

# Women through the Mediterranean:

why gender matters in the debate on  
migration and asylum

Milena Belloni

CeMIS  
Centre for Migration and Intercultural  
Studies  
University of Antwerp

Conference Scribani network- 21.09.2017-  
Antwerp



# Gender in migration and refugee studies

- Women and men often leave their home countries for different reasons, they pursue different mobility strategies, the obstacles and opportunities they encounter while living abroad are not the same.
- Gender-sensitive asylum and reception policies (Indra, 1987; Greatbatch, 1989; Boyd, 1999)



# Women as the ultimate vulnerable refugees? Some critical notes

- Women and children
- Gender approach to vulnerability does not mean to focus solely on sexual violence
- Women: a monolithic category? A move towards intersectionality

# Mobility as a way to achieve long-term prospect

- Trapped populations and protractedness:
  - 11.6 million refugees, representing some two-thirds of all refugees, were in protracted refugee situations at the end of 2016. Of this number, 4.1 million were in a situation lasting 20 years or more (UNHCR, 2017)
  - limited local integration, little prospect for repatriation and fewer resettlement opportunities (resettlement covers less than 1% of refugees worldwide)
- Geographic mobility often represents the only possibility for long-term solution, but migration is a self-selective process
  - who can move? (economic, social and physical resources)

# Global snapshot: Demographic characteristics of refugees (% of total population)

Table 5 | **Demographic characteristics of refugees**  
| 2003-2016 (% of total population)

Year	Women	Age		
		<18	18-59	>60
2003	48	49	46	5
2004	48	50	45	5
2005	48	46	49	5
2006	47	47	49	4
2007	47	46	49	5
2008	48	44	51	5
2009	47	41	54	5
2010	47	44	51	5
2011	48	46	49	5
2012	48	46	49	5
2013	49	50	46	4
2014	49	51	46	3
2015	47	51	46	3
2016	49	51	45	4

*These percentages are based on available data and exclude countries where no demographic information is available. This is particularly the case for high-income countries.*

- Shortage of data: sex disaggregated data are available for only 62% of the refugee population
- Women are the majority among those refugees living in camps (institutionally managed or self-settled) in 2014-2015-2016

(Source: UNHCR, 2017)

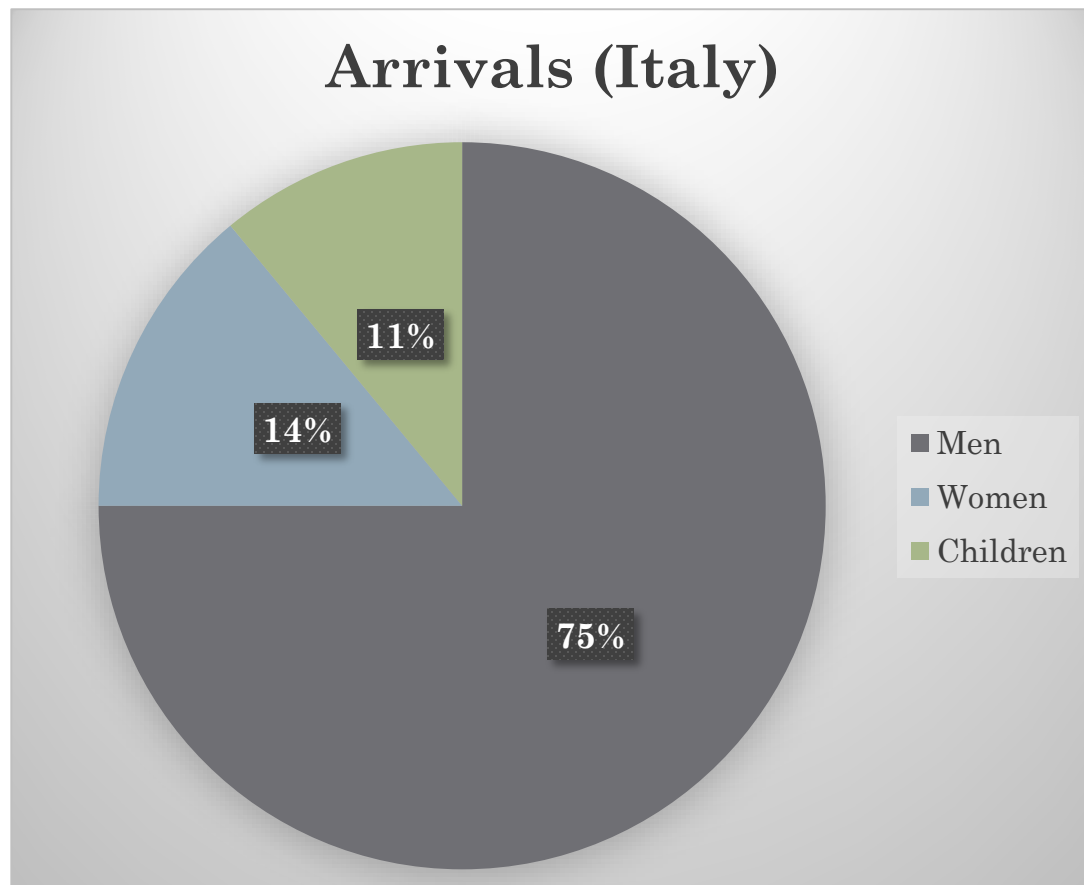
# Asylum seekers in the Europe (by sex and year of application)

YEAR	Female applicants	Male applicants	Percentage of women
2008	72.745	183.331	28%
2009	93.950	203.075	32%
2010	97.170	187.650	34%
2011	106.355	235.315	31%
2012	126.240	247.205	34%
2013	150.760	307.710	33%
2014	195.885	466.100	30%
2015	384.995	1.006.160	28%
2016	416.050	874.445	32%

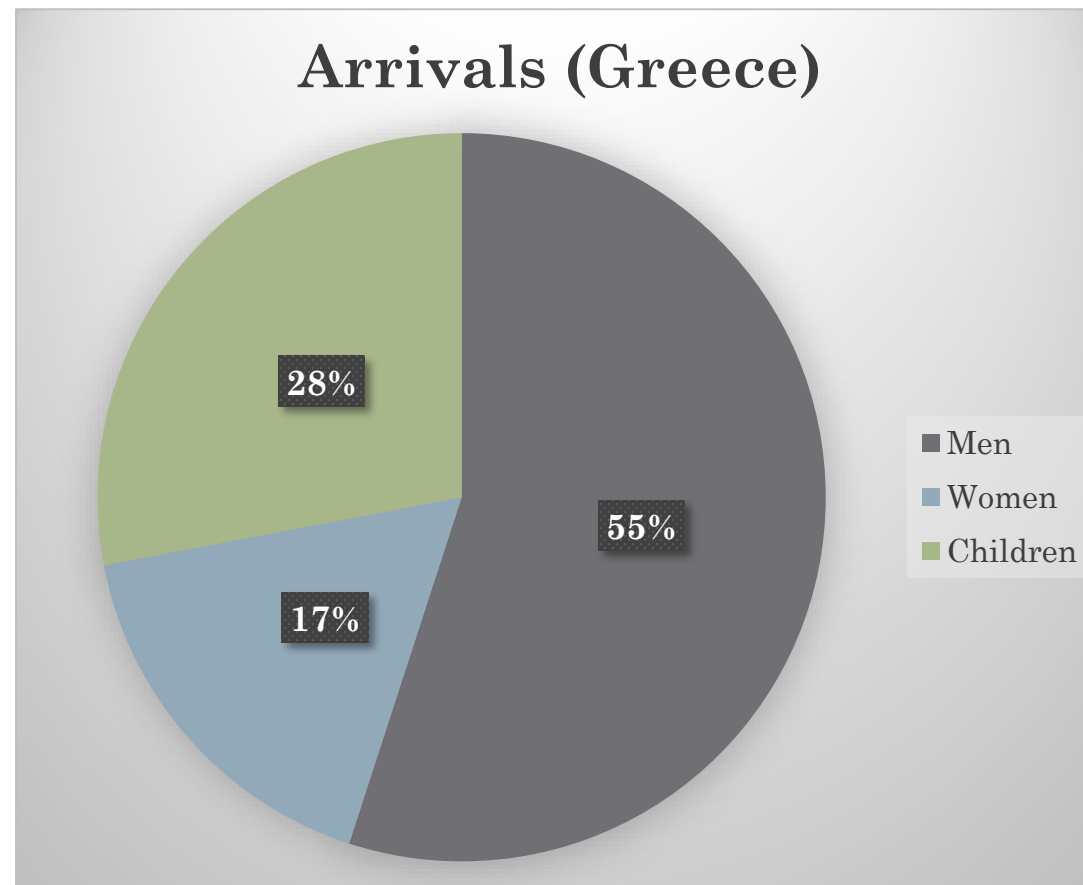
Source: EUROSTAT asylum database

# Who arrives in Europe? The Central and Eastern Mediterranean route: 2015

154,000



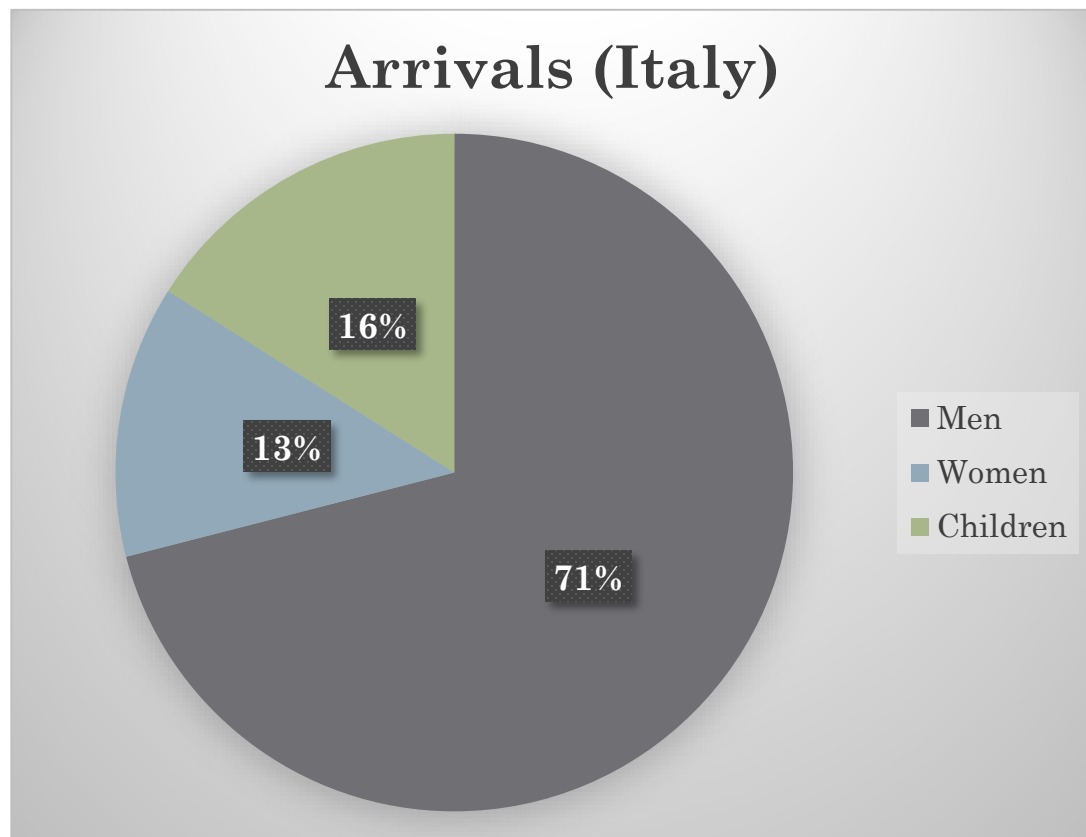
856,723



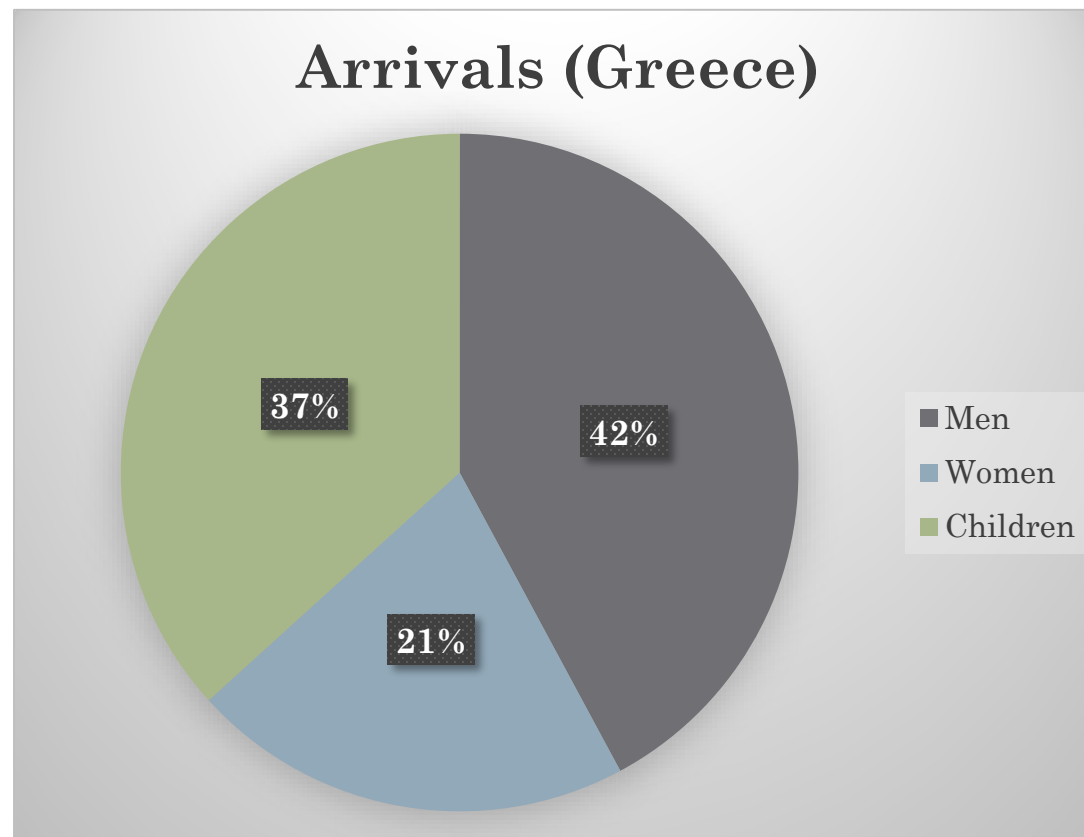
1,016,000 sea arrivals in total (Source: UNHCR Mediterranean situation webportal)

# 2016

181,500



173,450



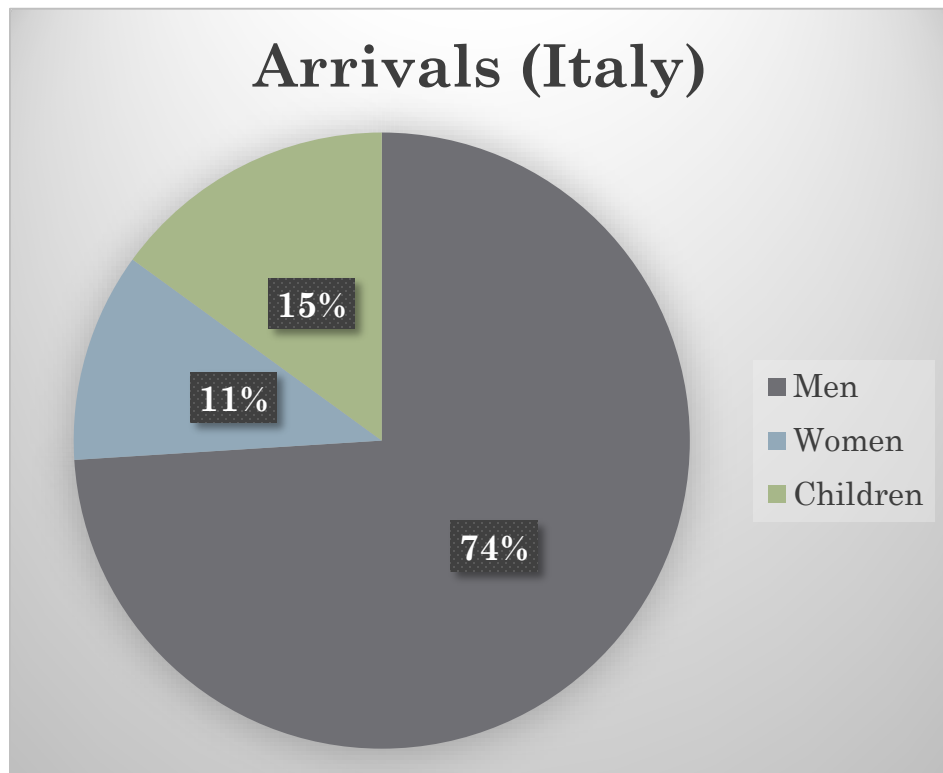
363,000 sea arrivals in total



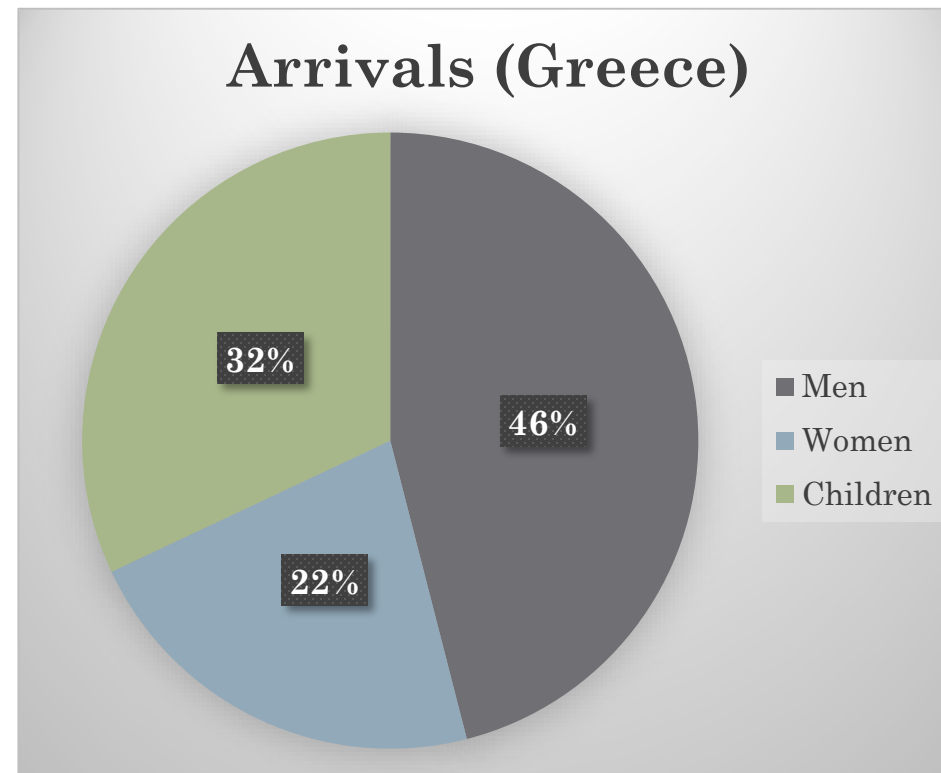


# 2017 (Jan-June)

83,752



9,286

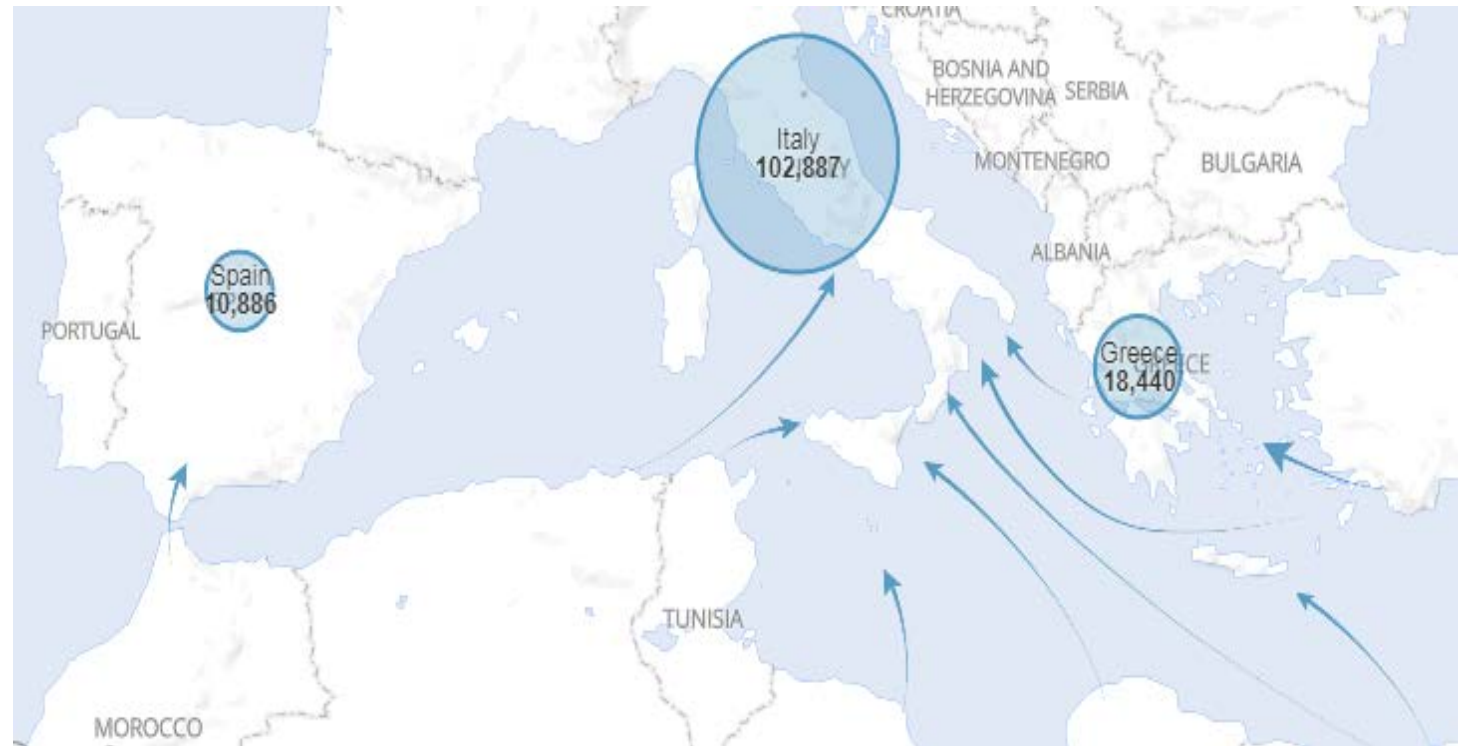


133,040 sea arrivals in total



# Some possible explanations:

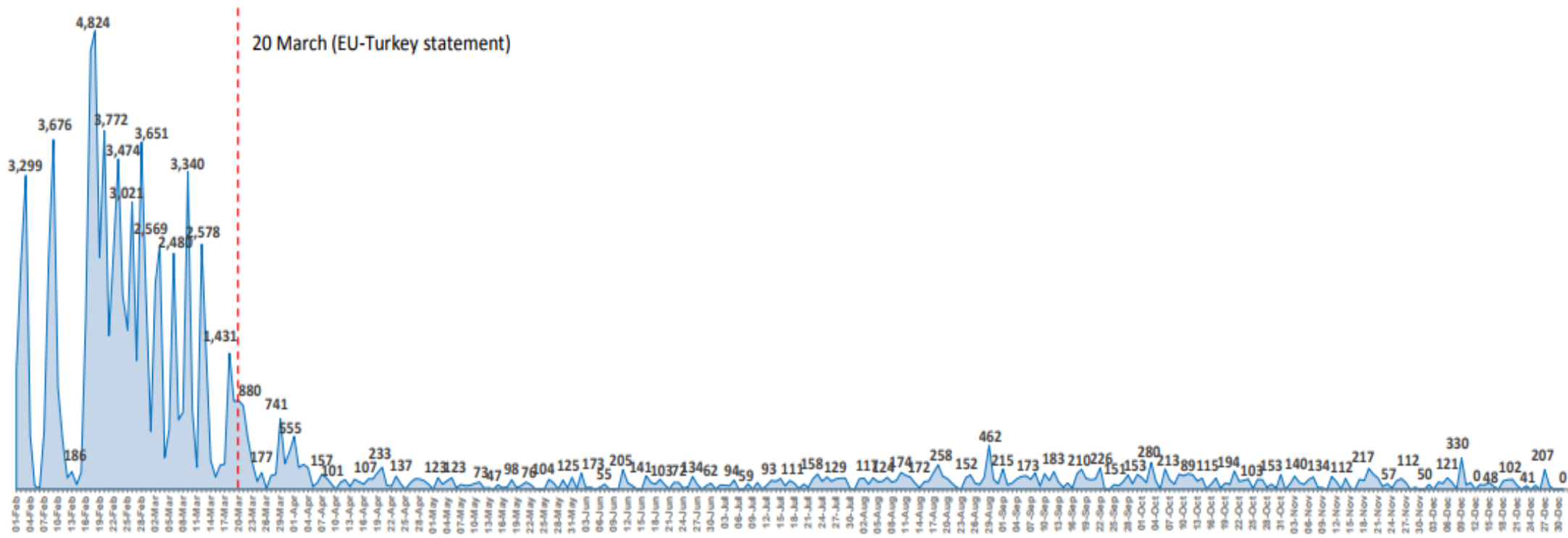
- Different levels of difficulties in the two routes
- Cost of the journeys
- Family strategies: diversification of risk
- - 46% Syrian refugee women in Turkey vs 21% in Greece
  - 58% of those Syrians interviewed in Greece state that they will reunify with their family once they get to destination
  - Similar strategies among other nationalities



# The role of EU border-enforcements: blocking asylum seekers...

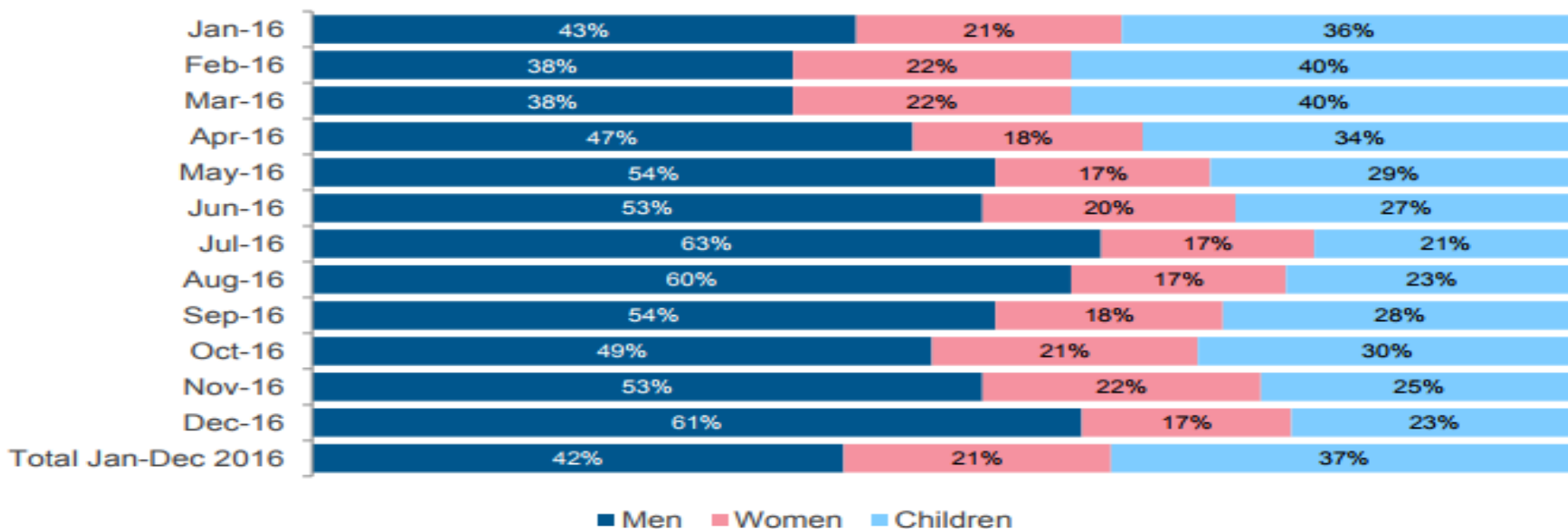
## Estimated daily arrivals

Daily arrivals are estimates based on the most reliable information available provided by the authorities. Daily estimates cannot be considered final and might change based on consolidated figures provided by authorities on a regular basis.



# ...women especially

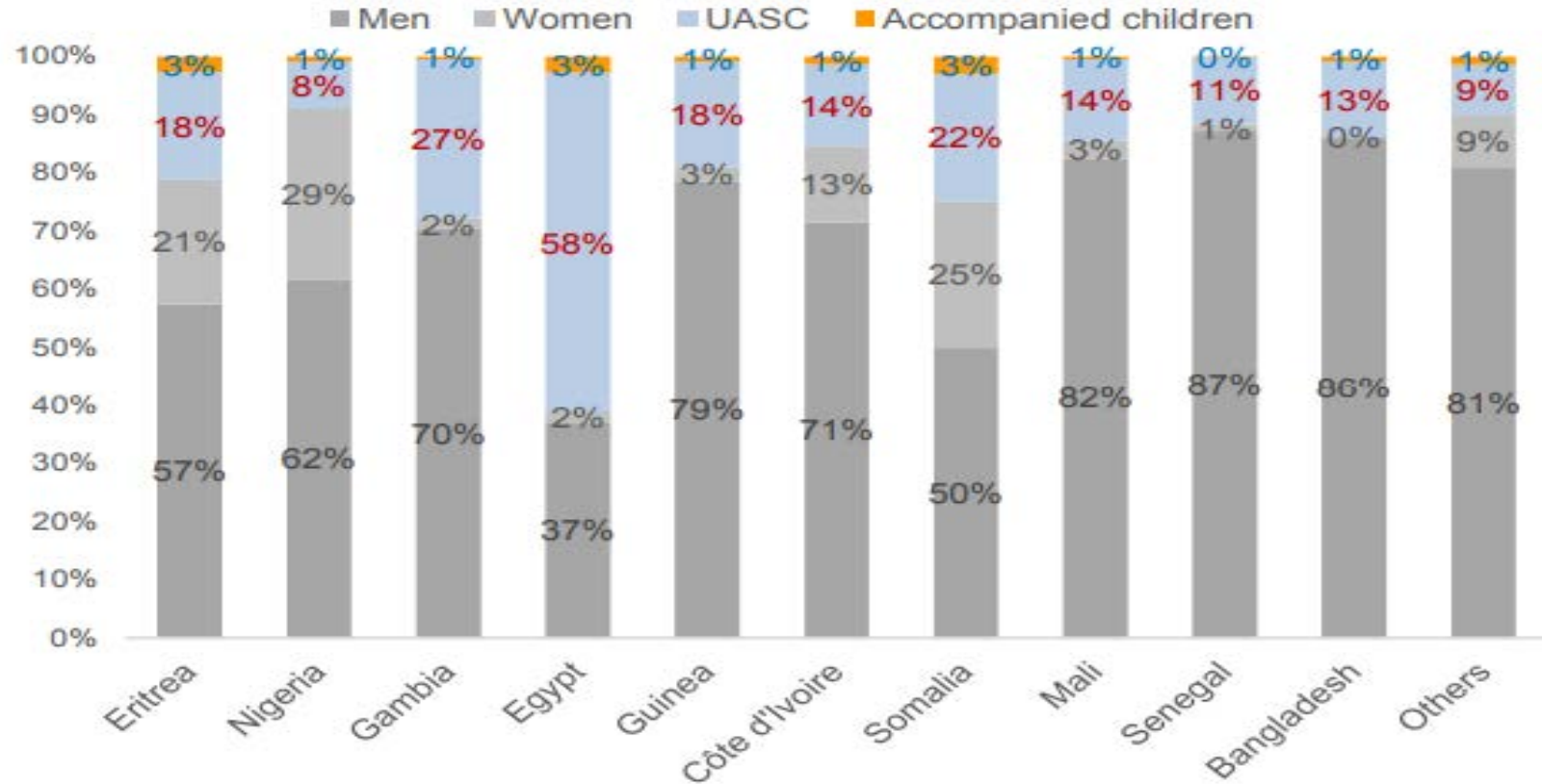
Figure 9 – Greece - Proportion of men, women and children arriving each month (January – December 2016)\*



- While women, children and families made up for the majority of those arriving in Greece before, a more male adult profile emerged after March 2016 (Kofman, forthcoming).



# Who are the women arriving in Europe?



Top 10 nationalities of sea arrivals: January – December 2016, Central Med. Route



# Behind the figures: some stories from the field

- Young women fleeing national service: the Eritrean case
- Resilience in spite of dangers
- Beyond female forced migration





# Concluding remarks

- A gender biased system
- Shifting the focus: involuntary immobility instead of forced migration
  - Expanding legal possibilities to migrate (study visas, family reunification, private sponsorships)
- Women as agents rather than victims
  - In migration
  - In reception contexts

# Bibliography

- Belloni, M. & Pastore, F. (2016). “Addressing the Gender Dimension of Contemporary Asylum Flows in the Mediterranean. Towards a more Gender-Sensitive Governance of International Protection as a Common Euro-Mediterranean Priority” (October) Women Empower the World (Italy)
- Boyd, M., & Grieco, E. (2003). Women and migration: incorporating gender into international migration theory. *Migration Information Source*, 1, 1-7.
- Freedman, J. (2008). Women Seeking Asylum: The politics of gender in the asylum determination process in France. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 10(2), 154-172.
- Grabska, K. (2016). Research Report Time to Look at Girls: Adolescent Girls’ Migration to Sudan. Available at [http://www.snis.ch/system/files/adolescent\\_girls\\_migration\\_in\\_sudan\\_-\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.snis.ch/system/files/adolescent_girls_migration_in_sudan_-_final_report.pdf)
- Greatbatch, J. (1989). The gender difference: Feminist critiques of refugee discourse. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 1(4), 518-527.
- Indra, D. (1987). Gender: A key dimension of the refugee experience. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 6(3).
- Kofman, E. (forthcoming), Gender mobilities and vulnerabilities: refugee journeys to and in Europe, in *Journal of Migration and Ethnic Studies*
- Lauby, J., & Stark, O. (1988). Individual migration as a family strategy: Young women in the Philippines. *Population studies*, 42(3), 473-486.
- Manchanda, R. (2004). Gender conflict and displacement: Contesting 'infantilisation' of forced migrant women. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4179-4186.
- UNHCR (2017). *Global Trends 2016*. Geneva