

EU external borders in 2021: Arrivals above pre-pandemic levels

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According to preliminary figures collected by Frontex, the total number of illegal border-crossings in 2021 was just short of 200 000, the highest number since 2017.

This is an increase of 36% when compared with 2019 and an increase of 57% compared with 2020 when we could observe a strong impact of COVID-19 restrictions. This suggests that factors other than the lifting of restrictions on global mobility are the cause of increased migratory pressure.

One such factor defining 2021 was undoubtedly the situation at the borders to Belarus, making it another year in which migration was used in a hybrid operation targeting the EU external border.

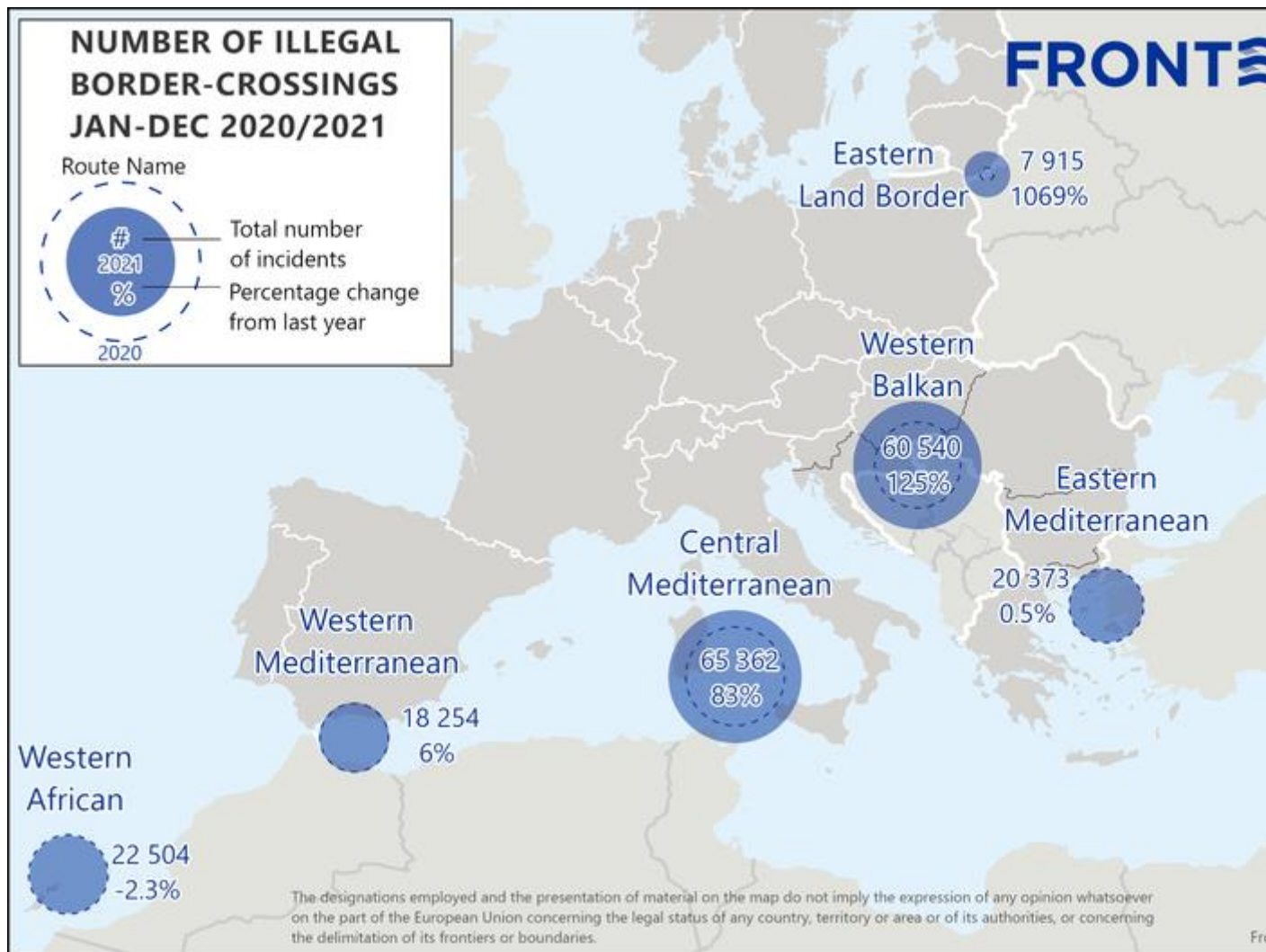
In 2021, Syrians remained the most frequently reported nationality of the people detected when crossing the border without permission, followed by Tunisians, Moroccans, Algerians and Afghans.

Just as in 2020, women continued to make up fewer than one in ten arrivals in 2021, a significant drop in their share compared to 2019. As regards other groups of vulnerable people, the reported share of minors was largely unchanged, as was that of unaccompanied minors.

The **Central Mediterranean route** was again the most-used migratory route to Europe in 2021, accounting for one-third of all reported illegal border-crossings.

With a year-on-year increase in detections of 83%, reflecting more arrivals from Libyan, Tunisian and Turkish shores, the route in fact took an even more prominent role amongst migratory routes.

While Tunisian migrants were most frequently detected in this region, 2021 importantly saw the return of larger numbers of Egyptian migrants (a sevenfold increase compared with 2020). Along with Bangladeshi migrants, Egyptians were among the key nationalities in the Central Mediterranean.



On the **Western Mediterranean route**, roughly 18 000 arrivals were reported in 2021, which is a stable situation compared to the same period in 2020. The majority of the migrants were of Algerian nationality, followed by Moroccans.

The **Western African route** also saw a similar number of detections as in 2020 with about 22 500 detections, with the usual seasonal peak occurring in September. The main nationalities registered were again Moroccan, followed by various Western African nations.

Around one in ten of all detected irregular crossings in 2021 occurred on the **Eastern Mediterranean route**, where the number was roughly on par with the same period of 2020.

However, while detections continue to drop in Greece, Cyprus recorded a significant increase in the migratory flow compared to previous years. Detections in Cyprus (around 10 400 in total in

2021, more than double (123%) the same period in 2020) notably increased in the last quarter of 2021 linked to a higher share of Africans among the detected migrants.

The **Western Balkan route** saw a further 124% increase of reported detections of illegal border-crossings in 2021 compared to 2020. The route marked an increasing trend until September and a slight decrease in the subsequent months. The majority of detected illegal border crossings can be traced back to people who have been in the region for some time and who repeatedly try to reach their target country in the EU.

On the **Eastern land borders**, roughly 8 000 illegal border-crossings for the year 2021 were detected, a more than tenfold increase in comparison to 2020. This illustrates an intense pressure with continuously attempted border crossings, which were detected in the context of the declared state of emergency in all three EU member states neighbouring Belarus. The figures peaked in the second half of the year as migratory pressure focused first on the Lithuanian border and shifted thereafter to the Polish and Latvian borders.