



2023 IRC ITALY  
MONITORING  
REPORT

# ARRIVALS FROM THE BALKAN ROUTE TO TRIESTE



The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is an international nongovernmental organization founded in 1933, at the initiative of Albert Einstein, that works in support of refugees and other vulnerable people. IRC currently works in more than 50 countries, helping people affected by humanitarian crises to survive, recover, and rebuild their lives.

IRC has been present in Trieste since 2021, providing support to newly-arrived people from the Balkan route in close collaboration with many different organizations. Every day, a team of three IRC Protection Officers identify dozens of new arrivals in the central station area and provide them with information about their rights, legal orientation, support with accessing crucial services (such as low-threshold dormitories, canteens, medical clinics), and support in access asylum. IRC staff works also to identify vulnerabilities and people with specific needs, offers psychological first aid, and distributes non-food items.

This report presents data on the profiles, migratory intentions, and challenges faced by migrants who arrived in Trieste in 2023. The quantitative data was collected collaboratively by IRC Italia and Diaconia Valdese in and around Trieste's central station (between Piazza Libertà and the Day Center in via Udine), through individual and group interviews with new arrivals.

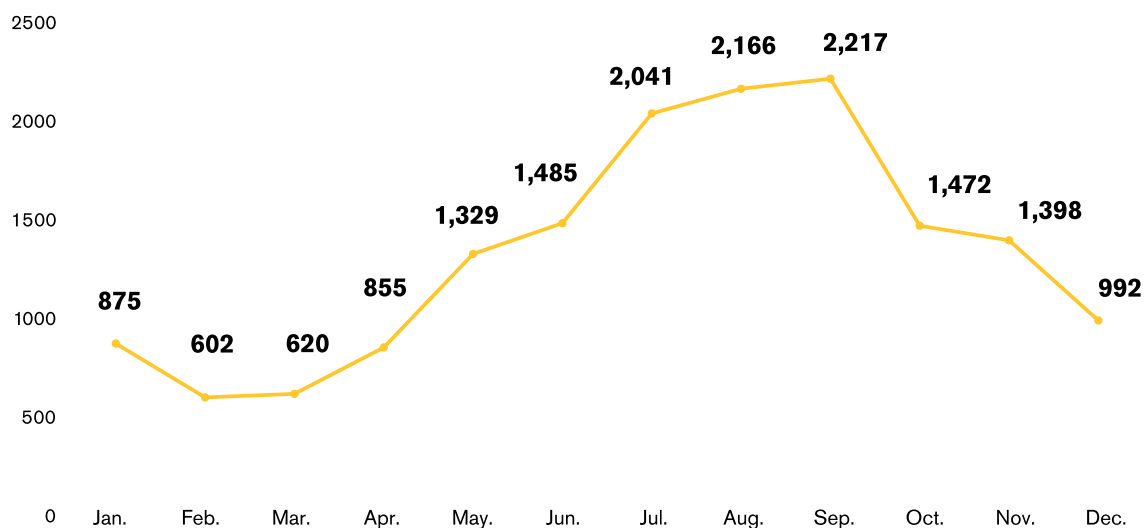
The interviews were carried out every day of 2023, including weekends and holidays, during the daytime and partially in the evenings. It is important to note that because IRC and Diaconia only interviewed arrivals that they met in the central station area, the sample from whom the data presented in this report was collected does not include all individuals who arrived in Trieste in 2023.

The Network of actors collaborating daily to provide direct support to newly arrived people in Trieste is composed by many different civil society organizations. We would like to thank for the positive and productive work and collaboration **Diaconia Valdese, San Martino al Campo, Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà, Caritas Trieste, Donk, Linea d'Ombra, Stella Polare, Save The Children, UNHCR** and **CIR onlus**.

# Analysis of arrivals during 2023

From January 1 to December 31, 2023, a total of **16,052** people who arrived from the Balkan route were met by IRC and Diaconia in the Trieste station area, at an average of 44 new people per day. This represents a **22%** increase in registered arrivals **compared to 2022**, where 13,127 people were met and supported, as illustrated in the ["Abandoned Lives"](#) 2022 report.

The graph below shows the monthly evolution of the number of new people met and supported, with figures exceeding one thousand per month between May and November 2023.



**Fig.1** Monthly trend of new people arriving in Trieste during 2023.



# Infographic with general data of 2023



# 16,052

new people met and supported



**96%**  
Males (15,391)



**76%**  
Adults (12,129)



**4%**  
Females (661)



**24%**  
Children (3,922)

## Demographic profiles



**69%**  
Single adult men (11,001)



**19%**  
Unaccompanied children (2,975)



**11%**  
Households (381) made up of 1,918 family members



**1%**  
Single adult women (158)

## Top 3 nationalities:



## Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey



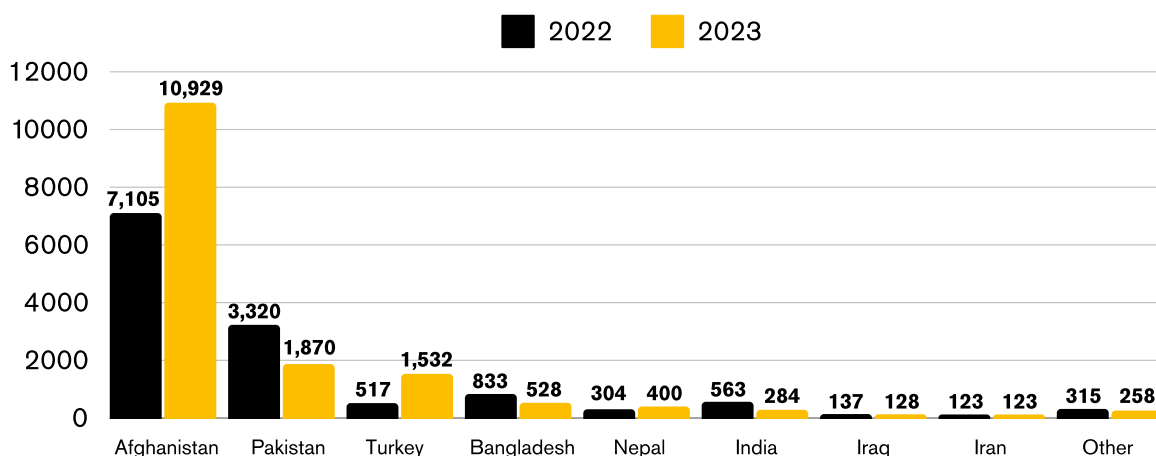
Only **16%** (2,215 people) of the people encountered intend to stop and seek for asylum in Trieste.

The remaining **68%** intend to go to other countries, such as



**Germany, France & Belgium.**

# Nationalities



**Fig.2** The main nationalities encountered in Trieste during 2023 in relation to 2022



**“Trieste is crossed predominantly by a generation of young Afghans fleeing and seeking protection.”**

The vast majority of people encountered in Trieste in 2023 were fleeing from Afghanistan, representing nearly 11,000 people out of a total of 16,000 (68%). This echoes data provided by the European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA) in its annual report, "[Latest Asylum Trends Annual Overview 2023](#)," which shows that during 2023, Afghans formed the second largest group of asylum applicants in the European Union (after Syrians), representing a total of 114,000 new applications.

The large number of Afghans on the move is a consequence of the severe [humanitarian crisis](#) that has been unfolding in the country since the Taliban took power in August 2021. A brief overview of the crisis is provided below.

## The context in Afghanistan

**Political situation:** Soon after establishing the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) in 2021, the Taliban reintroduced strict controls on personal freedoms, affecting the basic human rights of all Afghan citizens. For example, [women have been banned from studying at university](#), just months after being banned from public parks, gardens and gyms. In 2022, a new law prohibited women from leaving the house alone, always having to be accompanied by a male family member. The Taliban government also cut spending on social services by 81%, which, together with the blocking of most international development funding, has severely weakened the provision of essential public services. Ethnic minorities, such as the Hazaras, also face human rights violations and discrimination.

➤ **Economic situation:** In addition to the aforementioned political environment, the country has been devastated by an economic crisis. Most Afghan citizens are living in poverty, struggling to access health services and feed themselves. According to International Rescue Committee's "[Emergency Watchlist 2023](#)" report, 28.3 million people (out of a population of 40 million) need humanitarian aid to survive, and 97% of the Afghan population is at risk of poverty. In addition, it is estimated that 91% of an average Afghan family's income is spent on food purchases, forcing many to resort to crisis management strategies such as food rationing. To make matters worse, Afghanistan is facing its third consecutive year of drought and has witnessed violent flooding across the country, caused by above-average rainfall, which has further hampered food production.

**In sum**, many Afghans, including children, are struggling to survive. As a result, 2.7 million people have crossed borders and fled to Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and other countries in search of protection. [UNHCR](#) has called on all countries to recognize the right of Afghans to seek asylum and to respect the principles of non-refoulement.

The second most common nationality was **Pakistani**, representing 12% of all new arrivals encountered by IRC and Diaconia in Trieste in 2023. This is lower than last year, in which 25% of all new arrivals encountered were Pakistani (1,870 people of Pakistani nationality were encountered in 2023 versus 3,230 in 2022).

The third most common nationality was **Turkish**, representing 9% of those encountered in Trieste in 2023 (1,532 people). Most Turkish householders were from Kurdish origin. This marks a 66% increase compared to 2022, in which only 4% of all new arrivals encountered were Turkish (517 people).

Similarly, findings from the EUAA's annual report show that Turkey was the third most common nationality among asylum applicants in the EU in 2023, and that there were twice the number of Turkish applicants in 2023 compared to 2022. The large number of Turkish migrants on the move is a consequence of the [state and societal discrimination](#) that the Kurdish-Turkish community are currently facing in Ankara and other locations, as well as the earthquake that struck southern Turkey and northern regions of Syria on February 6th, 2023. The earthquake resulted in more than 57,000 confirmed casualties (including 50,500 in Turkey and 7,259 in Syria) and more than 121,000 injured. According to [Euronews](#), as of February 2024, 700,000 people were still living in precarious conditions in tents or prefabricated structures.

Lastly, it is worth noting that while IRC and Diaconia Valdese did not encounter a significant number of Syrian migrants in 2023 (0,4% out of total arrivals), the EUAA annual report found that Syrians emerged as the top nationality across the European Union for new asylum applications registered in 2023, representing a significant increase compared to 2022 (+38%). [Frontex](#) similarly found that Syrians were the most common nationality among those transiting along the Balkan route in 2023, and other organizations, such as NGO [Collective Aid](#), have observed a noticeable increase in Syrian nationals along the route.

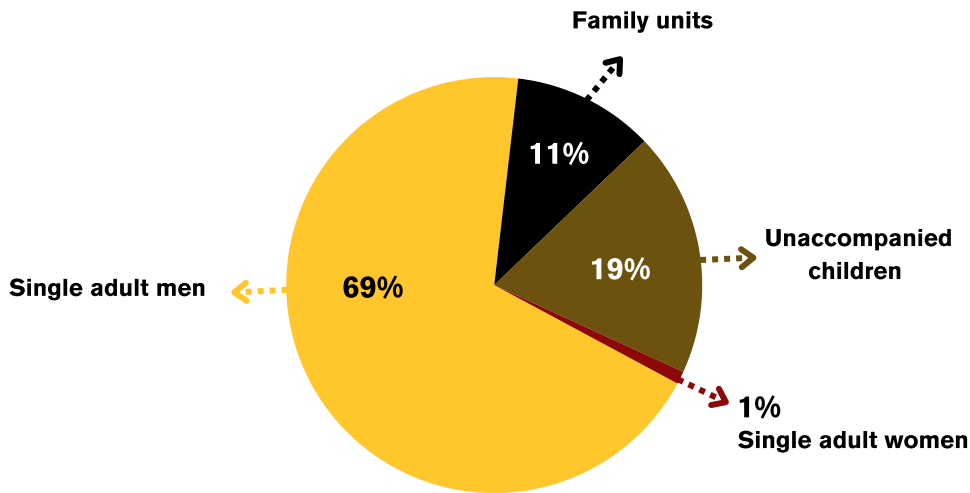
It is possible that the figures collected by IRC and Diaconia do not echo these findings because individuals from Syria are choosing migration routes that lead directly from Bosnia and Serbia to Germany, bypassing Italy. Nonetheless, in the first four months of 2024, several hundred Syrians (including unaccompanied children and families) were encountered by IRC and Diaconia for the first time (344 in total, 11% of total arrivals). This might signify that some Syrian migrants have started to consider the route through Trieste as a potential transit to Germany and Northern Europe. This emerging trend will be closely monitored in 2024.

## Demographic profiles



“One in three people is part of a vulnerable group.”

Compared to 2022, where the overwhelming majority of people supported were adult single men (82% of cases), 2023 saw a **sharp increase in vulnerable persons**, consisting mainly of unaccompanied children, single women, and family households, who account for **31% of all cases encountered**.



**Fig. 3** The demographic profiles of migrants encountered in the Trieste central station area.

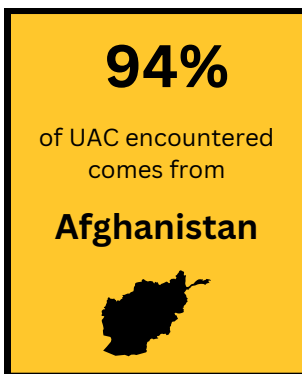
In 2023, nearly one in three people encountered belonged to a vulnerable group, requiring specialized attention and tailored services to their specific needs. This is due to a **considerable increase in the number of Unaccompanied Children** (+112% compared to 2022), which in 2023 totaled 2,975 and accounted for 19% of cases. Additionally, **family arrivals doubled** (+120% compared to 2022), reaching 381 cases and accounting for 11% of cases. The number of **single women** encountered remained similar to 2022, with 158 cases (representing 1% of the total).



## Unaccompanied children (UAC)

Unaccompanied children (UAC) represented nearly 19% of the new arrivals encountered in Trieste in 2023, a sharp increase from the previous year's 11%.

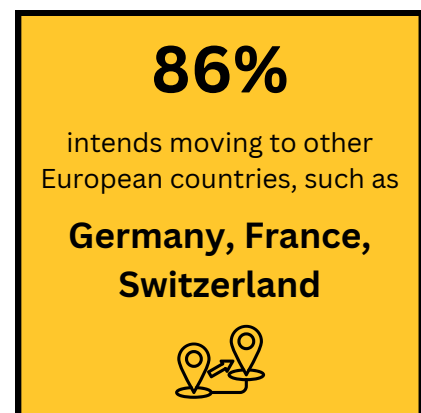
A total of **2,975 UAC** were met and assisted. Almost all the UAC encountered were Afghans (94%), while a small proportion were Pakistanis (5%). The vast majority were ethnic Pashtuns. Most of the children encountered (86%) expressed intent to travel to other countries, with Germany, France, and Switzerland being the most common destinations.



In total, the number of UAC who were only passing through Trieste for a few hours or days in 2023 was 2,613. The most critical issue regarding UAC remains the **lack of access to emergency temporary accommodation**. On average, 8 UAC every day were at risk of sleeping rough or in abandoned buildings in the area adjacent to the Trieste central station.

Another critical issue faced by the IRC team in supporting UAC is the **difficulty in establishing trust** and entering a relationship with the children to offer them effective guidance on rights and services.

Due to time constraints while children are in transit and the **absence of child friendly safe spaces**, dedicated to and accessible by UAC only, where they can feel protected and access tailored legal, mental health and first aid support, it is difficult to engage with them. Furthermore, they are often travelling with adults who often mediate and interact with IRC staff on their behalf. Of the nearly 3,000 UAC encountered in 2023, **only 196 decided to stop in Trieste (7%)** and sought support to the Network of Organizations for accessing the city's UAC facilities.



The rest decided to continue the journey to other countries in an irregular way, putting themselves in a position exposed to dangers and risks. No requests for family reunification under the Dublin regulation were made to the Network of Organizations during 2023, despite the specific information IRC and other organizations provide to the children about this important possibility.





## Family units

Over the year 2023, **381 family units** were encountered in Trieste, marking a significant increase from the 172 encountered in 2022. This totaled **1,918 individuals, including 947 children**, representing a significant increase from 6% to 12% out of the total number of people encountered in Trieste.

**Among these family units, 31 single-parent households were identified**, consisting of a single mother with children. The majority of families came from **Turkey (67%)**, most of whom were Kurdish nationals, followed by **Afghanistan (18%)**.

**31**  
family units composed  
only of  
**mother  
alone with  
children**



Only 6% of families met expressed an intention to stay in Italy, with only 4% intending to settle specifically in Trieste. **Nearly all households were traveling to other European countries**, and 77% of them cited Germany as their final destination.

Most of the families encountered were in rapid transit through the Trieste area, typically arriving in the evening and departing at dawn.

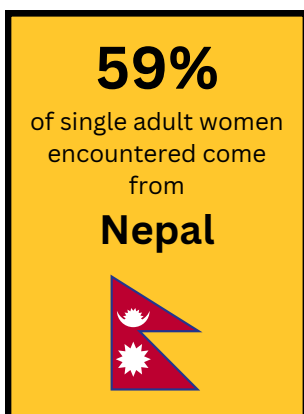
The IRC and other NGOs support efforts primarily focus on assisting incoming families in the area during the evening hours, where families with children in need are connected with and given support with accessing overnight shelters in collaboration with the low-threshold services of the city.

In 2023, a total of 82 households, consisting of 186 adults and 138 children, found shelter for the night through the collaborative efforts of various local organizations.

# Single adult women

The number of single adult women encountered in Trieste in 2023 was **158, representing 1%** of the total population encountered. The vast majority were **young Nepali women (59% out of total single women), of whom 49% cited Portugal as their final destination.**

The Second and third most common nationalities among single women encountered were **Turkish** (15%) and **Indian** (12%), respectively.



**Only 9% of single women intended to remain in Italy** as their final destination. The vast majority were planning to move to other countries, primarily Portugal (62% out of the total women whose intent is to move abroad), France (19%) and Germany (18%).

The migration of people from Central Asian countries such as Nepal, Pakistan, India, Thailand, and Bangladesh to Portugal is well documented. In recent years, the Portuguese government has introduced a [series of measures](#) to facilitate residency and regularization procedures for workers in its territory, to help tackle labor exploitation in the agricultural (raspberry picking) and fishing sectors.

It is now possible to apply for a Portuguese passport by demonstrating two years of legal employment and continuous residence. In addition, people can apply for Portuguese citizenship seven years after registering as a resident. According to [data](#) from Diário de Notícias published in March 2022, there could be up to 50,000 Nepalese individuals residing in Portugal, seeking assistance to legalize their status in the country attracted by the hope of a better life.



# Declared migratory intention

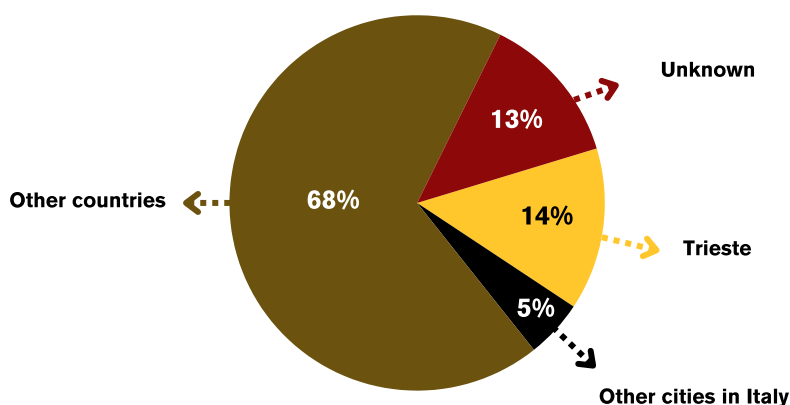


Fig. 4 The stated migration intention of people met in 2023.



**“Of the more than 16,000 people encountered in 2023, only 2,215 said they would stop in Trieste to apply for asylum”**

Compared to 2022, where about a third (32%) of people said they intended to apply for asylum in Italy, this year even fewer people reported that they planned to settle in Italy as their final destination.

Only **1 in 5 of the people interviewed said they would like to stay in Italy (19%)**, including **14% who said they would like to stay in Trieste (2,215 people)**. Besides Trieste, the most common cities were Milan and Rome.

13% of the people encountered were still uncertain about their destination or preferred not to disclose this information, which was then recorded as unknown.<sup>2</sup> IRC has observed in the field that the majority of people whose final destination is still undetermined tend to leave the Trieste area, often within a few hours or days.



**“The overall percentage of people encountered who identified Italy as their final travel destination has decreased since 2022.”**

<sup>2</sup> There are a number of different reasons why someone's intended destination may be cited as "unknown": a) some of the people encountered prefer not to share this sensitive information; b) people are undecided and do not have a predefined destination; c) some people experience difficulties in communicating their plans due to language barriers; d) IRC and Diaconia field staff find it difficult at times to collect individual data when encountering large groups of people.

**The vast majority of people (68%) said they would like to travel to other destinations outside of Italy**, with a clear preference for Germany (declared by 50% of the total respondents who intend to move abroad), followed by France (29%), Switzerland (6%), and Belgium (6%).

Deciding where to apply for asylum is very complex, and the decision depends on a number of factors, such as the socio-economic situation (job opportunities, education and social welfare), the country's asylum and integration policies, the rates at which protections for international protection are recognized and approved (which differ across EU countries), the ease of obtaining documents and legalizing one's status, and the presence of support networks and communities with which to reconnect.

The data presented in this report also suggests that migrants' nationalities can play a significant role in determining their migratory intentions. For example, there were notable differences in the migratory plans of Afghani, Pakistani, and Turkish migrants encountered by IRC and Diaconia in 2023:

### **Afghani**

The majority of Afghans (84%) wanted to move elsewhere in Europe, mainly to Germany (42% of the total Afghans encountered) and France (26%), with only 5% intending to stay in Italy.

### **Pakistani**

The majority of Pakistanis (88%) planned to stay in Italy, with a particular preference for Trieste (66%), while only 11% wanted to migrate outside Italy, mainly to France, Portugal and Switzerland.

### **Turkish**

About 1 in 2 people from Turkey (55%) expressed their intent to travel to other countries, with a particular preference for Germany (44% out of the total Turkish encountered) and France (15%), while only 2% want to stay in Italy. The rate of "unknown" responses to this question among Turkish migrants was very high, at 43%. This was mainly due to language barriers (IRC and Diaconia workers do not speak Turkish or Kurmanji) and the fact that most of the Turkish citizens interviewed were families, who tend to be more reserved and do not like to share their migratory intentions.

While this data gathered by IRC and Diaconia on new arrivals' migratory plans is valuable, it should be interpreted with the awareness that people's plans can change as a result of several factors, including the support that they receive during their journey. For example, in Trieste, the information, assistance, and orientation activities provided to new arrivals help them to become more aware of their rights and the possibilities available to them, empowering them to make informed decisions about their migration path.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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