

Q1 illegal border crossings into EU highest since 2016

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The first quarter of this year was the busiest in terms of illegal border crossings at the EU's external borders since the migratory crisis in 2016. Refugees fleeing Ukraine and entering the EU through border crossing points are not part of the figures of illegal entries detected. Preliminary calculations by Frontex show that more than 40 300* illegal crossings were detected between January and March of 2022, 57% more than a year ago.

In the month of March, nearly 11 700 irregular migrants were recorded at the EU external borders, 29% more than in the same month of 2021.

Responding to the various challenges at the external borders, Frontex has more than 2 100 standing corps officers and staff deployed in its operational activities.

Most active migratory routes

Western Balkans (+115% in Q1)

The Western Balkan route accounted for nearly half of all the illegal border crossings in the first three months of this year. The total figure for the January-March period more-than-doubled to over 18 300.

In the month of March, the number of irregular migrants detected in the region nearly tripled to 6650.

The main nationalities detected were Syrian and Afghani.

Eastern Mediterranean (+132%)

The Eastern Mediterranean route saw the number of arrivals of irregular migrants more than doubled in the January-March period to more than 7 000. The significant increase was driven by the detections of illegal border crossings in Cyprus, which rose three-fold to over 5 100 (on 7 005 detections for all Eastern Med route).

In the month of March, the total number of migrants detected also doubled to nearly 3 250.

The main nationalities detected were Nigerians and Congolese.

Western African route (+70%)

The number of detections on the Western African route rose 70% in the first quarter to around 5 850, even though the total for the month of March alone fell by two-thirds compared to a year ago to some 360.

The main nationalities detected were Moroccan and Guinean.

Eastern Land Border (+714%)

In the first quarter of the year, the Eastern Land Border saw the largest increase among the migratory routes. This was due to some Ukrainian citizens seeking to cross the border illegally between border crossing points, although a vast majority of Ukrainians arrived legally through regular border crossing points. The total number of detections rose seven-fold to over 950.

In the month of March alone, the number of detections of illegal border crossings in the region rose 12-fold to over 600.

The Channel (+190%)

The number of irregular migrants seeking to cross the Channel towards the UK so far this year nearly tripled from a year ago to more than nearly 8 900, half of them were prevented of departure and half were rescued by British authorities. Land patrols and aerial surveillance activities detected 55% of departures and these assets working together are key factors that enable the early detection and prevention of sea crossings.

*The figure includes other less active migratory routes not mentioned in this press release. The final figures may be higher due to delayed reporting.

Note: The preliminary data presented in this statement refer to the number of detections of irregular border-crossing at the external borders of the European Union. The same person may attempt to cross the border several times in different locations at the external border.

NUMBER OF ILLEGAL BORDER-CROSSINGS JAN-MAR 2021/2022

Route Name



Total number
of incidents

Percentage change
from last year

2021

FRONTIER

