaving we had another meeting at the Spanish embassy with all the other people who were going to travel. We watched a video and were given information about what would happen when we reached Spain. We were also allowed to ask questions, including about the accommodation. [...] Some people did not like the answers to their questions and dropped out of the resettlement programme. After this meeting, we were told the date of the flight and which city we would go to."*¹¹⁰

The information sessions are a crucial moment for the formation of applicants' expectations, which are not always confirmed by the perception of reality once in Spain. A Syrian young man reports: *"When I did the interview with the Spanish representative in Beirut, I was given information about the situation in Spain and the kind of support I would be given once I arrived in the country. As for now, I have been here for three months, and I can say that some [pieces] of information [have] not [been] true, other[s] have proven true, while it is still too early to know about the accuracy of other information."*¹¹¹

Culture, language and weather

Respondents often cited Spanish culture, weather and people as a reason for staying in Spain. These factors were mentioned by 13 respondents out of 57 and in the majority of cases individuals reported that they felt that Spanish culture was close to Syrian culture, mentioning the friendliness of people. Only one respondent out of 57¹¹² reported that their daughter felt discriminated against at school and that renting accommodation was not easy due to discrimination against Syrians. Furthermore, the Spanish weather, similar to the climate of most of Syria, was referenced among the reasons to remain in Spain.

Learning the Spanish language was recognised by one sixth of respondents as a key factor affecting their integration in Spain, perceived as both an obstacle and – when progress was made – as an incentive to stay.

“Apart from the little economic help, we really like Spain and we want to stay here. [...] Here there is safety and there is no discrimination. Also, the weather in Spain is like the [weather] in Syria. The language is easy and the people are nice. We do not want to go to Germany, even if a lot of people want to go there [...] We would recommend [that] Syrians in Lebanon come to Spain. Economic help is the only problem.”¹¹³

Institutional support: economic conditions and access to documents, employment and education

Perceptions of economic support and working opportunities, along with education, were important factors affecting Syrians’ migratory intentions.

“Even if here the economic support is very little and barely enough, and finding a job is very difficult, I am here on my own. For me it is still possible to find a way to create my future here, even if it is going to be very hard to stand on my own just one and a half [years after] my arrival. I know families who cannot afford to stay here because they cannot find a job and the economic support they receive is not enough, so they are thinking of moving to another country even if they had been given documents here in Spain.”¹¹⁴

Economic support provided by the Spanish government and access to employment were reported as the key challenges faced in Spain. The economic situation was perceived as dire, especially for respondents with families and health concerns. Awareness of the high rate of unemployment in Spain and limited governmental economic support translated into different migration intentions, including the intention to stay in the hope that the situation would improve or the intention to move elsewhere, based on availability of family networks and information of better conditions elsewhere.

¹⁰⁴ Syrians interviewed in this study were resettled from Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, the three countries hosting the highest number of Syrians in the region according to the UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response. All Syrian respondents were relocated from Greece.

¹⁰⁵ Reg_14.

¹⁰⁶ Reg_3.

¹⁰⁷ UNHCR (2011) Resettlement Handbook.

¹⁰⁸ EASO, Questions and Answers on Relocation: last accessed on 10 November 2017.

¹⁰⁹ Reg_12.

¹¹⁰ Reg_7.

¹¹¹ Reg_3.

¹¹² Findings in this section pertain to the responses of 57 individuals. For three individuals responses to this last set of questions were not available.

¹¹³ Reg_1.

¹¹⁴ Reg_15.

Access to education in Spain was reported as an important factor for one in five respondents in their decision to stay or move onward. The quality of education was generally perceived as good in Spain.

Conclusion

Between January and October 2017, more than 20,000 refugees and other migrants arrived in Spain irregularly, twice as many as during the same period in 2016. More than eight percent of these recent arrivals are Syrians.¹¹⁵ At the same time, Syrians have also increasingly arrived in Spain through legal pathways - such as relocation and resettlement. The aim of this study was to shed light on the different routes that Syrians have taken to Spain between 2015 and 2017, the protection risks they faced in transit and their future migratory intentions once in Spain.

Routes to Spain

- **Interviewed Syrians who arrived in Spain irregularly had reached the country through the land border between Morocco and the Spanish enclave of Melilla.** Most had lived for several years in the MENA region, mostly in Algeria or Morocco, before deciding to move to Spain. Some respondents who reached Spain irregularly had travelled to Morocco via Mali and Mauritania.
- **Respondents who reached Spain through legal pathways entered the country through resettlement from Lebanon, Turkey or Jordan, or through the EU's relocation scheme from Greece.** Individuals who had been resettled to Spain had spent several years outside Syria in the Middle East before reaching Spain. In contrast, Syrians who were relocated from Greece had spent less time in the MENA region, as they had left Syria with the intention to reach Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean route and got stranded in Greece upon the closure of the Western Balkans route.
- **Travelling irregularly to Spain required more time, travel and money and was often more dangerous.** Syrians who entered Spain irregularly travelled through an average of seven to eight countries before they reached the country and spent considerable amounts of money on the journey. Respondents who reached Spain through legal pathways tended to cross through an average of two countries and reported much lower expenses.
- **A deterioration of life in transit for both Syrians who reached Spain irregularly and those who entered the country through legal pathways shaped the decision to move there.** Among Syrians who entered Spain irregularly, difficulty in obtaining residence permits in Algeria, a requirement for Syrian nationals introduced in March 2015, meant that Syrians were unable to regularise their status, and unable to work legally. Respondents who had lived in Morocco for years had repeatedly made unsuccessful attempts to obtain a residence permit. Interviewed Syrians who reached Spain through legal pathways reported discrimination, a deterioration of living conditions, including in economic support and work opportunities in shaping the decision to move.
- **Interviewed Syrians who reached Spain through the EU's resettlement scheme had only rarely considered moving to Europe before being offered the opportunity to do so by UNHCR.** This means that legal pathways successfully enable the mobility of those who otherwise

¹¹⁵ UNHCR, Spain Arrivals Dashboard, accessed 30 November 2017.

could/would not have done so, including: vulnerable people (elderly, people with health concerns), people without documents or economic resources to travel through regular means, or to pay for the services of smugglers. Only one man reported that he would have travelled to Europe irregularly had he not been offered resettlement.

- **In contrast to legal pathways, the Western Mediterranean route to Europe via Spain was well known in both Morocco and Algeria and respondents could collect information about the irregular route without difficulty.** None of the respondents had considered travelling to Europe via Libya, as the route was perceived to be too dangerous.

Protection Risks

- **One third of interviewed Syrians who reached Spain irregularly had suffered labour exploitation in either Algeria or Morocco.** Without access to a residence permit, respondents were made to work long hours for very little money, often under dangerous conditions. Some men reported completing informal contracts and not being paid for their work.
- **All respondents who had reached Spain irregularly had, at some point in their journey, enlisted the services of a smuggler.** While using a smuggler did not put individuals at risk *per se*, it did heighten their exposure to potential exploitation by smugglers taking advantage of respondents' irregular situation.
- **The irregular border crossing between Algeria and Morocco was for most Syrians who reached Spain irregularly the most traumatising part of their journey since they left Syria.** Syrians reported border police violence, walking through dangerous areas and exploitation at the border by smugglers.

Intentions

- **Contrary to widespread assumptions, many of the respondents did not consider Spain a country of transit to reach other European destinations, and reportedly liked Spanish culture, weather and people – which are drivers to integration.** However, some Syrians reported concerns over the economic support and access to employment and education available in Spain. These were also reported as the most important factors shaping Syrians' decision to stay in Spain.
- **Satisfaction with the outcome of resettlement and relocation was mixed. Concerns related to the impossibility of choosing the final destination, and the mismatch between expectations upon departure and reality found at the destination** (in this case Spain). This is due, among other things, to individual factors affecting perceptions of conditions and expectations, but could also owe to information at departure (sources of information considered trustworthy, quality and effectiveness of communication means).

Recommendations

- **Create an institutional framework for Syrian refugees to reside legally in Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, such as through regularisation campaigns and changing visa requirements.** This would enable Syrian refugees intending to stay in the region to build a sustainable

life in their country of choice. Such institutional support should go together with other support schemes improving refugees and other migrants' livelihood opportunities and coping strategies in the region.

- **Extend legal pathways for migration to North Africa and improve the existing schemes' functions:** interviewed Syrians reported resettlement procedures lasting between two to four years. For some families, such a timeframe was too long, as the family's situation changed in the meantime or respondents' health conditions further deteriorated. All of the Syrians interviewed in this study who travelled irregularly to Spain did not have access to legal pathways as they were not available in Algeria or Morocco. Legal pathways should be made available in these countries to allow vulnerable refugees and other migrants living in North Africa to take advantage of these schemes.
- **Make information on legal pathways more available:** all successful resettlement and relocation candidates had heard about legal pathways only through UNHCR. However, the most trusted and available information sources were personal contacts and the network of Syrians worldwide. Information providers should capitalise on these information networks as dissemination tools.
- **Make dissemination of information to relocation and resettlement candidates more effective.** The decision to move to Europe, even through a legal pathway, is an important and often difficult decision for families and individuals. As such, information should be as accurate and complete as possible to allow individuals to have realistic expectations and form an informed decision on whether to move to Europe.

Areas for further research

- **Explore the decision-making process behind choosing legal pathways:**
 - How to ensure that information on existing schemes reaches individuals eligible for such schemes
 - How to ensure that legal pathways are the preferred mode of migration: efficiency of the system in the selection of individuals and timeframe for legal pathways, where to target individuals and how
- **Improve understanding of the situation irregular migrants face in Algeria and Morocco,** including individuals of nationalities other than Syrian, including Sub-Saharan refugees and other migrants.
- **Explore the migration routes of other nationalities to Spain, including Sub-Saharan, Yemeni and Palestinian refugees and other migrants,** with a focus on unaccompanied and separated children in particular.
- **Investigate the reception system in Spain, integration and onward movement of refugees and migrants in Europe.**
 - How to support refugees and asylum seekers in building a future in Spain.

Annex 1: List of Participants

Form ID	Gender	Age	Type of entry into Spain	In Spain with family/ alone	Interview location	Arrival in Spain
Irreg_1	Male	35	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_2	Female	35	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_3	Male	21	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_4	Male	50	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_5	Male	28	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_6	Male	24	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2015
Irreg_7	Male	22	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_8	Male	42	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_9	Male	28	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_10	Male	20	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_11	Male	20	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_12	Male	21	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_13	Male	18	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_14	Male	26	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_15	Male	32	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_16	Male	23	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_17	Male	24	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_18	Male	27	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_19	Male	26	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_20	Male	24	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_21	Male	21	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_22	Male	19	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_23	Male	24	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_24	Male	18	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017

Irreg_25	Male	19	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_26	Male	23	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_27	Male	25	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_28	Male	25	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Melilla	2017
Irreg_29	Male	25	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2015
Irreg_30	Male	27	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Melilla	2017
Irreg_31	Male	37	Irregular via Greece	With family	Melilla	2016
Irreg_32	Male	29	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Seville	2016
Irreg_33	Male	53	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Seville	2015
Irreg_34	Male	30	Irregular via Greece	Alone	Seville	2016
Irreg_35	Male	26	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Seville	2016
Irreg_36	Male	37	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Seville	2016
Irreg_37	Male	30	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Seville	2015
Irreg_38	Male	25	Irregular via Greece	Alone	Seville	2017
Irreg_39	Male	30	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Seville	2015
Irreg_40	Male	30	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Seville	2016
Irreg_41	Male	67	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Cordoba	2015
Irreg_42	Male	37	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Madrid	2015
Irreg_43	Male	29	Irregular via Melilla	Alone	Madrid	2015
Irreg_44	Male	30	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Valencia	2017
Irreg_45	Male	25	Irregular via Melilla	With family	Valencia	2016
Reg_1	Male	35	Resettlement from Lebanon	With family	Madrid	2017
Reg_2	Male	41	Resettlement from Lebanon	With family	Seville	2017
Reg_3	Male	22	Resettlement from Lebanon	Alone	Valencia	2017
Reg_4	Male	52	Resettlement from Lebanon	With family	Madrid	2017
Reg_5	Male	34	Resettlement from Lebanon	With family	Seville	2017
Reg_6	Male	37	Resettlement from Lebanon	With family	Seville	2017

Reg_7	Male	61	Resettlement from Turkey	With family	Valencia	2017
Reg_8	Male	39	Resettlement from Turkey	With family	Madrid	2017
Reg_9	Male	51	Resettlement from Jordan	With family	Madrid	2015
Reg_10	Male	46	Relocation from Greece	With family	Seville	2016
Reg_11	Male	38	Relocation from Greece	With family	Seville	2017
Reg_12	Male	50	Relocation from Greece	With family	Valencia	2017
Reg_13	Male	26	Relocation from Greece	Alone	Valencia	2017
Reg_14	Male	26	Relocation from Greece	Alone	Valencia	2017
Reg_15	Male	26	Relocation from Greece	Alone	Valencia	2016