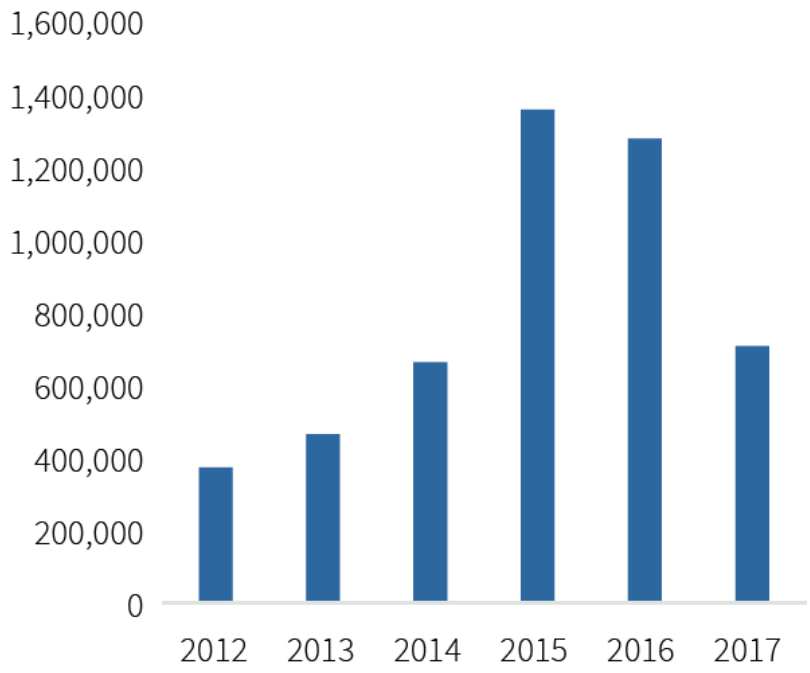
Asylum Seekers in the European Union:

Building Evidence to Inform Policy Making

WORLD BANK GROUP

A spike in the number of asylum seekers in the EU



- 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol
- The EU Dublin Regulation
- EU Directives

EASO (2018)

Two questions motivated the study

- Who are the asylum seekers and why are they choosing to come to the EU and what are their motivations?
  - Who decides to go vs. stay behind?
  - The migration experience

- What is the nature of the labor supply that these asylum seekers constitute?
  - Human capital

Outcome of the study

- Contribute to filling the data and knowledge gaps

  →Scarcity of policy-relevant data and analysis

  → Complement global knowledge agenda on forced displacement

- Contribute through World Bank's technical expertise on sampling, data collection and welfare analysis

- Sets an agenda for future data and analytical work

Scope

- Survey designed to allow meaningful benchmarking of asylum seeker population, with comparisons between asylum seekers, with countries of origin, and with general world population.

- Sampling designed to be representative of the adult population staying at reception centers in Italy and Greece at the time of the survey

- The survey does *not* include (i) those who stayed in 3rd countries outside the E.U. or remained in country of origin; (ii) people in earlier (or later) waves of migration; (iii) people who did not stay in reception centers; and (iv) unaccompanied minors.

Multiple-methods data

Target population: asylum seekers 18+ years hosted in centers/camps in Italy and Greece, from top nationalities of arrivals *(sample does NOT include unaccompanied minors)*

Timing of data collection: January – May 2017

I. Quantitative

→ Two-stage stratified sample

Italy

- 2,444 (2,139 males and 305 females)
- Nationalities: Nigeria, Gambia, Senegal, Eritrea, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Somalia, Sudan (72% of total 2016 arrivals)

Greece

- 1,680 (1,101 males and 579 females)
- Nationalities: Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq (91% of total 2016 arrivals)

→ Multiple languages

English, French, Arabic, Farsi, Tigrigna, Bambara

→ Multiple modules

Comparability between refugees, with individuals in

II. Qualitative

- Individual In-depth Interviews and Focus Groups, Key Informant Interviews
- 260 participants in 16 centers across Italy and Greece
- Non-overlapping sample with quantitative
- Composition: nationalities as in quantitative data, oversampling women, variation in marital status

III. Literacy assessment

(developed with OECD)

- To avoid mismeasurement and lack of comparability of education standards across countries
- Computer-based measurement of proficiency
- Results are comparable across all countries with PIAAC data or equivalent

- Subsample of the quantitative sample
- Administered in official languages
- 45 minutes on average for completion
- Validity checks

Five key messages

1. Heterogeneity among asylum seekers
   - Country of origin, family composition

2. High cost of journey: monetary and physical/psychological
   - 3 to 4 years of income (at poverty line)
   - High incidence of violence (Italy route) - high risks incurred during sea crossing

3. Education, past work experience, and literacy proficiency assessment suggest asylum seekers will supply low-skill labor
   - Literacy proficiency low, comparable to recent migrants to the EU.

4. High incidence of mental distress
   - Up to 70 percent of severe symptoms of anxiety and depression

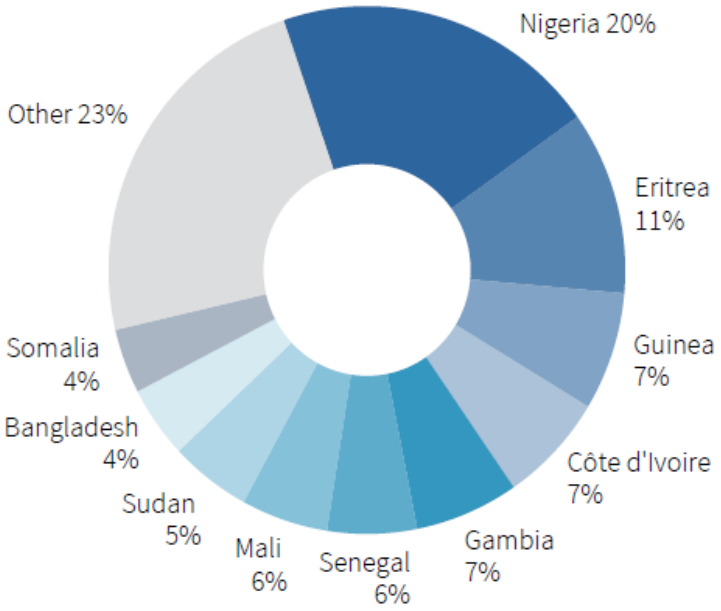
5. A robust data and knowledge agenda for understanding migration and forced migration needed
   - Many unanswered questions: host communities, panel data…

Who are the asylum seekers?

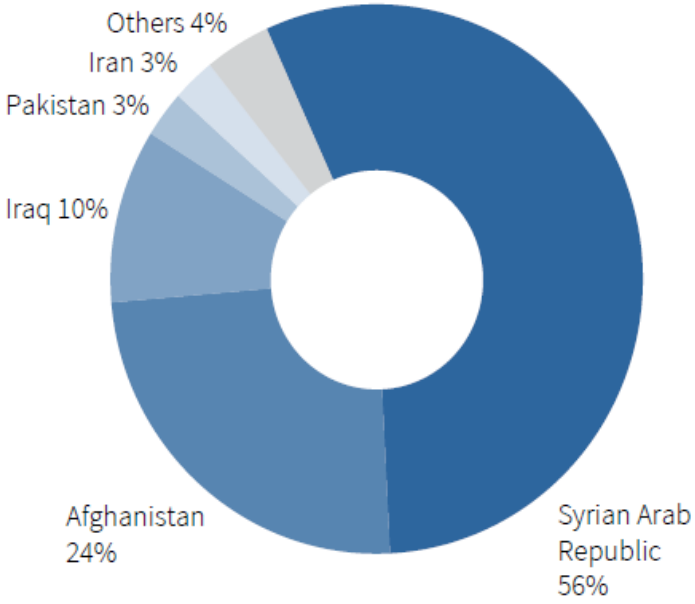
Context and demographics

Nationality composition of asylum seekers

Nationalities arriving to Italy

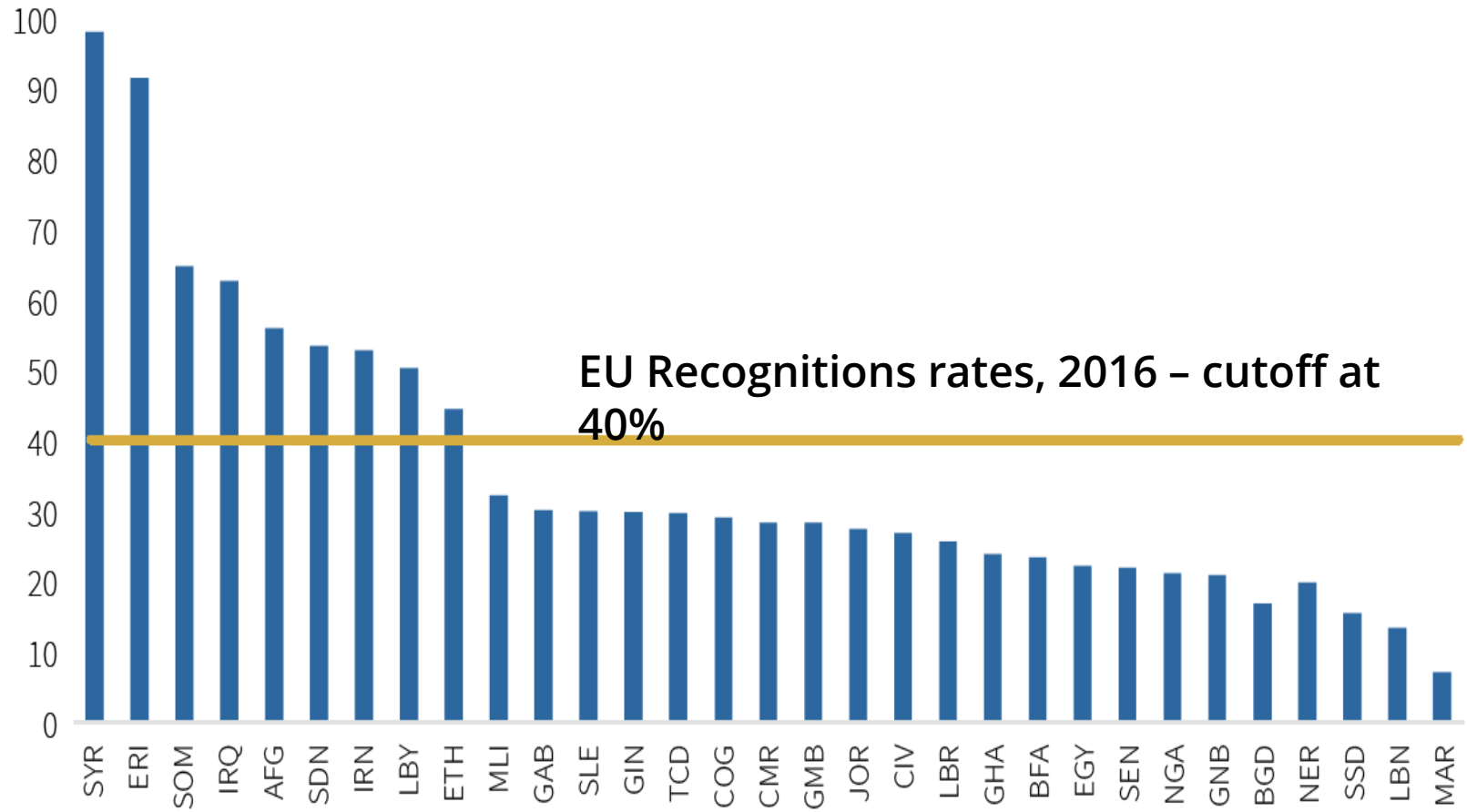


Nationalities arriving to Greece



UNHCR (2018)

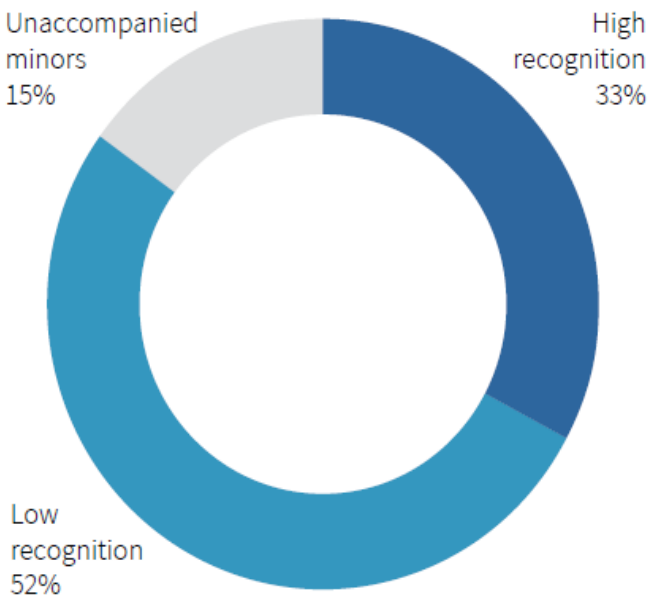
Migrants face different odds of recognition



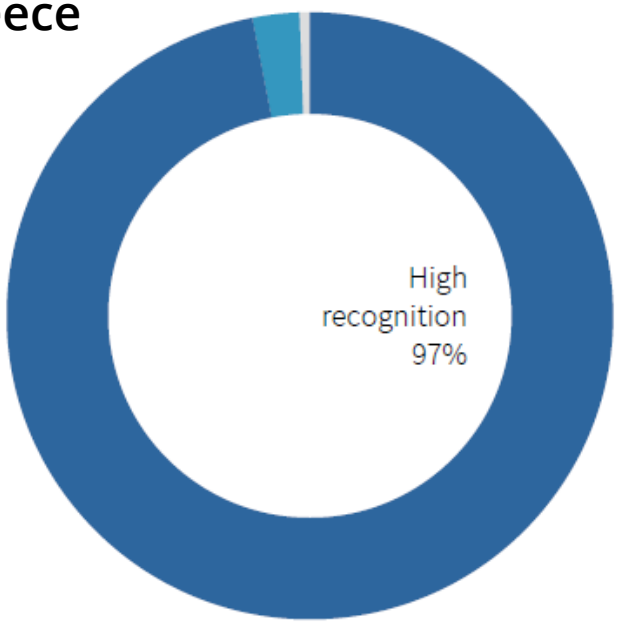
Sources: Eurostat

In Greece, most will likely be granted asylum; in Italy, the flow is mixed

Diverse origins in Italy



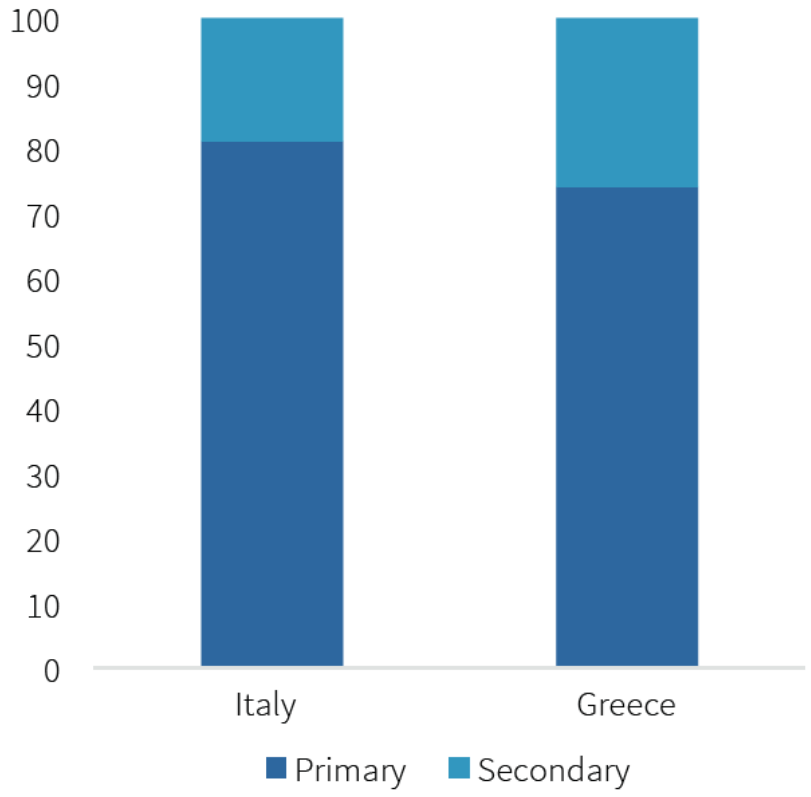
High recognition countries in Greece



Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample, and UNHCR administrative data

Not everyone came directly from their country of origin to the EU; some were settled elsewhere

By arrival

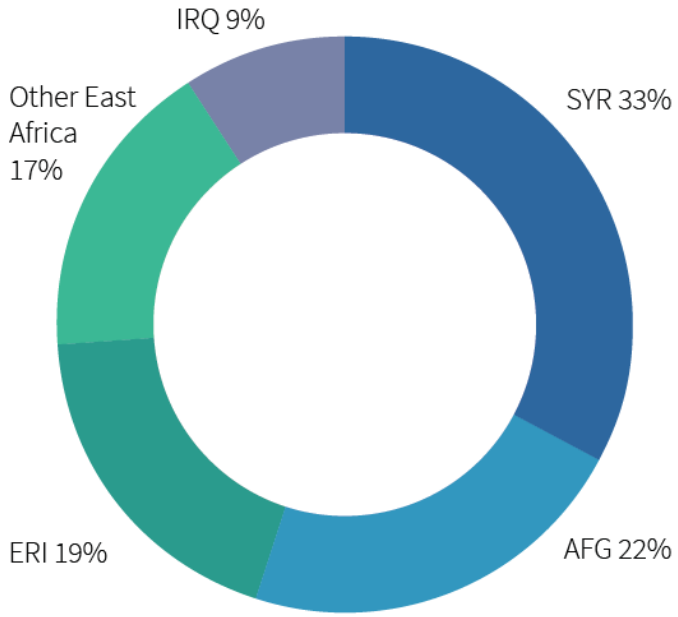


- **27%** of Syrians were in Turkey or Iraq before deciding to move to Europe.
- **34%** of Afghans had lived in Iran, some for a long period, before taking on this journey.
- **18%** of West Africans arriving to Italy are were settled in Libya or another West African country before migrating.

Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample

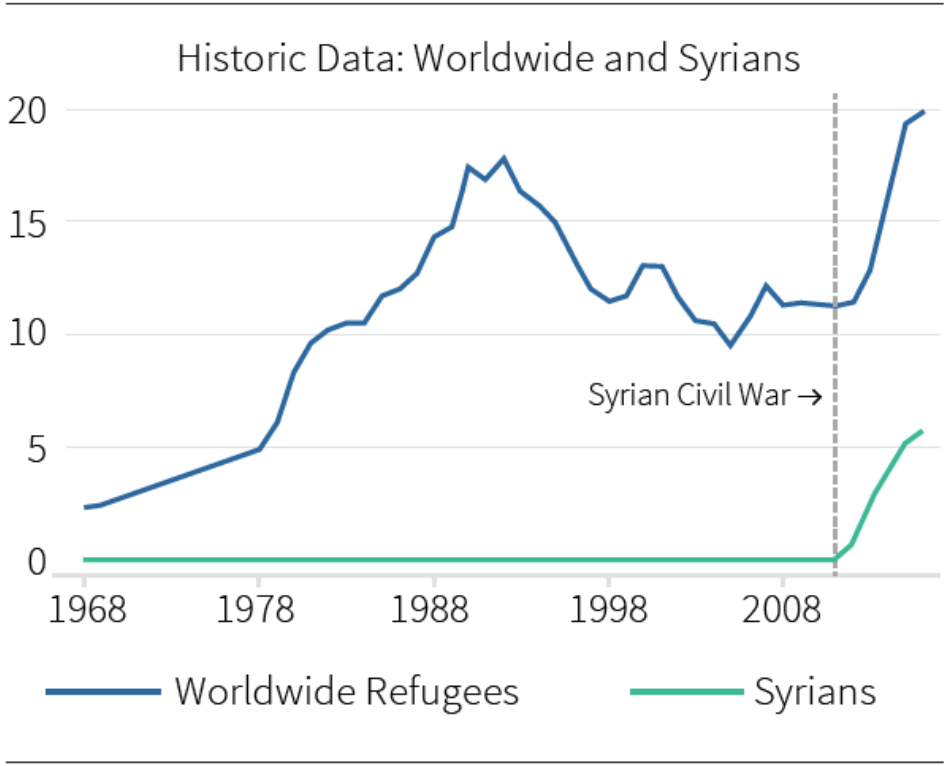
Asylum seekers of high-recognition-rate countries

Flow from high-recognition countries, by nationality, Greece and Italy, 2016



Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample, and UNHCR administrative data

Syrian asylum seekers in the E.U.

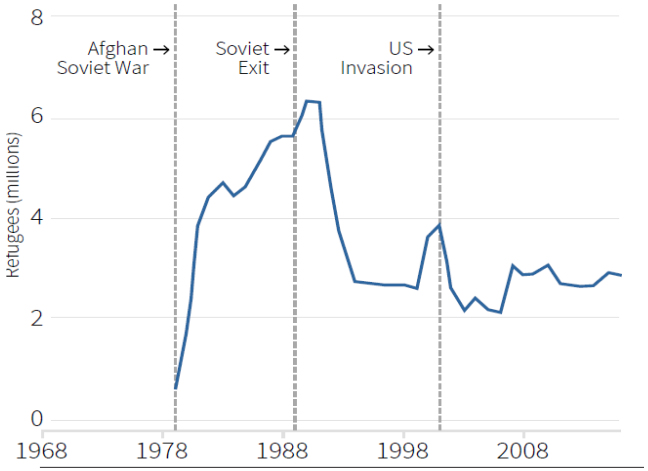


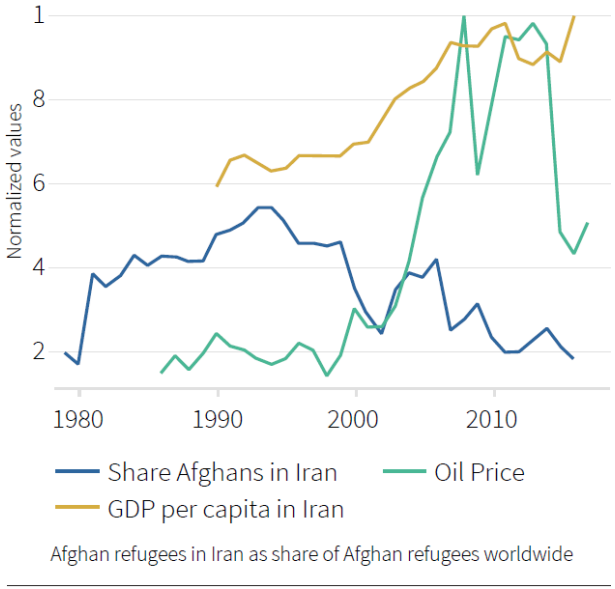
"I wanted to give my children a better education and decided to go to Germany… Many people where I was in the camp in Turkey had already left for Germany."

Syrian woman

- 27 percent are secondary movers (from Turkey)
- 2/3 are families moving together

Afghan asylum seekers in the E.U.





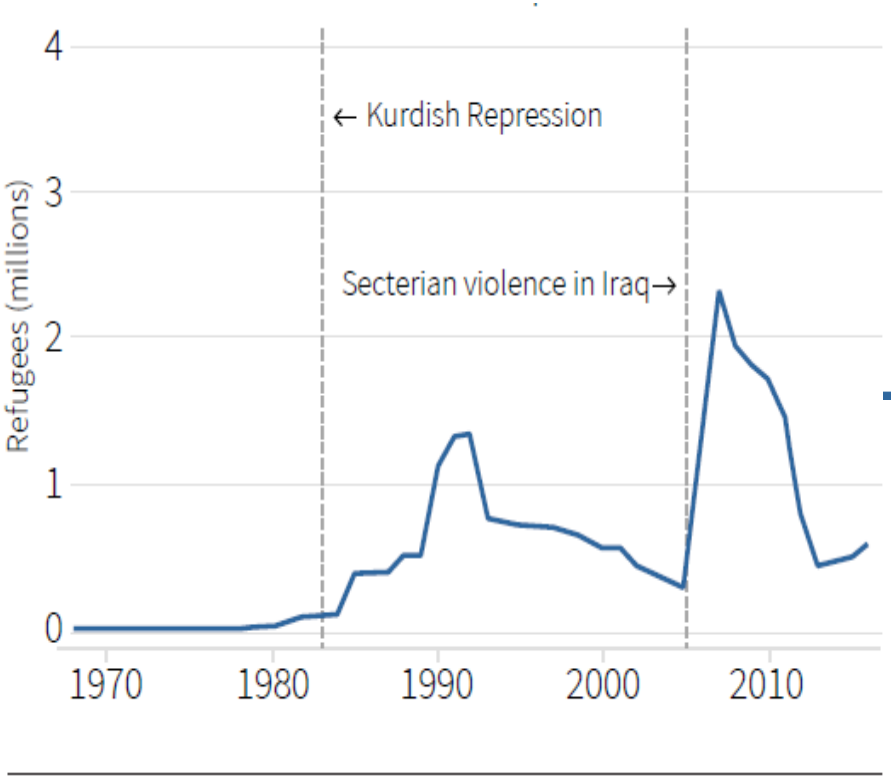
Afghan refugees in Iran as share of Afghan refugees worldwide

"I weighed it all up and thought to myself, when a country has been at war for 38 years there is no hope for the future."

Afghan man

- 34 percent are **secondary movers** (from Iran)
- 3/4 of migrants are **families** moving together

Iraqi asylum seekers in the E.U.



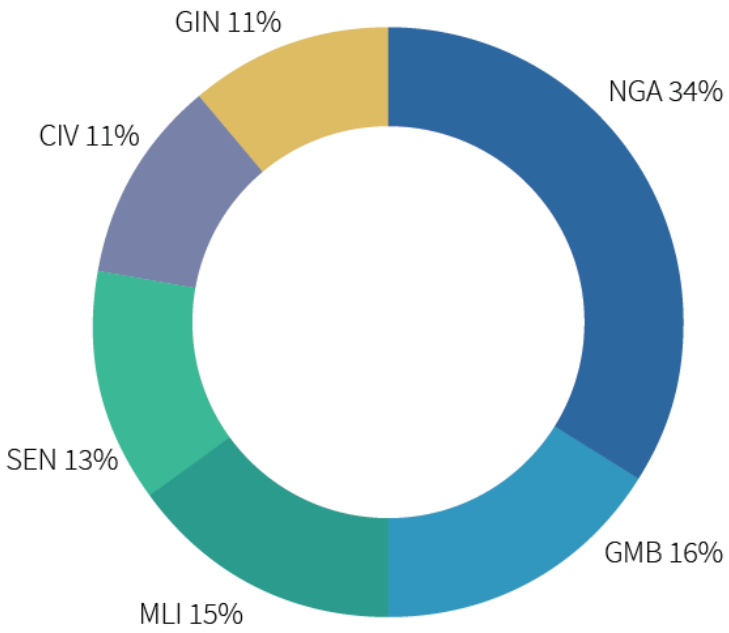
"We started thinking of leaving when my brother-in-law was killed by a car bomb that was placed on his car in 2014"

Iraqi woman

- **Almost no instances of secondary migration**
- **70 percent are families moving together**

Asylum seekers of low-recognition-rate countries are concentrated in Italy

Flow from low-recognition countries, by nationality, 2016



8% are secondary movers from Libya; the conflict altered the flows

From a destination country

To a transit country

Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample, and UNHCR administrative data

The journey

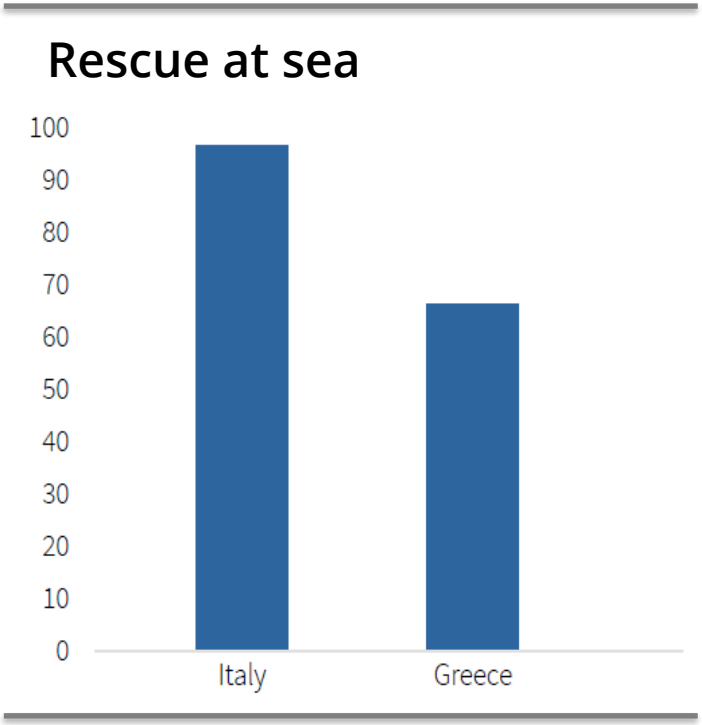
The Journey to the European Union followed a few main routes

The journey was longer and more dangerous to Italy

3 relatively large transit points

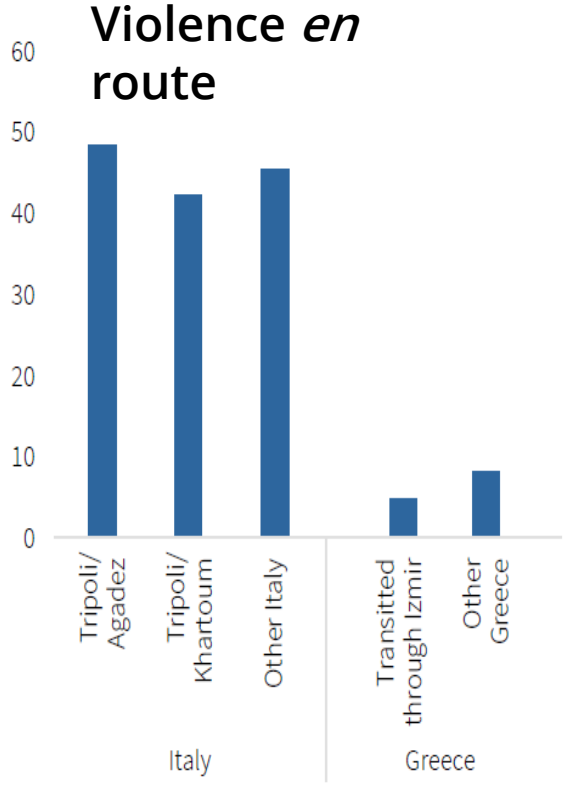
A median of a month and a half in each transit point for those arriving into Italy, compared to over a week in Greece

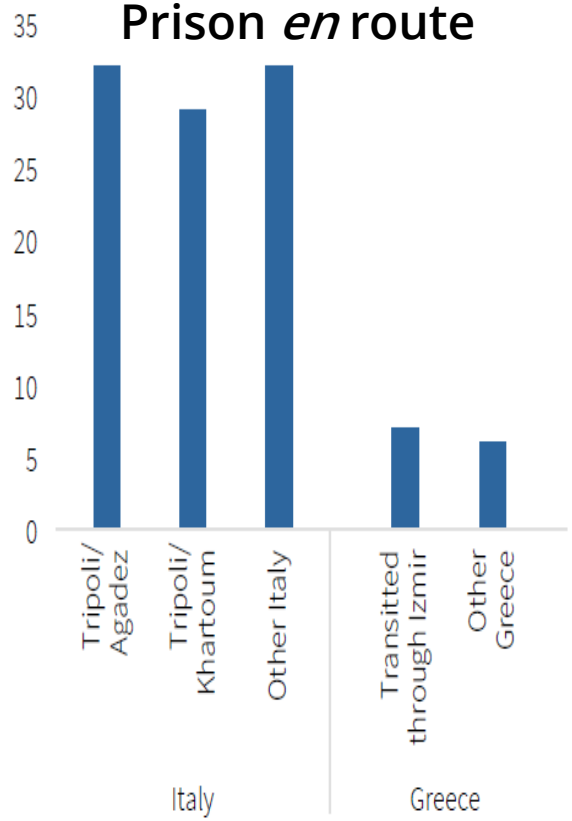
67% of those arriving to Italy crossed the Mediterranean on an inflatable boat.

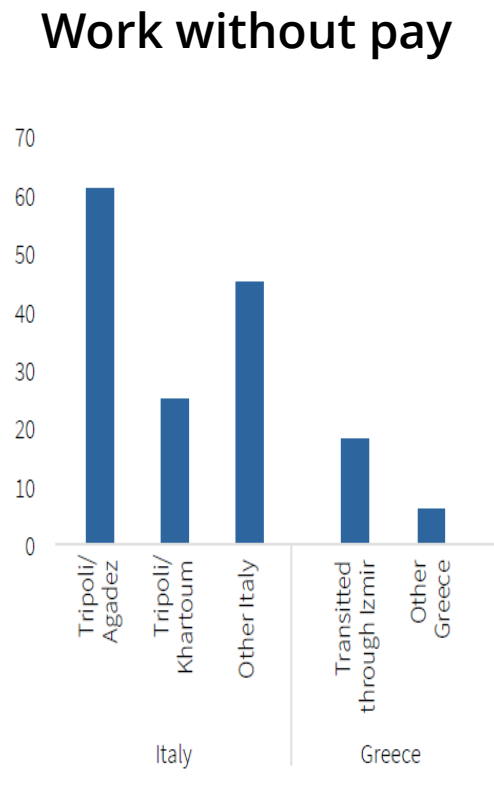


Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample

Asylum seekers encountered violence in transit, particularly those coming from Africa

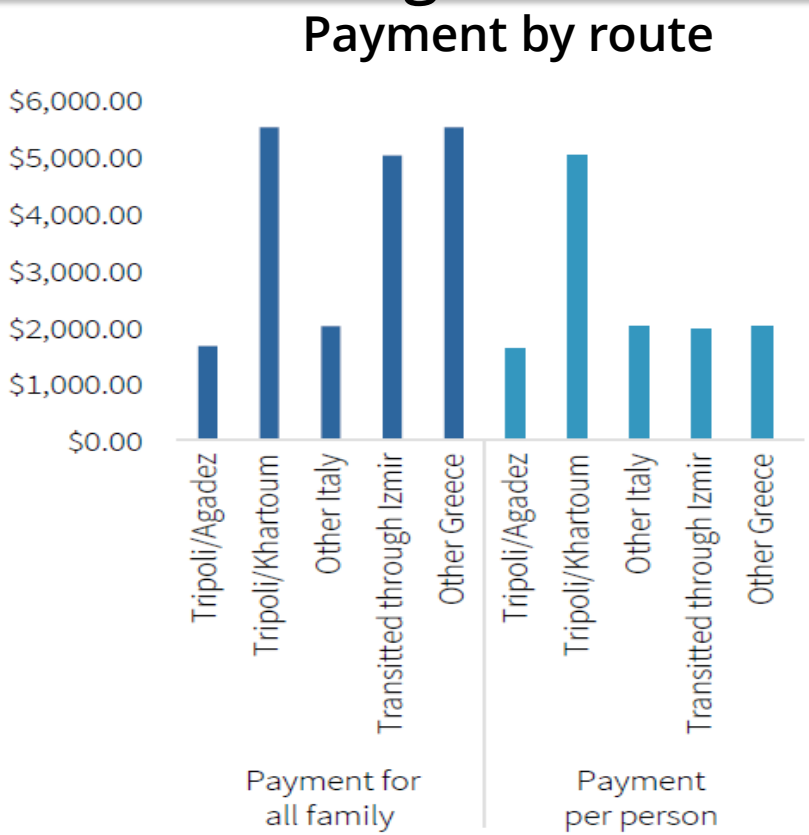






Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample

The Journey is expensive, and represents three to four years of income of a poor person in countries of origin



Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample

Summary findings

"I knew from Satellite TV and the news that the route was danger-ous. We had heard all the stories about people drowning in the Mediterranean. I personally know an entire family who drowned. But our lives were in danger so we had no choice."

Afghan man

- **Cost of migration is high**
- **General awareness of costs and benefits**
- **Speaks to the perceived benefits of migration and deteriorating conditions at home**

Who are the asylum seekers?

Living standards and human capital

Overall, differences in profile across groups

Category	Country	Secondary Migration	Male	Single	Average Age
High Recognition	Syrians	27	64	29	33
	Afghans	34	70	32	33
	Iraqis	4	61	27	33
	Eritreans	24	67	57	26
	Other East Africans	23	86	44	26
Low Recognition	West Africans	18	90	81	24

Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample

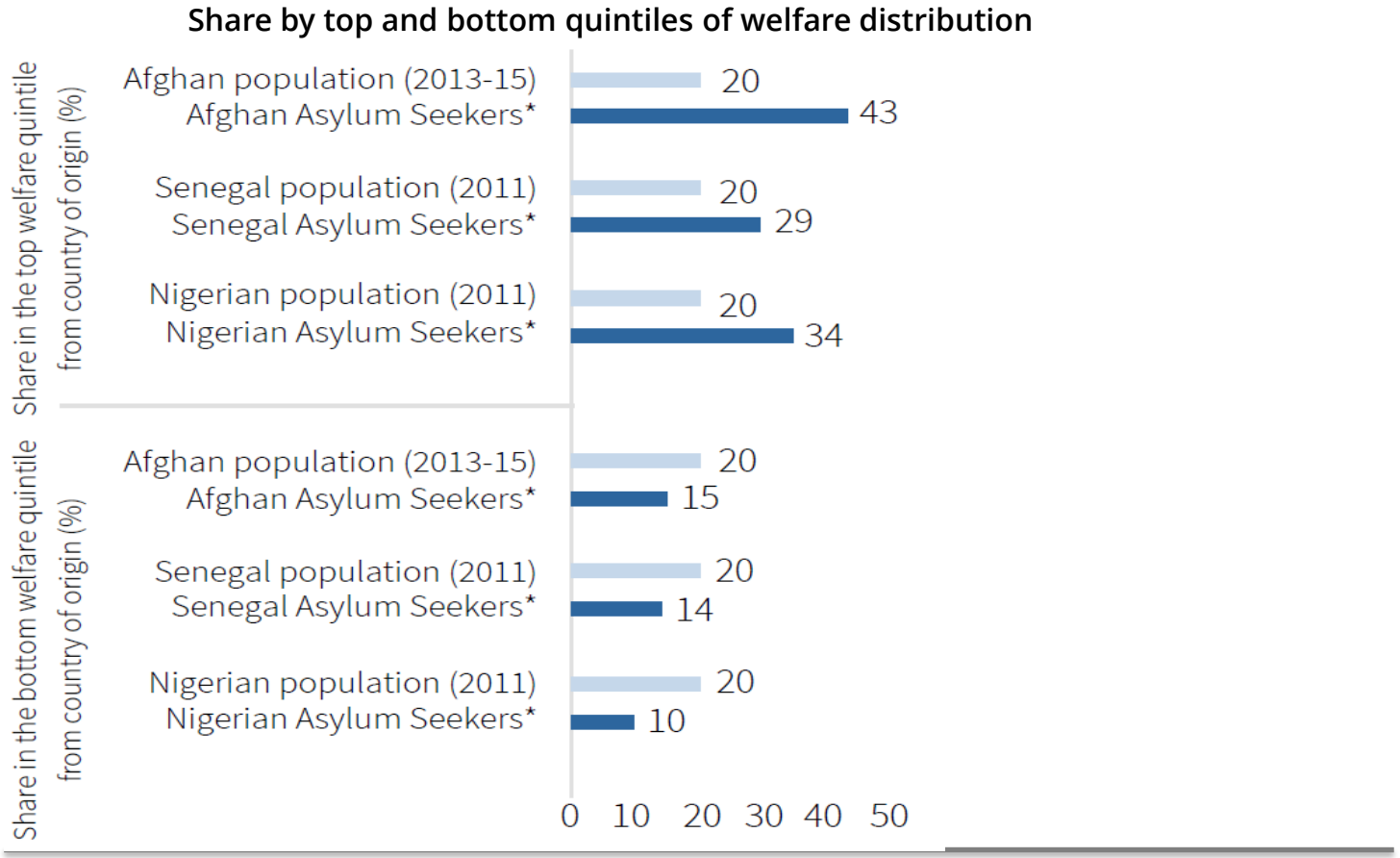
Single women asylum seekers

Low among women arriving to Greece

High among women arriving to Italy:

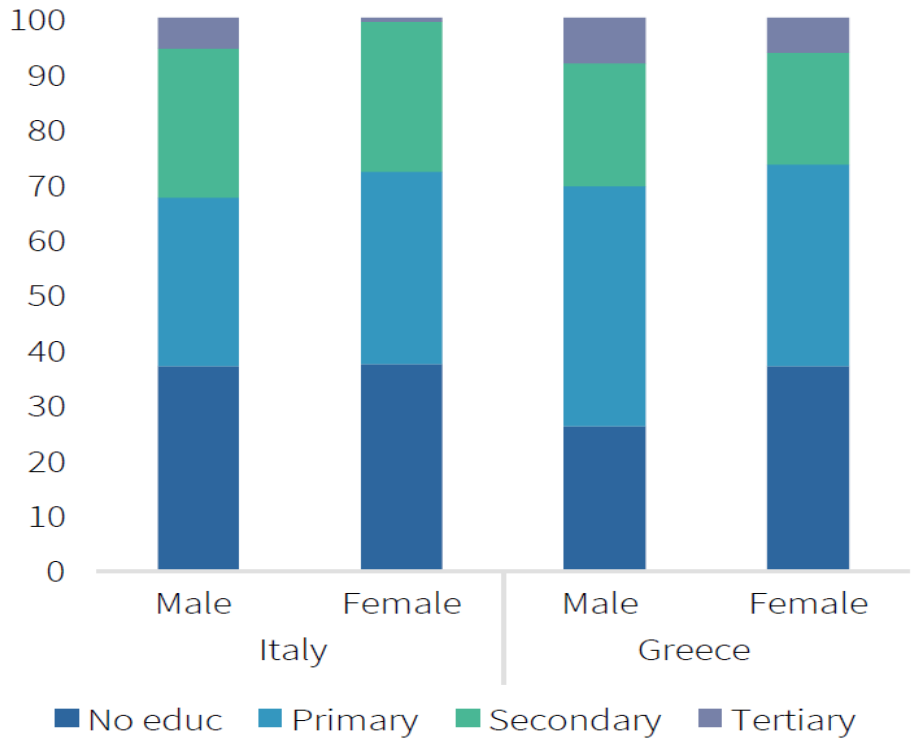
- **53% of single women from Nigeria**
- **25% from Eritrea**

Many asylum seekers surveyed were wealthier than those who stayed



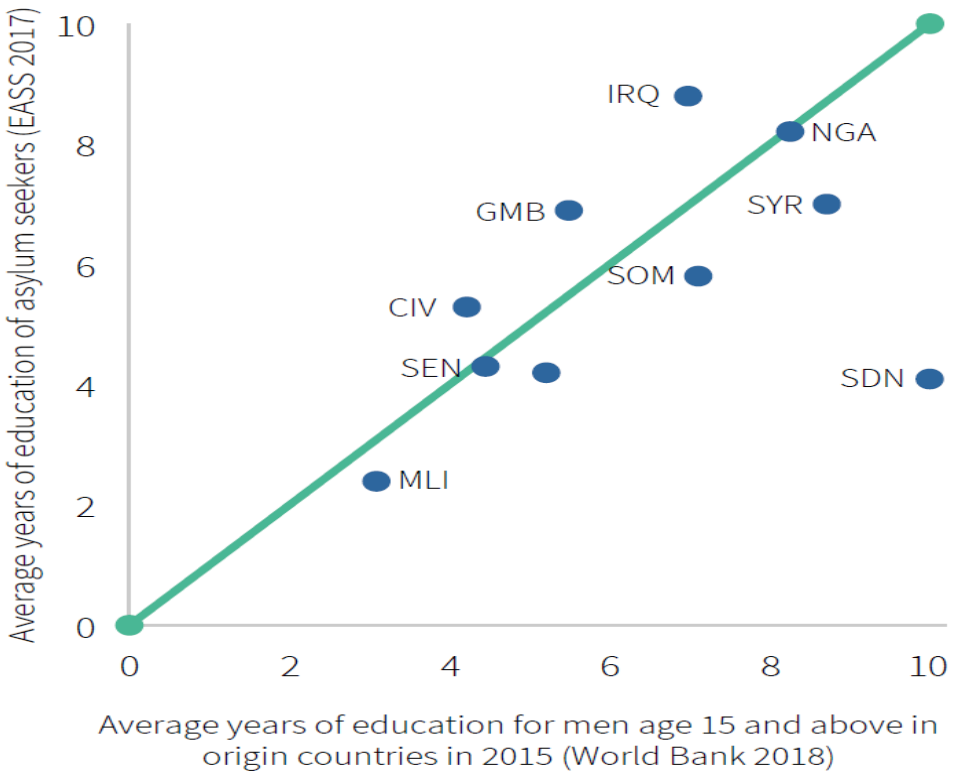
Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample, Nigeria 2011 Living Standard Measurement Survey; Senegal 2011 (ESPS II).

On average, asylum seekers in Italy and Greece had low levels of education



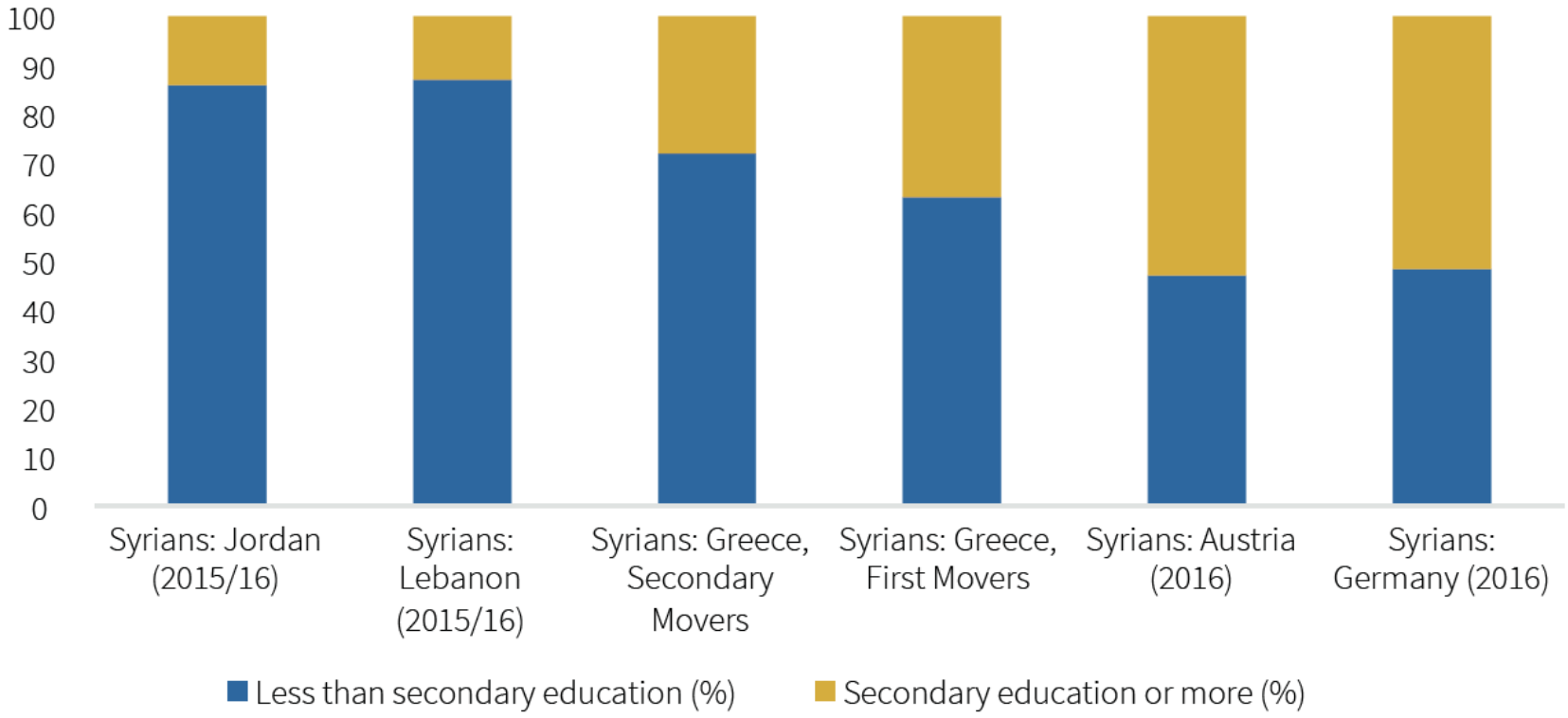
Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample

Education levels are in line with education levels in countries of origin



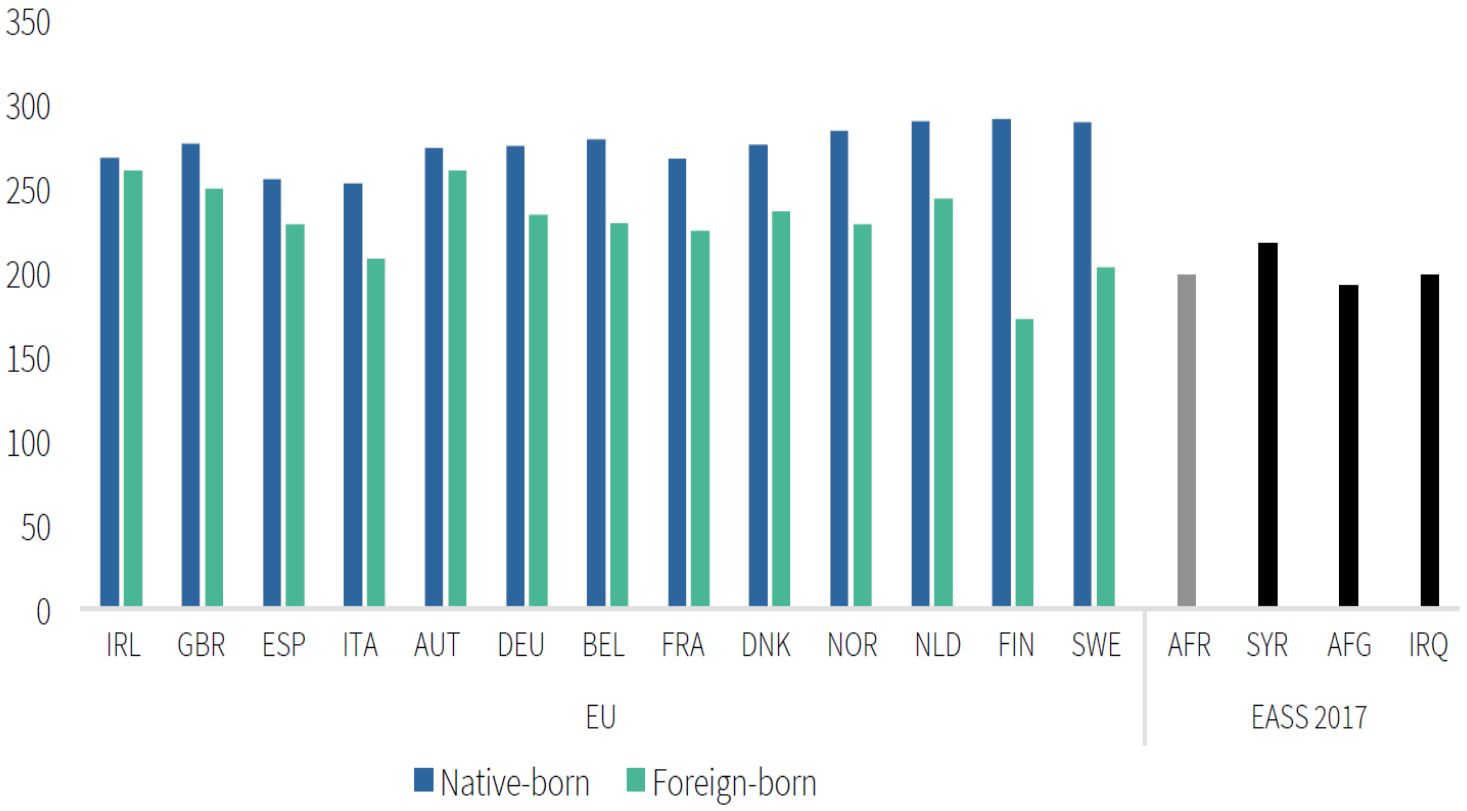
Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample and World Bank 2018

For Syrians, clear differences between the waves of migration



Sources: EASS 2017; for Jordan, KRI, and Lebanon: 2015-16 SRHCS; for Austria, Buber-Ennser et al. 2016 (limited to population 20-59 years); and for Germany, the 2016 IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey.

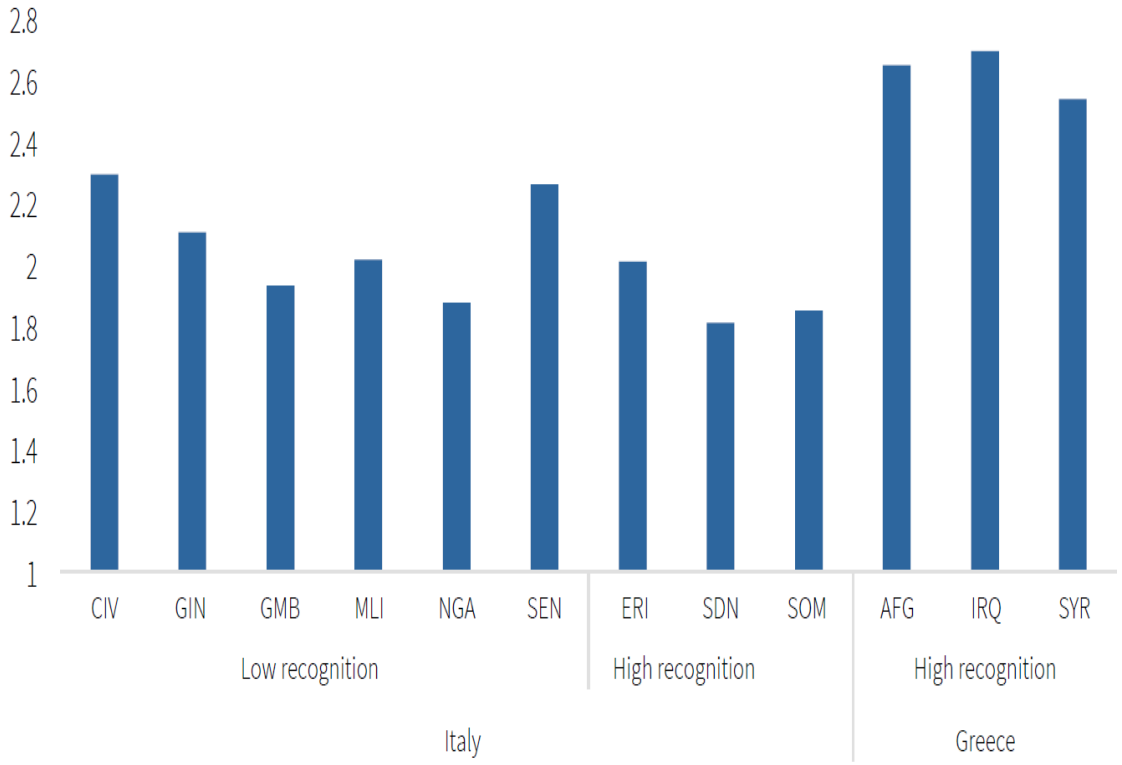
Asylum seekers have limited proficiency in designated language, but their PIAAC scores are comparable to those of migrants who have been in the EU for less than five years



Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample and OECD 2016

Mental health as an important policy dimension:
Instances of mental distress were widespread

Severe Mental Distress, GSI by Country of Origin



"I don't know anything about the future. I don't know if they will give us asylum here or deport us. I don't know if they will give us a house. I don't want to know. I can't handle any more pressure."

Iraqi woman

Sources: Data from EASS 2017 – Weighted sample

Insights into Policy

Insights into Policies

MORE DATA AND KNOWLEDGE: The need to collect more data and further build the evidence; challenges to collecting data on transient and vulnerable populations

EDUCATION AND SKILLS: Policies to support the early identification of skills of asylum seekers, refugees or other migrants to tailor education and labor market policies in host or origin countries

MENTAL HEALTH: Policies to support the early identification of mental health needs of asylum seekers, refugees or other migrants

SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING: Policies directed at combating smugglers and human trafficking networks could help curb the flows, but they could also have unintended negative consequences

VULNERABILITIES IN ORIGIN/THIRD COUNTRIES: Policies to tackle vulnerabilities in countries of origin: asylum seekers come from situations that, in their views, make the costly and perilous journey worth it

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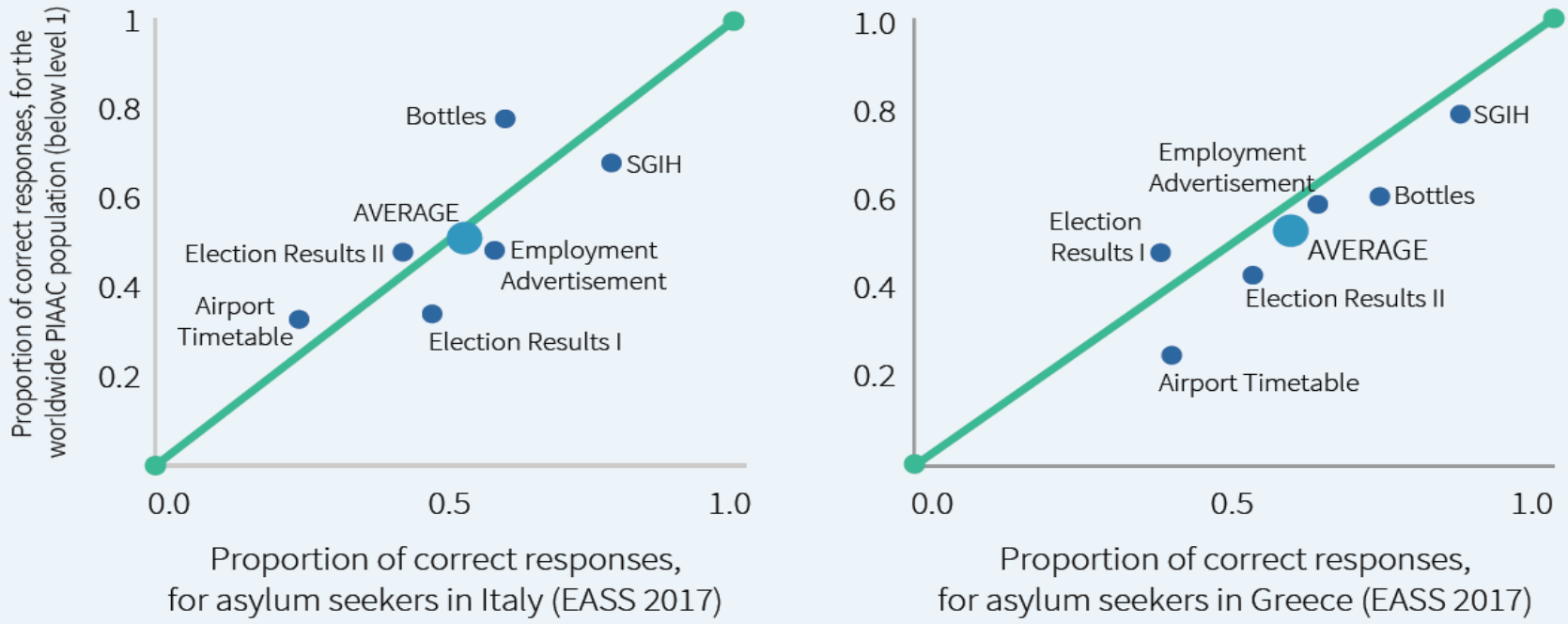
ANNEX: Skills test validation

Asylum seekers and worldwide population , scoring below 1 proficiency



Source: Data from EASS 2017 – Literacy and OECD PIAAC data.