Key Points

- As of 4 Dec 2016, 172,229 irregular migrants have been intercepted in the Central Mediterranean, which represents a 16% increase compared to the same period of 2015.

- Increasing number of arrivals in October and November compared to the same months in previous years.

- Most of the incidents involved rubber dinghies and small wooden boats coming from Libya.

- [Redacted] arriving in Italy in the reporting period.

- The number of arrivals from Algeria in one single week represents 20% of the total of arrivals from this country in 2016.

- [Redacted]

- First reported case where the criminal networks were smuggling migrants directly on a NGO vessel.
Main Trends

During the period under analysis, 67 illegal immigration incidents were reported (26 incidents in week 47 and 41 in week 48) involving the apprehension of 5,871 irregular migrants (3,025 apprehensions in week 47 and 2,846 apprehensions in week 48). In particular:

- 48 boats arrived from Libya involving 5,075 migrants
- 11 boats from Algeria involving 204 migrants on board
- 4 boats from Turkey involving 550 migrants
- 3 boats from Tunisia with 13 migrants on board
- 1 boat from Greece with 29 migrants on board

Thus far in 2016, the number of migrants apprehended in the Central Mediterranean totalled 172,229 which represents a -16% increase compared to the same period of 2015 (147,913). As illustrated in Figure 1, the number of arrivals increased in October and November compared to the same months in 2015. Despite tough weather conditions during this period of the year, migrant arrivals continued unabated mainly from Libya, and for that reason they are encouraging the migrants to sail even when the sea is rough because they will be rescued soon after their departure. In 2015, the average number of migrants in each rubber dinghy was 108. Thus far in 2016, using the same type of rubber dinghy, the average number of migrants has increased to 121 in each dinghy. By overcrowding the migrant boats and encouraging them to sail in inclement weather the smugglers are further endangering migrants’ lives. According to IOM, the number of fatalities in 2016 has increased by -48% compared to the same period in 2015. For instance, on 21 November one incident involving two overcrowded rubber dinghies was reported; these boats had departed from Zawiya (Libya). When the migrants were on the high seas, a huge wave hit both dinghies and the dinghies immediately capsized, with all the migrants falling into the water with only a few surviving (Fig 2). In addition in the period under analysis, open sources reported that a wooden boat carrying migrants was shipwrecked approximately 15 km from the Libyan coast with dozens of people feared missed (Fig 3). Two days later, Libyan open sources reported that dozens of corpses had been found on Libya’s coastline.

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Figure 2: One of the migrants’ rubber dinghies capsized.
Source: Frontex.

Figure 1: Number of arrivals in 2015/2016. In the red circle the peak in Oct and Nov 2016.

Figure 3: Shipwrecked wooden boat on 3 Dec approx. 15 km from the Libyan shore. Source: Facebook.

1 https://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean
2 https://www.facebook.com/%D9%84%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%84%D9%98-%D9%84%D9%83%D8%7C%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86-%
Once again Libya is the main country of departure with -86% of irregular migrant arrivals during the reporting period. Most of the incidents continue to involve rubber dinghies that had departed from Libya bound for Italy.

It is especially noteworthy that one incident from Greece was reported after 14 weeks without arrivals from this country. In this specific case, 29 migrants managed to disembark undetected on mainland Italy. Even if this is an isolated case, it is worth nothing that there have been no arrivals from Egypt since September. The Egyptian authorities are prosecuting two maritime inspection officials accused of belonging to the smuggling network that was involved in the most recent incident where a fishing boat capsized off the coast of Egypt in September. Furthermore, the Egyptian authorities have reported the discovery of a network which is accused of illicit international trafficking in human organs. Apparently, some of the victims have been migrants. As previously reported, with these measures the Egyptian authorities are trying to tackle smuggling activities in Egypt.

During weeks 47 and 48, irregular migrant arrivals were also reported from Algeria, Turkey and Tunisia, with the following locations being identified as the main departure areas/points in each country: Annaba in Algeria, Sfax and Kerkenah Islands in Tunisia and izmir in Turkey.

Main Nationalities

Thus far in 2016, the most common nationalities reported within the framework of the JO Triton have been from the following countries: Nigeria, Eritrea, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Sudan, Bangladesh and Somalia. During the reporting period the majority of the migrants arrived from Western and Central African countries.

In terms of the price paid by migrants to be smuggled from Libya to Italy, the amount varies depending of the specific deal agreed between the migrant and the smuggler.

\[\text{Figure 5: Main nationalities from 1 Jan to 4 Dec 2016/2015}\]

This suggests that the demand for smuggling services is high which allows the smuggling networks to increase the price for certain nationalities without a decrease in the number of migrants wanting to be smuggled to the EU.

\[\text{http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-egypt-idUSKBN1320MC}\]

Main Findings

As previously mentioned, the overall increase in the number of detections in 2016 compared to the same period in 2015 is directly related to the increase in the number of arrivals in October and November. The number of arrivals in October and November 2016 is the highest ever recorded in these months in the Central Mediterranean route since the beginning of Frontex Joint operations.
Thus far in 2016 the number of arrivals from Algeria has increased by -440% compared to the same period in 2015.

In the reporting period, a total of 204 migrants arrived from Algeria in 11 incidents, which represents -20% of all arrivals from Algeria in 2016.

Even though during most of 2016 migration pressure from Turkey has remained lower than last year, in August 2016 the flow started to increase and reached a peak during November 2016 (the highest number since January 2015).

The main reason for the increasing trend has to be found in the situation that thousands of migrants are facing on the Greek Eastern Aegean Islands, where they remain stranded with little possibility of reaching the Greek mainland.
First reported case where the criminal networks were smuggling migrants directly on a NGO maritime vessel

It is also worth highlighting that during the reporting period and, according to the Italian authorities, during a SAR operation, which was being carried out by two NGOs vessels Minden and Topaz Responder, there was a small fibreglass boat in the area displaying a Libyan flag with persons pretending to be fishermen. At a certain point, this fibreglass boat approached one of the NGO vessels 'Minden' and transferred two Libyan citizens from the small boat to the EU vessel claiming that they were migrants. The NGO vessel took them aboard and let the Libyan boat leave the area. The migrants stated that the crew aboard the small Libyan boat were the people smugglers.

This is the first reported case where the criminal networks directly approached an EU vessel and smuggled the migrants directly into Europe using the NGO vessel. Identification, and arrest of smugglers as well as seizure or disposal of the migrants' boats are crucial steps in tackling and curbing smuggling activities in the Central Mediterranean.

Figure 11: Libyan smugglers approaching the NGO vessel to transfer the two Libyan migrants. Source: MOAS
Main trends by country of departure in 2016

In 2016, the breakdown by migratory routes in the Central Mediterranean shows an increasing trend (+16%) of arrivals from Libya which has remained the main country of departure. Moreover, the number of arrivals increased from Egypt, Turkey, Tunisia and Algeria but decreased from Greece.

The following map shows the volume of the migratory flows by country of departure since the beginning of 2016 compared to the same period in 2015.