

# Fatal Journeys

Volume 3

PART 2

Improving Data on Missing Migrants



IOM's Global Migration  
Data Analysis Centre  
GMDAC



65  
YEARS

International Organization for Migration

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**Cover Photo:** “State of Exception/ Estado de Excepción”. Backpacks of migrants found in the Arizona desert, as part of the Undocumented Migration Project led by Jason De León at the University of Michigan.

**Installation:** Richard Barnes (Artist/Photographer), Jason De León (Anthropologist), Amanda Krugliak (Artist/Curator). © OTTO 2013 (Photo by Richard Barnes)

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# Fatal Journeys

## Volume 3

### PART 2

## Improving Data on Missing Migrants

Edited by  
Frank Laczko, Ann Singleton and Julia Black



IOM's Global Migration  
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## Foreword

This is the third in the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) series of global reports documenting the number of lives lost during migration. The publication of this report is particularly timely, as the 192 UN Member States prepare to discuss the adoption of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. A key indicator of unsafe migration is the number of migrants who perish each year during their journeys. Sadly, there seem to be few signs that this number is decreasing.

Since the beginning of 2014, IOM has recorded the deaths and disappearances of nearly 25,000 migrants. IOM has also calculated that at least 60,000 migrants have died since the year 2000. The Mediterranean crossing, which has claimed the lives of 15,000 migrants since it first made headlines in October 2013, is just one example of the many migration routes that see numerous fatalities each year.

However, the true number of migrant fatalities is unknown, as not all deaths and disappearances are reported. In many remote regions of the world, bodies may never be found, and many migrants may never be identified. Each nameless death represents a family missing a loved one.

In addition to providing a global analysis of trends, this year's report focuses on how to improve the data on missing migrants. Although data collection has improved over the last three years, there are many gaps in our knowledge about missing migrants. Basic information such as the sex or the age of the migrant who is reported dead or missing is often lacking. The number of bodies that are retrieved and identified still remains very low. There are many potential sources of data and approaches that could be taken to improve data on missing migrants. The challenge is not simply a lack of data, but the unwillingness of some authorities to collect them, as well as deficiencies in resources and know-how.

I have consistently stressed the importance of saving lives in any response to migration, with a view to protecting migrants' rights, including the right to life. Improving information on who these missing migrants are, where they come from, and above all, when they are most at risk, is crucial to building a holistic response to reduce the number of migrant deaths. As I have argued many times before, making migration safer will require the implementation of a comprehensive set of measures, including more legal pathways to migration. Good data are essential if we are to keep track of our efforts to make migration safer.



**William Lacy Swing**  
Director General



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## Executive summary

This is part 2 of the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) third *Fatal Journeys* report, *Improving Data on Missing Migrants*. Part 1, published in September 2017, presented an overview of global trends in migrant fatalities and highlighted innovative data collection efforts relating to missing migrants. This second part focuses on regional perspectives, taking an in-depth look at the quantity and quality of data on missing migrants in six different regions: (a) Middle East and North Africa; (b) sub-Saharan Africa; (c) Asia-Pacific; (d) Central America; (e) South America; and (f) Europe and the Mediterranean.

Each chapter examines the challenges of collecting data on missing migrants specific to each region. Data on migrant fatalities remain sparse in most areas of the world as a result of the lack of official sources and/or media reporting on migrant deaths. These challenges mean that data on migrant deaths may never be complete. Nonetheless, significant improvements can be made in each region, as discussed in this report.

Even in areas such as Europe, where several dedicated data collection initiatives exist, the opportunities to verify and cross-check data are limited. The physical and administrative remoteness of migrant deaths and disappearances, the varying definitions of border deaths used in different databases, as well as the use of conflicting media or first-hand reports, means that the quality and coverage of data within a single region and across different regions varies widely.

In the Asia-Pacific, the 2015 Andaman Sea Crisis and the more recent mass emigration of Rohingya\* from Myanmar to Bangladesh have been the subject of increased monitoring by the media and international agencies. Similarly, migration across the Mediterranean has led to non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations (including IOM) activity dedicated to collecting information on fatalities during migration to Europe than ever before.

While the policy and media attention on such "crises" may lead to improved data in the short-term, they do not always result in long-term systematic data collection. Most migrant deaths continue to occur in large unpatrolled spaces, often at sea, and are not necessarily captured in coverage of these "crises". For example, the deaths of migrant women and children are visible in a handful of high-profile incidents, but they are underrepresented in the overall available data.

In regions where there is no perception or narrative of crisis, but where migrant deaths regularly occur in smaller numbers, data are even scarcer. Throughout Central America, for example, few data on migrant deaths and disappearances are available. Crimes committed against migrants, including those leading to death and disappearance, are rarely investigated, let alone reported, which leads to large gaps in the available data on missing migrants. Similarly, few migrant deaths have been recorded in South America; however, with new groups passing through tight border controls during migration, it is important that systems are put in place to record deaths and identify the people who are dying.

The journeys of migrants travelling through or from Middle Eastern, African and Asian countries across the Mediterranean Sea have been widely reported since 2013, but there is little public or policy awareness of the risks migrants encounter before they reach the coasts of Turkey and North Africa. The challenges of collecting data in the Middle East and Africa are characterized by conflict: the reduction of legal exits from war-torn countries means that would-be migrants must travel on risky irregular routes, and the distinction between migration- and conflict-related deaths is often blurred. Survey-based initiatives, which are already being carried out in Northern, Western and Eastern Africa, could be one way of improving data on migrant deaths and disappearances in these and other regions.

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\* Note that the term *Rohingya* as used to describe the Muslim peoples of Rakhine State, Myanmar, is not accepted by the Government of the Union of Myanmar, which in June 2016 issued an order directing State-owned media to use the term "Muslim community in Rakhine State".

Survey-based initiatives represent just one way of improving data on missing migrants. Because the quantity and quality of data varies widely between regions, good data practices from one region can be applied in regions where data is lacking. For example, the collection of administrative data on migrant bodies by the Deaths at the Borders Database in Europe, and by the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner on the United States–Mexico border, could be emulated to improve historical data in other regions where records of migrants’ bodies are not publicly available. The strong collaboration between authorities and civil society groups in Latin America could also improve data in other regions, especially regions in which improving the identification of missing migrants is a priority. New methodologies, such as using “big data”, piloted in some regions, could be expanded to improve the availability and completeness of data on migrant fatalities.

Ultimately, comprehensive data on migrant fatalities will remain a challenge without more commitment of resources from local, national and international authorities. In order to address the widespread lack of data, coordination and cross-checking between the various efforts to collect data on migrant fatalities should be promoted, and in the long-term authorities must take steps to standardize and make public data on migrant fatalities.

Until data on migrant deaths and disappearances improve, the public, academic and policy understanding of fatalities during migration will remain limited by the largely unofficial and incomplete sources available. Collecting reliable data over time is necessary in order to create strong evidence-based policies to save lives, and to improve identification of missing migrants.

## Key recommendations

Five key recommendations emerge from the comparison of the regions and innovative methodologies discussed in both parts of *Fatal Journeys Volume 3*. Though data coverage and quality vary within and across regions, as do the capacities of official and unofficial actors, most, if not all, of the following steps could be taken across the world to improve data on missing migrants.

### (a) Make better use of administrative data.

Local, national and regional authorities that collect data on missing migrants should publish it wherever and whenever possible, in accordance with data protection standards. These authorities should also cooperate to standardize data collection so that it is more easily compared and cross-checked.

### (b) Promote survey-based data collection.

In areas where few institutions collect data on missing migrants, or where access is an issue, survey data should be collected in order to better understand the risks people face during migration.

### (c) Explore new technologies.

The quality and coverage of data on missing migrants can be improved through new technologies, including the use of big data. New and emerging data collection techniques and sources should be investigated in the interest of improving data on missing migrants and better understanding the context in which migrants die or disappear.

**(d) Work with civil society and families.**

Data collection efforts led by civil society groups should be promoted, as they can provide new information and increase the likelihood that data can be verified. Collaboration between families of the missing and other actors should also be encouraged, as families can be a source of data on the missing, and their involvement in data collection and identification processes can help to address the ambiguous loss that they face.

**(e) Improve data sharing.**

Data on missing migrants tends to be scattered and fragmented, and there is great value in bringing disparate sources of data together. Data sharing should be bolstered across regions and sectors wherever possible, in order to maximize accuracy and improve the understanding of the risks migrants face across the world.



## Introduction

Frank Laczko, Ann Singleton and Julia Black<sup>a</sup>

This is part two of the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) global report, *Fatal Journeys Volume 3*, which explores the challenges of collecting data on migrant deaths and disappearances. The first part of the report, published earlier this year, focused on a number of thematic issues and included an overview of global trends in the number of missing migrants. This second part of *Fatal Journeys Volume 3* focuses on how to improve data on missing migrants at the regional level. This report looks more closely at how data on missing migrants vary by region. It also presents some of the innovative measures that have been taken at the regional level to improve data on missing migrants. The report concludes with five key recommendations on how data on missing migrants could be improved at the regional level.

Since 2014, IOM has documented nearly 25,000 migrant deaths around the world. As discussed in the first volume of this report, the quality and coverage of data on missing migrants varies widely by region. The available data are often not comparable because of different data collection methods and definitions of who is a missing migrant. The global picture is distorted by the fact that more data are available for Europe and North America than for other regions of the world. This availability of data partly reflects the high incidence of deaths in these regions and partly is a result of more resources being available for the data collection tasks. Nonetheless, as is the case across the globe, many bodies (an unknown number) are never recovered or identified in Europe and North America.

Gathering more and better-quality data on missing migrants is especially important at a time when States are discussing how best to achieve safer and more orderly migration. Finding better ways to measure and document unsafe migration is also important, given the inclusion of migration in the 2030 Global Agenda for Sustainable Development. All countries have agreed, according to this agenda, to work towards promoting safe, orderly and regular migration. This language is also used in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migration signed in September 2016, which will be followed by the signing of a global compact for migration in 2018. Building upon the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration will set out a range of principles, commitments and understandings among UN Member States regarding international migration in all its dimensions. Better quality data on all aspects of migration and the deaths that occur during migration will be essential to improving the evidence base for these policy discussions.

Each chapter of this report presents, as accurately as possible, the best available data on the number and profile of missing migrants regionally, and the data on the numbers of persons who are identified. Each chapter also discusses how such numbers are collected. Furthermore, the report explores how data collection could be improved in regions of the world where anecdotal and unofficial reports indicate that many migrant deaths and disappearances occur. For example, it is evident that in some regions of the world, the percentage of missing migrants identified is much higher than in other regions (see Table a). This information suggests that there is scope to increase identification rates, and that there are practices in some regions which might potentially be adopted in other regions.

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<sup>a</sup> Frank Laczko is the Director of IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC). Ann Singleton is Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bristol and Senior Advisor to GMDAC. Julia Black is the Project Coordinator for IOM's Missing Migrants Project, and is based at GMDAC.

**Table a. Rates of identification of recovered migrant remains – Comparison of regional data**

Region	Share of remains identified	Time frame	Source
European States and territories bordering the Mediterranean <sup>b</sup>	35%	1990–2013	Deaths at the Borders Database, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Rhodes Island, Greece	74%	January 2015–February 2016	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Thrace region, Greece	25%	2010–2015	Dr Pavlidis, Laboratory of Forensic Sciences, Democritus University of Thrace
October 2013 shipwrecks off the coast of Lampedusa, Italy	50%	-	LABANOF Institute, University of Milan
Southern Arizona	66%	1990–2013	Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner
Webb County, Texas	58%	Mid-2013–mid-2015	Webb County Medical Examiner

Source: Adapted from *Fatal Journeys Volume 2: Identification and Tracing of Dead and Missing Migrants*, 2016.

## Strengths and weaknesses of data collection by region

The six chapters in this report highlight the fact that data quality and coverage vary widely within and between regions. In most areas of the world, there is often a lack of any data on missing migrants – meaning that the *quantity* of data is insufficient. Even where there is a reasonable amount of data on migrant deaths and disappearances, the information available is often incomplete or unreliable, meaning that the *quality* of data can be very poor.

Most regions discussed in this report lack the data needed to design policies to prevent further deaths and improve identification rates. On a few migratory routes, where data collection efforts have been underway for several years, there is a significant volume of data. Areas with strong institutions, where local or national authorities collect and disseminate data on migrant deaths, are one such exception. For example, medical examiners and coroners working on the southern border of the United States provide relatively comprehensive figures of the number of migrant deaths and disappearances within their respective jurisdictions.

Data collection efforts led by media consortiums and civil society groups also provide a good source of data on missing migrants in the few regions where they are available. In Europe and the Mediterranean, the databases collated by Fortress Europe, UNITED for Intercultural Action and the Migrants Files contain data on migrant deaths and disappearances dating back as far as 1988.<sup>c</sup> In the Asia-Pacific and on the United States–Mexico border, there are also multiple civil society and media groups collecting and publishing data on migration-related deaths and disappearances.<sup>d</sup> Multiple data collection efforts within these regions means that these areas represent the few parts of the world in which data on missing migrants can, to some degree, be cross-checked and verified.<sup>e</sup>

<sup>b</sup> Italy, Greece, Malta, Spain and Gibraltar.

<sup>c</sup> Fortress Europe began collecting data on missing migrants in November 1988, UNITED in January 1993, and the Migrants Files in January 2000.

<sup>d</sup> For a list of sources publishing data on migrant or border-related deaths, see the annex in the first *Fatal Journeys* report.

<sup>e</sup> Though the challenges to doing so remain significant, as discussed in chapter 6 on Europe and the Mediterranean.

So-called migration crises can also lead to an increase in attention to the issue of migrant deaths, and often lead to improved monitoring by civil society organizations and humanitarian agencies. The Mediterranean “migration crisis” was, from 2014, increasingly marked by the proliferation of search-and-rescue operations and an increase in data collection efforts. Several organizations had been collecting such data for many years, but the rise in the numbers of migrants crossing the Mediterranean led to an increase in media reporting of migrant deaths and data collection efforts by international agencies, which led to a much larger quantity of data on missing migrants. Similarly, the Bay of Bengal “crisis” in 2015 resulted in a large amount of media attention and, eventually, to a dedicated effort in estimating the number of migrants who had disappeared at sea.

It is likely that the quantity of data produced will never truly reflect the true number of missing migrants across the world. Data on missing migrants will always be incomplete to some degree due to the physical remoteness of irregular migration. On overland journeys, migrants travel through remote deserts, jungles and mountains – meaning that bodies may not be found for weeks, if at all. On migratory routes across any body of water, bodies might never be recovered, meaning that data on these missing migrants will always be estimates.

Even in areas where the data are thought to capture the true number of migrant fatalities, issues with data quality persist. For example, data may come from unreliable, often conflicting media sources,<sup>f</sup> or a single incident may be recorded multiple times. Table b shows differences in the coverage of data in the six regions discussed in this report, based on information collected by IOM’s Missing Migrants Project.

**Table b. Completeness of data on missing migrants by region, January 2014–September 2017**

Region	Total number of reported incidents	Total number of reported dead and missing migrants	Proportion of reported incidents containing information on age or gender	Proportion of reported incidents containing information on migrants’ origin country
Middle East and North Africa*	962	3,820	20%	14%
Sub-Saharan Africa	115	800	55%	15%
Asia-Pacific**	59	2,008	66%	95%
Central America	349	620	91%	58%
South America	12	34	83%	100%
Europe and the Mediterranean	846	15,163	62%	37%

Source: IOM’s Missing Migrants Project, 2017.

Notes: \* Includes the Horn of Africa.

\*\* The data for Asia-Pacific include a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimate of the total number of deaths in the Bay of Bengal in 2016, which includes an estimated 250 child deaths.

<sup>f</sup> Discussed in chapter 3, part 1 of this report: Mixed messages: Media coverage of migration and fatalities.

It is immediately apparent from this table that the quality and quantity of data on missing migrants in each region varies greatly, and that a large amount of data in one region does not necessarily mean that the data for that region is complete. Areas that are reasonably well-monitored and therefore have a large quantity of data, such as the Mediterranean, nonetheless lack high-quality data. For example, in Europe and the Mediterranean, Table b shows that only 62 per cent of the data collected by the Missing Migrants report includes data on age or gender, and only 37 per cent on the migrant's country of origin. The corresponding figures for Central America are 91 per cent and 58 per cent.

In the Mediterranean, this is due in part to the many migrants who are lost at sea, and also because reports on migrant deaths are often incomplete or inconsistent. For example, in both news media and official sources, migrants from a wide number of countries may be correctly or incorrectly described as “Maghreb”, “sub-Saharan”, or simply “African”. Similarly, as the majority of those crossing the Mediterranean are young males, it may be often assumed that most deaths occur among this group, and therefore there is no need to report on the age or sex of the missing migrant.<sup>6</sup> Even when details on a migrant's death are provided, they are often incomplete; for example, in many incidents, only the age of migrant children is reported, while in others the countries of origins of migrants are listed, but it is not clear how many of the missing came from each State.

Conversely, in some regions where there are relatively few data on migrant fatalities in total, the quality of the available data is high. Across Central and South America, for example, though there have been fewer than 400 incidents involving migrant deaths recorded since 2014, most of the available data include information on the age, gender and origin of the missing migrants. In part, this is because Spanish – the predominant language in Latin America – uses gendered nouns, but there is also a long history of activism and attention dedicated to identifying missing persons. This supports one of the messages of this report: in each region, lessons can be learned and potentially applied elsewhere to improve data on missing migrants worldwide.



Baker Jamal, a 17-year-old Iraqi, and his older brother tried to cross from Turkey to Kos, Greece, by boat on the night of 2 September 2015 when their boat sank. The older brother was saved by the coast guard, but the younger one is still missing. His father is still looking for him in the hopes that his youngest son is still alive. ©IOM/2015

<sup>6</sup> Further discussion of gender issues relating to data on missing migrants is discussed in the first chapter of part 1 of this report, and in chapter 3 on the Asia-Pacific in this report.

## Comparing regional data collection and analysis

The six regions included in this report were selected because each of them faces different challenges to improving data on missing migrants, and each has different approaches to data collection. Some regions exemplify ways to improve the quantity of data on migrant fatalities through increased monitoring. Others demonstrate interesting approaches to collecting more complete, high-quality data through collaboration between different actors working on the issue of migrant deaths and disappearances.

Given the lack of data in many regions of the world, regions where there is a large quantity of data on missing migrants stand out. Migration across the Mediterranean has been monitored by a wide variety of official and unofficial actors for more than a decade. Monitoring and data collection by multiple actors is the most straightforward way to improving the volume and accuracy of data on missing migrants, though in many regions, this would require a significant investment of time and money.

Also in the Mediterranean context, the work of the Deaths at the Border Database is an exemplary effort at collecting official, State-produced evidence on people who died during migration. The project gathered data on deaths from 1990 to 2013 from civil registries, coroners and other officials in Greece, Italy, Spain, Gibraltar and Malta. This database contains some of the most complete and detailed data on migrant deaths in a single region, which allows for comprehensive analysis of migrant deaths (but not disappearances) at Europe's southern borders. Though such an approach is time-consuming and labour-intensive, it could be replicated where reliable official sources on migrant deaths exist.

For regions in which this approach is not feasible because of a lack of strong institutions, the collection of survey-based data is one way to increase the coverage of data on migrant deaths and disappearances. Survey-based initiatives, such as those carried out in North Africa and the Horn of Africa, rely on interviews with migrants who are asked to report any deaths that they have seen during their journeys, and include many questions that give context to migration in the region. These surveys are limited by non-representative sampling and a lack of systems to verify reports of migrant fatalities, meaning that there is a risk that some deaths are recorded twice. However, given the limited number of surveys currently conducted, it is likely that the available data are gross undercounts of the true number of fatalities occurring in poorly monitored routes in Africa. Data from survey-based initiatives are by no means comprehensive, but nonetheless can help to improve the quantity of data in regions where access is difficult, and few other data on missing migrants are available.

The quality of data on missing migrants can also be improved by learning from the best practices in some areas and applying them in regions where data are poor. For example, the pioneering efforts of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology team in Central America has led to a collaboration between national authorities and community organizations, which strengthen data crucial to identifying missing migrants.<sup>h</sup> Similarly, the work of migrant shelters and non-governmental organizations in Mexico and the United States–Mexico border have improved outreach to migrants and their families, which can lead to more and better-quality data on the context and characteristics of migrant deaths and disappearances. In the Mediterranean, the UN Global Pulse uses big data to examine search-and-rescue operations that resulted in deaths, which can shed light on the situation during a migrant shipwreck, and lead to a better understanding of rescue at sea.<sup>i</sup> Collaboration between different actors and comparison between different data sets are both approaches that can be applied to many regions of the world to improve the understanding of deaths and disappearances that occur during migration.

<sup>h</sup> See chapter 6 in part 1 of this report: The Border Project: Towards a regional forensic mechanism for the identification of missing migrants.

<sup>i</sup> See chapter 2 in part 1 of this report: Using big data to study rescue patterns in the Mediterranean.

However, improving the quality and quantity of data on missing migrants will remain a challenge without an increased commitment from States. The work of the Pima County Medical Examiner (PCOME), which processes all migrant bodies recovered in Southern Arizona, is an outstanding example of a strong commitment by local authorities to humanely collect and publish data on the deaths that they process. The PCOME's collaboration with civil society groups and families of the missing is one way that authorities could improve the identification of missing migrants. In order to address the widespread lack of data on migrant fatalities, local authorities, States and regional organizations should take steps to standardize and make public data on migrant fatalities.

## Key recommendations

Five key recommendations emerge from the comparison of the regions and innovative methodologies discussed in both parts of *Fatal Journeys Volume 3*. Though data coverage and quality vary within and across regions, as do the capacities of official and unofficial actors, most, if not all, of the following steps could be taken across the world to improve data on missing migrants.

### **(a) Make better use of administrative data.**

Local, national and regional authorities that collect data on missing migrants should publish it wherever and whenever possible, in accordance with data protection standards. These authorities should also cooperate to standardize data collection so that it is more easily compared and cross-checked.

### **(b) Promote survey-based data collection.**

In areas where few institutions collect data on missing migrants, or where access is an issue, survey data should be collected in order to better understand the risks people face during migration.

### **(c) Explore new technologies.**

The quality and coverage of data on missing migrants can be improved through new technologies, including the use of big data. New and emerging data collection techniques and sources should be investigated in the interest of improving data on missing migrants and better understanding the context in which migrants die or disappear.

### **(d) Work with civil society and families.**

Data collection efforts led by civil society groups should be promoted, as they can provide new information and increase the likelihood that data can be verified. Collaboration between families of the missing and other actors should also be encouraged, as families can be a source of data on the missing, and their involvement in data collection and identification processes can help address the ambiguous loss that they face.

### **(e) Improve data sharing.**

Data on missing migrants tends to be scattered and fragmented, and there is great value in bringing disparate sources of data together. Data sharing should be bolstered across regions and sectors wherever possible, in order to maximize accuracy and improve the understanding of the risks migrants face across the world.

## I.1. Introduction

Persistent conflict in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region<sup>2</sup> has resulted in large-scale forced displacement, while consequent migration from the region, as well as from sub-Saharan Africa and Asia through MENA to Europe has been the focus of in-migration and asylum politics around the world. In the two-year period between 2015 and 2016, more than an estimated 1.7 million migrants entered Europe irregularly, having originated in or transited through the MENA region, while around 3 million refugees have sought safety in the Middle East and North Africa, and an additional 2.8 million in Turkey (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2017).

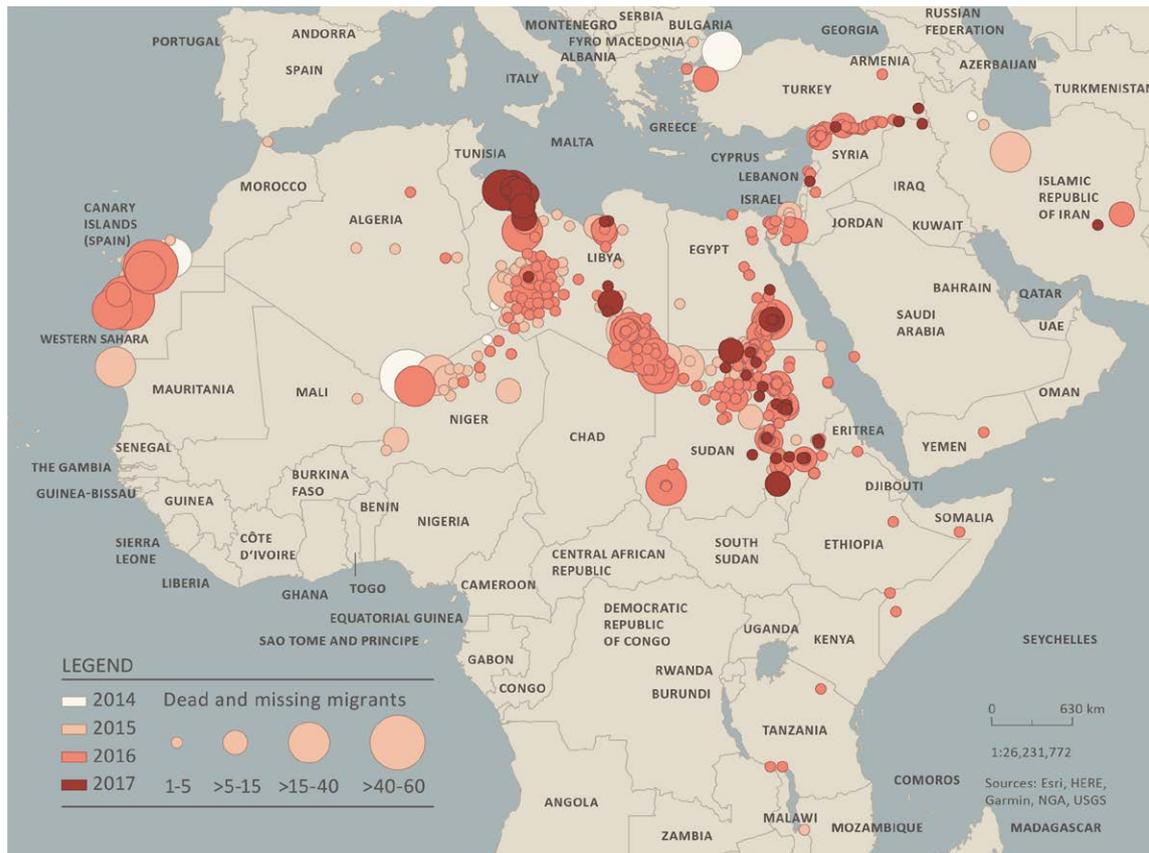
The journeys of Middle Eastern, African and Asian migrants crossing the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas have been the subject of intense media attention since 2013. However, relatively little research has been conducted on the risks encountered by migrants prior to reaching the coasts of Turkey and North Africa, or when travelling to other destinations in MENA. Travel out of countries in conflict in the Middle East or through North Africa can present significant and life-threatening risks that begin long before migrants reach the borders of Europe. Others are unable to escape from conflict to areas of safety; hundreds of thousands of people in the Middle East have been trapped in conflict zones or remain stranded in border regions unable to cross into neighbouring countries, while migrants in North Africa may become stuck in unsafe countries of transit.

While few data exist on the deaths of migrants in the MENA region, significant anecdotal evidence from migrants indicates substantial life-threatening risks. What data do exist point to thousands of deaths annually, with countless more unrecorded. This chapter primarily seeks to examine available data sources, methods and challenges. It also provides an overview of recent trends and the primary risks faced by migrants in the MENA region.

<sup>1</sup> Tara Brian is a Research Officer with the IOM Regional Office for Middle East and North Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Middle East: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. North Africa: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia.

**Map 1. Migrant deaths and disappearances recorded in the MENA region**



Source: International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Missing Migrants Project, data from January 2014 to June 2017.

Note: Names and boundaries indicated on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

## 1.2. Middle East

Propelled by wars in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Yemen, the Middle East region is one of the largest producers of forced displacement in the world, with over 5.7 million refugees originating in the region since mid-2016 and 12 million people displaced internally in Middle Eastern countries (UNHCR, 2017; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2017). An additional 5.27 million Palestinian refugees are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). This large-scale human displacement has resulted in asylum seekers fleeing to safety in neighbouring countries and further afield.

The largest source of refugees in the region, over 5 million people have fled the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, as well as Europe and other destinations, since the Syrian conflict began in 2011 (UNHCR, 2017). A further 6 million people are displaced inside the country (IDMC, 2017). In Iraq, protracted conflict and instability have caused long-term and multiple displacement, with more than 3.2 million people estimated to be displaced inside the country as of September 2017, and 2.3 million people previously displaced who have since returned home (IOM, 2017a).<sup>3</sup> In addition to internal displacement, there are 280,000 registered Iraqi refugees outside the country (UNHCR, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> IDMC notes that about 1.1 million IDPs were still living in displacement following the 2006–2008 sectarian conflict, meaning the total number of IDPs in the country could be significantly higher. See [www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/iraq/figures-analysis/](http://www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/iraq/figures-analysis/)

The majority of the Middle East's refugees have remained in the region, with over one quarter of all registered refugees in the world in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan alone (4.5 million) (UNHCR, 2017).<sup>4</sup> However, countries in the region – including Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey – have increasingly been closing their borders to Syrians and other refugees, leaving those fleeing violence with few legal exit routes (Vio, 2016).

In addition to the displacement in the Mashreq,<sup>5</sup> Yemen remains a key transit and destination country for labour migrants from the Horn of Africa who often endure brutal trips through the country. Travelling the other direction, Yemenis and other nationals may take risky journeys to escape Yemen's ongoing conflict, while more than 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) face famine and acute health and security needs inside the country (Task Force for Population Movement, 2017). Countries of the Mashreq and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)<sup>6</sup> are primary destinations for labour migrants from Africa and Asia; apart from transit through Yemen, these migration routes will not be dealt with in this chapter as, broadly speaking, safety concerns are more prominent once at the destination than during the migration journey.<sup>7</sup> The section will focus on migration out of the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq and through Yemen.

## **1.2.1. Risks to life for migrants in the Middle East**

### *Exit from conflict: Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq*

A 2016 analysis conducted by IOM of risks during migration from Iraq to Europe identifies three stages of risk: (a) while exiting Iraq; (b) during transit; and (c) once reaching the destination (Malakooti, 2016). Risks during exit and transit vary, with movement by land via the Syrian Arab Republic and into Turkey identified as the most dangerous route out of the country. The report highlights dangers of violating Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) exit bans, transit through checkpoints of various groups, and through areas in conflict. Similar risks are reported for Syrians travelling by land out of the country (see for example Alwani, 2016; Dettmer, 2016). The dangers of the journeys out of war-torn countries like Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic mean migrants must rely on smugglers not only to cross borders, but also for travelling through their countries. Smugglers themselves often face high risks, with reports of shootings and deaths of smugglers (Malakooti, 2016). Aside from anecdotal evidence, there are no comprehensive figures of deaths occurring on these journeys through Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

### *Crossing borders*

The reduction of legal exits out of the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq posed by increasingly sealed international boundaries means those who attempt to cross borders must travel irregularly, taking riskier, more arduous and expensive routes. Testimonials from migrants report the challenges of entering Turkey through clandestine routes, with the majority of migrants attempting multiple times before they manage to enter undetected (Malakooti, 2016; Vio, 2016; Alkousaa and Popp, 2016). Various reports describe shootings at the border (Vio, 2016; Amnesty International, 2016; Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2016), and even reported minefield explosions (Malakooti, 2016). IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) recorded 79 deaths attributed to shootings on the Turkish border in 2016, based on reports from HRW and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (IOM, 2017c).

<sup>4</sup> An additional 5.27 million Palestinian refugees are registered with the UNRWA and not included in this calculation.

<sup>5</sup> As used by IOM, this subregion includes Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories and the Syrian Arab Republic.

<sup>6</sup> Includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

<sup>7</sup> Although this will not be discussed here, various efforts have been made to document occupational deaths occurring in the GCC region.

## Immobility

The distinction between migration-related and conflict-related deaths is at times blurred in the Middle East context. Migration can be a way to survive, but is not an option for all. Those who cannot leave their homes or cross a border to safety, either due to policy, lack of physical ability or resources are left in danger. As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2017) observes, media focus has been on international forced displacement, with little attention to internally displaced, and even less to those in conditions of involuntary immobility, who are unable to move to escape violence and hardship by crossing a border. While this report focuses on deaths during migration, the concept of involuntary immobility and fatality is an important consideration when discussing migration deaths in the context of forced displacement, and consequent data collection parameters.

Since the closure of Turkey's land border with the Syrian Arab Republic to all but the seriously injured beginning in 2015, tens of thousands of Syrians have become trapped in informal camps along the Syrian side of the border, with particular surges of people amassing at the border in early 2016 (HRW, 2016). Despite humanitarian aid, poor conditions have led to reported deaths in these border camps, while the shifting battle in northern Syrian Arab Republic has variously left camps along the border dangerously close to active conflict (ibid.).<sup>8</sup> The closure of Jordan's border with the Syrian Arab Republic has also led to tens of thousands of migrants becoming stranded along the border in precarious conditions (Mixed Migration Platform, 2017; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2017).

In addition to those stranded on borders, hundreds of thousands remain stuck in active conflict areas, unable to flee to safety. Notable examples include Mosul, Iraq, and Raqqa, the Syrian Arab Republic, where ISIL restrictions on exit contributed to situations in which hundreds of thousands of residents became trapped in the midst of conflict or risked extremely dangerous exits (Petkova, 2017; Prickett, 2017; CBC, 2017; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2017).

### 1.2.2. Mixed migration flows through Yemen and risks to life

In 2016, a record number of 117,000 migrants were estimated to have entered Yemen irregularly, mainly from Ethiopia and Somalia (Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS), 2017). Many seek to reach Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, although they may become stranded in Yemen. Not only do migrants face danger to their lives crossing the sea (see chapter 2), but once reaching Yemen, they are frequently exposed to abuses and danger, including rampant kidnapping and instances of torture to extract ransoms (Al-Zikry and Michael, 2017; IOM interview 1 and 2, 2017;<sup>9</sup> RMMS, 2017; Savage and Ali Kalfod, 2016; HRW, 2014). Based on over 4,000 screening interviews with migrants seeking assistance at IOM Migrant Response Points (MRPs) in Aden and Al Hudaydah in 2016, nearly 40 per cent reported they had been abducted and 30 per cent reported being tortured.<sup>10</sup> While data are not available, stories of death resulting from torture and outright killings are common (Al-Zikry and Michael, 2017; IOM interview 1, 2017; RMMS, 2017). IOM-run MRPs record abuses suffered by migrants at the hands of smugglers and traffickers, but no data are recorded on numbers of deaths witnessed (IOM interviews 1, 2 and 3, 2017) (see section 2.3. for more details).

<sup>8</sup> See D. Ibarra Sanchez, "Syrian refugees mass at Turkish border", *Al Jazeera*, 28 February 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Interview 1: Phone interview with Esam Al-Makhzomi and Hebah Al-Dhursi, IOM Yemen, Aden, 15 March 2017. Interview 2: Phone interview with Chissey Mueller, IOM Yemen, 16 March 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Calculation based on monthly Migrant Snapshots, available on IOM Yemen's website [www.iom.int/countries/yemen](http://www.iom.int/countries/yemen). Note that figures for January 2016 were excluded from the calculation, as the number interviewed that month is not indicated.

Once migrants are released from smugglers' "dens", those who continue their journeys risk recapture or death due to the ongoing conflict, or while attempting to cross through the border area with Saudi Arabia, portions of which are an active conflict zone (IOM interviews, 2017; RMMS, 2017; Al-Zikry and Michael, 2017). Migrants have also faced risks during detention and deportation, with several temporary deportation campaigns leading to deaths due to poor treatment, including at least 24 reported in the fall of 2016 (IOM interview 1, 2017; Schlein, 2016).

While people migrate into Yemen, others are leaving. By the end of 2016, more than 183,000 Yemenis and other nationals had arrived in the Horn of Africa and Gulf countries since the start of the Yemen conflict in March 2015, although numbers who have subsequently returned to Yemen are unknown (RMMS, 2017). In March 2017, 42 Somali refugees were killed while crossing the Red Sea following a military attack on their boat (Beaumont, 2017).



Shimbiro, Somalia. Somali and Ethiopian migrants prepare to board one of three smuggler's boats that will depart simultaneously for Yemen, November 2007. © NOOR 2007 (Photo: Alixandra Fazzina)

### **I.2.3. Data sources**

There is no systematic source of data on migrant deaths in the Middle East. Some data do exist on occupational deaths of migrant workers in the Gulf region – for instance in Nepal with regards to its workers abroad. However, data on deaths during migration are not collected systematically, with the exception of some data on deaths during sea crossings between the Horn of Africa and Yemen (see chapter 2). IOM's MMP recorded 114 deaths of migrants in the Middle East in 2016, with data compiled from various sources – most notably reports of HRW and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights whose reporting accounts for more than half of Middle East deaths recorded by MMP (IOM, 2017b).

#### ***IOM Migrant Response Points in Yemen***

In 2016, IOM supported more than 21,000 migrants at MRPs in Aden and Al Hudaydah, with about 25 per cent of migrants screened for protection concerns and needs (IOM interview 2, 2017). Screening interviews include questions on abuses suffered, including instances of abduction, torture, extortion, robbery and psychological abuse, among others. As noted in the previous section, although migrants do mention witnessing deaths at times, these are not recorded systematically.

#### ***Media, ad hoc reporting and research***

Data on deaths are often compiled from media sources and ad hoc reporting of international or local organizations operating along migration routes – for instance Amnesty International, HRW and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights publish some information on deaths, as part of broader analysis of human rights concerns and violations. Information tends to be more available on border regions, due to the relative “visibility” of these areas. As noted by IOM's MMP, over 70 per cent of deaths recorded in the Middle East in 2016 were along the border between the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey. These numbers reflect the relative availability of data on the border in contrast to the lack of data for areas within the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and other internal land routes (IOM, 2017c).

Interviews with migrants, usually in the context of research done on irregular routes to Europe, may include anecdotal mention of deaths witnessed, but to date there has been no attempt to consolidate these reports or to conduct large-scale data collection with the objective of quantifying migrant deaths. Such research could contribute to the knowledge of the scale of deaths and impacts of policy on risk levels.

### **I.2.4. Data challenges and recommendations**

The context of ongoing conflict in countries and areas through which migrants are moving in the Middle East increases the challenges for detection of deaths en route, whether information is collected by humanitarian agencies and authorities or reported by media. Systems that could overcome this challenge of “access” to a degree could be similar to those being tried in Africa, which involve ongoing administration of surveys with migrants on the move and at destinations. Such mechanisms could be established through, for instance, IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) in Iraq, or DTM Flow Monitoring Surveys with migrants on arrival in Europe, as is already being done on the Central Mediterranean. As discussed more in the following section on North Africa, challenges arise with these methods, including inability to verify reported incidents, access a representative sample and ensure data reliability, among others. However, data could be indicative of risk levels and factors.

An additional challenge in the Middle East raised by IOM in Yemen is posed by the fact that, at least in the case of Yemen, limited support structures exist for migrants who have experienced the death of a relative, both with regards to tracing of missing persons, as well as burial or repatriation of bodies, and as such organizations may be reluctant to raise the issue with migrants they assist (IOM interview 2, 2017).

### 1.3. North Africa

North Africa has long been a destination for labour migrants and a transit zone for Africans aiming to reach Europe. In recent years, the number of migrants using this route has increased, with over half a million people arriving in Europe via North Africa between 2014 and 2016, and over 115,000 in 2017 as of the end of September (Frontex, 2017). In the process, more than 13,500 people have lost their lives in the sea crossing from North Africa (IOM, 2017b),<sup>11</sup> 97 per cent of them in the Central Mediterranean between Libya and Italy. Less visible to the public eye, migrants face daunting risks and human rights abuses as they journey through sub-Saharan and Northern Africa to reach the coast. While data are poor, it is likely that thousands of migrants lose their lives each year in the attempt to navigate these overland journeys, with horrific stories of abuse, torture and bonded labour along the way.

Movement along routes from Africa to Europe has shifted over the years with most recent migration concentrated on the Central Mediterranean, mainly via Libya and to a much lesser degree Egypt, as well as some departures from Tunisia and Algeria. As discussed in chapter 6, migration also occurs along the Western Mediterranean route through Morocco into Spain. Numbers of arrivals to Italy from Libya more than tripled in 2014, propelled by over 42,000 Syrians seeking asylum in Europe,<sup>12</sup> as well as shifts in the smuggling market following the downfall of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi (Micallef, 2017). Although numbers of Syrians greatly declined in 2015 and 2016, migration of West Africans has increased, with prominent nationalities including Nigerians, Guineans, Ivoirians, Gambians, and Senegalese, as well as Bangladeshis, Moroccans and others.<sup>13</sup> Still among the top nationalities arriving in Italy, the number of migrants from the Horn of Africa decreased in 2016 and the first half of 2017 compared to previous years.

A much smaller share of total numbers of migrants on the Central Mediterranean route depart from Egypt, with some reports suggesting Egypt may be chosen as a safer alternative to Libya (Sollitt and Frouws, 2016). Information regarding deaths in North Africa is largely focused on those occurring at sea; not until recently has there been any effort to collect data on deaths occurring during overland journeys through sub-Saharan and North Africa.

<sup>11</sup> Based on data from January 2014 through end of September 2017, along the Western and Central Mediterranean routes.

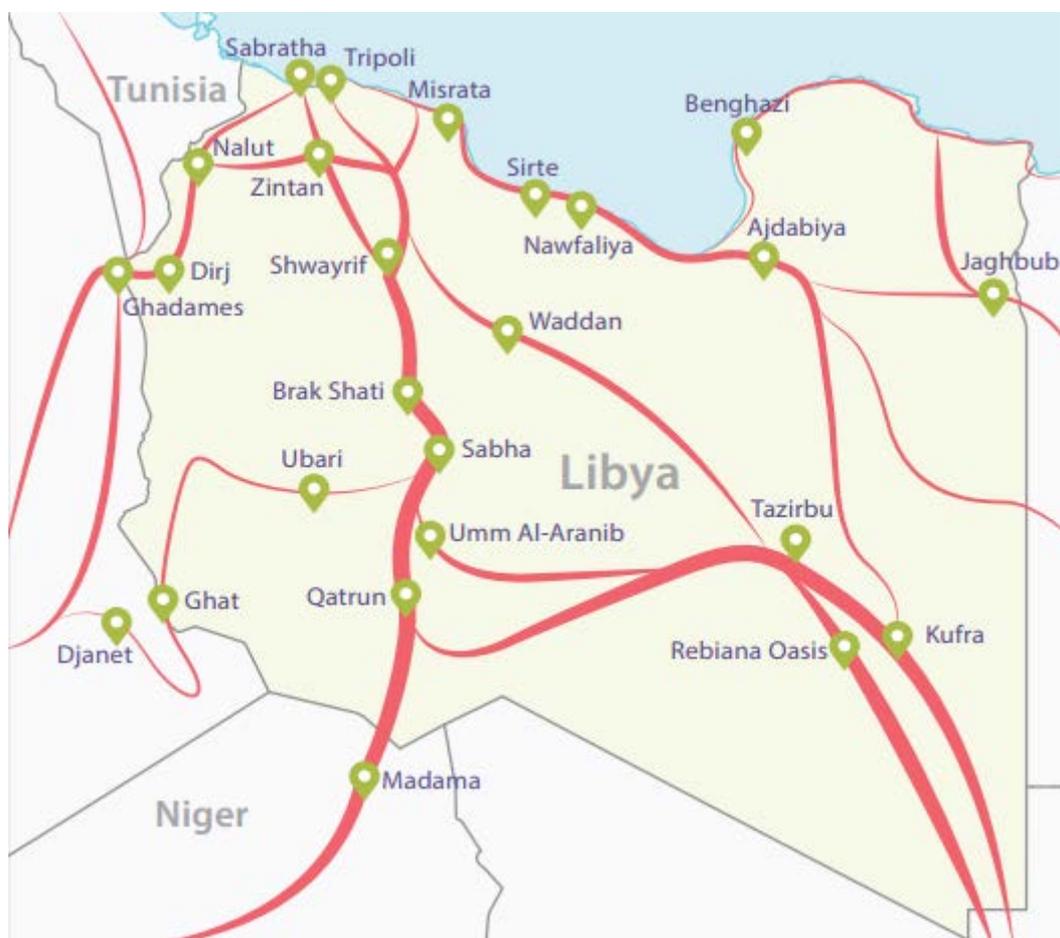
<sup>12</sup> Data provided to IOM by Italian Ministry of Interior, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Data provided to IOM by Italian Ministry of Interior, 2017.

### I.3.1. Risks to life in North Africa

#### To and through Libya

**Map 2. Routes through Libya's main smuggling hubs**



Source: Micallef, 2017.

Note: Names and boundaries indicated on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

Migrants from sub-Saharan African countries reach Libya through a number of overland desert routes, typically through the Niger and Sudan, and to a lesser extent via crossings into Libya from Egypt or through Algeria (Micallef, 2017). These overland journeys across brutal terrain involve risks posed by bandits and smugglers, including robbery, abuse, rape and neglect, at times leading to death (Reitano and Tinti, 2015). Poor treatment by smugglers includes abandoning injured or ill migrants along the wayside, or refusing to return for migrants who fall off moving vehicles. In June 2017, 44 Ghanaian and Nigerian migrants were reported to have died from thirst after their vehicle broke down in northern Niger (BBC, 2017), and similar stories have been reported in previous years (for example BBC, 2016). A small survey by the Mixed Migration Hub (MHub) found that one quarter of deaths reported in the Sahara were attributed to smugglers refusing to stop vehicles when someone fell off (MHub, 2017). Sexual abuse and rape are also quite widely reported in interviews with migrants, with sex at times used as a form of payment for progression along the journey (for example, see MHub, 2016). Many migrants work along their journeys to and within Libya, including through assisting smugglers (Kemp, 2017), or may enter into forms of indentured or bonded labour (Micallef, 2017).

Once in Libya, migrants face perhaps the most treacherous portion of their journey. Kidnappings and forced labour are common, with migrants often held in “connection houses”, farms, warehouses or other locations and forced to work, and/or held captive until a ransom is paid. They are often beaten, abused and tortured to elicit a larger and quicker ransom; numerous reports document resulting deaths (Kemp, 2017; OHCHR and United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), 2016; Amnesty International, 2015; Micallef, 2015).

*They beat me every day with an electricity cable, and they showed me pictures of people who they had killed or skeletons in the desert telling me: “If your family doesn’t pay, this is what will happen to you”.*

- Eritrean migrant who was held for 15 days in an unknown location in Libya, interviewed in Sicily in May 2016. His family paid USD 3,000 for his release (Micallef, 2017:35).

Arbitrary detention in Libya is widespread, including in more informal detention under the control of armed groups and smuggling and trafficking networks (UNSMIL, 2016). UNSMIL has highlighted the deplorable conditions of detention facilities in Libya, noting numerous and consistent reports of torture, including sexual and physical abuses, and forced labour under the auspices of armed groups with access to detention centres, as well as outright killings (UNSMIL, 2016; OHCHR and UNSMIL, 2016). Reitano and Tinti’s 2015 report on the economics of smuggling to Europe highlights the involvement of militia and smuggling networks in the detention “business” in Libya, describing reports of guards offering to facilitate release from detention if the migrant would purchase a boat trip, or of migrants being forced onto boats directly from detention. Micallef’s report documents similar incidents (2017).

*They treated us like animals. This is what they call us – “animals”. ... For our captors, it does not matter if we die.*

- 16-year-old Somali migrant who had witnessed the death of his friend due to sickness and beatings, described to UNSMIL (OHCHR and UNSMIL, 2016:19).

Based on interviews with 1,602 migrants in early 2017 who had recently arrived in Italy, IOM DTM’s Flow Monitoring Survey found that the majority had directly experienced some form of exploitation – possibly amounting to human trafficking – during their journey, with 91 per cent of reported abuses occurring in Libya (IOM, 2017d). Three quarters (76%) answered “yes” to at least one of four indicators of exploitation, including being held against their will (64%), and being forced to work or perform activities against their will (36%).<sup>14</sup> IOM and UNICEF’s 2017 report *Harrowing Journeys* finds that adolescents and youth are more likely than adults to be exploited along the Central Mediterranean route, particularly those from sub-Saharan Africa, as well as those travelling alone and with lower levels of education. Boys and young men were more likely to report exploitation, although the survey data did not cover all forms of exploitation including sexual exploitation. The report is based on data collected through IOM Flow Monitoring Surveys from 11,000 adolescents and youth (ages 14–24) arriving in Europe in 2016 and 2017.

In a survey conducted by MHub of 341 migrants who had arrived in Italy, Libya was similarly identified as the most dangerous segment of the journey, with 78 per cent of reported abuses occurring there (MHub, 2016). The vast majority of migrants who travelled through Libya reported experiencing or witnessing forced labour (95%), arbitrary detention (88%), physical abuse (83%) and sexual abuse (76%). Note that MHub’s survey asks migrants to also report on events they have witnessed, in addition to those directly experienced, which reduces the ability to verify reported events, and increases the chances of double counting. Nonetheless, both surveys point to the very high degree of abuse occurring in Libya.

<sup>14</sup> Other questions used as proxy indicators are working without receiving the expected remuneration, and being approached with offers for arranged marriage. A forthcoming in-depth analysis of survey data of over 16,000 migrants who arrived in Europe in 2015/2016 is expected to be published by IOM in the fall of 2017.

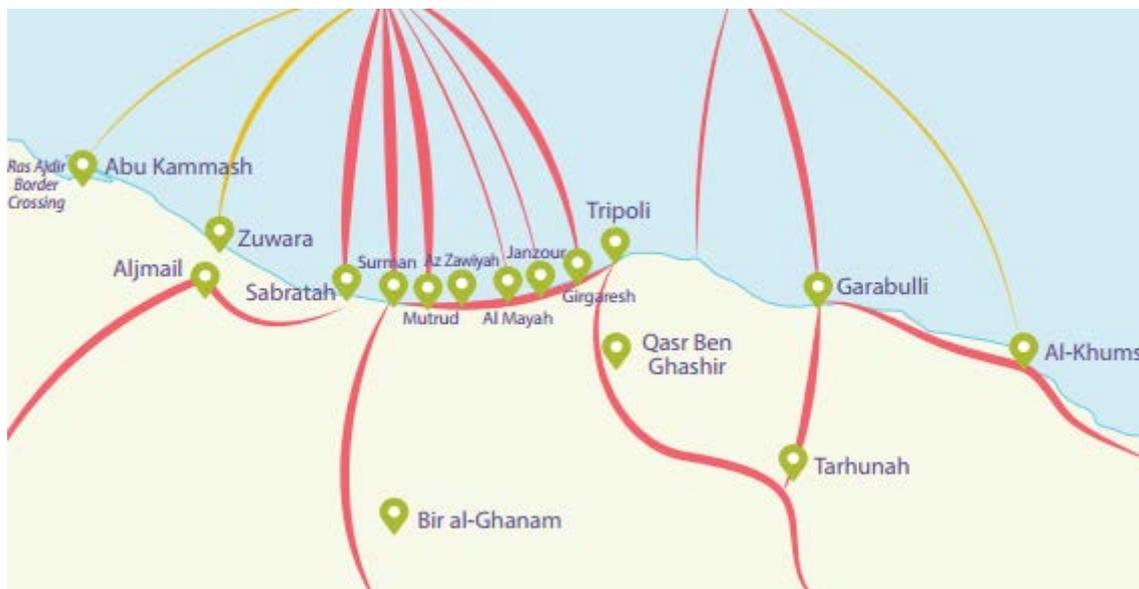
With return home often not possible, migrants may face limited alternatives to the Mediterranean crossing (Altai Consulting, 2015). As Kemp says in his damning report of conditions in Libya, “For tens of thousands of migrants in the country at the moment, they have no means of escape.” As emphasis by international actors grows on capacitating Libyan Coast Guard and rescuing migrants before they leave Libyan waters, those avenues for exit have become even scarcer.

*Once in Tripoli, we were imprisoned by the Libyan police. They used to beat us every day. ... We ate once a day, some biscuits, and sometimes they suspended the feeding for a few days. We were something like 40 prisoners in a 4x4 [meter] room. We were forced to work outside the prison, and those who refused to work were just shot and killed. After one year, they took us to the coast and forced us to go on a boat. That was the beginning of our way to Italy. We did not have any idea of where we were going to.*

— Male migrant from Mali interviewed in Venice in January 2017 (MHub, 2017).

### Libyan coast

**Map 3. Smuggling points on the coast of Libya**



Source: Micallef, 2017.

While sea crossings from Libya have always been dangerous, changing dynamics following the Libyan revolution have augmented the risks faced by migrants and the subsequent mortality rate (Micallef, 2017). A combination of increased competition (facilitated by lowering entry costs and market liberalization), a shortage of sturdier traditional vessels and the presence of rescue operations moving increasingly closer to the Libyan coast, Micallef argues, converged to create particularly lethal conditions for migrants. Smugglers were now overloading poorer quality boats, not equipped to reach their final destination (Micallef, 2017; Reitano and Tinti, 2015). Subsequent shifts in the European Union rescue policy and operations in the Mediterranean have had no success in reducing loss of life.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Some evidence suggests Operation Sophia’s policy of interdiction at sea has made smugglers even more careless about the boats and motors used to transport migrants, effectively heightening risks. See A. Travis, “EU-UK naval mission on people smuggling led to more deaths, report says”, *The Guardian*, 11 July 2017.

Use of force and violence also appears more prevalent, with a large number of migrants reporting being forced onto unsafe boats against their will (Reitano and Tinti, 2015). There are various reports from migrants, as well as international organizations carrying out search and rescue, of dangerous and life-threatening interceptions by armed groups, at times from the Libyan Coast Guard or masquerading as such (OHCHR and UNSMIL, 2016).<sup>16</sup> Escalation of tensions and unsafe rescue conditions have led civil society actors to suspend their operations in the Mediterranean, beginning in September 2017. Recent reports have raised strong concerns regarding unsafe practices of rescue at sea in Libyan waters and disembarkation in Libya (for example, Amnesty International, 2017).

### *In and through Egypt*

Much smaller numbers of migrants depart for Italy from the coast of Egypt, having entered the country through Sudan, or having decided to move onwards after residing in Egypt for some time. Some evidence suggests there may be increased numbers of migrants stranded in the country (De Bel-Air, 2016; Reidy, 2017), mainly from the Horn of Africa and Sudan, but also Syrians who entered Egypt by air prior to the introduction of visa requirements in 2013. Economic instability in Egypt, insecurity for migrants within local communities and challenges to regularize their stay may increase the vulnerabilities of migrants in irregular situations and exert pressure on the Mediterranean route. However, following initial increases in departures from the country in the first half of 2016, numbers have subsequently fallen, with only very few departures thus far in 2017 – perhaps the result of enhanced law enforcement (Reidy, 2017). Some evidence suggests migrants may be at risk of organ trafficking in Egypt, although absolute numbers are likely very small. IOM's Flow Monitoring Survey in Italy in 2017 found 1.5 per cent of respondents reported to know of instances during the journey where people have been forced to give either blood, organs or body parts against their will, with the majority of incidents occurring in Libya and Egypt (IOM, 2017d). In 2016, IOM Egypt assisted two migrants who had experienced organ removal.<sup>17</sup>

In 2016, several large shipwrecks occurred near the coast of Egypt or on routes usually taken from Egypt. In April 2016, 400 people died in a shipwreck off the eastern coast of Libya, with at least several passengers having initially departed from Alexandria before boarding a boat in Tobruk, Libya (Kingsley and Michaelson, 2016; Micallef, 2017). Several months later in June, a ship which had departed from Egypt capsized near Crete, causing the death of over 320 migrants from Egypt and the Horn and Eastern Africa (IOM, 2016). In September 2016, nearly 300 migrants are estimated to have perished following a shipwreck off the coast of Egypt (*Reuters*, 2016).

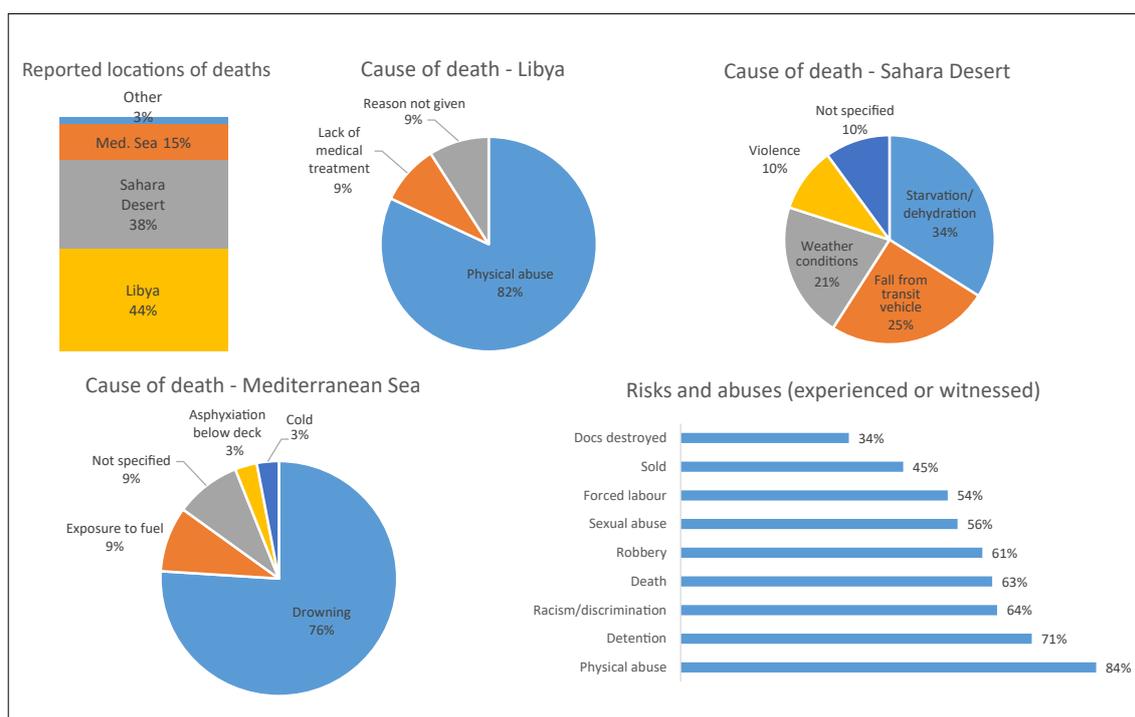
### **1.3.2. Deaths of migrants in North Africa**

In the MHub's survey of 380 migrants who had arrived in Italy in 2016, two thirds (65%) reported witnessing one or more deaths during their journey, mainly in Libya (44%) or the Sahara Desert (38%) (MHub, 2017). Of deaths reported in Libya, more than 80 per cent were attributed to physical abuse. In contrast, the majority which occurred in the Sahara were due to conditions of the journey and neglect by smugglers (see Figure 1).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example: An incident in February 2015 when armed smugglers threatened an Italian Coast Guard rescue crew and took off with the migrants' boat following the rescue (*The Telegraph*, 2015); an incident in April 2015 in which armed smugglers took back a vessel following rescue (Arnarsdóttir, 2015); an attack on a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) rescue ship occurred in August 2016 by armed men initially thought to be from the Libyan Navy, but the circumstances remain unclear (MSF, 2016); an incident from May 2017 in which shots were fired at migrant boats (Khomami, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Egyptian authorities arrested over 35 people suspected of involvement in organ trafficking rings in two separate incidents between December 2016 and August 2017. See *BBC*, "Egypt arrests 'organ trafficking ring'", 2 December 2016; and A.-M. Al-Youm, "Egyptian authorities arrest 12 suspects over human organ trafficking", *Egypt Independent*, 23 August 2017.

**Figure 1. Causes of deaths witnessed by migrants, interviewed in Italy between March 2016 and January 2017**



Source: Recreated from MHub, Survey Snapshot: Italy, January 2017. Based on interviews with 381 migrants throughout Italy.

Based on interviews with 3,560 migrants from the Horn of Africa between 2014 and early 2017, the Danish Refugee Council's Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) recorded more than 2,500 deaths that migrant interviewees reported witnessing, mainly in Libya and Sudan (see chapter 2, which contains detailed analysis of 4Mi data).<sup>18</sup>

Based on 4Mi, media reports and other sources, IOM reported 1,382 deaths in North Africa in 2016. Half of these were due to sickness, dehydration, starvation or exposure, while 24 per cent were due to abuse leading to death or outright killings (IOM, 2017c). The Libyan Red Crescent recovered 462 bodies from the shores of Libya in 2016, a number roughly similar to 2015.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.3.3. Data sources and challenges

As noted in previous editions of *Fatal Journeys*, tracking deaths on remote land routes is a daunting endeavor that likely can never be complete. Although a shipwreck in the heavily patrolled Mediterranean can generate media coverage and State attention, deaths occurring in frequent but small numbers on remote land areas often go unrecorded in any sort of official or even unofficial statistics. Furthermore, the high involvement of criminal actors and smugglers in causing deaths of migrants, and the collusion or direct involvement of government authorities, limits access to information on these cases. Prosecution of smugglers and other criminals can bring information to light, but it offers only a highly incomplete source of data.

Until recently, almost all information published on migrant deaths in North Africa were ad hoc reports from media that quoted numbers from aid agencies, authorities or interviews with migrants or other actors. In the past few years, several initiatives have emerged that begin to provide data on the region, mainly relying on interviews with migrants in Africa or Europe.

<sup>18</sup> See also RMMS, *Forgotten fatalities: the number of migrant deaths before reaching the Mediterranean*. June 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Nasir Hajaj from the Libyan Red Crescent, via e-mail. June 2017.

### **Mixed Migration Hub (MHub) surveys**

MHub is an inter-agency knowledge hub and secretariat of the North Africa Mixed Migration Task Force comprised of eight UN agencies and international organizations engaged in the North Africa region. In 2015, MHub began carrying out surveys in several origin, transit and destination countries of migrants moving through North Africa. At the time of writing, surveys are conducted in Italy, Tunisia and Morocco by a single data collector in each of the countries. The surveys focus on risks and conditions of the journey, and include a question on deaths witnessed. While a promising initiative, it should be kept in mind that sample sizes are small and not representative of the whole population on the move. Monitoring of sampling and data quality is largely left to the discretion of the data collector, reducing possibilities for more robust data triangulation or quality control.

The results of surveys carried out in Italy throughout 2016 are published in the snapshot report – Survey Snapshot: Italy, January 2017 – and a synopsis was presented in the previous section of this chapter.

**Figure 2. Question in MHub survey regarding migrant deaths**

Did you witness the death of another on your journey?  Yes  No

If yes:

How many deaths did you witness? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did this take place? city \_\_\_\_\_ country \_\_\_\_\_

What was the cause of death?  Hunger  Thirst  Exposure  Drowning  Beating/torture  Fell off vehicle  
 Car accident  Shot  Burned  Asphyxiation  Other – Specify \_\_\_\_\_

Who was responsible for this?  border officials  citizens  employer  government soldiers  I do not know  migrants  
 police  smugglers  traffickers  militia  local gang member(s)  other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Source: MHub, 2017.

### **Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi)**

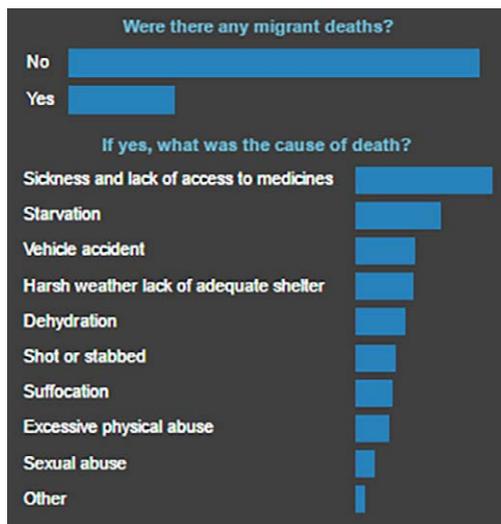
An initiative of the Danish Refugee Council, 4Mi collects and analyses data on mixed migration flows of migrants originating in the Horn of Africa. The initiative was launched in 2014 and in its first phase until February 2017 gathered over 3,560 individual interviews with migrants, smugglers and observers. 4Mi relies on a network of local data monitors – usually refugees – positioned in migration hubs in Africa and Europe who collect data using a mobile app.<sup>20</sup> Additional detail and analysis of 4Mi is included in chapter 2.

In North Africa, Egypt is the only country with data monitors currently in place (in Cairo), although monitors in Europe also provide information on North Africa. RMMS is in process of setting up monitors in Libya, although progress has been slow. 4Mi faces similar challenges to MHub, with little ability to monitor data quality or ensure a representative sample.

The 4Mi survey asks if the respondent witnessed any deaths during his or her journey, and if so, the cause of death. Additionally, respondents are asked if anyone from their group went missing. Figure 3 is a sample graphic of 4Mi data.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Chris Horwood, Global Specialist Lead on Mixed Migration, Global Mixed Migration Secretariat, 11 April 2017.

**Figure 3. Sample 4Mi data on migrant deaths**



Source: 4Mi, 2017.

4Mi, MHub and other tools that rely on interviews with migrants can provide valuable information on the risks and potential prevalence of death, however as noted, significant methodological challenges remain. When looking at data on deaths specifically, central challenges involve the inability to verify reported information, relatively small sample sizes that are not necessarily representative, and the possibility of double counting the same incident reported independently by more than one respondent. Further training of data collectors is needed to reduce the likelihood of this, as well as address other challenges in the data collection process and data quality. An additional challenge can be lack of precise information or detail, on for instance, location and date of an event.



A boat left Libyan shores with 133 people on board near Azzwayah City, Libya, on 20 February. Only 24 survived. © Libyan Red Crescent

### **Libyan Red Crescent**

The Libyan Red Crescent is involved in retrieval of bodies that wash up on the shores of Libya, and keeps data on bodies recovered. These data, although selective, are highly useful and some of the only verifiable data existing on deaths in the North Africa region. Data are not published but can be requested. While the Libyan Red Crescent is not actively involved in identification, it does receive ad hoc requests from the International Committee of the Red Cross's Restoring Family Links programme regarding tracing of missing persons.<sup>21</sup>

### **IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP)**

While not in itself not collecting primary data, IOM's MMP represents the first attempt to bring together all available data on migrant deaths globally into consolidated estimates. In the North Africa and Sahara region, MMP relies primarily on the data gathered through 4Mi, IOM country offices and media, as well as increasing use of MHub's survey data when possible. A challenge in the use of these various sources includes the potential for double counting if migrants participating in one or more of the initiatives report the same incident, or an incident reported by a migrant is also covered in the media. Efforts are being made to reduce this as much as possible. See [missingmigrants.iom.int/methodology](https://missingmigrants.iom.int/methodology) and Part 1 of this report for more details on the methodology of MMP.

### **Media**

The media provide another source of information, which is addressed in chapter 3 of Part 1.

## **I.3.4. Data recommendations**

Some positive steps have been taking place in the North Africa region with regards to data collection on deaths during migration; strengthening these mechanisms would be a start to improving data on deaths in the region. In the past two years, both MHub and 4Mi tools have emerged, and despite shortcomings outlined above, they can be refined to produce more robust data over time. Another possible source of data on deaths is IOM DTM's Flow Monitoring surveys currently conducted in Libya and in some transit countries, such as the Niger, and destination countries. DTM surveys initially already publish data on incidence of exploitation, as presented earlier, and could be expanded to include questions on deaths witnessed. The high number of migrants reached through DTM could provide a valuable source of data on deaths, to complement smaller-scale, more qualitative methods of MHub and others. As noted in the previous section, such survey methods present various challenges that must be addressed to the extent possible, including for instance the possibility of double-counting incidents, reliability of information and non-representative sampling. It is essential that there is cooperation and coordination between these various initiatives to promote comparability and avoid duplication of data. Alternative sources of data can also be explored with the aim of more systematic collection and reporting, such as numbers of bodies retrieved by the Red Crescent in Libya and other North African countries where applicable, as well as data from government sources whenever possible to obtain.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Libyan Red Crescent, via e-mail, June 2017.

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Interview 1 by phone with Esam Al-Makhzomi and Hebah Al-Dhurasi, IOM Yemen, Aden, 15 March 2017.

Interview 2 by phone with Chissey Mueller, IOM Yemen, 16 March 2017.

Interview 3 by phone with Fawaz Al Asemi, Manal Gahaf, Hanan Hajori, IOM Yemen, Al Hudaydah, 19 March 2017.

Interview 4 by phone with Chris Horwood, Global Specialist Lead on Mixed Migration, Global Mixed Migration Secretariat, 11 April 2017.

Interview 5 by e-mail with Nasir Hajaj, Libyan Red Crescent, via e-mail, 9 June 2017.



# Chapter 2 | Sub-Saharan Africa

Chris Horwood<sup>22</sup>

## 2.1. Introduction: Migration trends and policy context

This chapter investigates issues concerning migrant deaths in the sub-Saharan African (SSA) region,<sup>23</sup> in particular, data sources concerning migrant deaths. The region is very large and home to over 1 billion people, a small but growing proportion of whom are migrants or refugees. The three areas of significant population movement are Western Africa, the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa. These will be the focus of this analysis.

Stereotypical, often alarmist popular descriptions of migration out of Africa, such as floods, invasions, crushes and surges, distorts the empirical realities of African mobility. The reality is that movement within Africa is far higher – in some regions (Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) in particular) the South-to-South migration may be as high as 80 per cent of all movement. Nevertheless, there have been some important recent changes in intracontinental and extracontinental migration – particularly relating to SSA countries – that are integral to the understanding of the context in which migration fatalities occur. These dynamics are important to understand because they will shape migration for some years to come, and their characteristics help cause and perpetuate migrant deaths.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.1.1. Increased movement due to demographic changes

A new International Monetary Fund (IMF) study shows that while the migration rate has remained stable at about 2 per cent of the population (and lower than the global average of 3%), the SSA region has meanwhile doubled its population between 1990 and 2013 (Gonzalez-Garcia, 2016). Recording the most rapid population growth in the world, the population of the region is projected to increase further from about 1 billion in 2016 to 2 billion in 2050, and possibly 2.7 billion by 2060 (Bakilana, 2015). These critical demographic changes have had a direct impact on the volume of movement especially when compounded with other drivers including global and regional economic inequalities, persistent crisis in some areas (conflict, persecution, insurgency, drought, mass unemployment and so forth), along with rapid economic development and rising aspirations.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Horwood is a political scientist and development economist based in East Africa for more than 12 years. He is the Founding Coordinator of the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, and works on mixed migration data, analysis and research in the Horn of Africa and Yemen region.

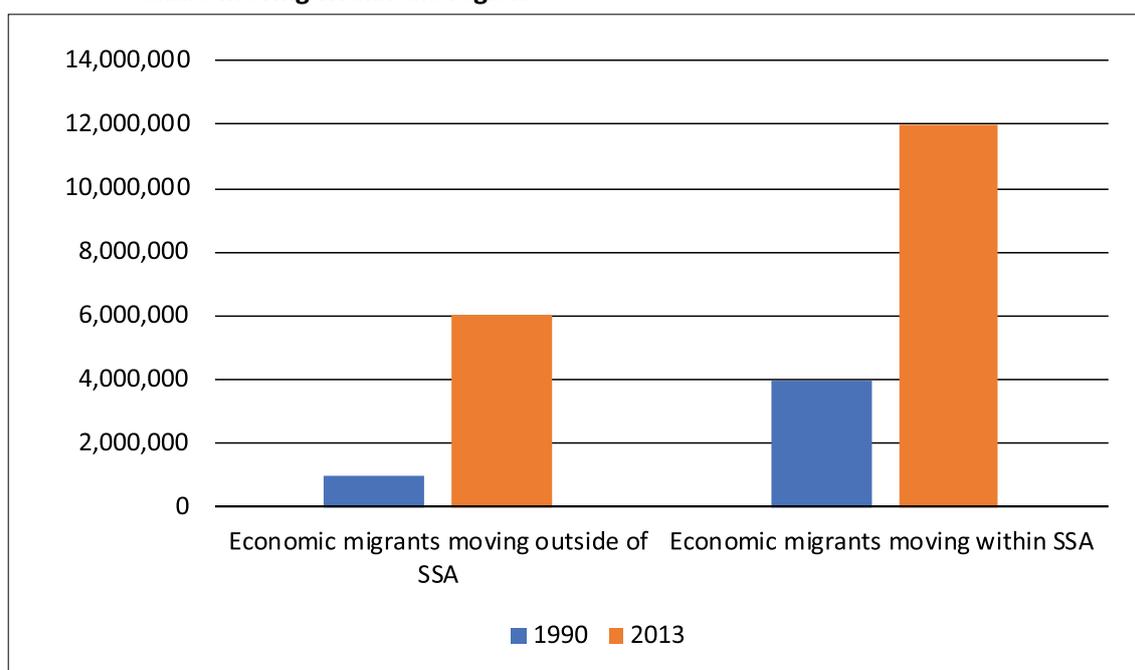
<sup>23</sup> Though migration trends in the Western, Central, Eastern and Southern African regions are diverse, these regions are discussed here as “sub-Saharan Africa” due to the fact that comparatively few migrant deaths are recorded in this area, and many of the challenges to improving the available data are similar. For the purposes of this chapter, sub-Saharan Africa includes all countries fully or partially located south of Sahara Desert, including Sudan.

<sup>24</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, “migrant” is used as an umbrella term to cover the categories of refugee and asylum seeker, as well as international migrants in an irregular situation, trafficked persons, smuggled migrants and other categories, unless specified otherwise.

## 2.1.2. Shifting trends: Increased South-to-North movement

Up to the 1990s, SSA migration was dominated by South-to-South intraregional migration, which previously represented 75 per cent of total migration, but over the last 15 years, migration outside the region has increased rapidly, mainly to countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).<sup>25</sup> Only a few of these countries have been consistently attractive to migrants and refugees from the sub-Saharan region, often due to links with diaspora (“network effects”) or language compatibility and therefore have absorbed the majority of extracontinental “displacement”, whether through regular or irregular entry. About 85 per cent of the SSA diaspora in the rest of the world is in countries belonging to the OECD – with the United States, United Kingdom and France – hosting about 50 per cent of SSA migrants (Gonzalez-Garcia and Mlachila, 2016). According to IMF analysis, the share of migrants who move outside the SSA region for economic reasons has increased steadily, growing sixfold between 1990 and 2013 – from approximately 1 million to 6 million. In comparison, economic migrants within the region increased threefold – from 4 million to 12 million (Gonzalez-Garcia et al., 2016; Gonzalez-Garcia and Mlachila, 2016). This recent acceleration and diversification of migration from SSA has led to an increase in the number moving to the United States and Canada in particular, but more recently to Europe, the Gulf and Asia.

**Figure 4. Share of migrants moving outside of SSA region rising faster, proportionally, than share moving within the region**



Source: Gonzalez-Garcia et al., 2016.

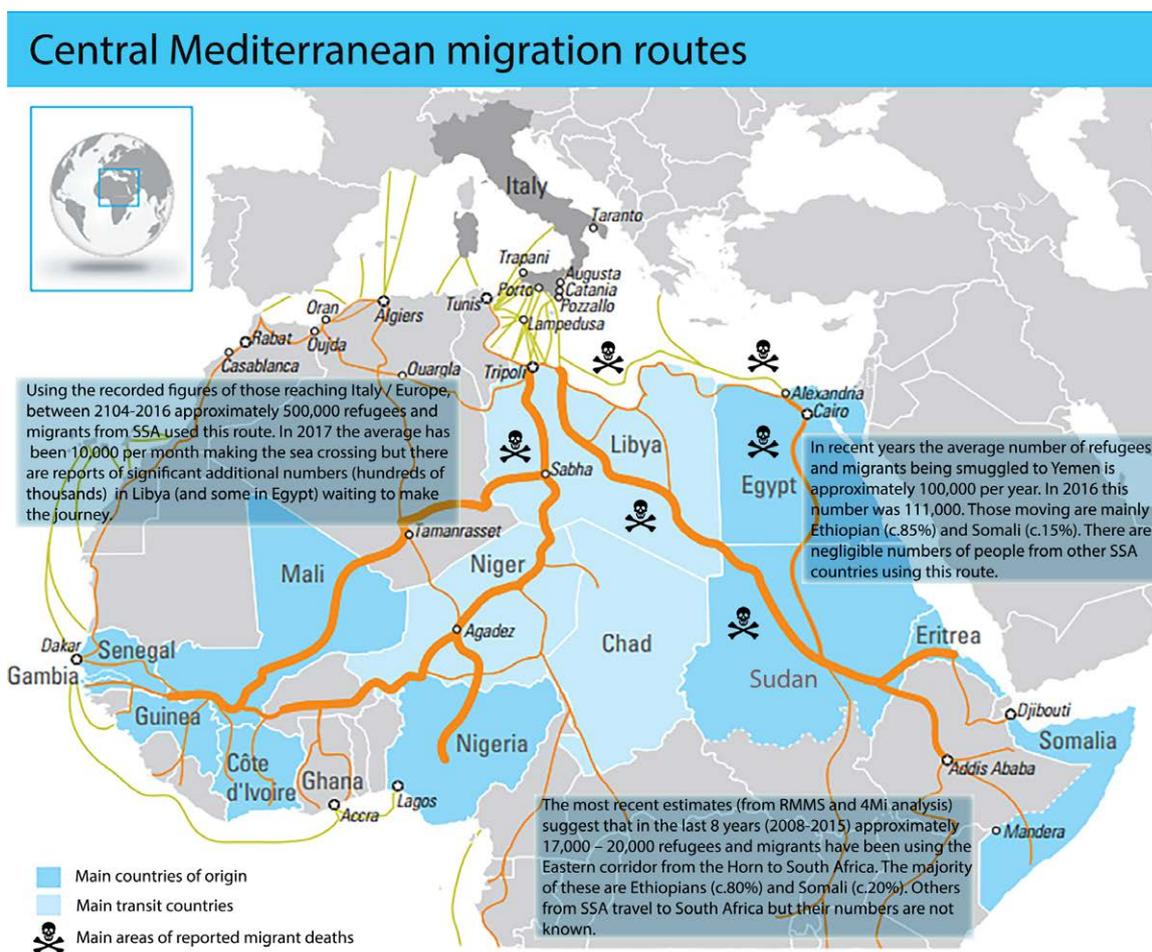
While North Africa<sup>26</sup> is still overrepresented in extracontinental emigration, the share of other regions, particularly West and East Africa, is increasing (Flahaux and de Haas, 2016).<sup>27</sup> This is significant when examining risks and fatalities facing migrants because, as the sections below will illustrate, while many fatalities occur in North Africa, the Sahel and in North African waters, those affected normally originate from West and East Africa, including the Horn of Africa.

<sup>25</sup> Countries associated with the global North/advanced economies. The OECD was formed in 1961 with founding membership from Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, West Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States. During the next 12 years, Japan, Finland, Australia and New Zealand also joined.

<sup>26</sup> Comprising Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

<sup>27</sup> For example, while the numbers of West Africans arriving in Italy has doubled, from 22 per cent in 2014 to 50 per cent in 2016. In January and February 2017, nationals from West Africa made up 64 per cent of arrivals and six out of the top 10 nationalities arriving in Italy by sea via the Central Mediterranean route.

**Map 4. Map indicating direction and volume of irregular movements, with areas where most migrant fatalities recorded are noted**



Source: UNICEF, 2017a.

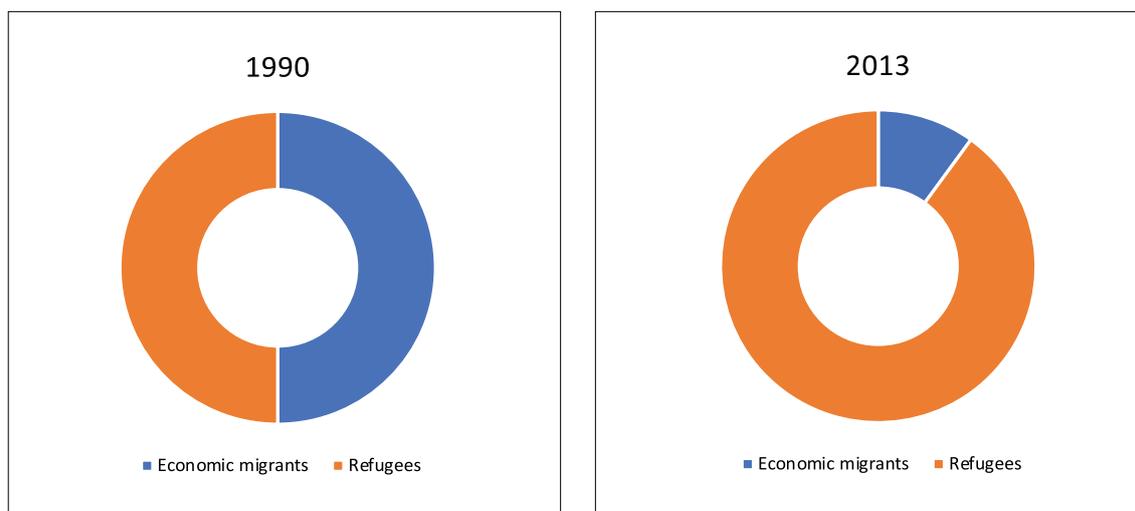
Note: Names and boundaries indicated on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

### 2.1.3. Decreasing proportion of refugees in SSA migration displacement

Beyond the changes described above concerning regular migration,<sup>28</sup> the number of *refugees* in the SSA region has decreased since 1990, both within and outside the region. In 1990, approximately 50 per cent of total migrants were refugees. This share has declined to only about 10 per cent by 2013 (Gonzalez-Garcia et al., 2016). With the current conflict in South Sudan having added another 1.5 million refugees to the 2013 totals, the percentage has now risen somewhat, but the figures ultimately show that more than 85 per cent of international migration within Africa is not primarily related to conflict.

<sup>28</sup> These figures do not include irregular migration; some estimates suggest there are up to 4 million irregular migrants living in Europe in 2008 (Triandafyllidou, 2009), likely to have risen by some million by 2017, and an estimated 11–12 million in the United States (Passel, Cohn and Gonzales-Barrera, 2013).

**Figure 5. Proportion of refugees displaced within SSA decreased between 1990 and 2013**



Source: Gonzalez-Garcia et al., 2016.

Proportionally, this is an important new reality because it illustrates the higher share of economic migrants from the SSA deciding to seek better opportunities outside of the region by any means in a climate of ever-increasing visa restrictions.<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, the industry around fraudulent documentation, illegally acquired travel documents, deceptive visa applications and human smuggling has risen exponentially, becoming a remarkably low-risk/high-profit sector of the clandestine economy for those selling such services.

#### 2.1.4. Policy restrictions escalate migrant deaths

Indeed, this reflects the broader argument that tighter policy restrictions alter the character of migration rather than decrease overall volumes of migration, which as we see, are rising from SSA. Based on this, Hein de Haas (2011) has hypothesized that one of the four “substitution effects” that can limit the effectiveness of immigration restrictions is *categorical substitution through a reorientation towards other legal or illegal channels* (Hein de Haas (2011)). This is the evident growing trend of using people (or migrant) smugglers (for irregular international border crossings) or other illicit methods (as mentioned, involving document falsification, fraudulent applications, illegal visa procurement, intentional visa overstays and so on) to effect extracontinental movement.

Many argue that restrictive migration policies and the closing of asylum space actively empowers smugglers and offer those that feel compelled to move no alternatives but to take the riskiest methods possible (Tinti and Reitano, 2016; Achilli and Sanchez, 2017). Inadvertently, many of the policies therefore contribute to migrant deaths. More specifically, migrant fatalities and severe human rights violations faced by those on the move in these mixed flows out of SSA overwhelmingly occur when those in mixed flows use *irregular* methods and closely associated, but not exclusively, with people (or migrant) smugglers.

<sup>29</sup> New research using DEMIG VISA data is showing strong trends of increasingly restrictive visa and immigration policies in the SSA region, as well as outside Africa, especially in Europe (Flahaux and Hein de Haas, 2016).

### 2.1.5. Policy context and future trends

The trends and dynamics now apparent have been developing for some years and over a decade ago were predicted by some analysts (for example, Cross et al., 2006). They look set to continue.

The migration patterns within SSA (intraregional migration) are predominantly driven by geographic proximity (distance and adjacency), income differences, wars in the home country, political stability in host countries, network effects and environmental factors (Ruysen and Rayp, 2014) – factors that also do not look set to disappear in the short or medium term. IMF findings echo many others claiming that strong demographic booms compounded by income differentials/wage gaps in SSA (compared with OECD countries and some regional neighbours) will likely play an important role in shaping extracontinental migration in the coming decades (Gonzalez-Garcia et al., 2016).

Additionally, seemingly contradictory evidence is building that particularly in poor societies, development increases rather than decreases levels of migration (Clemens, 2014; Skeldon, 2012) – dubbed by one IOM spokesperson as the so called middle-class migration phenomenon (Schlein, 2016).<sup>30</sup> This may be of particular relevance to the SSA region that includes some of the poorest countries in the world and with high fertility rates – as their economies grow and population’s increase additional voluntary, but most likely irregular, movement can be expected.

Conventional accounts of African migration tend to ignore the role of African States in shaping migration, but recent DEMIG VISA research indicates that most African countries have, in the last decade, become as restrictive to fellow African regular movement as European (and other OECD) countries have (Czaika, de Haas and Villares-Varela, 2017). Clearly, countries in the SSA and target destination countries outside the region will need to design policies that facilitate the rapid social and economic integration of migrant workers for all to benefit. Most evidence suggests the opposite is occurring as more migrants are forced into irregular and dangerous forms of movement closely associated with migrant fatalities.

### 2.1.6. Instruments to end smuggling may increase migrant deaths

The recent policy focus on human smugglers as seen in new high-budget international (but predominantly Eurocentric) agreements, summits and compacts may be seen as a distraction from the larger issue of migration to Europe, or evidence of policy confusion. The emphasis is on breaking the “evil” and “predatory” business model of smugglers (often wrongly called traffickers<sup>31</sup>) in order to end the deaths (especially maritime) and abuse of migrants. Many suspect the real aim is to end mobility of unwanted irregular arrivals in Europe and elsewhere.

These initiatives encapsulated in, and articulated through, new trust funds, framework agreements and interregional or bilateral deals<sup>32</sup> seek to end human smuggling at a time when immigration policies are stricter than ever against migration and asylum seekers.<sup>33</sup> These policies effectively create the optimum conditions for human smuggling to thrive and massively boost

<sup>30</sup> Confirming the “migration transition theory”: “Contradicting conventional interpretations of African migration being essentially driven by poverty, violence and underdevelopment, increasing migration out of Africa seems rather to be driven by processes of development and social transformation which have increased Africans’ capabilities and aspirations to migrate, a trend which is likely to continue in the future.” (Flahaux and de Haas, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Though trafficking is linked to abuses of sub-Saharan migrants in many instances, there is always an element of coercion, deception and exploitation of migrants in such business models (Art. 3a of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, available from [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/index.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/index.html)

<sup>32</sup> Some of the following are key policy instruments used to guide and direct international action, financial allocations and support and bilateral/multilateral government deals: (a) European Union’s Global Approach to Mobility and Migration (GAMM since 2005); (b) Rabat Process (starting in 2006 and with three subsequent international plans and strategies in 2008, 2011 and 2014); (c) Khartoum Process (since 2014, combatting smuggling and trafficking); (d) European Union Migration Partnership Framework (2016); (e) European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (established at Valletta Summit, Malta, 2015); and finally (f) New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016, leading to the global compacts process for both).

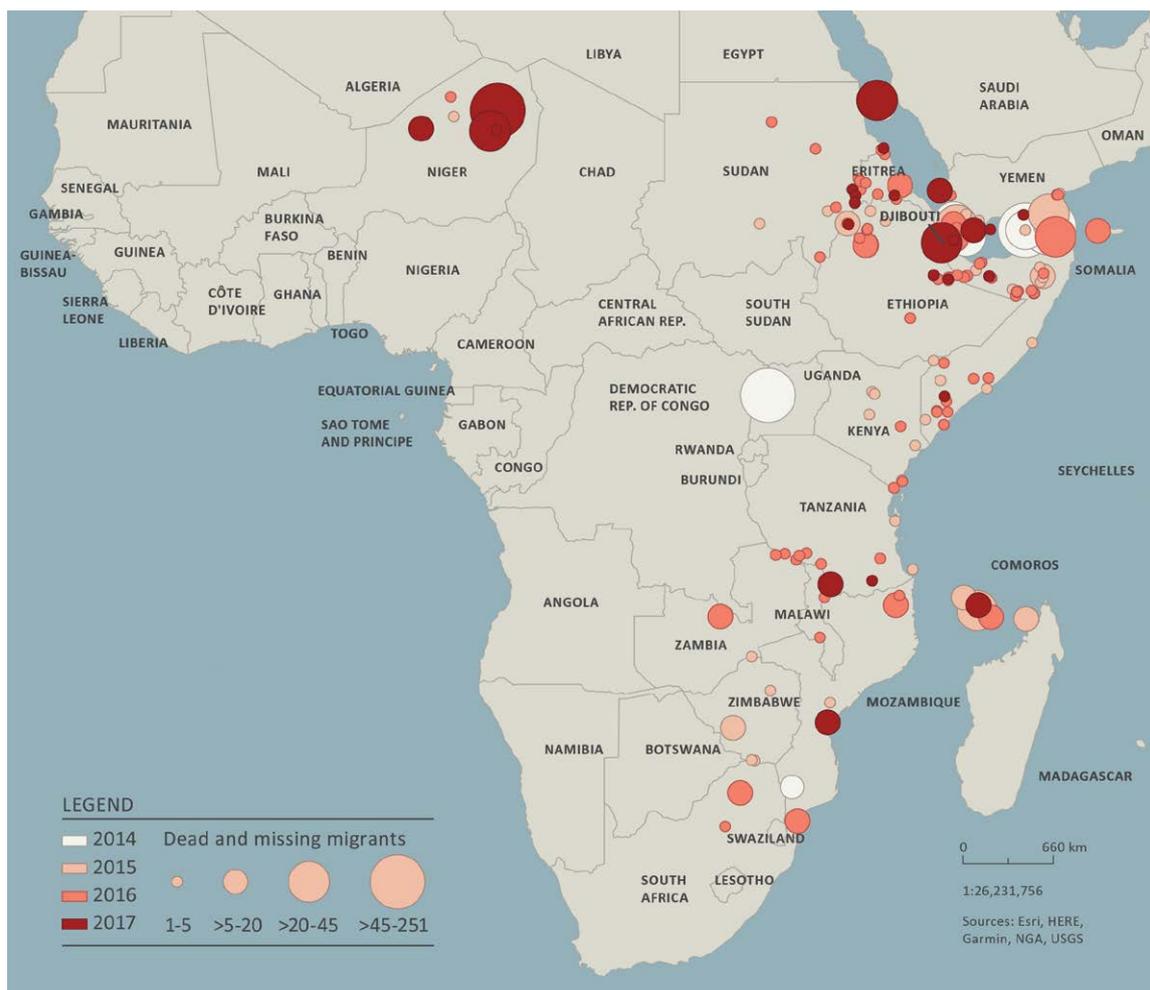
<sup>33</sup> Despite the de facto openness of Europe to an estimated 2 million recorded and non-recorded irregular migrants and refugees in 2015 and 2016, this was an anomalous situation resulting from contradictory forces that belie actual immigration policy positions of the European Union and individual Member States then and since.

the clandestine-in-full-sight global industry that currently competes with drug smuggling as the largest, most lucrative criminal economy globally. It is an industry that currently thrives, assisting hundreds of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers to move from West Africa into Europe primarily, and from East Africa towards the Gulf, to South Africa as well as Europe. It is in this context that the most egregious human rights violations and fatalities occur, and as long as the demand to move increases against growing restrictions on regular mobility, it is expected that mass smuggling will grow, along with continued violations and migrant deaths.

## 2.2. Risks and vulnerabilities of sub-Saharan African migrants moving through and out of the region

Before disaggregating available data and existing analysis to explain risk levels facing migrants in and from the SSA region, it is useful to identify in broad terms which migrants are at risk, how many are at risk and why they are at risk.

**Map 5. Migrant deaths and disappearances recorded in sub-Saharan Africa**



Source: IOM's Missing Migrants Project, data from January 2014 to June 2017.

## 2.2.1. Those most at risk

Stated simply, those most at risk are those who use land and sea to reach their destination on their journey through and out of sub-Saharan Africa. Whether they use smugglers for most of their journey or part of their journey, whether they make the journey rapidly or over a period of many months, they face dangers along the way that sometimes lead to death.

An important aspect of terrestrial and sea travel is that migrants inevitably encounter numerous people, communities and authorities (and/or people with power advantage) and various geographical conditions and situations (natural and man-made) that hugely increase their vulnerability. The evidence indicates that those who use air travel for much or all of their journey, and those that can procure reliable documentation (albeit falsified) and who pay for a higher calibre of smuggling face significantly less risk (Tinti and Reitano, 2016). It is the low-budget smuggling arrangements that are the most dangerous. Clearly, a migrant armed with a student visa (real or fraudulent that he or she intends to overstay) who flies from Nairobi, or Dakar to Europe, avoids in half a dozen hours the land and sea locations where much of violence, abuse, detention and death occurs. Equally clearly, migration via flight is the preference of those that can afford to do it by whatever means. Such demand has spawned urban concentrations known for their ability to obtain and create necessary documentation and paperwork in places like Dakar, Bamako, Nairobi and Johannesburg.

## 2.2.2. Some at more risk than others

Disaggregating data and testimony from migrants further indicate that certain groups of migrants and refugees travelling along certain routes face different levels of risk. 4Mi disaggregated data from 3,560 migrant interviews<sup>34</sup> show that there is a significant difference between the experiences of Somalis on the one hand and Eritreans and Ethiopians on the other when it comes to witnessing death (see Table 1).

The experience of migrants can vary according to the different treatment meted out according to nationality group. Migrants often live, move and are abused in such groups, suffering significantly different lethal risks. A possible and partial explanation for the differences (more than threefold) may be that a high number of those migrants interviewed from Ethiopia and Eritrea were from Christian communities while Somalis are all Muslim. The three countries reportedly most dangerous to migrants (Libya, Sudan and Egypt) in 4Mi data are Muslim countries who may treat their co-religionist Somali migrants less harshly. Migrants' testimonies often cite religious and racial abuse accompanying physical abuse.

**Table 1. 4Mi survey responses of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali nationals**

National group	Majority religion stated in interviews (%)	Percentage having claimed to have witnessed death (%)
Ethiopian	44 Christian (various traditions)	26
Eritrean	70 Christian (various traditions)	23
Somali	100 Muslim	7

Source: Danish Refugee Council (DRC), 4Mi data, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> From late 2014 to early 2017 (32-month period) Danish Refugee Council's 4Mi data collection system interviewed 3,560 migrants mostly in transit, in different regions of sub-Saharan Africa and some in Europe. The methodology is fully explained on the 4Mi website but comprises continuous interviews in certain hotspots and migration hubs or transit points by 4Mi monitors who are themselves refugees or migrants and kinsmen or compatriots with those they interview. In the Horn of Africa and East Africa, the 4Mi monitors record their interviews on a smartphone application, which is then collected for analysis in Nairobi. The collection is continuously yielding longitudinal qualitative and quantitative data.

Further evidence is found in a new report by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya that found that among all the detained migrants, sub-Saharan Africans were generally treated much worse than other migrants and death was not uncommon (UNSMIL, 2016). It would make sense in such conditions that deaths of migrants from SSA would be more prevalent than those from Egypt, the Gaza Strip or the Syrian Arab Republic, for example.

However, a high number of the 4Mi interviewed migrants in the 3,560 sample had not travelled through or Libya by the time of their interview, and there is growing evidence that extreme abuse occurs in Libya, including death. A recent Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) report on Eritrean migrants (interviewed after having been rescued in the Mediterranean and therefore having experienced Libya and the sea voyage) illustrates vividly how certain groups suffer more than others along the way. Their interviews found:

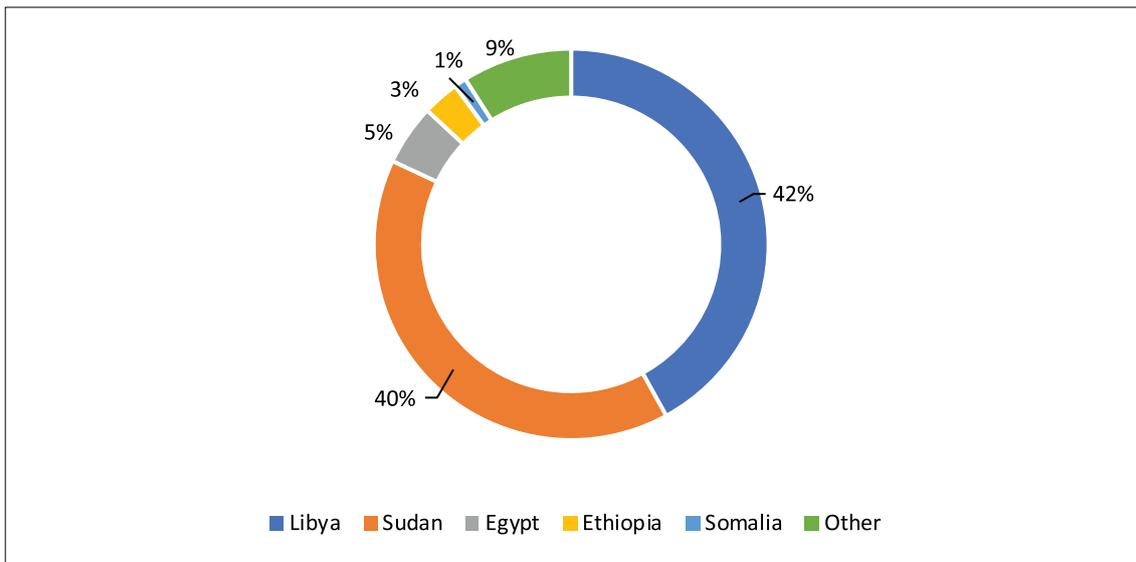
- Every Eritrean interviewed by MSF teams on its search-and-rescue vessels in the Mediterranean Sea has reported being either a direct victim or a witness to severe levels of violence, including torture, in multiple locations throughout their harrowing journey from Eritrea to Europe.
- Every Eritrean interviewed has reported being held in captivity of some kind, while over half have reported seeing fellow refugees, asylum seekers or migrants die, most often as the result of violence.
- Every Eritrean woman interviewed by MSF has either directly experienced, or knows someone who has experienced, sexual violence, including rape, often inflicted by multiple perpetrators. (MSF, 2017)

Female migrants face additional and possibly higher risks than others, although it is not clear if female migrants or unaccompanied minors, for example, face a higher threat of death than others. The ubiquity of sexual violence and rape reported by female migrants, repeatedly, during their migration journey is as alarming as it is remarkable (Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS), 2017). Indeed, while these vulnerable groups may face greater threats of abuse and exploitation, they may face a lower threat of death than male migrants.

### **2.2.3. Migrants reporting deaths**

The Danish Refugee Council's (DRC) 4Mi data collection system interviewed 3,560 migrants mostly in transit, in different regions of sub-Saharan Africa and some in Europe. The interviewees were exclusively migrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. They collectively reported witnessing 2,522 migrant deaths in multiple countries but most occurring in Libya (42% of reported cases), Sudan (40% of reported cases) and Egypt (5% of reported cases). Although Libya and Egypt are the subjects of the first chapter of this publication, these findings are relevant as they involve migrants from the SSA region.

**Figure 6. Countries where deaths were witnessed by interviewed migrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, by percentage of total**



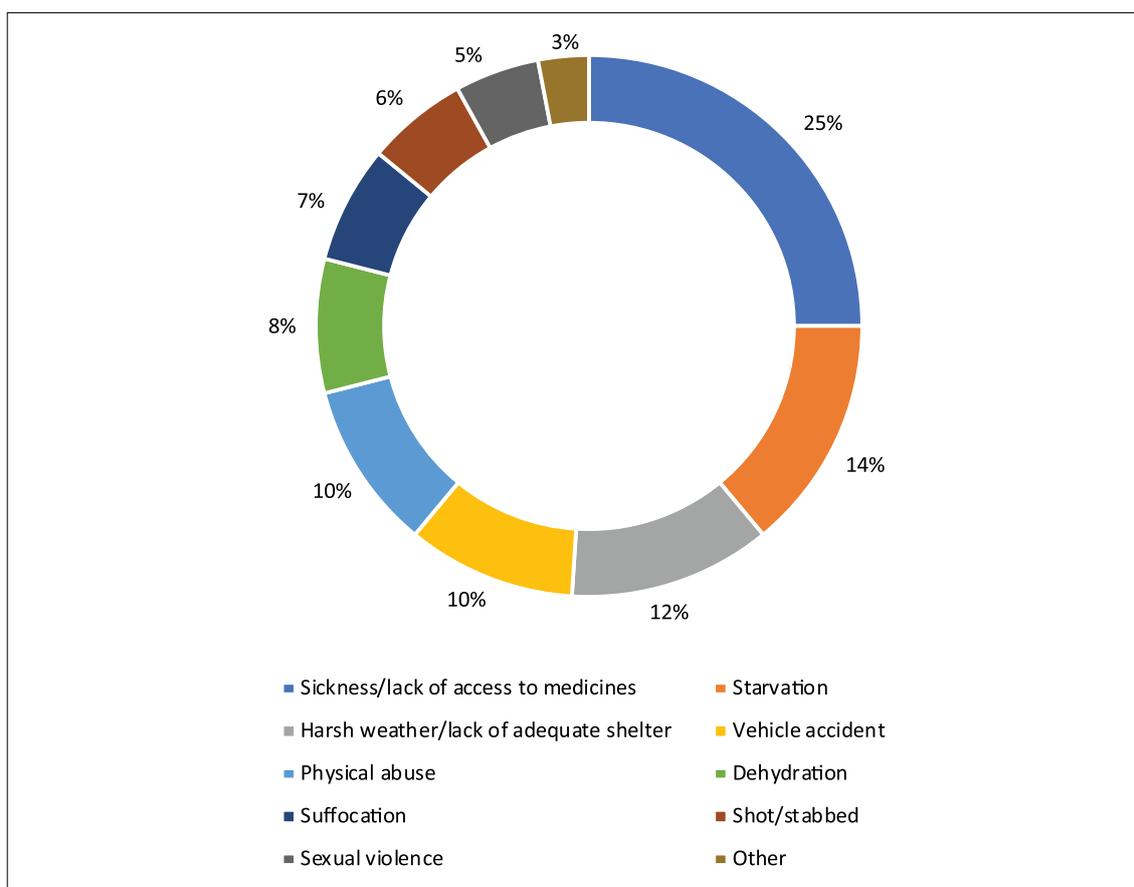
Source: DRC, 4Mi data, 2017.

Note: 3,560 migrants interviewed by 4Mi collectively reported 2,522 deaths.

4Mi monitors in West Africa (in the Niger and Mali only) have interviewed a smaller number of West African migrants in 2017 – and critically before they crossed the desert or experienced the dangers of Libya.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, out of 421 interviews of migrants embarking mostly for the first time on their journey, 27 individuals claimed to have seen 42 deaths, including those of children. Of these, 78 per cent had reportedly died of sickness or lack of access to medicines. Other deaths were caused by excessive physical abuse at borders. Of course, the sample in West Africa is still limited and, as mentioned, they were interviewed before experiencing the “death zones” of the Sahara and Libya so the figures should not be compared to 4Mi data on migrants from the Horn of Africa. If 4Mi interviewed migrants before they entered Libya, Sudan and Egypt, the numbers of witnessed deaths would be far lower.

<sup>35</sup> Interviews conducted between January and April 2017 (DRC/4Mi West Africa).

**Figure 7. Reasons given for migrant deaths, by percentage of total**



Source: DRC, 4Mi data, 2017.

Note: 3,560 migrants interviewed by 4Mi collectively reported 2,522 deaths.

Generally, it should be noted that there are a number of limitations to these survey-based data. First, the figures are based on migrants reporting the deaths of other migrants, and there is no system in place to verify their accounts. Furthermore, some deaths may be reported twice if migrants who were travelling in the same group refer to the same incident separately. However, given the relatively limited number of monitors in the 4Mi project, it is likely that these numbers – both in terms of the western route and the southern route – are underestimates.

#### 2.2.4. Numbers at risk

How many migrants are at risk of death during their journey depend on which countries migrants and refugees originate from, as well as which countries they pass through. Generally, all migrants using these routes and methods are at risk. Some routes are more dangerous than others, and as mentioned, certain groups are more vulnerable than others to particular risks.

Migrants from the Horn of Africa travelling to South Africa through the eastern seaboard countries in the SSA region are at some risk of being held for ransom and detained along the way but are at much lower risk of death than those on the route north. According to 4Mi data, and as mentioned, while 2,522 migrant deaths were reportedly witnessed from interviews with 3,560 migrants (predominantly occurring in Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, Egypt and Libya), only 56 deaths were reported from interviews, with 398 migrants interviewed in South Africa from 2014 to 2016 (occurring in Kenya, Malawi, United Republic of Tanzania, Mozambique and Zimbabwe). Proportionally, the northern and north-western routes out of the Horn are significantly more lethal for migrants (Frouws and Horwood, 2017).

Although accurate data on the number of migrants that die travelling through and out of SSA are unavailable, multiple migrant testimony illustrates that to some extent, fatalities are arbitrary. Insofar that most of the journeys are already highly risky and who exactly falls foul of violent and negligent smugglers; or who is abandoned in a desert without shelter or water; or which migrants are caught up in civil conflict; or which overcrowded boat crossing the Mediterranean is rescued and which succumbs to bad weather has a random quality to it. A notable example occurred on 16 March 2017 when 42 people, mainly Somali refugees, were killed when a boat carrying around 145 passengers – among them women and children – came under fire off Yemen’s west coast (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2017).

### 2.2.5. Russian roulette

Migrants can be said to play Russian roulette insofar that the gun is partially loaded, but there are multiple situations they face along the way where fate’s trigger is pulled, and they may be unlucky or deliberately targeted. Migrants do not die in just one type of situation. As the typography of migrant fatalities shows below, there are so many circumstances where death occurs precisely in situations where many others pass unscathed or who successfully arrive at their destinations intact. However, a minority of irregular migrants arriving in Europe, South Africa or Saudi Arabia have not witnessed or experienced rights violations and/or death during their journey.<sup>36</sup>

### 2.2.6. Reasons for risk

In some areas, the risks are higher and the involvement of different criminal groups is more apparent, increasing the overall vulnerability of those in transit moving through vast areas of territory where, in many cases, the institutions of the State are weak or corruptible.

Overwhelmingly, those migrants who are at risk of severe rights violation including death are those closely associated with smugglers during their journey and/or who pass through particular geographical areas that have become notorious. Figure 8 illustrates the high involvement of smugglers and police in witnessed migrant deaths according to 4Mi migrant interviews.

### 2.2.7. Where protectors become perpetrators

In a vast majority of cases, migrants’ protectors are often the perpetrators of a wide array of violations, whether they are the smugglers – paid to bring migrants safely to their destination – or State officials – paid to uphold the law and protect. Such areas, like in the Sahara regions of Mali, the Niger, Algeria and Sudan or the western desert of Egypt, are notoriously harsh in climate, remoteness and lawlessness – where migrants travel with limited access to water, total reliance on their smugglers/drivers and their vehicles’ functionality, normally with no access to medicines, shelter, physical protection from banditry, robbery, sexual violence and/or official caprice and venality. Where there is no access to protection of the law – on the contrary where State officials may be perpetrators of every crime or abuse and be in collusion with smugglers or worse traffickers, to whom they may hand over or sell migrants.

*There is no one who will reach you at that desert area, so they can do whatever they like and want to do.*

- Ethiopian male migrant, 26 years old. Interviewed in Sudan, October 2016 (4Mi Quotes, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> Data gathered from 4Mi is a source here, showing that in terms of the wide spectrum of right violations including death, few migrants interviewed in destination countries without having witnessed or experienced some form of violation, and many have done so on multiple occasions. Further evidence is found in various RMMS research studies such as *Desperate Choices* (RMMS, 2012).

*Around the border and police customs the police, border guards and military were together with smugglers abusing the human rights [...] and also forcing the migrant to pay the extra money.*

- Ethiopian male migrant, 31 years old. Interviewed in Ethiopia, November 2016 (4Mi Quotes, 2017).

### 2.2.8. Migrants from SSA in Libya – The extreme case

Other notorious areas may be due to the local communities, tribes or national citizens who pose great risk to migrants. Perhaps the most extreme example is Libya where thousands of West Africans and migrants from the Horn have been and continue to be – with total impunity – detained, tortured, starved, beaten, robbed, raped, sold, exploited and killed (Micallef, 2017). For more details on deaths of migrants in Libya, refer to the chapter 1 in this publication dealing with the Middle East and North Africa.

As the recent Global Initiative report cited above details, the sociopolitical conditions in Libya are extraordinarily dangerous for migrants and with Libya as the premier North African departure point for sea-crossing irregular migrants – over 500,000 between 2014 and 2016 inclusive – approximately half of all European new arrivals (via sea) in 2016. The year 2017 is already showing high departure rates of approximately 10,000 per month, with over 1,000 deaths at sea between January and April 2017.<sup>37</sup> Other reports in late 2016 spoke of at least 235,000 migrants waiting in Libya to cross the Mediterranean and attempt to enter Europe.<sup>38</sup>

No one has attempted to calculate the deaths in detention in Libya, but given that proportionally most migrants detained originate from West Africa and the Horn, and given Libyan's notorious treatment<sup>39</sup> of black Africans (as opposed to Arab Africans), it may be assumed that migrants from the SSA region comprise the majority of fatalities there.

### 2.2.9. More dangerous countries

*...The Sudanese smugglers beat migrants and put them in Sahara Desert in mountain caves without food and water. Then when the migrants are tired and unable to protect themselves, they rape and beat and burn and force the migrants to go with them on foot long distances from their bases and would beat them when the migrants were unable to go further and would fall down due to harsh weather conditions. They left many migrants in Sahara Desert to die.*

- Ethiopian male, 41 years old, Interviewed in Sudan, July 2016 (4Mi Quotes, 2017).

4Mi data indicates that in Sudan, migrants face severe abuse through kidnapping for ransom, torture, rape and sale (trafficking). In Egypt, similar practices were most prevalent between 2007 and 2014 (linked to similar perpetrators in Sudan) and particularly victimizing Eritrean asylum seekers – possibly 30,000 of them in total, of which an estimated 10,000 deaths from torture violence and neglect (van Reisen et al., 2012).

Yemen too, has a grim reputation of kidnap and “torture camps”, but the number of migrants killed is unknown (Human Rights Watch, 2013). The number of victims of violent kidnapping for ransom is remarkably high. In the last quarter of 2016, 25 per cent of the 9,000 migrants crossing from Djibouti to Yemen were reportedly kidnapped on arrival (over 2,200 individuals) (RMMS, 2016). In some quarters in 2014 and 2015, the percentage was much higher. Furthermore, in

<sup>37</sup> Various UNHCR sources including their online Operational Portal, <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean?id=502>

<sup>38</sup> Mentioned in various reports quoting the UN, in September 2016, also here: <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/world/italy-braces-as-235000-migrants-on-libyas-coast-wait-to-cross-the-mediterranean-to-europe>

<sup>39</sup> See, inter alia, Flahaux and de Haas, 2016; MSF, 2017; UNICEF, 2017a.

recent years, thousands of Ethiopian (and some Somali) female migrants have disappeared in Yemen, presumed trafficked or sold into slavery. It is unknown how many of these remain alive, they are now invisible (RMMS, 2014). For more details on deaths of migrants in Yemen, refer to chapter 1 in this publication dealing with the Middle East and North Africa.

Once migrants embark upon journeys under the charge of smugglers, they face immediate and continual risk because the business model of smuggling in SSA means that quite soon the initial smugglers hand their clients over to other smugglers who often do the same. While the initial smuggler may have social or network relationships with a migrant's relatives or communities that may limit or inhibit negligent or criminal behaviour, subsequent smugglers normally feel no such restrictions. The range of abusive and negligent behaviour by smugglers and others is testimony to the commoditization of migrants on their journey and their exposure to abuse and death. Figure 6 shows the extent to which migrants interviewed in the 4Mi project claimed to have witnessed death, while Figure 8 shows to what extent they identified those responsible as their own paid smugglers.

## 2.2.10. Specific nature of risk

In volume one of IOM's annual *Fatal Journeys report*, chapters 4 and 5 listed 13 causes of death or disappearance relating to migrants originating from East and West Africa, including the Horn – representing migrants from SSA (IOM, 2014). These chapters catalogued, in individual sections with examples and testimony, death from physical hardship (see Text Box 1).

### **Text Box 1. A typography of deaths, old (2014) and new (2017)**

In volume one of IOM's *Fatal Journeys*, chapters 4 and 5 catalogued, in individual sections with examples and testimony, deaths from physical hardship including those fatalities in deserts; on roads; on seas and lakes and from "natural causes" (including illness, suicide and general debilitation). Additional sections charted and discussed known examples of fatalities of migrants at the hands of others or caused by others; as stranded/abandoned migrants; through malicious neglect or abusive practices when smuggled; through torture outright murder by smugglers, traffickers and other criminals; at the hands of gangs, or from action by State officials and in detention and as a result of organ removal. Finally, the issue of death of regular migrants (labour migrants) was discussed along with the mass disappearance of female Somali and especially Ethiopian migrants, specifically prevalent in Yemen from 2012 but with some examples from other regions.

To this list, from 2014, may be added additional causes of death recorded from migrant testimonies and various studies relating to SSA outmigration between 2014 and early 2017. Some of these include:

- Death at the hands of State and non-State armed groups;<sup>40</sup>
- Death from violence between rival gangs of smugglers/bandits (examples from coastal departure areas and in deserts);
- Death from getting caught up in conflicts including gunfire and aerial bombardment (in Yemen and the seas around Yemen);

<sup>40</sup> Given the fact that many human smugglers, traffickers and criminal gangs who victimize migrants are often armed, these groups can also be included as non-State armed actors – as suggested by MSF (2016:8). Furthermore, in an unusual case in Sudan in 2016, there is evidence of non-State actors (formerly Janjaweed but now named Rapid Support Force) being positioned along the Libya border and responsible for arresting and detaining up to 1,500 irregular migrants from the Horn of Africa on behalf of the Government (Small Arms Survey, 2017).

- Death of infants in the case of mothers losing their children and the death and unborn children carried by pregnant women;<sup>41</sup>
- Death of refugees and migrants in refugee camps as a result of being attacked or snatched for trafficking (reports from Northern Ethiopia and Eastern Sudan);
- Death from trying to protect other migrants from violence or abuse (general, but also specifically when preventing female fellow migrants from being sexually abused or abducted);<sup>42</sup>
- The killing of migrants and refugees from the SSA region by xenophobic mobs targeting foreigners. South Africa offers repeated examples, with some reports suggesting hundreds of Somalis alone have been targeted and killed as unwanted foreigners in South Africa between 2014 and 2017 and particularly in the 2015 surge in xenophobic attacks (Chutel, 2017);
- Death from shootings by State officials – migrants leaving Eritrea cite shooting by their border guards. Migrants avoiding arrest/capture elsewhere (Sudanese/Libya border, Egypt) have also reportedly been shot dead; and
- Acts of faith-based murder: in 2015, graphic videos emerged of three separate incidents involving beheading of dozens of (Christian) Eritrean, (Coptic) Egyptian and Ethiopian migrants in Libya by the Islamic State group (Wyke and Wilgress, 2015).

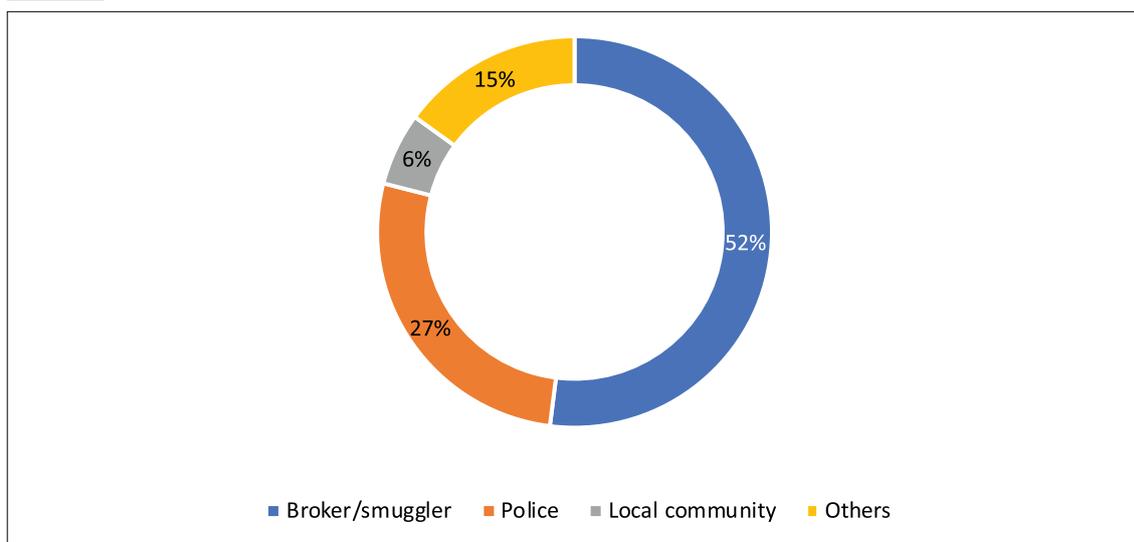
The extensive nature of manner of death listed in Text Box 1's typography illustrates the wide range of situations and people migrants face when crossing land and sea. The evidence and testimony offered in volume one was damning and egregious, clearly illustrating high levels of misadventure and direct malice, exploitation and fatal neglect or murderous intent with regards to migrants and refugees.

This chapter will not attempt to repeat the detailed typography and evidence of the particular form of migrants' deaths of those from SSA, even though they continue, but will seek to identify where may have changed or remained the same since 2014.

<sup>41</sup> For example, from Libya: "From there we were taken towards the coast to go to Europe, but the police stopped us. They shot towards us. I lost my baby from the fear and stress. I was six weeks pregnant. My friend also lost her baby, and a nine-month-old baby who was sick died." (22-year-old Eritrean woman, on board *Aquarius* search-and-rescue vessel, September 2016 (MSF, 2016:31)).

<sup>42</sup> As quoted in MSF, not an uncommon statement from migrants: "Witnessing the sexual violence done to our women and sisters was the worst. If you tell them to stop, they will kill you, or drop you off to die in the desert." (MSF, 2016:26).

**Figure 8. Party reported directly responsible for migrant death(s), percentage**



Source: DRC, 4Mi data, 2017.

Note: This chart only includes data in which the interviewee reported that another person was directly responsible for the witnessed death.

## 2.2.11. Perpetrator impunity

*MSF patients frequently report witnessing deaths as smugglers try to maximise their profits with no regard for their passengers' lives. Eritrean and other refugees and migrants fall off overcrowded vehicles while driving through the desert and are left to die in the blistering heat. Others become sick and sometimes die from a lack of food and water over a sustained period of time. (MSF, 2016)*

A final note at the end of this section needs to address the issue of impunity. Some may find it remarkable that documents like this one and the many associated references can chart countless and repeated violations of migrants, sometimes with specific details of locations and perpetrators in multiple countries. Despite the damning evidence, between the publication of the first volume of *Fatal Journeys* in 2014 and 2017, not only have severe violations and migrant deaths continued, but they are likely to have increased along with the growth of the illicit smuggling industry. Indeed, representatives of Member States where the worst violations occur frequently meet in international fora, often to discuss the issue of human smuggling, migration and trafficking. However, surveys with migrants indicate that the reality on the ground is that impunity is ubiquitous, and in many cases State officials closely collaborate with smugglers, directly profiting from smuggling and – depending how entrenched impunity is – may be directly involved in violations and also responsible for migrant deaths (4Mi quotes, 2017).

*The smugglers, border guards and police highly abused the human rights of the migrants. The police and border guards killed three migrants because of additional payment and raped the women. And also they left more than ten migrants in the desert – I don't know why. Maybe they left them for the human traffickers.*

- Ethiopian male, 23 years old. Interviewed in Sudan, February 2017 (4Mi Quotes, 2017)

For nearly all perpetrators, it remains a low-risk/high-profit activity. Without addressing and reducing the dual factors of corruption and impunity, it is unlikely that migrants' lives and rights will be better respected in the near future.



Kumasi, Ghana; 15 January 2017: Nationals of countries in ECOWAS travel with different modes of transportation. For travel outside of the region, many rely on the services of smugglers. © Shutterstock (Photo: Anton Ivanov)

## 2.3. Existing data sources in the sub-Saharan Africa region

In the SSA region, there are few sources of data on migrant deaths, and there has been limited change since 2014. There is more information than real data. *Information* is qualitatively different from *data*, with information suggesting a non-systematic approach and thereby a less reliable source.

### 2.3.1. National and international media

Information (not data) concerning migrant deaths can be found in numerous sporadic and possibly inaccurate and unverifiable **media reports** in many parts of the SSA and international press. Investigative reports, in-depth features and special focus items increasingly highlight migrant's deaths while examining other aspects of migration or the smuggling industry. In these cases, mention of deaths is often incidental, tangential and non-specific but not robust statistically.

**The press** is also responsible for “breaking” news articles on specific grim but newsworthy events involving migrant deaths – a capsized boat, a mob attack, a group of refugees attacked, an abandoned container found with suffocated corpses, bodies discovered in the desert or captured migrants beheaded by extremists, and so forth. Accumulatively, these reports can provide

a general impression of the dangers of migration within and out of the region, but offer no indication of actual numbers, regularity of deaths, the identity of the dead (beyond speculation of their country of origin) or details of highest risk locations.

Press reports were used extensively by the Migrant Files<sup>43</sup> – a consortium of journalists from over 15 European countries coordinated by Journalism++. These Files focused on the number of migrants who died while seeking refuge in Europe and obtained data by monitoring real-time global news on asylum seekers, migration and human trafficking activities in and around Europe. They documented their findings from 2000 to June 2016, when they discontinued their service. This initiative followed an earlier system under the non-governmental organization (NGO) United for Intercultural Action that used the same media-based data gathering system to track migrant fatalities from 1993 until 2012, documenting about 17,000 deaths.

### 2.3.2. Advocacy agencies and academia

Human rights or rights-based studies (by international organizations, international advocacy NGOs, specialized institutions and academia) – some of which have informed this chapter – offer more systematic information on violations against migrants and migrant deaths.<sup>44</sup> However, they themselves depend on media reports, witness statements, interviews and citations of other studies. These studies also generally cannot offer evidence-based, regular data on migrant deaths and nor do they find or use supporting evidence from government authorities (police and prison records, court proceedings, immigration documents or mortuary statistics and so on). What data that may exist from country to country is scattered between different authorities and often misrecorded where the cause of death and the identity of the dead may often be unreliable and conflated with other deaths or other incidents. For example, irregular migrants dying in a road accident are unlikely to go onto any official record of migrant deaths but more likely to be recorded as unknown persons, or foreigners, as casualties in a road accident recorded by local police only.

### 2.3.3. Regional blocs and the African Union

Considering the level of interest and engagement by many State officials in the issues of migration, smuggling, trafficking and related criminal activities, it is remarkable how scarce any official data is on any aspect of migration, let alone migrant deaths. This is true for individual Member States of the African Union, as well as the African Union itself. The same is true of economic blocs within SSA, such as Intergovernmental Authority on Development, ECOWAS and SADC, all of which have significant human rights and criminal justice challenges associated with migration, smuggling and trafficking.

Some have criticized the African Union and African nations for their apparent indifference and silence on the issue of migrant deaths (*BBC*, 2015; Stäcker and Hoffman, 2015). As the Institute for Security Studies (2016) have written: “Africans account for less than a quarter of migrants, yet form the largest number of casualties”.

### 2.3.4. Dedicated initiatives

Noticeable perhaps by their absence in the subsector documenting migrants’ deaths are some of the larger agencies dealing with refugees and human displacement. In particular, UNHCR, which has offered detailed focus on the number of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean since 2014, has no sustained focus on migrant or refugee deaths in SSA region, except periodic articles or

<sup>43</sup> See [www.themigrantsfiles.com/](http://www.themigrantsfiles.com/)

<sup>44</sup> For example Human Rights Watch, 2014; MSF, 2017; van Reisen, Estefanos and Rijken, 2012.

press releases where deaths of refugees may be mentioned in passing. The IOM however have, since 2014, started their **Missing Migrants Project (MMP)**. This represents the first attempt to bring together all available data on migrant deaths globally into consolidated estimates. See chapter 1 in volume one of this report for more details on the methodology of MMP.

**Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi):** One new system attempting to gather primary data from migrants themselves is the DRC's 4Mi project. This has been a new development since mid-2014 when 4Mi started as a pilot project aiming to interview migrants in transit from three origin countries – Somalis, Ethiopians and Eritreans – and taking journeys out of the region in a northerly (Ethiopia, Egypt), westerly (Sudan, Libya, Europe) and southerly (South Africa) direction.

During Phase 1 – from 2015 up to February 2017 and using field monitors across Africa and Europe – the 4Mi project interviewed 3,784 migrants, 153 smugglers and 289 third-party observers. The results from these interviews are still accessible on the 4Mi website,<sup>45</sup> and some of the findings and quotations have been used in this and other chapters. In 2016, additional 4Mi projects were started in West Africa (Mali, the Niger) and Libya, as well as outside Africa (Central Asia to follow Afghan migrants).

4Mi data gathering faces various operational and methodological challenges as it tries to gather information from migrants in remote and sometimes hostile environments. As such, the findings are more of a summation of multiple interviews from which trends and frequency can be distilled and derived but do not represent hard data in a scientific sense. However, some of the many detailed questions the 4Mi migrants answer focus on death of fellow migrants. While they cannot offer an accurate picture of the numbers of death occurring along the routes migrants take, they offer a sense of the scale and location of deaths. IOM uses 4Mi data as one of the sources for its own data compiled in its Missing Migrants Project.

**Mixed Migration Hub:** As reported in more detail in chapter 1 of this volume, the Mixed Migration Hub (MHub) is an inter-agency knowledge hub carrying out surveys in several origin, transit and destination countries of migrants moving through North Africa. Currently, surveys are being done in Italy, Tunisia and Morocco by a single data collector in each of the countries. The surveys focus on risks and conditions of the journey, and include a question on deaths witnessed. Although like 4Mi, their surveys are not representative, the data serve to indicate relative frequency of deaths in different countries on route as well as primary causes. Insofar that the findings shed some light on reported deaths in the Sahara area where most of the victims come from West Africa, this can be seen as a partial data source for deaths of migrants from the SSA regions.

Apart from these various sources of information in the SSA region, this author cannot trace any others offering regular and specific information or data concerning migrant deaths in the SSA region.

**Migration Response Centre Regional Data Collection System:** Since July 2016, IOM has supported the Migration Response Centre (MRC) Regional Data Collection System as an effort to establish a standardized approach for collecting data from MRCs in the Horn of Africa. Being better able to compare the data across the MRC network allows for analysis of migrant vulnerabilities and needs, and leads to better understanding of protection profiles, migrant motivations and intentions, and hardships faced. It also facilitates an understanding of the services requested of and provided by MRC locations. The monthly updates provided from this data collection system are created on the basis of depersonalized information, collected mainly through the registration of migrants, conducted in line with IOM Data Protection Principles, and contribute to assembling a clearer picture of migration trends and migrant vulnerabilities, which can feed into evidence-based advocacy, policy and programming. IOM is currently in the process of strengthening the analysis of the data collected, including by combining the MRC Regional Data Collection System with regional activities under its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and flow monitoring projects.

<sup>45</sup> See <http://4mi.regionalmms.org/>

## **Text Box 2. Migration Response Centres Regional Data Collection System**

*by Christopher Wade and John Kinuthia<sup>46</sup>*

Since 2009, a regional network of five Migration Response Centres (MRCs) has been established in strategic locations in the Horn of Africa – including Somalia (2009), Djibouti (2011) and Ethiopia (2014) – in order to provide direct assistance to vulnerable migrants and support the strengthening of governments' capacity to respond to mixed migration challenges. Similar institutions were also established in Yemen, where they are known as Migration Response Points.

IOM established the MRC Regional Data Collection System in July 2016 in an effort to advance a standardized approach for collecting data and monitoring responses. The MRC network uses the points of registration to analyse migrant vulnerabilities and needs, understand protection profiles and identify migrant motivations and intentions.

The approach used in the Horn of Africa enables comparison of data from across the MRC network, which are collected mainly through the registration of migrants and conducted in line with IOM's Data Protection Principles. This data collection system yields anonymized monthly updates, which contribute to assembling a clearer picture of migration trends and migrant vulnerabilities in the Horn of Africa. The monthly snapshots also feed into evidence-based advocacy, well-informed policy prescriptions and programming tailored to the specific needs of the diverse profiles within mixed flows, which are characterized by complexity and the need for accurate identification and referral to support services.

The mixed nature of regional flows is supported by 12 months of data accumulated from the MRCs in Metema and Semera, Ethiopia; Obock, Djibouti; and in Bossaso and Hargeisa, Somalia. Between August 2016 and August 2017, a total of 7,573 migrants were registered, comprising of 5,888 males (78%) and 1,685 females (22%). Of these, 5,998 (79%) were adults, and 1,575 (21%) were children, with at least 585 being unaccompanied children. Of these migrants, approximately 52 per cent reported that their primary hardship was in relation to their inability to meet basic needs, such as access to food, water and shelter, or other basic human rights. Approximately 18 per cent of those registered indicated that they had faced a variety of more severe hardships, which included psychological abuse, discrimination or xenophobia, paying bribes, sexual exploitation, imprisonment or detention, forced labour, forced marriage, robbery or extortion, lack of basic pay and abduction or kidnapping.

These profiles point to extreme vulnerabilities for migrants in the Horn of Africa and, potentially, trafficking cases that would require additional interviewing for verification and specialized referral. Since these hardships have been identified and highlighted during the screening process, IOM stresses the importance of ensuring migrants are asked about their experiences, and that a migrant registration process is appropriately linked to a robust referral and case management/tracking system.

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Wade was the Interim Project Coordinator for the Regional Mixed Migration Programme covering the Horn of Africa and Yemen from March to November 2017. John Kinuthia is a Data Analyst and Reporting Assistant. Both are based at IOM's Regional Office in Nairobi, Kenya. The data for this text box was collected through the regional network of MRCs supported through IOM in the Horn of Africa.

## 2.4. Responding to data collection challenges

The previous section offers clear illustration of the partial, imprecise and insufficient nature of existing data sources concerning the number of migrants from the SSA region. The gaps are evident and glaring. In previous publications of *Fatal Journeys*, it has been suggested that whatever trends and numbers are collated, the reality is most likely far higher. This simply concerns the numbers of migrant deaths, let alone issue of identification of the victims, or perpetrators and informing families of those that die or are killed.

It is, on one side, extraordinary that governments of the SSA region themselves are not lobbying and organizing themselves (through international bodies and regional bloc and the African Union itself) to collect data of deaths of their own citizens. But, on the other side, many of these governments struggle to provide basic services to their own populations and have weak institutions, limited capacity and often meagre resources. Additionally, most of those on the move who are victims are also travelling irregularly using inherently clandestine and invisible means, without documentation and outside the law. Some could argue that by putting themselves outside the law and using non-legal methods to travel, they cannot be surprised if their deaths are not formally recognized or recorded, even if the capacity existed to do so.

Nevertheless, it remains unacceptable that people can die in their thousands, and their deaths pass unrecorded and undocumented. Efforts should be made to rectify the situation, and the following shortlist are suggestions of possible actions to improve collective effort in this regard.

- (a) If the political will and national concern of SSA nations regarding their own citizens' welfare (when migrating regularly or irregularly) could be enhanced, there could be better chances of national and regional efforts to record and document migrant deaths. This could be achieved by setting systems in place to require State officials and institutions (police, immigration and so forth) to be more specific about foreign deaths on their territory. This could occur at the national, regional and international levels (African Union).
- (b) At the non-governmental level, civil society groups could be engaged more in their awareness and collaboration towards the goal of recording and identifying migrants' deaths throughout the SSA region. The growth of human right agencies throughout the world is testimony to the fact that particular issues can be championed by a growing number of civil society organizations. If the issue around migrant welfare and vulnerability is prioritized more, the resulting information and accuracy of data from multiple sources could be forthcoming.
- (c) Specific cross-border, multi-country initiatives that work with migrants and smugglers and the communities through which they pass could be supported and expanded so that the data that is currently partial and indicative (as from MHub, 4Mi and IOM's DTM<sup>47</sup>) can be enhanced and more comprehensive.

Some of the data and description around mixed migration and the deaths of migrants – predominantly irregular migrants – used in this chapter was not available in 2014. This illustrates that progress has been made, and an increasing number of agencies and organizations are concerned about collecting this data, but nonetheless much more could be done.

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# Chapter 3 Asia-Pacific

Sharon Pickering and Rebecca Powell<sup>48</sup>

## 3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of data on refugee and migrant deaths in the Asia-Pacific and the ongoing methodological challenges of recording these deaths. The chapter pursues two themes: (a) the impact of the 2015 Andaman Sea Crisis on refugee and migrant fatalities and the regional response to that crisis; and (b) emerging data on the deaths of women and children in the region, increasing numbers of whom are undertaking risky, irregular, illegalized journeys in the region.

The unregulated migration pathway from the Bay of Bengal to South-East Asia is a well-established route that has been used by Rohingya<sup>49</sup> refugees and Bangladeshi migrants for many years. In May 2015, international attention was focused on the Andaman Sea and the dangers and risks associated with travel across it as thousands of refugees and migrants were suddenly abandoned at sea. The chapter will examine official estimates of refugee and migrant deaths and efforts to reduce fatalities in the years following the crisis.

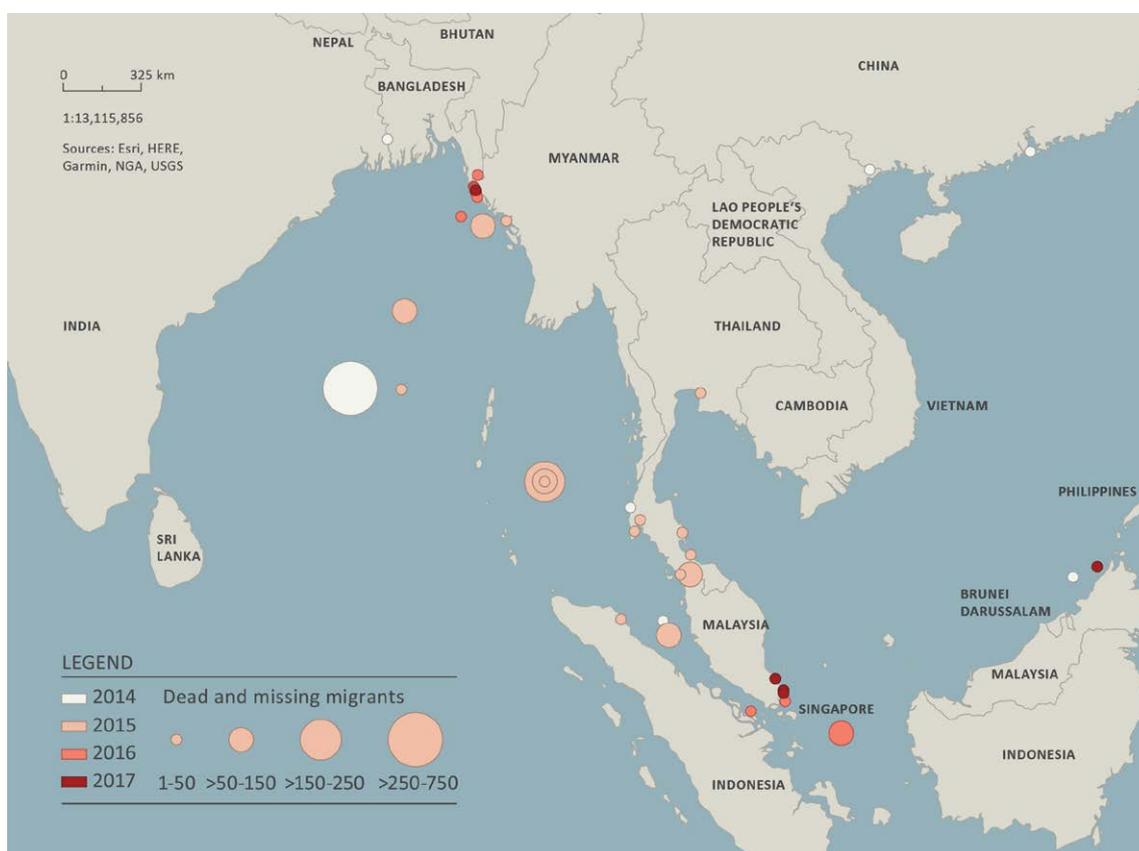
The focus on women and children will detail the problem with the lack of sex- and age-disaggregated statistics. Data on women and children's deaths are often either hyper visible in the case of a handful of high-profile incidents, or much more regularly, invisible. The chapter will focus on why women are less likely to be reported missing, their bodies less likely to be recovered and, where they are recovered, their bodies are less likely to be identified. It will examine where it is believed that there are large numbers of "missing women" in estimates and records of migrant deaths. The chapter will specifically deal with the increased risks of death for women and children and connect this to processes of decision-making around migration journeys. The authors argued in the earlier edition of this report and elsewhere that people die because of the ways in which borders between the Global North and the Global South are controlled (Weber and Pickering, 2011). When looking more broadly at the Asia-Pacific region, deaths are not only due to the ways borders are controlled between the Global North and Global South, but their occurrence is profoundly marked by their great invisibility along the long coastlines of South-East Asia. Migrant deaths in the Asia-Pacific are also the by-product of internal conflicts and ethnic cleansing that have captured less Western attention than the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the deaths in the Mediterranean. The reality is that most deaths in the Asia-Pacific continue to occur in large unpatrolled spaces, often – but not exclusively – at sea. The majority go unrecorded, as will be shown in this chapter.

<sup>48</sup> Sharon Pickering is Professor of Criminology at Monash University and Dean of Arts. She is also the Director and co-founder of the Border Crossing Observatory, an innovative virtual research centre that produces high-quality and independent research on border crossings. Pickering researches irregular border crossing and has written in the areas of refugees and trafficking with a focus on gender and human rights. Rebecca Powell is the Managing Director of the Border Crossing Observatory at Monash University and also works as a researcher for a number of the research projects hosted by the Observatory. Before joining the Border Crossing Observatory, Powell worked in the field of human trafficking prevention from a law enforcement and criminal justice perspective for international organizations, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Asia Regional Trafficking in Persons Project.

<sup>49</sup> Note that the term *Rohingya* as used to describe the Muslim peoples of Rakhine State, Myanmar, is not accepted by the Government of the Union of Myanmar, which in June 2016 issued an order directing State-owned media to use the term "Muslim community in Rakhine State".

Migrant and refugee deaths in the Asia-Pacific are often foreseeable and can occur by deliberate act or omission; however, the identification and explication of border deaths is not straightforward, nor are the chains of responsibility or accountability for these deaths easily identifiable. Without comprehensive, rigorous ways to count and record border-related deaths, understanding the patterns and causes is hampered, and prevention and justice is delayed as a consequence. As argued earlier (ibid.), the principles of equity require that those who lose their lives far away from home, and their surviving relatives and loved ones, receive the same level of resources, respect and consideration irrespective of the circumstances in which their lives were lost. The challenge for realizing this in the Asia-Pacific is significant, given the lack of data and resources to count and report on such deaths, geographical scale of border deaths sites in the region and national and regional responses to irregular migration within the region that do not support safer migration pathways.

**Map 6. Migrant deaths and disappearances recorded in Asia**



Source: IOM's Missing Migrants Project, data from January 2014 to June 2017.

Note: Names and boundaries indicated on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

### 3.1.1. Current migration trends and policy context

Between 2014 and 2017, two key developments have focused regional and global attention towards refugee and migrant deaths in the Asia-Pacific. The first was the Andaman Sea Crisis, and the second was the Australian border control policies that have arguably displaced migrant routes and their associated harms through the region. Before turning to these two key events, it is important to consider broader migration trends and the policy context in the Asia-Pacific.

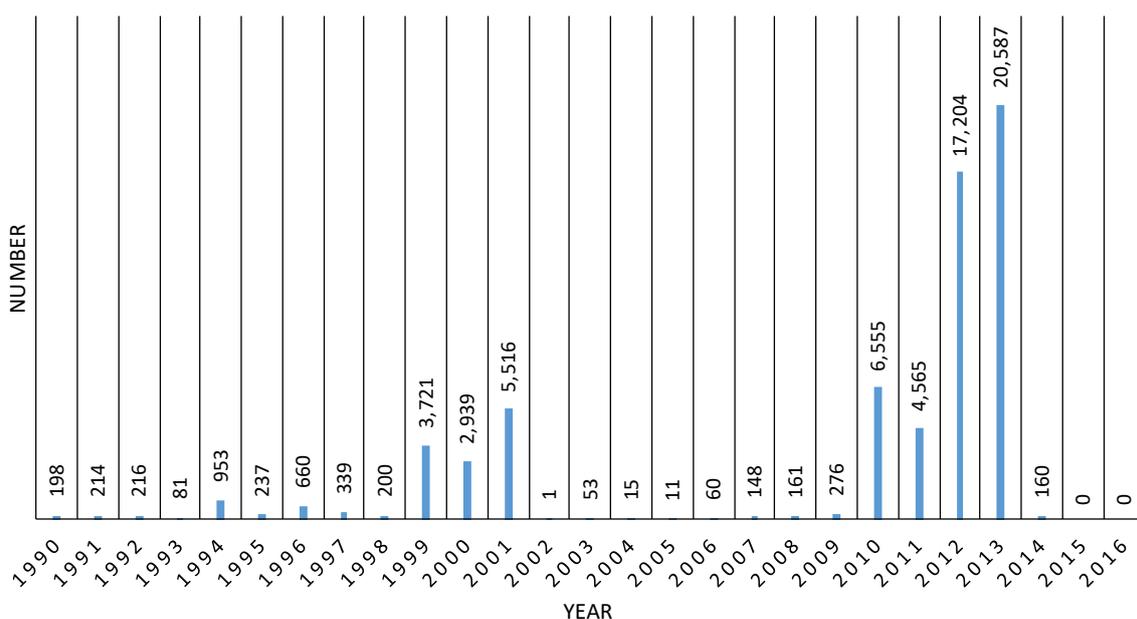
In recent years, the data indicate that women are increasingly on the move both globally and in the region. The *International Migration Report* (2016) estimated that at the end of 2015, there were 244 million migrants in the world. Of this number, 48 per cent are estimated to be women.

The majority of all migrants – 104 million – are in Asia (United Nations, 2016).<sup>50</sup> Data from the Asia-Pacific region support this evidence and reflect the global statistics with a reported increase in the numbers of women migrating within and into the region, showing that women now make up the same proportion – nearly half (48%) of all regional migrants (Sijapati, 2015; Asia-Pacific RCM Thematic Working Group on International Migration, 2015).

The Andaman Sea Crisis in May 2015, discussed below, sheds light on the increased number of women refugees travelling irregularly in the region. Data collected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – while monitoring the crisis – showed an increase in the number of female passengers travelling the Andaman Sea route from the Bay of Bengal to South-East Asia by 50 per cent in a one-year period between 2014 to 2015 (UNHCR, 2015a and 2016).

Considering the Australian context, the introduction of Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) in September 2013 has had an impact on the number of boat arrivals in Australia. The policy is centred on a military-led, inter-agency border security initiative to stop boat arrivals by “boat turn backs” to Sri Lanka, Viet Nam and Indonesia by Australian authorities (Andrew and Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, 2016). Indonesia is identified as a transit point for irregular maritime migrants to embark on boat journeys to Australia, with Sri Lanka and Viet Nam as countries of origin for irregular maritime departures to Australia. While OSB has resulted in zero boat arrivals to Australia since 2015, and only one arrival reported in 2014 (Phillips, 2017), this does not mean that people have stopped attempting to take irregular boat voyages to Australia and risking their lives at sea. The Government of Australia’s data reporting boat turn backs under OSB are not publicly accessible, so accurate numbers are unavailable.<sup>51</sup> It is also worth considering that since the introduction of OSB, large numbers of refugees and irregular migrants who may have planned to go to Australia, wait in transit countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia in situations of limbo and with irregular, unlawful migrant status as they replan their migration journeys to other international destinations, await lengthy UNHCR asylum processing or for pathways to Australia to open once again (see Pickering et al., 2016; Tazreiter, Pickering and Powell, forthcoming).

**Figure 9. Number of people arriving irregularly in Australia on boats, annual figures, 1990–2016**



Source: Phillips, 2017.

<sup>50</sup> These are stock figures that represent accumulated numbers of people living in a country other than the one in which they were born.

<sup>51</sup> For available data, see Phillips, 2017; Andrew and Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, 2016.



September 2017. Rohingya migrants cross from Rakhine, Myanmar into Bangladesh at the Ajumanpara Border point. © IOM 2017 (Photo: Muse Mohammed)

### Text Box 3. Migrant deaths at the Myanmar–Bangladesh border

by Kate Dearden and Marta Sanchez<sup>52</sup>

Between January 2014 and November 2017, Missing Migrants Project recorded the deaths of 274 people trying to cross the border from Myanmar to Bangladesh. All but one of these deaths occurred during two periods of violence in Rakhine State in Myanmar between late 2016 and October 2017, both of which resulted in the mass movement of people across the border into the district of Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh. Most of these deaths occurred on the coast of Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal, or in the Naf River, which runs along nearly half of the border between Myanmar’s Rakhine State and Bangladesh. The cause of at least 86 per cent of the deaths was drowning.

Hundreds of thousands of people from the Rohingya population in Rakhine State have lived in both official and unofficial refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar since 1991.<sup>53</sup> Since the early 1990s, at least 300,000 Rohingya have continued to live in Bangladesh with and without refugee protection.<sup>54</sup> There have been fluctuations in these populations over the years. A modest number of Rohingya have returned to Myanmar, and there has been secondary migration to other countries in South and South-East Asia.

<sup>52</sup> Kate Dearden is a data analyst working on IOM’s Missing Migrants Project, and Marta Sanchez is a consultant based at IOM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Centre.

<sup>53</sup> See *Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2008*, available from [www.burmalibrary.org/docs08/HRDU\\_YB-2008/pdf/refugees.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs08/HRDU_YB-2008/pdf/refugees.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> Some 33,000 Rohingya are officially recognized as refugees in Bangladesh, those living in two official refugee camps set up after the 1991 influx in Kutupalong and Nayapara. The Government of Bangladesh officially refers to the rest of the Rohingya population in the country as undocumented Myanmar nationals (UMN).

### October 2016–February 2017

During this period, approximately 80,000 people crossed the border into Cox’s Bazar, joining over 100,000 already settled there.<sup>55</sup> Missing Migrants Project recorded 60 fatalities of Rohingya attempting to leave Myanmar and reach Bangladesh in November and December 2016. Of the recorded fatalities, 38 per cent were due to drownings in the Naf River. Another 18 deaths were recorded with unknown causes, while 4 people were recorded as having been killed by gunfire. There were 15 women and 12 children confirmed to be among the dead during this period. The bodies of 51 people were recovered, while the remaining 9 were recorded as missing and presumed dead after their boats capsized on the Naf River.

### August–November 2017 (ongoing)

Following the second outbreak of violence in Rakhine State on 25 August, some 514,650 new people fled to Cox’s Bazar by the end of September, more than doubling the Rohingya population already in the region.<sup>56</sup> There were 217 fatalities recorded between 31 August and 30 November 2017 as Rohingya tried to cross the Myanmar–Bangladesh border, including 142 in the Naf River and 67 in the Bay of Bengal. Four other people were killed by gunfire while crossing the border, and five were killed by landmine blasts. Several reports of human rights organizations point to new anti-personnel land mines being planted on the Myanmar side of the border since September.<sup>57, 58</sup> Of almost 19,000 people who arrived and were assessed by IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix in Cox’s Bazar between 21 and 27 September, 30 per cent had taken a boat to cross the border, while 34 per cent had walked.<sup>59</sup>

Among the 173 deaths recorded in this period, 37 were confirmed to be women and 60 were children. As of 21 September 2017, approximately 23 per cent of Rohingya living in Cox’s Bazar were women and 58 per cent were children.<sup>60</sup> This chapter describes research on the particular risks that women and children face on migrant journeys, and why they are undercounted in records.

### Data sources and challenges

There are general methodological challenges involved in tracking migrant deaths,<sup>61</sup> but several specific issues on the Myanmar–Bangladesh border amplify these difficulties. Humanitarian workers and journalists’ lack of access to Rakhine State during the two recent periods of conflict means that many more migrant deaths are likely to have occurred with no witnesses or formal verification. Deaths occurring during humanitarian emergencies and instability also coincide with less capacity for aid agencies and researchers on the ground to thoroughly record deaths.

<sup>55</sup> See IOM, Bangladesh Needs and Population Monitoring: Round 5, 21 September 2017, available from [www.globaldtm.info/npm-bangladesh-round-5-report-september-2017/](http://www.globaldtm.info/npm-bangladesh-round-5-report-september-2017/)

<sup>56</sup> See Inter Sector Coordination Group, Situation Update: Rohingya Crisis, 5 October 2017, available from [www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/171005\\_iscg\\_sitrep\\_final.pdf](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/171005_iscg_sitrep_final.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> See Amnesty International, “Myanmar: New landmine blasts point to deliberate targeting of Rohingya”, 10 September 2017, available from [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/09/myanmar-new-landmine-blasts-point-to-deliberate-targeting-of-rohingya/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/09/myanmar-new-landmine-blasts-point-to-deliberate-targeting-of-rohingya/)

<sup>58</sup> See Human Rights Watch, “Burma: Landmines deadly for fleeing Rohingya”, 23 September 2017, available from [www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/23/burma-landmines-deadly-fleeing-rohingya](http://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/23/burma-landmines-deadly-fleeing-rohingya)

<sup>59</sup> See IOM, Bangladesh Needs and Population Monitoring Dashboard: Round 5, 27 September 2017, available from [www.globaldtm.info/npm-bangladesh-round-5-report-dashboard-27-september-2017/](http://www.globaldtm.info/npm-bangladesh-round-5-report-dashboard-27-september-2017/)

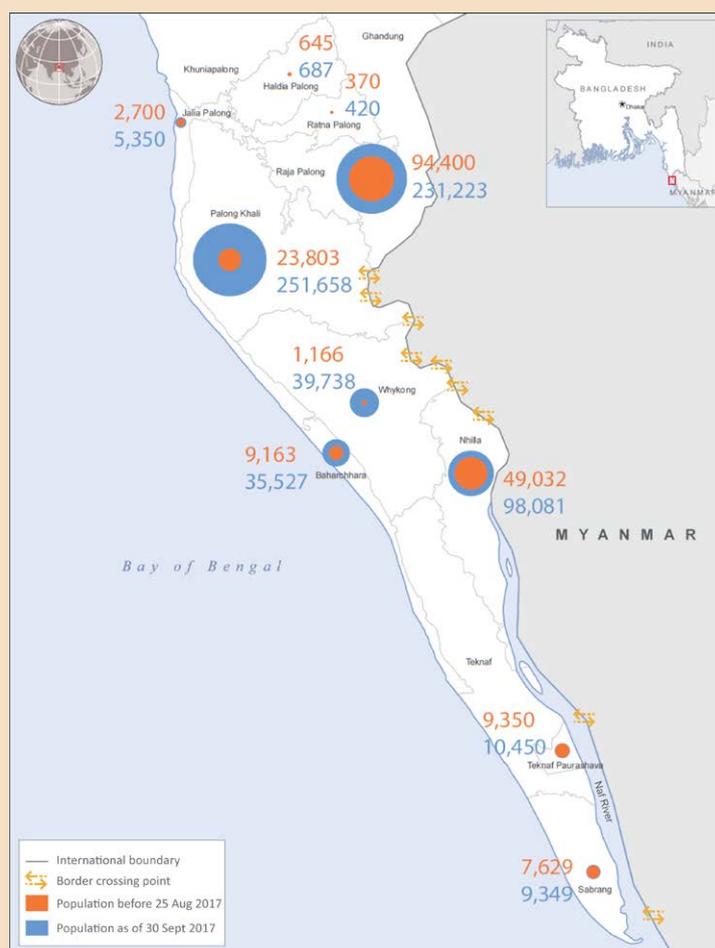
<sup>60</sup> See IOM, Bangladesh Needs and Population Monitoring: Round 5, September 2017, available from [www.globaldtm.info/npm-bangladesh-round-5-report-september-2017/](http://www.globaldtm.info/npm-bangladesh-round-5-report-september-2017/)

<sup>61</sup> As described in the first chapter of Part 1 of this report.

For these reasons, the Missing Migrants Project has largely relied on news media for first reports of migrant deaths. This leaves most of the records in this region only partially verified. There are several weaknesses related to using media sources – the quality varies significantly and information can be incomplete or inaccurate. In addition, reports on migrant fatalities are generally not followed up. For example, although a shipwreck is reported soon after it happens, in the following days, little information is published about the identities of the dead and missing. Nevertheless, journalism in this context continues to serve as a conduit to information otherwise unavailable in the wider public sphere.<sup>62</sup>

Witness statements reported to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in January 2017 also included information on deaths that occurred on the journey across the Myanmar border into Bangladesh.<sup>63</sup> Although it is impossible to verify such testimonies for veracity or double-counting, without other alternatives, these deaths may otherwise have gone unrecorded. Current conditions on the border mean that challenges remain to data collection, and any information gathered is likely to be reliant on in-depth, investigative journalism.

**Map 7. Comparison of refugee population in sub-districts in Cox’s Bazaar, Bangladesh 2017**



Source: Adapted from Inter Sector Coordination Group – Bangladesh, 2017.

<sup>62</sup> For discussion of ethical journalism when reporting on missing migrants, see A. White and A. Singleton, “Chapter 3: Mixed messages: Media coverage of migration and fatalities”, In: *Fatal Journeys Volume 3, Part 1: Improving Data on Missing Migrants* (IOM, Geneva, 2017), available from <https://publications.iom.int/books/fatal-journeys-volume-3-part-1-improving-data-missing-migrants>

<sup>63</sup> See OHCHR, Report of OHCHR Mission to Bangladesh: Interviews with Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016, Flash Report, 3 February 2017, available from [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport3Feb2017.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport3Feb2017.pdf)

## 3.2. Risks migrants and refugees face in the Asia-Pacific

This section focuses firstly on the most significant crisis in the Asia-Pacific in recent years, which is regarded as accounting for the majority of migrant and refugee deaths in the region. Secondly, it returns to the high-profile issue of migrant and refugee deaths en route to Australia and the ongoing volatility of arrivals in relation to Australian border control policies.

### 3.2.1. The Andaman Sea Crisis

Rohingya have experienced cyclical expulsion and irregular forced migration from Myanmar, primarily to Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia, as a result of discriminatory policies and during flares of sectarian and state-based violence against them (Equal Rights Trust, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2014; Green, Macmanus and de la Cour Venning 2015; Parnini, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2013; O'Connor, 2014; Ullah, 2011; Farzana, 2016; Slezak, Singer and Ramadurai, 2015; Southwick, 2015; Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), 2016). Flares of violence in Rakhine State occurred in 2012 and more recently in 2016–2017, causing a large number of Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh and Malaysia. Amnesty International (2016) reports that, as a result of violence in Rakhine State in 2012, 125,000 Rohingya were internally displaced, while the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR, 2015) estimate this number to be up to 140,000. The literature identifies that this violence from 2012 and 2014 against the Rohingya, combined with their statelessness and continued discriminatory restrictions they face, led to a surge in refugee movements that ultimately contributed to the Andaman Sea Crisis in May 2015 (Newland, 2015; Refugee Council of Australia, 2015; Amnesty International, 2015; Hin-Lim, 2015; APHR, 2015; Green, Macmanus and de la Cour Venning, 2015; UNHCR, 2015b). With renewed flares of violence against the Rohingya in Rakhine State in 2016 and 2017, the potential for a future irregular migration crisis similar to that in the Andaman Sea in 2015 is considered to be a real possibility (Robertson, 2017; United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2017).

Increasingly, the research stressed that Rohingya were not the only group caught up in the Andaman Sea Crisis. Irregular Bangladeshi migrants also make this sea journey in search of economic opportunity in South-East Asia, particularly in Thailand and Malaysia (Ullah, 2013; Wickramasekara, 2016; Ranjan, 2016; Newland, 2015).

While the situation in May 2015 focused international attention on this maritime migration route and the dangers and risks associated with travel along it, the Andaman Sea route was a well-established and unregulated migration pathway from the Bay of Bengal to South-East Asia that has been used by Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants for many years (UNHCR, 2014, 2015a, 2016; Wickramasekara, 2016; Amnesty International, 2016). The UNHCR, IOM and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2015) have described this unregulated maritime movement as a “complex, mixed migratory movement composed of refugees, stateless people and economic migrants”.

Surges in migration through the Bay of Bengal occurred in 2012 and 2014, peaking in October of 2014 (UNHCR, 2014). These followed outbreaks of violence and persecution targeting Rohingya in Myanmar and forcing them to flee (Green, Macmanus and de la Cour Venning, 2015; APHR, 2015; Refugee Council of Australia, 2015; UNHCR, 2016).

In 2014, the Government of Myanmar instructed all Rohingya to register as Bengali, which would then result in the group's exclusion from the national census. Further, in February 2015, the Government announced a revocation of all Temporary Registration Certificates, this having an impact on the situation of Rohingya, who no longer would have any form of identity documents as a result (Amnesty International, 2015). Bangladeshis seeking better economic opportunities and fleeing situations of poverty in Bangladesh were also caught up in the Andaman Sea Crisis (Amnesty International, 2015; Hin-Lim, 2015; Newland, 2015).

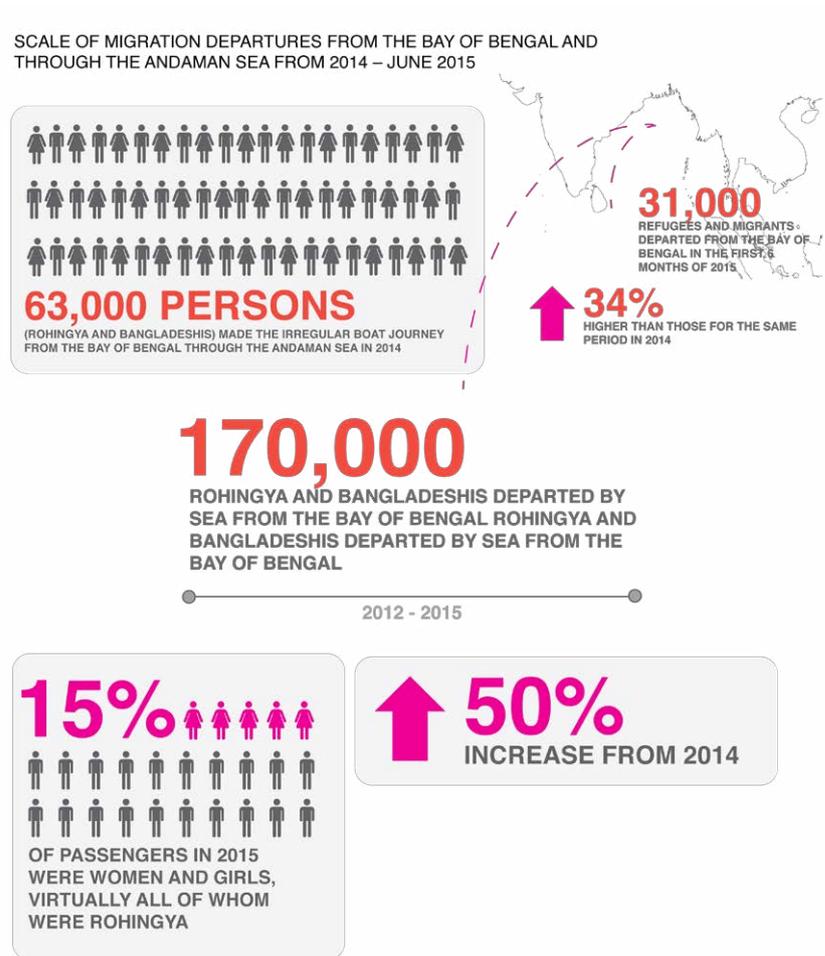
The UNHCR reported that smugglers facilitating travel from the Bay of Bengal through the Andaman Sea had begun to abandon their “human cargo” at sea due to restricted disembarkation opportunities in Thailand and Malaysia from May 2015 (UNHCR, 2015a). Usually, smugglers would disembark their passengers in Thailand, holding them in camps and demanding ransom payments, before continuing with overland travel to Malaysia. However, with the discovery of smuggler jungle camps along the Thailand–Malaysia border in early May, and the subsequent crackdown on people smugglers by the Thai authorities, smuggler-facilitated boat journeys to South-East Asia through the Bay of Bengal were compromised. Analysis of this period shows that the Government of Thailand’s crackdown on people smugglers was through a “help on” policy resulting in boat tow backs, preventing disembarkation on Thai shores. Instead, this “help on” policy involved the interception of boats at sea by the Thai authorities, supplying them with provisions before then towing them back out to sea. The policy was replicated by the Malaysian and Indonesian authorities, preventing disembarkation further down the Andaman Sea route. As a result, smugglers eventually began to abandon their ships and passengers at sea in dire conditions, some drifting for months, without enough food and water (McAuliffe, 2016; Newland, 2015).

Two existing regional mechanisms are the mainstays of evaluation of regional responses to the Andaman Sea Crisis: (a) Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN); and (b) Bali Process. The available research identifies the 20 May 2015 tripartite meeting of foreign affairs ministers from Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia called by Malaysia (as the chair of ASEAN) as producing the first collective response to the situation (Newland, 2015). By the time of this meeting, all boats that had been drifting in the Andaman Sea had already been rescued by fishermen or had run aground; two more boats were rescued after the meeting by Myanmar authorities. Boat turn backs ceased following this meeting as a result of growing international pressure to disembark migrants (Amnesty International, 2015; UNHCR, 2016). While subsequent meetings were held, the ASEAN principle of non-interference is identified as hampering meaningful attempts to redress the root cause of the crisis (APHR, 2015). The Bali Process, a voluntary and non-binding consultative process remained silent on the Andaman Sea Crisis until well into 2015 (Newland, 2015). To date, and following the Andaman Sea Crisis that exposed inadequacies in the regional responses to this event, there have been no significant developments to enhance the capacity of regional mechanisms for preventing and responding to irregular migration, including trafficking and smuggling.

### ***Border deaths***

There is broad agreement in the literature on the scale of this irregular migration and the estimates reported by the UNHCR and IOM, the two main intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) monitoring and reporting on the situation. It has been reported that maritime migration along this route tripled between 2012 and 2014 (Newland, 2015; UNHCR, 2014, 2015a), with all major IGOs reporting the figure provided by the UNHCR that 63,000 persons (Rohingya and Bangladeshis) made the irregular boat journey from the Bay of Bengal through the Andaman Sea in 2014 (Amnesty International, 2015; Newland, 2015; UNHCR, IOM and UNODC, 2015; UNHCR, 2014). Estimates from the IGOs that monitored and reported on the situation indicate that 31,000 refugees and migrants journeyed through the Bay of Bengal in the first six months of 2015 (Amnesty International, 2015; UNHCR, 2015a). The UNHCR estimated that, in the three years between the intercommunal violence that occurred in Rakhine State in 2012 and the Andaman Sea Crisis in 2015, some 170,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshis departed by sea from the Bay of Bengal (UNHCR, 2016).

**Figure 10. Scale of migration departures from the Bay of Bengal and through the Andaman Sea from January 2014 to June 2015**

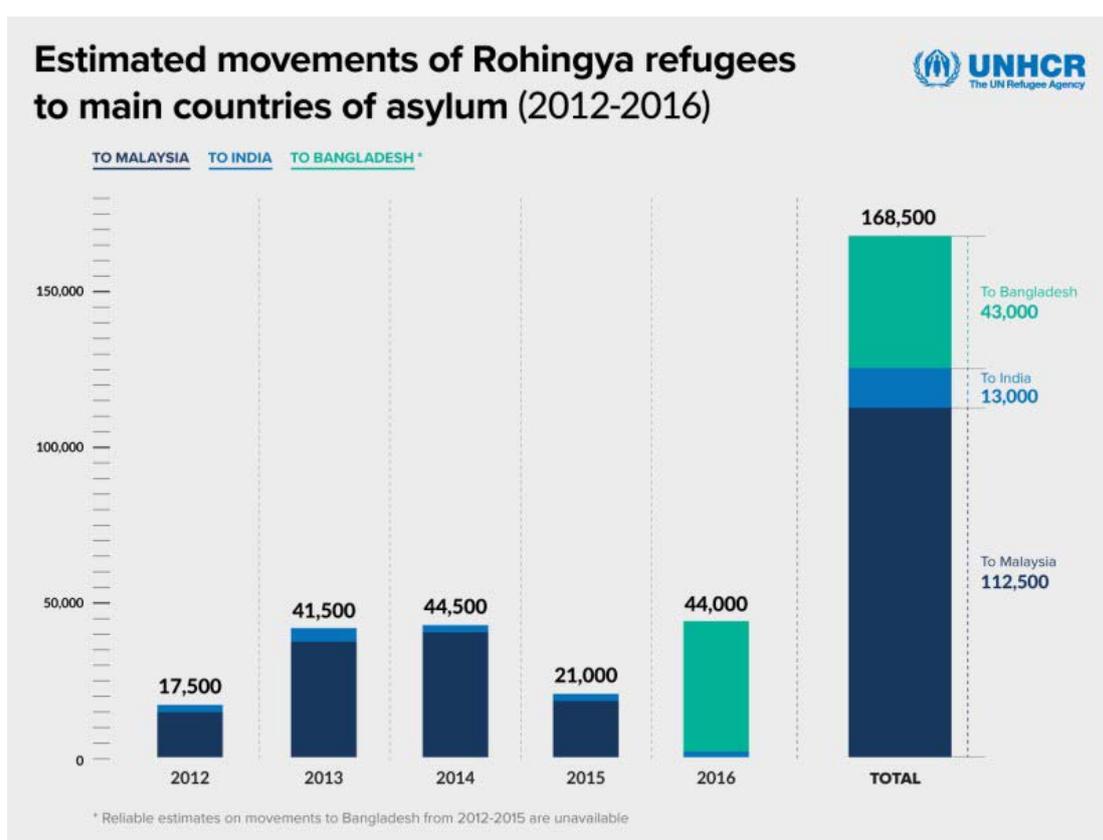


Sources: UNHCR, IOM and UNODC, 2015; UNHCR, 2014, 2015a, 2016.

Embarkation and disembarkation data for irregular maritime journeys are the basis from which to understand the risks and dangers of such journeys and can provide some insight into missing migrant and refugee deaths en route. These data ideally need to be collected in tandem; however, this was not the case for the Andaman Sea crisis. Although some embarkation and disembarkation data are available, the two sets of data for embarkations and disembarkations do not correspond. Disembarkation data are available from the crisis period; however, embarkation data are only for the first half of 2015 as a whole and not specifically for the crisis period, from which a comparison could be made to then begin to more accurately determine the number of dead or missing migrants and refugees. Disembarkation data from the crisis period recorded by IGOs help to show the scale of irregular migration through the Andaman Sea at this time. For example, UNHCR reported that the total number of irregular migrants and refugees travelling through the Andaman Sea to South-East Asia in the first half of 2015 was 31,000. Disembarkation data are only available for the May–July crisis period and not for the first half of the year in total, although the disembarkation data do not capture all of those who disembarked from irregular maritime journeys. Data on the total number of irregular migrants and refugees who journeyed through the Andaman Sea in the crisis period are unavailable.

IOM and UNHCR provided irregular migration movement data during the crisis period and beyond, with IOM consistently reporting that “at least 5,543 persons who departed from Myanmar and Bangladesh managed to disembark in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand, between 10 May and 30 July 2015” (IOM, 2015; 2016c).<sup>64</sup> The UNHCR has data on the estimated movements of Rohingya in the region to main countries of asylum from 2012 to 2016 with an estimated peak of Rohingya movement in 2014 at 44,500 (UNHCR, 2017a) (see Figure 11). While UNHCR (2016) reported on the high number of departures from the Bay of Bengal in the first half of 2015, it also reported on a significant decline in the number of departures (1,600) in the second half of that year. The number of departures in the first half of 2015 was 34 per cent higher than those for the same period in 2014. Based on interviews conducted by UNHCR with refugees who experienced the Andaman Sea Crises, it appears that the decline in departures was due to the crackdown by authorities at both the departure and arrival points, and also to refugees learning of the harsh conditions faced on arrival in South-East Asia, such as detention, and of the discovery of mass graves in smuggler camps (UNHCR, 2016). Further, the IOM reported data on embarkations from Myanmar and Bangladesh from September to December 2015, including at least 1,500 departures (IOM, 2016a and 2016b).

**Figure 11. Estimated movements of Rohingya refugees to main countries of asylum, 2012–2016**



Source: UNHCR, 2017a.

Note: Reliable estimates on movements to Bangladesh from 2012 to 2015 are unavailable.

<sup>64</sup> This phrase was used in all IOM Situation Reports on the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea Crisis Response between September 2015 and July 2016, which are available from [www.iom.int/press-room/situation-reports](http://www.iom.int/press-room/situation-reports)

Only UNHCR has reported on the number of women and girls who experienced the Andaman Sea Crisis. While the number of irregular migrant and refugee women and girls travelling along this maritime route has increased in recent years, the UNHCR found that 18 per cent of passengers in 2015 were women and girls, virtually all of whom were Rohingya (UNHCR, 2016). It also reported that 12 per cent of those travelling along this route in 2014 were women, representing a 50 per cent increase from 2014 to 2015 (UNHCR, 2014).

UNHCR was the only international organization to report on the number of deaths that occurred during the Andaman Sea Crisis. In 2014, UNHCR reported that an estimated 750 people died during irregular maritime journeys in the Andaman Sea in that year as a result of starvation, dehydration or beating by smuggler crew members (ibid.). While not providing an exact figure, in 2014, the Organization also reported that “[h]undreds more are alleged to have died in smuggling camps in Thailand” (ibid.). In 2015, it estimated that 370 persons died while taking the Andaman Sea journey from the Bay of Bengal as a result of starvation, disease, dehydration or beatings by people smugglers between January and June 2015 (UNHCR, 2016; 2015a).<sup>65</sup>

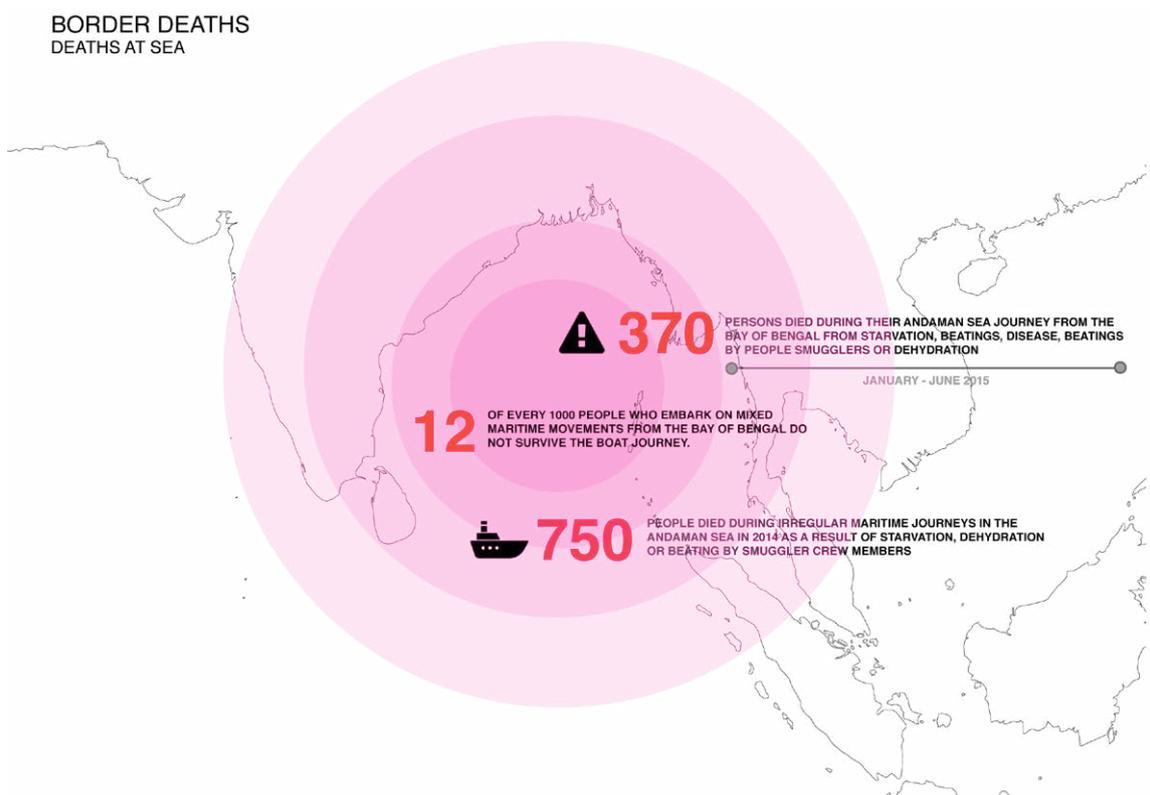
Based on these estimates, the UNHCR claims that the fatality rate for those journeying on boats through the Andaman Sea from the Bay of Bengal from 2013 to 2015 was double that for refugees and asylum seekers travelling through the Mediterranean Sea during the same time period (UNHCR, 2017a). Further, the UNHCR reported that “[a]pproximately 12 of every 1,000 people who embark on mixed maritime movements from the Bay of Bengal do not survive the boat journey. This means as many as 2,000 Bangladeshis and Rohingya may have died before ever reaching land in the past four years (since 2012)” (UNHCR, 2016).

The UNHCR’s border death counts are based largely on interviews conducted by the UNHCR with those passengers caught up in the situation who disembarked in South-East Asia and recounted their witnessing of deaths at sea during the journey (UNHCR, 2016; 2015a).

UNHCR’s estimates do not include deaths that occurred on land, such as those discovered in the mass graves in Thailand and Malaysia. Other reports of deaths have been largely reported by IGOs and news media. The discovery of mass graves in smuggler camps along the Thai–Malaysian border on the Thai side by the Thai authorities was reported in early May (as detailed above), resulting in the Government of Thailand’s crackdown on people smugglers. More graves were discovered by the Malaysian authorities in late May 2015 and August 2015. According to news reports, the Malaysian authorities found 28 smuggler camps and 139 mass graves in May 2015 at Wang Kelian along its border with Thailand, yet could not identify how many bodies were held in each grave (*ABC News*, 2015; *Nayak*, 2015; *Lih-Yi*, 2015). An additional 24 skeletons were found by Malaysian authorities in 18 more graves in August 2015 (*Bernama*, 2015).

<sup>65</sup> At the time of publication, UNHCR advised that they had updated their estimates for maritime deaths in the Andaman Sea for 2014 and 2015. Updated estimates are 200 deaths in 2015 and 700 in 2014.

**Figure 12. Estimated border deaths in the Andaman Sea as reported in 2014–2015**

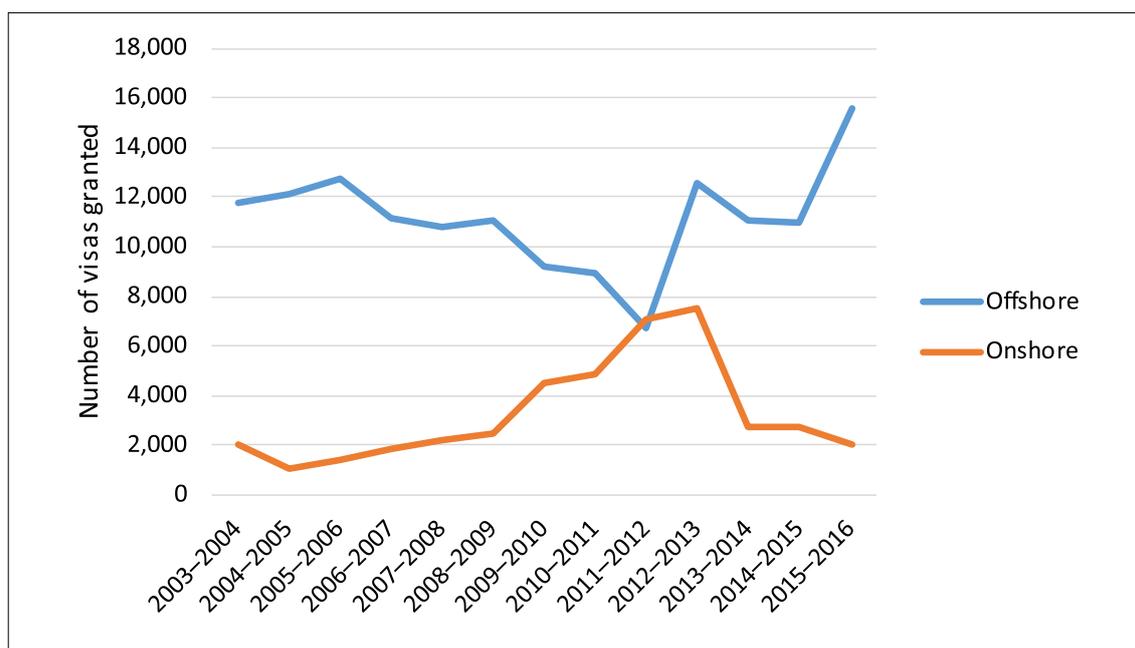


Source: UNHCR, 2016, 2015a, 2014.

### ***Migrant and refugee deaths en route to Australia***

Australian border-related deaths remain shaped by geography and by the total visa system that is the core of the border management system. Those who have undertaken the irregular maritime journey from Indonesia to Australia with the intention of seeking asylum have paid a facilitator for the journey. While successive Australian governments have sought to prevent irregular maritime asylum seekers from arriving in Australia to claim asylum, those who have done so continue to access grants of protection (see Figure 13), albeit at much reduced levels since 2012–2013.

**Figure 13** Number of onshore and offshore visas granted under the Australian humanitarian visa programme, 2003–2016



Source: DIBP Annual Reports 2003–2004 to 2015–2016.

The number of boat arrivals to Australia have always been volatile, with two discernible peaks around the early 2000s and again from 2009 to 2013 (Phillips and Spinks, 2013; Phillips, 2017; see also Figure 9). The degree to which this variability is explained by global trends in refugee-producing situations or by changes in Australian border protection policies is a matter of ongoing dispute. Most recently, Australia has seen another trough in arrivals, although the extent to which there continue to be departures from Indonesia but information on interception or turnarounds remain unknown.

Over the last decade, and particularly the last five years prior to the recent cessation of arrivals, asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat come from the Middle East, West and South Asia, and in recent years have overwhelmingly come from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Sri Lanka. Those fleeing Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq often engage in complicated travel routes that eventuate in air arrival to Malaysia and then onward travel to Indonesia (Barker, 2013; Pickering et al., 2016). Many Iranians travel directly to Indonesia where, along with those travelling from Iraq, they do not need visas. While Sri Lankan asylum seekers may sail directly from Sri Lanka, the vast majority of asylum seekers arriving in Australia have come via Indonesia. According to UNODC (2015), these were the most well-known routes for irregular travel to Australia until late 2013 when OSB was introduced.

### 3.3. Assessment of available data in the Asia-Pacific

Other regions of the world – notably Europe and North America – have seen significant advances and coordination of efforts around recording migrant and refugee deaths; however, the Asia-Pacific is yet to advance a regional approach to counting and accounting for these deaths.

Although the UNHCR has reported on border deaths from the Andaman Sea crisis, the gendered breakdown of deaths and other identifying details for individuals who died, such as name, age, country of origin, cause of death, adult or child, have not been recorded and therefore not reported. While UNHCR’s estimates, being the only border deaths data available, are useful

for the period covering the situation, rigorous methodological improvements could be made to enhance the quality and accuracy of border deaths recording. These include collecting embarkation and disembarkation data in tandem and recording gender breakdowns and other identifiable details of those who died (see border deaths data recording methodology in Weber and Pickering, 2011).

Counting migrant and refugee deaths in the Asia-Pacific has paradoxically been either a case of “high octane” public debate, as in the case of Australia, or of chilling silences, as has been the case in relation to the Andaman Sea Crisis. Counting migrant and refugee deaths in this region has been subject to competing claims, and there is no reliable basis or system for recording these deaths. When high-quality and credible data are collected, they can be better used to identify and humanize those who have died. They also provide evidence for pressure to increase government accountability for the deaths and for advocates of policy shifts towards safer migration pathways.

Approaches to recording migrant and refugee deaths in the Asia-Pacific should be informed by clear ethics in the process of counting that should be reflected in both a rigorous methodology and the application of the knowledge generated. Migrant and refugee death counts can be constructed with different purposes in mind. As argued before (Weber and Pickering, 2011), these include providing a statistical basis for research on the risks and consequences of border crossing and enforcement, as a record and tribute to those who died, as a basis for accountability, to inform policy and prevent further deaths, and to assist relatives to identify their missing loved ones. And the act of counting can implicitly or explicitly attribute cause and effect, and can identify different forms of harm or death. In this section, the authors seek to relay how this ethical, practical and political terrain has been negotiated in the establishment and maintenance of the Australian Border Deaths Database.

The only publicly available mechanism for counting deaths in this region has focused on Australia through the Australian Border Deaths Database. The Database was established as part of the research for *Globalization and Borders: Death at the Global Frontier* (Weber and Pickering, 2011) when it became apparent that there was no publicly available official data on border-related deaths in Australia. Hosted at the Border Crossing Observatory at Monash University, the information is obtained primarily from media reports, which are cross-referenced where possible with official reports from governments, verified information from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), coronial inquiries and similar. The data are updated as fatalities are reported, and other data sources are used from time to time to cross-check the list. Discrepancies identified through these checks can be difficult to reconcile. The Observatory is now seeking to expand the Database across South-East Asia through a network of agencies and NGOs, in order to build a more comprehensive picture of border deaths in the region.

The team behind the Australian Border Deaths Database plans to apply the “functional border methodology” across South-East Asia. This approach in effect challenges the idea that deaths are only counted if bodies are found in situ, as those counts that include deaths where bodies are not found (as is often the case with individuals presumed to be lost at sea), or are found at some distance from the border, produce figures of a different nature and complexion than those generated by a count that relies solely on forensic examination. The importance of including data that may not have been subject to official examination is critical for the Asia-Pacific region, where deaths at sea remain the largest category of deaths. For example, the lack of openly accessible data on border-related deaths occurring en route to Australia is a severe impediment to full recording of deaths and to the understanding of the human costs of border controls and irregular migration. As detailed in an earlier volume (Weber and Pickering, 2014), out of 43 incidents involving the deaths of 61 people since 2000, only 15 coronial inquests were conducted and just 8 made publicly available (Weber and Pickering, 2011).

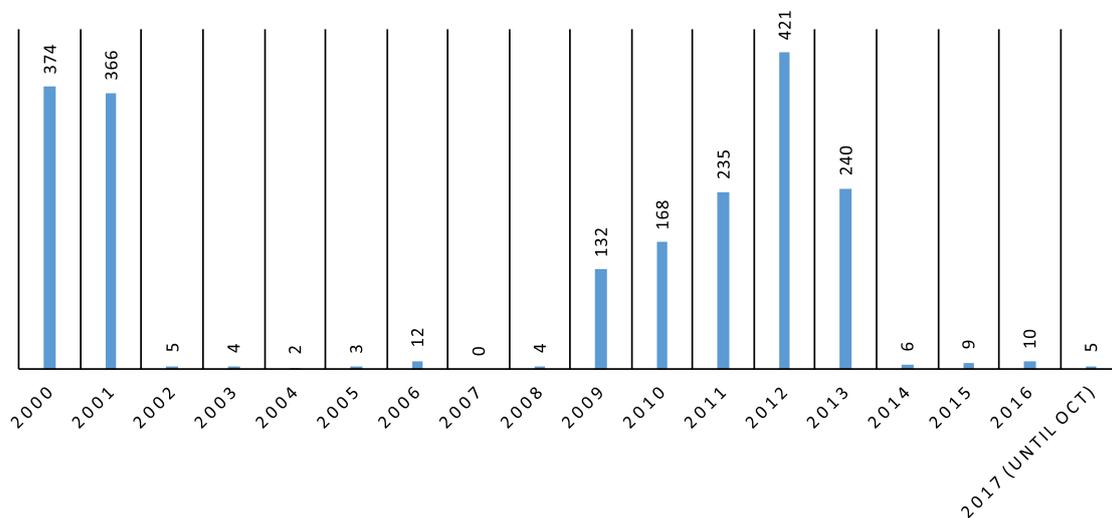
### 3.4. What do the available data show?

This section discusses what is known and unknown about deaths en route to Australia.

#### 3.4.1. How many people die?

The Australian Border Deaths Database has recorded 1,996 border-related deaths between January 2000 and October 2017. This figure includes those who are believed to be missing, and those who have not been rescued or recovered and are therefore feared drowned. It includes those who have died en route to Australia, including during interdiction by Australian authorities, and during apprehension by authorities on the Australian mainland, while in onshore or offshore detention centres, and during or after deportation. Table 2 shows that the vast majority of these deaths (96%) occur at sea, often before asylum seeker vessels have entered Australian waters. The distinction between deaths that occur within and outside Australian waters should be treated with caution, since media reports do not always describe the location with precision, and also because of the variety of maritime borders that exist in law and practice. In the absence of more detailed information, fatal incidents have only been classified as occurring within Australian waters where there is some indication that Australian border control or rescue patrols have been involved. This approach is likely to undercount the number of sinkings that have occurred in Australian waters.

**Figure 14. Annual number of deaths during irregular journeys to Australia, January 2000–October 2017**



Source: Border Crossing Observatory, Australian Border Deaths Database, 2017.

**Table 2. Known deaths related to Australian border controls, January 2000–October 2017**

Circumstances	Deaths	Percentage of total
En route to Australia	1,270	64%
Inside Australian waters	639	32%
Onshore detention	36	2%
Upon return to home country	16	0.8%
In-country suicide	17	0.8%
Offshore detention (includes Christmas Island)	14	0.7%
Arrest/deportation	3	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,996</b>	

Source: Border Crossing Observatory, Australian Border Deaths Database, 2017.

Both UNHCR and IOM have been monitoring and reporting on deaths in South-East Asia in since 2013 and 2014, respectively. IOM established the Missing Migrants Project (see [missingmigrants.iom.int](http://missingmigrants.iom.int)), which includes border deaths counts for South-East Asia from 2014. These border deaths figures are only estimates however, taken from a variety of both primary/secondary data sources on deaths/missing migrants, including data on the Bay of Bengal from reports by UNHCR and NGOs.

**Table 3. IOM border deaths in South-East Asia from January 2014 to September 2017**

Year	Number of deaths
2014	814
2015	789
2016	187
2017 (as of 30 September)	216
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,006</b>

Source: IOM's Missing Migrants Project, [missingmigrants.iom.int/region/asia](http://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/asia), 2017

Data from UNHCR on border deaths from Rohingya and Bangladeshi maritime movements across the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea between 2013 and 2015 shows an estimated total of 1,800 deaths across this three-year period. UNHCR was unable, however, to estimate the gender breakdown of such deaths. In the same period UNHCR data shows the dramatic increase of female passengers travelling along this sea route (from 8 to 18%), reflecting the 50 per cent increase in their numbers from 2014 to 2015. While these UNHCR border deaths figures are estimates, they are informed by data collected by UNHCR from over 500 interviews with refugees following their disembarkation in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. These data only cover maritime deaths, and as UNHCR notes in the most recent Mixed Maritime Movement report (2017a), these maritime deaths were largely due to smuggler abuse and deprivation and not by drowning. These estimates from UNHCR do not include statistics on other border-related deaths, such as deaths in smuggling camps, other deaths during overland journeys from starvation, dehydration, accidents and deaths in immigration detention centres in the region for example.

The most recent violence in Rakhine State against the Rohingya from 25 August 2017 has caused another large-scale migration movement with more than 500,000 Rohingya refugees crossing into neighbouring Bangladesh in a period of less than five weeks from this date (UNHCR, 2017b). The scale of this Rohingya refugee flow has surpassed anything seen in the region since the Indochinese crisis in the 1970s. Since August, the media have reported more than 180 deaths of Rohingya refugees attempting the journey to safety in Bangladesh (Dartford 2017; *Daily Observer*, 2017). These have included a number of deaths from boat capsizing incidents, where refugees crossed the Naf River or skirted the Bay of Bengal to get from Rakhine State to Cox's Bazar (SBS News 2017a, 2017b; *Al Jazeera*, 2017).

**Table 4: Border deaths estimates from Rohingya and Bangladeshi maritime movements to Malaysia, 2013–2015**

YEAR	2013	2014	2015	TOTAL
Fatality rate	1.7%	1.2%	0.6%	1.2%
Estimated deaths	900	700	200	1,800
Female	8%	12%	18%	12%
<b>Place of origin of Rohingya</b>				
Maungdaw	51%	40%	35%	43%
Buthidaung	15%	15%	15%	15%
Sittwe	22%	31%	41%	30%

Source: UNHCR, 2017a.

### 3.4.2. Where are the women and girls?

Gender roles, inequalities and changing social mores have profound impacts on women's migrations in the region. Migration can generate opportunities for women and their families, redress vulnerabilities and open up chances for increased empowerment. However, it can also increase vulnerabilities, discrimination and risks.

However, migration is not just about the benefits or detriment for the woman involved; it has effects for whole communities. Inflows of remittances benefit sending countries, transnational familial relationships transform gender roles, increased labour supply and what many have called the feminization of migration has been changing entire workforces.

The number of women migrants has been increasing in most countries both absolutely and proportionally. Predominantly, women are moving into service sectors within other South-East Asian nations, the Middle East and Gulf countries. But they are also using South-East Asia as a point of transit, and they are increasingly seeking protection in larger numbers. The first wave of the recent Rohingya refugee flow from August 2017 to Bangladesh was predominantly women and children (UNHCR, 2017c).

Women's migrations and whether they are deemed legal or illegal are changeable, mostly because of the ways government policy changes and what was a legal and safe form of migration is criminalized and becomes unsafe and vice versa. Many countries have repeatedly introduced restrictions or outright bans on migrating to certain countries or sectors; these changes have disproportionately impacted low-paid domestic service or hospitality sectors and aimed to restrict women's migration. This has the effect of forcing women to migrate through informal means. At the same time, the private sector has gained greater traction in the organization of migration for overseas employment that many have identified as resulting in a protection gap for women, especially in relation to the rise of the entrepreneurial middle person. In most migration destinations, labour laws do not cover domestic workers.

The majority of women migrants in the region move to work in female-dominated occupations – where UN Women have described women migrants being regarded as “young, needy, pliable, portable and a disposable labour force” (2013:17). Research by the authors in Indonesia and Malaysia suggests that migrating women are largely making autonomous decisions to provide safety or financial support for their families. Yet it has also been found that women are often making decisions about migration routes with lower levels of knowledge and the dangers involved. In many contexts, this results in women being charged higher prices by smugglers and officials requiring bribes. Women are also more likely than men to become stuck in transit countries due to lack of documentation, money and are more likely to be subject to local hostility (Pickering et al., 2016; Tazreiter, Pickering and Powell, forthcoming).

As UN Women noted in their seminal 2013 report, “[m]uch of the difficulty in enforcing gender-sensitive, rights-based labour migration governance is also due to the systemic lack of sex-disaggregated data and statistics” (p. 6). Migrating to less developed and often less regulated settings, utilizing irregular routes and the use of smugglers, working in illicit and unregulated markets all mean while women’s migration may be increasing, it is largely occurring in the shadows.

When regular avenues of migration for work or for accessing protection are closed, or involve interminable delays often of years, women move by irregular means. Invariably for women, this involves the use of facilitators. Women use smugglers more often than men in similar circumstances. In this unregulated space gender-based violence is often routine. Although in recent work with 335 Rohingya women in Malaysia, the authors found that rates of reported gender-based violence were higher when women travelled with male family members than when they travelled unaccompanied using smugglers. Overall, almost half of the women reported gender-based violence during the journey (see Tazreiter, Pickering and Powell, forthcoming).

The research also shows, however, that the costs of smugglers are often prohibitive for women who usually have even less resources than men, which is why refugee camps and transit centres are often populated by women and children. Refugee camps, transit centres and immigration detention centres have high rates of sexual and gendered violence. The harms and risks of irregular migration are deeply gendered.

Border-related deaths occur at the physical border (frontier), en route, in offshore or onshore detention, during deportation, on forced return to homeland, and even within the community as a result of hate crime, labour exploitation, withholding of subsistence or the promotion of conditions of legal and social precariousness. All of these border death sites have clear gendered elements – here, two are considered by focusing on pregnancy – in relation to sexual violence en route and in relation to increased mortality at sea.

Pregnancy during irregular border crossing is inimically linked to heightened levels of sexual violence in borderland regions (Carpenter, 2006). Reports from over 30 identified jungle camps where Rohingya refugees have been held report that rape and sexual assault are daily realities. This has much in common with women who fled Burma (now Myanmar) into Thailand after 1988 where there were routine reports that if a woman of child-bearing age was not pregnant at the start of her journey, then she most likely would be by the end. In over 140 mass graves found at the camps, 220 bodies have been identified. Local NGOs believe the majority of bodies are of women and children.

Pregnancy is a feature of women who die by drowning while attempting to irregularly cross a border (Pickering, 2011). In cases where there have been survivors of boats sinking between Australia and Indonesia, eyewitness accounts have included references to fetuses floating in the water (Weber and Pickering, 2011). There are similar reports of maritime incidents in the Andaman Sea and the Mediterranean have included similar accounts (Bugeja Coster, 2008). However, the manner in which death by drowning occurs is also likely to be affected by the precise location of a woman on a vessel at the time of the incident; reports of women fleeing Myanmar indicate that during sea voyages, women and children are more likely to be located in

areas below deck where exposure to fumes, leaking water and other hazards is likely (Pickering and Cochrane, 2013). This is also confirmed in interviews conducted by the authors with women arriving in Australia.

Research into the onset of domestic violence has identified pregnancy as an important biographical event both in relation to the onset of domestic violence and also for motivating new or renewed attempts to leave a violent relationship (Jasinski, 2004). Pregnancy can also be a motivating factor for fleeing situations where there is a heightened risk of sexual violence, persecution or insecurity, but of course can also be a reason why women are unable to travel safely (Crawley, 2001).

Epidemiological studies can assist by providing some insight into why women are more likely to drown than men. UNICEF studies across Asia have consistently shown that in the case of drowning, while men regularly outnumber women, in terms of exposure to potential drowning situations, women are at a survival disadvantage (Linnan, 2011). This is partly because in developing countries, women typically swim at half the speed of men, which is often considered a by-product of societal gendered roles (ibid.). Moreover, in developing countries, women of reproductive age often have young children in their care, further placing them at a disadvantage in dangerous water situations. Women who irregularly cross borders by boat, especially those travelling with children, face a survival disadvantage relative to their male counterparts. This reality has never been as stark as in the SIEV X tragedy where 350 people died in 2001, 77 per cent of men drowned, while 93 per cent of women and 95 per cent children drowned (SIEV X, n.d.).

### 3.4. How to address the data collection challenges in the Asia-Pacific

There are scant rigorous empirical data on irregular migration journeys, refugee and migrant decision-making, resettlement patterns and related activity in the South-East Asia region that impacts on resettlement in Australia. Building capacity for data gathering and information collection to capture and analyse key irregular migration trends would provide more timely and useful data for decision makers to address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement and drive sustainable regional responses to irregular migration and forced displacement towards safer migration pathways. Importantly, increasing data and analytic capacity can assist in better forecasting peaks and troughs in irregular migrations flows in order to respond to surges in irregular migration flows with a humanitarian preparedness. This presents the need to develop processes and protocols for the timely information exchange between nations and regional bodies on irregular migration in the region.

In order to build a complex and informed picture of who, where and why women and men die crossing borders, compelling empirical data sets, as well as the rich detailed accounts of migrants and refugees are needed. Simply counting the dead provides a foundation for debate and accountability and change. The facticity of numbers is powerful when seeking to move government and intergovernmental regional approaches to managing migration. More personally, it gives the families of the dead the chance to grieve.

#### *Recommendations*

- Increase support for key organizations in the Asia-Pacific for collecting robust and comprehensive data on irregular migration trends including missing migrants.

- Ensure that data on missing refugees and migrants worldwide include gender and age breakdowns and explicitly address concerns around missing women and girls associated with the increase in the number of irregular migrant and refugee women and children in the region. As discussed above, these include gender-based violence, higher risk of death and considerations surrounding pregnant women, women travelling with children and childcare responsibilities.
- Develop key questions and strategies that, when used proactively, will better identify where women are missing but have gone unreported or unknown.
- Build capacity in civil society for data gathering and information collection on missing migrants that can be meaningfully fed into broader data collection efforts.
- Strengthen engagement with regional bodies (e.g. ASEAN, the Bali Process) and encourage greater focus on missing migrants.
- Increase the capacity of organizations to develop processes and protocols for timely information exchange between organizations and government agencies in the region.
- Explore the use of emerging technology to capture data over the large “invisible spaces” of maritime journeys in the Asia-Pacific.



Irregular Cambodian migrants arrive at the IOM reception centre in Poipet, a city near the border with Thailand. Many Cambodians work daily in nearby border towns while others might venture further in to work for short- to long-term periods. While for some, it is their first time being deported back to Cambodia, for a number of migrants, this is a regular occurrence with them as they repeatedly continue to cross the border. © Muse Mohamed/IOM 2016

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## Chapter 4 | Central America

John Doering-White, Amelia Frank-Vitale and Jason De León<sup>66</sup>

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the conditions that complicate efforts to document and investigate migrant deaths and disappearances at different points along the migrant trail through Mexico, through which many Central American migrants travel on their journeys north. The analysis draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted as part of the Undocumented Migration Project, an anthropological research initiative based at the University of Michigan that since 2009 has drawn on archaeology, ethnography, forensic science and visual anthropology to understand the social process of clandestine migration.<sup>67</sup> The discussion is framed around what has come to be known as *Programa Frontera Sur* (Southern Border Programme),<sup>68</sup> a Mexican immigration enforcement initiative launched in 2014 that seeks to curb the movement of undocumented Central Americans headed towards the United States–Mexico border. The authors trace how the impacts of this programme build on prior border enforcement and drug interdiction initiatives and discuss how various forms of migrant rights organizing have addressed the consequences of these programmes.

One example of these efforts is the *Hermanos en El Camino* shelter in Ixtepec, Oaxaca, where volunteers ask each person who arrives for their names, their places of origin, number of children and other demographic information. During this process, there is often a pause when the volunteer gets to one question: *señas particulares* (identifying features). “Do you have any scars, birthmarks or tattoos?” the volunteer asks. Tattoos are often stigmatized as markers of gang affiliation in many parts of Central America. Sometimes reframing the question clears things up: “How might we identify your body? We do not discriminate here. We just want to have a record in case a family member calls here trying to find you, in case something should happen along the route.” Then the person being interviewed lifts a pant leg, pulls aside a sleeve, points out a scar, a birthmark, a tattoo.

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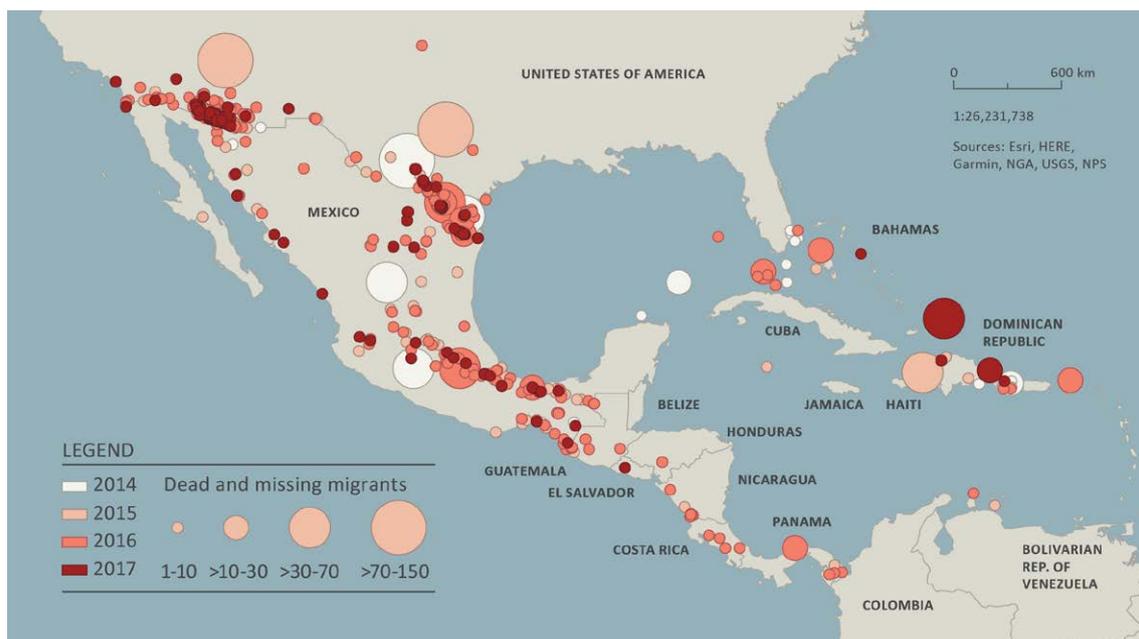
<sup>67</sup> See [www.undocumentedmigrationproject.com](http://www.undocumentedmigrationproject.com)

<sup>68</sup> The authors have translated *Programa Frontera Sur* as the “Southern Border Programme”, although others have translated the initiative as the “Southern Border Plan”.

As with many of the more than 50 organizations across Mexico that offer aid to Central Americans in Mexico, the shelter in Ixtepec keeps meticulous records of who passes through their doors. These records are then shared between the network of 13 shelters that make up the Organizations of Migrant Defense Documentation Network (REDODEM),<sup>69</sup> one of the first efforts to systematically collect information on individuals who migrate through Mexico. REDODEM's efforts are laying the groundwork for locating missing migrants. They represent broader efforts to confront the issue of death and disappearance, an issue that affects vulnerable populations across Mexico, regardless of their immigration status.

With numerous ways to vanish while in Mexico, the need for documentation of missing migrants has become increasingly urgent. However, reliable statistics are both hard to come by and contentious.<sup>70</sup> The Comision Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH – Mexican Human Rights Commission)<sup>71</sup> estimates that in a six-month period in 2010, more than 11,000 non-citizens were kidnapped (CNDH, 2011). More recently, the *Red Jesuita con Migrantes* (Jesuit Network with Migrants) counted 2,180 reported and confirmed cases of Central Americans having disappeared while in Mexico at the end of 2015, although the report does not indicate the time period that those numbers cover (Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, 2015).<sup>72</sup> In contrast, the *Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano* (Mesoamerican Migration Movement),<sup>73</sup> a Mexico-based immigrant advocacy group, reports over 70,000 migrant disappearances since 2006 (Movimiento Mesoamericano Migrante, 2016).

**Map 8. Migrant deaths and disappearances recorded in Central America**



Source: IOM's Missing Migrants Project, data from January 2014 to June 2017.

Note: Names and boundaries indicated on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

These discrepancies are not surprising. Many of these estimates come from interviewing victims and witnesses. Fear of collusion between elected officials and organized crime means that disappearances frequently go unreported. To this point, in a prior 2009 CNDH report, 91 of 238

<sup>69</sup> Report available through the Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes (2016).

<sup>70</sup> Mexico's "National Registry of Disappeared or Missing Persons" (Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas), for example, has been described as "ineffective and inconsistent" by the chairman of Mexico's Human Rights Commission (*Associated Press*, 2015).

<sup>71</sup> Comision Nacional de Derechos Humanos.

<sup>72</sup> 132 Nicaraguans, 200 Guatemalans, 480 Hondurans and 1,368 Salvadorans.

<sup>73</sup> Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano.

victims and witnesses of kidnappings who were interviewed reported that State officials were directly responsible for the kidnapping (CNDH, 2010). Beyond questions of fear and corruption, however, the lack of reliable data is fundamentally related to the fact that moving through Mexico relies upon invisibility, evading detection, and erasing one's own presence (De León, 2015).

Recently, intensified immigration enforcement along traditional migration routes has rendered migrants more vulnerable to abuses. For years, freight trains were a cheap and relatively unenforced means of migrating through Mexico (Nazario, 2006; Martínez, 2015). In 2014, however, as unaccompanied minors were seen to “surge” across the United States–Mexico border, Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto announced *Programa Frontera Sur* (Wilson and Valenzuela, 2014). Launched to “bring order” to flows of people and goods while defending migrants against the abuses of criminal gangs and human trafficking networks, Central Americans know of the initiative less as a humanitarian intervention and more as an attempt to close the train to migrants. Increasingly unable to board trains in the south, many of those migrating now walk the desolate stretches of track they once passed by from atop freight cars. Echoing the United States' Prevention Through Deterrence initiatives that, since the mid-1990s, have pushed migrants away from urban border crossings and into more desolate and deadly desert terrain (De León, 2015), *Programa Frontera Sur* has rendered those migrating increasingly vulnerable to robbery, kidnapping, forced labour and disappearance (Knippen, Boggs and Meyer, 2015).

To discuss how these dynamics overlap and intertwine, this chapter is organized geographically around the conditions that contribute to the disappearance of migrants and complicate investigations in three different regions of Mexico (South, Central and North). In each section, the authors describe how policy frameworks and civil society initiatives address a situation in which investigating migrant death is both difficult and dangerous. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how communities across Central America's Northern Triangle have confronted the ambiguous loss<sup>74</sup> of missing family members by forming committees in search of loved ones who have neither arrived nor returned since leaving home.

## 4.2. South

Since the implementation of *Programa Frontera Sur*, a key strategy for keeping migrants off trains has been to prevent them from getting to them in the first place. For those taking the route that follows the Gulf of Mexico, the first chance to catch a train is in Palenque, Chiapas, 42 miles from the river that divides Mexico from Guatemala.

Riding the rails was never a safe way to travel. Crossing Mexico by hopping freight trains has always been physically grueling. When it rains, the cars become dangerously slippery. It can also get so cold that people suffer from hypothermia. When the sky is clear, the hot sun reflects up from the tops of the metal cars, burning and cracking any uncovered skin on the riders. Tunnels fill with the engine's hot, soot-filled smoke. People's lungs burn, and their bodies become covered with ash. Many describe seeing others go numb from standing in one position for hours, losing their grip, and falling into the train's slicing wheels. For those whose attention strays for a moment, low-hanging branches can suddenly appear and send them careening off the top of box cars. If this happens in a populated area, the body might be recovered, taken to the morgue, and reported to consular officials. Traversing remote jungle, mountain passes and desolate desert, however, many are never accounted for, entering the ranks of the disappeared.

<sup>74</sup> See Boss (1999) and Reineke's contribution in IOM (2016).

**Text Box 4. Migrant testimonies collected in shelters in Mexico**

*by Amelia Frank-Vitale*

In July 2015, Frank-Vitale discussed with a group of Honduran men inside a migrant shelter in Palenque about what it had taken for them to get there: after crossing the river border, they walked for three days to cover the equivalent of a three-hour bus ride. They successfully avoided five checkpoints by weaving back and forth between walking along the paved road and making their way through the wilderness. The men were exhausted. Scratch-marks criss-crossed their arms from trekking through thick vegetation and the soles of their feet were raw. Still, they were anxious to move on, and conversation quickly turned to what their next steps would be. Palenque was just the first leg of a much longer journey; they had nearly 2,000 more miles to go before reaching the Mexico–United States border. Rumors were circulating that getting on the train was a sure way to be detained, and the highway northward was dotted with a patchwork of checkpoints. There seemed to be no good way to leave Palenque. They also knew that these days, they weren't likely to get very far on the train any way. "What will you do?" Frank-Vitale asked. "Ni modo," they said, slipping their bruised feet back into already worn shoes, "Caminamos." (Oh well. We walk.)

Samuel, a young man from El Salvador, was kidnapped on La Bestia. His captors transported him to an isolated ranch where he was held for more than two months, along with at least a hundred other Central Americans. They were beaten daily, given only enough food to stay alive and made to call their families to ask for ransoms of USD 4,500 per person. Early on, three of Samuel's fellow captives were killed and rolled up in carpets. Their bodies were left to decompose as a warning to everyone else. While Samuel was let go when his sister wired money for his release, he suspected that those who couldn't get the money together were either killed or pressed into service for the cartel.



Migrants preparing to board a freight train in Palenque, Chiapas. © 2017 (Photo: Jason De León)

As Mexico escalated its war against drug cartels in 2006, hopping on to the trains took on a new host of dangers (Frank-Vitale, 2013). By 2010, large-scale kidnappings were commonplace in the remote train yards of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco and Veracruz. Here, heavily armed men affiliated with the Zetas Drug Cartel would make people get off the train and crowd them into trucks used to transport livestock.

Criminal groups like the Zetas have also invented additional ways to profit from migrants in transit, adding other opportunities for Central Americans to vanish. At various points, Zeta affiliates demand a USD 100–200 *cuota*, or fee, to ride the train. Those who cannot pay are routinely killed or simply thrown off. Even as hopping freight cars has become more difficult since the implementation of *Programa Frontera Sur*, cartels still demand this kind of fee. In Palenque, days after that group of men decided to keep going on foot, an older man from Honduras cut a conversation with Frank-Vitale short to negotiate with the person who was charging the fee to board. When the train did leave the station, the older man waved from aboard; he had clearly figured out a way to pay the *cuota*. Even paying, however, would not ensure safe passage. Consistent with the investigative reporting of Oscar Martínez (2015:191), De León’s ongoing work with Honduran smugglers also indicates that constantly-shifting dynamics between these individuals, criminal organizations and corrupt government officials means that even well-connected veteran guides are at risk.

As fewer Central Americans attempt to cross Southern Mexico by travelling aboard the freight train, many, like the men in Palenque, opt to walk along highways that pass through the remote Mexican countryside. Some suggest that this renders migration more invisible, reasoning that circuitous routes take migrants away from both immigration agents and sources of humanitarian aid. However, advocates and authorities throughout the region have seen a surge in the number of abuses against migrants. In the state of Chiapas, the Special Attorney for the Protection of Migrants,<sup>75</sup> a wing of the state attorney’s office, has seen a 221 per cent increase in reported abuses between 2013 and 2016. As opposed to pushing migrants to the margins, *Programa Frontera Sur* has instead simply made the route much more difficult. And while the number of reported abuses has increased, as discussed in the next section, it is likely that those who report abuses represent only a fraction of incidents.

### 4.3. Central

As those migrating pass through the series of 32 railway tunnels around Orizaba, Veracruz that mark the transition from the jungles of Southern Mexico to the high desert plain of Central Mexico, they also transition into a different ecology of exploitation. While immigration enforcement has been concentrated in the southern states of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Veracruz (SEGOB, 2014, 2015, 2016),<sup>76</sup> it builds on a series of transnational security initiatives that, in the name of drug interdiction and defending national security, have bolstered militarized policing across Mexico. Emerging from the final tunnel, migrants are confronted with what are known as the *garroteros*, heavily armed paramilitary security guards who have taken control of the railways in this region since 2014.

*La Sagrada Familia* migrant shelter in Apizaco, Tlaxcala, is the first humanitarian space that those riding the train come to after passing through the tunnels. While Doering-White conducted fieldwork in this region throughout 2015 and 2016, migrants arriving at the shelter who had already made the journey through Mexico observed a shift in how *garroteros* treated them. On a rainy day in September of 2015, for example, a Salvadoran man named Henry who was making his way north after his second deportation from the United States, explained, “I used to not

<sup>75</sup> Fiscalía Especial de Atención al Migrante.

<sup>76</sup> Between 2014 and 2016, these three states have accounted for around 70 per cent of all deportations from Mexico each year, according to statistics from the Mexican Instituto Nacional de Migración.

worry too much about the *garroteros*. They would charge us to ride the train, but they cared more about the merchandise, either protecting it or stealing it. Sometimes they would even defend us from the thieves. Now they're the thieves. Now they're taking people." Sharing his testimony with the shelter's coordinators, Henry detailed how three days earlier, railway guards forced him and 20 others from the train at gunpoint. They told the migrants to lie face down on the ground, separated three women in the group, bound them with zip ties, and hauled them away in a pickup truck. The railway guards then photographed each person and rifled through the backpacks looking for any valuables. As the *garroteros* boarded the train and pulled out of the station, Henry remembered how they yelled over the roar of the engine, "We know what you look like. Don't let us see your faces in any newspapers."

Across Central Mexico, while these testimonies of disappearance have become commonplace, they rarely result in active investigations or the collection of data. At a press conference in December 2015, activists denounced 34 formally documented abuses committed by railway guards over the course of six months (Arellano García, 2016). Those who collect migrants' testimonies are often adept at respectfully asking witnesses and survivors to formally report abuses, being careful to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. They also say, however, that these testimonies only go so far. As one shelter organizer explained to Doering-White, "We can collect all the testimonies in the world, but if the victim does not stay to press charges, there is very little we can do." Henry arrived at the shelter along with five others who witnessed the kidnapping after walking along the railway tracks for three days and nights. The others, he explained, worried that shelter volunteers might be colluding with the railway guards and decided to continue sleeping outside. A combination of desperation and indignation led Henry to share his story. He was physically hobbled by blisters across the bottoms of his feet and emotionally drained after three days of constant vigilance and no sleep. "I'll tell you what happened," Henry told Doering-White, "but I won't stay here to fight a case."



Observing the train at a shelter in Central Mexico. © 2015 (Photo: John Doering-White)

Often, abuses and eyewitness accounts of kidnappings are only officially reported when those migrating narrowly escape death. Shelters in the region increasingly provide long-term care when those recuperating from bullet wounds, burns and broken bones are no longer eligible for care within hospitals. While waiting for their wounds to heal, shelter organizers often encourage victims to apply for what is known as the “humanitarian visa”, whereby those who are victims or witnesses of a “grave offense” can regularize their immigration status while criminal investigations are underway. State officials, however, often contest what is considered a “grave” offense. In January 2017, for example, two men who had been shot by railway guards were denied humanitarian visas despite X-rays showing buckshot shrapnel embedded throughout their legs. “They can walk,” one migrant rights advocate explained. “Apparently gunshot wounds aren’t grave enough if you can still walk.” These dynamics have created a deafening silence in which abuses typically go unreported. This complicates reliable documentation of disappearance and curtails criminal investigations against those committing abuses.

## 4.4. North

In October 2016, six months after fleeing death threats in his hometown of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, over an unpaid extortion fee, a man named Omar sank his tired frame heavily into a bare mattress. The mattress and a small plastic stool, where Doering-White sat, were the only pieces of furniture that came with the room that Omar was renting week to week on the outskirts of Monterrey. Marvin, the caretaker of the boarding house, leaned in the doorway as conversation circled around two brothers who had left Monterrey for the border two weeks prior. In exchange for a rent-free room, the brothers had helped Marvin to add a series of rooms onto the second story of the building. Marvin came to feel responsible for the two men and made sure that they memorized his phone number before leaving. For the first two weeks, the brothers had called every evening to check in. As the hum of a small fan buzzed around, Marvin muttered, “Three days of radio silence. Those punks are probably with the Zetas now.”

In northern Mexico, “being with the Zetas” can mean any number of things for Central Americans. When the brothers left Monterrey, it meant they were desperate enough to enter the world of drug smuggling. The brothers were “looking for a *mochila* [backpack] in Caborca”, Marvin explained. Carrying a *mochila* refers to carrying a 50-pound pack of narcotics across the border in exchange for free passage. Travelling to Caborca would mean crossing from the Zeta-controlled eastern border region and into the western state of Sonora, which is controlled by the Sinaloa Cartel. Those affiliated with organized crime often single out men and women who look Central American, then pull them from buses as they leave and enter different cartel territories. Those who cannot pay the fees charged by criminal groups to travel through the territory are regularly kidnapped, and those suspected of working for a rival group are often executed.

The brothers were well aware of these risks. Having passed through the shelter in Saltillo, they had likely received the primer on how to survive the border region that is delivered by shelter volunteers: “If you’re going to buy any supplies, do it here or in Monterrey, not at the border. If you buy it at the border, the store clerk will hear your accent, and identify you to the cartels. If you stay at a hotel, give them a Mexican name – María, Jose, Juan, Carmen – don’t use a Central American sounding name, no Melvin, Kelvin, Wilson, etc. At night, they come to the *hotelitos* and check the guest registry. If they spot a Central American name, they will take you out of your room in the middle of the night.”

As with riding the train, people do not become drug mules by choice. They do so out of necessity. Carrying drugs across the border is one of the only ways to attempt crossing into the United States for those who can’t pay the fee charged by criminal groups to even access the border. It is also a common route to disappearance. Each year, hundreds die while attempting to cross through the inhospitable terrain of the United States–Mexico border (Reineke and Martínez,

2015). Those carrying drugs face even greater risks. To accommodate the heavy packs, they are often coerced to take drugs that numb the pain and dehydrate their bodies while walking great distances. This only compounds the already deadly combination of hostile elements that make the Sonoran desert such a deadly place (De León, 2015). Others are pressed into the service of criminal groups as they pass through the border region, tending crops of marijuana or working in methamphetamine production labs (OHCHR, 2011).

Another way of “being with the Zetas” is at the bottom of an unmarked grave. Some see murdering Central Americans as a way that cartels send a message to coyotes operating in their territory: pay the fee or die (Martínez, 2015). The results of these practices have emerged slowly and piece by piece through the discovery of unmarked graves. In 2010, 72 bodies were found dead at an abandoned ranch on the outskirts of San Fernando, Tamaulipas (Moore, 2011). In the ensuing investigation, another 169 bodies were found scattered across more than 30 clandestine gravesites in the state of Tamaulipas. Incidents such as these are not limited to Central Americans. After complaining about inaction from government authorities, volunteer groups across Mexico have begun conducting their own searches for clandestine graves (Ureste, 2017b; 2017c). Between August 2016 and March 2017, one civilian group in the state of Veracruz has uncovered more than 250 bodies within 125 clandestine graves (Ureste, 2017c). Most recently, Mexico’s Human Rights Commission published a report detailing the discovery of 855 clandestine graves containing 1,548 human cadavers (CNDH, 2017). The report also notes a total of 35,958 unidentified human remains found in the states of Coahuila, Colima, Nuevo Leon and Veracruz, all states controlled by the Zeta Cartel. Activists insist that many of the bodies are likely Central Americans, who will remain disappeared unless identification of the remains is possible.

As crossing the Mexico–United States border becomes increasingly dangerous and costly, Central Americans have also come to disappear in a subtler way by simply losing touch with family members back home. Settling onto the bare mattress, Omar rested what remained of his right foot on the plastic stool beside his bed. A train’s unforgiving wheels had sheared half of the foot off two months earlier when he slipped on the ladder of a rail car while making the short trip from the shelter in Saltillo up to Monterrey. In Saltillo, Omar and his wife Mari spent two months petitioning for refugee status as part of a pilot programme designed to make applying for refugee status more feasible (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016). However, as is common, the couple abandoned their application in favour of looking for work in Monterrey. As he sat up to apply antibiotic cream to his wound, his face contorted with pain, Omar said, “I’m just lucky to be alive. I won’t travel anymore. Now we’re just going to see what Mexico has to offer.” Later, Omar would explain that he no longer had anything to offer his family in Honduras and lamented how difficult it was to speak with them on the phone. He felt embarrassed to have made it so far only to become, as he saw it, a burden. He had not spoken with any of his family members in over a month and did not have plans to do so.

## 4.5. Conclusion

Since the 2014 increase in the number of unaccompanied children arriving at the United States–Mexico border (Rosenblum and Ball, 2016), a discourse of protection has been used by the governments of the United States and Mexico to justify intensified policing along the railways that Central Americans have relied on to transit through the country. Instead of reducing the risks faced by those migrating, initiatives such as *Programa Frontera Sur* that increase policing have exacerbated the risk of death and disappearance for the undocumented in Mexico. In this paper, conditions that complicate efforts to document and investigate disappearance were highlighted, as well as what dissuades survivors from reporting abuses in the first place. This chapter concludes by briefly outlining how these dynamics reverberate throughout Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, as well as how civil society groups in those countries have developed initiatives in response.

Across Central America, it is hard for families to even imagine to whom they ought to turn to report the absence of someone who had intentionally left as an unauthorized migrant. Speaking with Frank-Vitale, for example, a Kaqchikel woman from Guatemala named Victoria waited for months before trying to report that her husband, who had left for the United States in 2009, was missing. Desperate, she gathered up the courage to do something she had never done in her life – file a complaint with the local police. “That doesn’t concern us,” they told her, “what happened to your husband happened in Mexico.” Eventually, through other contacts, she was put in touch with MENAMIG,<sup>77</sup> the Guatemalan ministry for migrant-related issues, and they documented her case. Her husband, however, has never been found.

Frustrated families across Central America have responded to this situation by forming community-based organizations made up of mothers searching for missing family members.<sup>78</sup> Each year, these groups travel across Mexico as part of a *Caravana de Madres*, or Mothers’ Caravan, looking for loved ones. The mothers stop in shelters, cross-referencing shelter databases with their own list of names and taking time to raise awareness and consciousness among those migrating. They also canvass *cantinas*, inquire at brothels and boarding houses, and spend time knocking on doors throughout neighbourhoods where Central Americans have come to settle. Each year, family members are reunited during the Mothers’ Caravan, some of whom have been separated for decades. The reunifications are often the result of diligent investigations conducted in collaboration with the *Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano*, an organization dedicated to documenting the experiences of Central Americans and searching for the missing.

While these organizations are increasingly forming transnational networks of collaboration, the scope of their work is limited considering the scale of disappearance. This situation is only expected to worsen. It is not uncommon for migrants to churn through a series of deportations. Many are unable to return to their home communities after being deported due to threats of violence and untenable economic circumstances. Many simply turn right around and have another go at making it through Mexico, risking disappearance and death with each new bet on a better life. Often, a registry of their *señas particulares* at a shelter is the only trace of their having passed through the country.

## 4.6. Action points for change

- (a) **Officials must improve access to justice for crime victims.** Crimes committed against migrants travelling through Mexico, including death and disappearance, are rarely investigated, let alone reported, which leads to large gaps in the available data on missing migrants in Central America. According to information obtained by REDODEM, between 2011 and 2015, only 183 of the 2,356 reports filed formally with the Attorney General’s Office in the state of Chiapas resulted in active investigations. Central Americans often avoid reporting crimes or abandon investigations when they continue their journeys. Recent efforts aim to address this problem. In December 2015, Mexico’s Attorney General’s Office created a Mechanism for Mexican Foreign Support in the Search and Investigation of Crimes against Migrants along with a “Unit for the Investigation of Crimes Involving Migrants.”<sup>79</sup> These programmes allow families in Central America to report disappearances and to follow up with ongoing investigations from abroad. As of March 2017, 67 cases have been reported through these programmes. As Ximena Suárez-Enríquez and Maureen Meyer of the Washington Office on Latin America have recently reported, “By ensuring that [these programmes] operate effectively, the government can turn its [human rights] commitments into concrete actions and results” (2017). As of yet, however, it remains unclear whether crimes reported from abroad will lead to concrete

<sup>77</sup> MENAMIG: Mesa Nacional de Migraciones, the National Board for Migrations.

<sup>78</sup> See for example [www.wola.org/events/missing-migrants-families-search-answers-justice/](http://www.wola.org/events/missing-migrants-families-search-answers-justice/)

<sup>79</sup> See [www.dof.gob.mx/nota\\_detalle.php?codigo=5420681&fecha=18/12/2015](http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5420681&fecha=18/12/2015)

investigations in Mexico. One way of helping this to happen would be for government organizations in the United States and Mexico to fund the investigation of disappearances with the same vigor as drug interdiction initiatives.

- (b) Greater support for data collection within shelters is needed.** Through the work of organizations such as REDODEM, various shelters across Mexico have begun coordinating data collection across shelters. Data collection, however, is often not the number one priority for overburdened shelter workers. Moreover, many migrants do not feel comfortable sharing information about having witnessed kidnappings, murders and disappearances. Despite this, non-governmental migrant shelters offer great potential for the ethical collection and coordination of data. Such data sharing might facilitate future investigations into the death and disappearance of Central Americans. Support is needed to develop and implement protocols for securely and confidentially collecting and sharing the identifying information of individuals who pass through shelters that could play a major role in locating disappeared migrants.
- (c) Norms of international protection must be updated to reflect current conditions.** In federal year 2014, of the 13,847 requests for asylum by Salvadorans, Hondurans and Guatemalans, the United States granted only 510 claims – 3.6 per cent (EOIROPAT, 2015). This is much lower than the United States' average: in 2014, asylum judges granted more than 20 per cent of all asylum claims in the United States. This is in part because the asylum criteria used in the United States are based on an earlier understanding of persecution. To be granted asylum in the United States, individuals must demonstrate that the authorities in their country of origin are unable or unwilling to protect them from persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. The last item allows for some room for interpretation, and asylum judges in the United States are granted wide discretion. However, if someone is fleeing Central America because gangs have threatened to kill him because they want to kill *him*, not because he is part of some group that is under threat, he likely would not have a winnable asylum claim. There are a few cases that buck this paradigm, but generally Central American asylum claims based on *mara* violence are rejected in the United States, and in Mexico. Standards of international protection must account for those who are victims of gang violence and organized crime.

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# Chapter 5 | South America

Vanina Modolo<sup>80</sup>

## 5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the current situation regarding fatal and dangerous journeys within South America. Although there are relatively few recorded migrant deaths in the region, South America has become increasingly unsafe for many migrants. The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Missing Migrants Project has recorded 30 migrants have died or gone missing in 2016, but a lack of data on migrant deaths and disappearances in South America means that the true number is likely higher. The aim of this chapter is to draw attention to this issue and the importance of improving data to develop evidence-based policies. There is an urgent need for an effective humanitarian response in order to promote safe migration.

The chapter is organized around three main sections. The first section gives a brief introduction outlining the current migration trends and policy context in the region. South America is a source, destination and transit region for international migrants. Regarding this last case, it is considered a transit zone for migrants of many different nationalities who intend to reach the United States of America via Central America and Mexico. The second section of this chapter identifies and describes migratory routes across South America, where migrants are travelling through irregular channels facing severe dangers as they journey north and south. The third section presents the most recent estimates and information on migrant fatalities in the region from media, official authorities, international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), among others. It describes the fatalities through the data available and gives a critical review of data sources and challenges regarding the data collection. The chapter concludes with some final remarks and recommendations regarding the importance of gathering data on the contexts in which migrants are dying to provide sound evidence for policies and to ensure State actors, NGOs and international organizations make all possible efforts to protect their fundamental rights.

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**Map 9. Migrant deaths and disappearances recorded in South America**



Source: IOM's Missing Migrants Project, data from January 2014 to June 2017.

Note: Names and boundaries indicated on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

## 5.2. Migration trends and policy context<sup>81</sup>

Currently, the following traits stand out for migratory patterns in South America: (a) intensification of intraregional cross-border migration; (b) growth and diversification of migrant countries of origin and destinations of extraregional immigration; and (c) persistency of extraregional emigration. The intraregional migrant population in South America is larger than the extraregional migrant population. This is partly due to the death of former migrants from the massive European immigration of the twentieth century and to increasing regional flows. Approximately 70 per cent of the total immigrant stock in South America is intraregional and has increased 11 per cent between 2010 and 2015 (from 3,566,510 migrants to 3,986,756). A range of factors could explain this growth in intraregional mobility: (a) restrictive policies on entry and access to residence in developed nations; (b) the economic crises in the United States and Europe; and/or (c) greater employment opportunities and more beneficial regulatory frameworks in the region.

<sup>81</sup> This section is mainly based on information extracted from IOM Regional Office Buenos Aires Migratory Analysis Unit (2017) and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015).

Mobility across South America has been improved through some measures. Within the region, South American nationals do not need passports to cross borders,<sup>82</sup> are not required to obtain tourist visas, and have special residence regimes. The new normative framework implemented by several South American countries, along with regional law, has effectively regularized previously unauthorized migration through legal residence.<sup>83</sup>

In 2010, the Organization of American States' (OAS) former Special Committee on Migration Issues (CEAM) highlighted that immigration from overseas was a “new and increasing” phenomenon in Latin America (CEAM-OAS, 2010). In South America, these flows are mainly made up of streams from Africa and Asia and are mixed flows, including economic migrants, asylum applicants, refugees and victims of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons.

In the case of Asia, there is a long tradition of migration to South America, particularly from China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. At present, Chinese and Korean migration into the region continues to be dynamic, with variable growth in some countries.<sup>84</sup> As well, a growing diversification of origin countries has been noted: migrants travel from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal among others, with very low population impact in quantitative terms. Migration from Africa, although not important in absolute numbers, is highly visible, and migrants from Africa are often quite vulnerable as they face, *inter alia*, difficult access to regularization, language barriers and cultural differences.

These South–South migration patterns grew within a context of increasingly restrictive policies in Europe and North America, along with visa liberalization in certain South American countries (IOM Regional Office for South America, 2013). In June 2008, Ecuador granted tourist visa exemptions to all nationalities. Extracontinental entries from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan and Somalia tripled in number between 2008 and 2009. For instance, people from China grew from 4,776 in 2007 to 14,459 in 2008.<sup>85</sup> Nowadays, tourist visas are still not required for a stay up to 90 days within a 12-month period, unless the traveller is a citizen from one of the following countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan and Somalia. In 2007, Colombia exempted Chinese from visa requirement, but a few months later, this visa-free travel was abolished.

Meanwhile, extraregional immigration from the continent has appeared as a new feature. In recent years, South American countries have received increasing numbers of Caribbean migrants, with Haiti, Dominican Republic and Cuba as the principal countries of origin. In some countries, visa restrictions have been imposed as a way to prevent smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons. For instance, since 2012, nationals of the Dominican Republic have needed a tourist visa to enter Argentina and Chile, and since 2014, to enter Uruguay; similarly, since January 2012, Haitians have needed a tourist visit to enter Peru.<sup>86</sup>

Dominican emigrants have historically moved to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, but over the past few years, the destination country list has grown to include other South American countries. The number of Dominicans who have moved to Chile and Argentina over the last decade has increased. Between 2005 and 2015, almost 35,000 residency permits were issued, a third of which were for permanent residency. Natural disasters – in addition to Haiti's already precarious economic situation – have encouraged emigration to various destinations in South

<sup>82</sup> South American citizens are allowed to travel with their National ID from one country to another within the region.

<sup>83</sup> For instance, the MERCOSUR Residence Agreement has contributed to the facilitation of regular migration movements within the region. More than 2 million people have obtained regular residence permits (IOM Regional Office for South America, forthcoming).

<sup>84</sup> This can be observed in the rise in the number of residency permits granted. For example, over the course of one decade (2004–2014), Argentina, Brazil and Chile granted nearly 50,000 permanent residency permits to Chinese citizens. Between 2010 and 2016, Colombia issued 19,790 residences to Chinese citizens.

<sup>85</sup> See Ecuador – Dirección Nacional de Migración.

<sup>86</sup> See Supreme Decret No. 1/2012.

America. Brazil is the main destination for Haitians; between 2010 and 2016, almost 70,000 residency permits were granted. In Argentina and Chile, almost 3,000 permanent residency permits were granted between 2010 and 2015. Right after the 2010 earthquake, Ecuador gave a special amnesty to Haitians<sup>87</sup> and much more recently, a special amnesty has been established in Argentina.<sup>88</sup>

### 5.3. Risks faced by migrants in South America: Recent changes

This section identifies and describes migratory routes across South America, where migrants are travelling through irregular channels and face severe dangers as they journey north and south. In the case of African, Asian and Caribbean citizens, some countries in South America have become the gateway to Latin America, leading to routes towards developed countries in the North, which entail long trips across the continent.

A recent publication (OAS/IOM, 2016) provides information about irregular flows from Asia, Africa, Haiti and Cuba in some South American countries, including Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil. IOM (2016) also suggests that many migrants travel to Brazil or Ecuador where they can benefit from visa systems and then fly or trek across Central America. Currently, Brazil, Ecuador and Colombia are host to thousands of stranded migrants hoping to reach the United States. These backlogs are the result of various Central American countries closing their borders (for instance, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama).<sup>89</sup>

As the only State bordering Central America, Colombia is one of the main transit countries in South America for migrants travelling north. The last annual report from Colombia's immigration agency affirms that in 2016, 33,891 irregular migrants were detected. Among the principal nationalities were Haitians (20,366), Cubans (8,167), Indians (874), Congolese (570) and Nepalese (553) (Migración Colombia, 2017a:11). Colombia has many transit routes through its territory via air, land and sea. Last year, three new routes for the smuggling of migrants to the United States as a final destination were identified.<sup>90</sup> The first is through the Department of Putumayo (from Ecuador and Peru); the second is from Brazil through the Department of Amazonas, to Department of Antioquia where the final destination in Colombia is the city of Turbo; last route identified is that for migrants arriving as tourists on commercial flights to San Andres Island and from there by boat to Central America.

In August 2016, around 1,800 migrants were registered in Turbo, which is their last stop before entering Panama or other Central American countries (Migración Colombia, 2016). The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has expressed its "deep concern regarding the extreme vulnerability of some migrants who are stranded in the Colombian town of Turbo, near the Darien Gap, Colombia, close to the border with Panama" (IACHR, 2016). Most of these migrants came from Cuba and Haiti, along with others from African and Asian countries, and were heading towards the United States.

<sup>87</sup> See Decree No. 248/10.

<sup>88</sup> See Resolution No. 1143/17.

<sup>89</sup> According to Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR-OAS, 2016): "the situation of the migrants stranded in Turbo has been exacerbated by the closure of the border and the tightening of immigration controls by Panama on May 9, 2016".

<sup>90</sup> See Migración Colombia (2017c) for a detailed explanation of these routes.

**Map 10. Three migrant routes in South America**



Source: Author's elaboration based on data from Migración Colombia (2017c).

Note: Names and boundaries indicated on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

The latest *Trafficking in Persons Report* affirms that migrants from South America, China and Senegal, transiting Peru to Brazil were reportedly vulnerable to human trafficking (US Department of State, 2017:324). In 2013, an article from *BBC World News* highlighted the presence of “coyotes” – a term traditionally used for migrant smugglers in Mexico and on the United States–Mexico border – as new actors at Brazilian borders. Migrant smuggling is a highly profitable business in which criminals enjoy low risk of detection and punishment. According to Brazilian Intelligence Agency (Agência Brasileira de Inteligência-Abin), smuggling networks have gained around USD 60 million between 2011 and 2015 in the border state of Acre alone (Noticias ao Minuto, 2015).

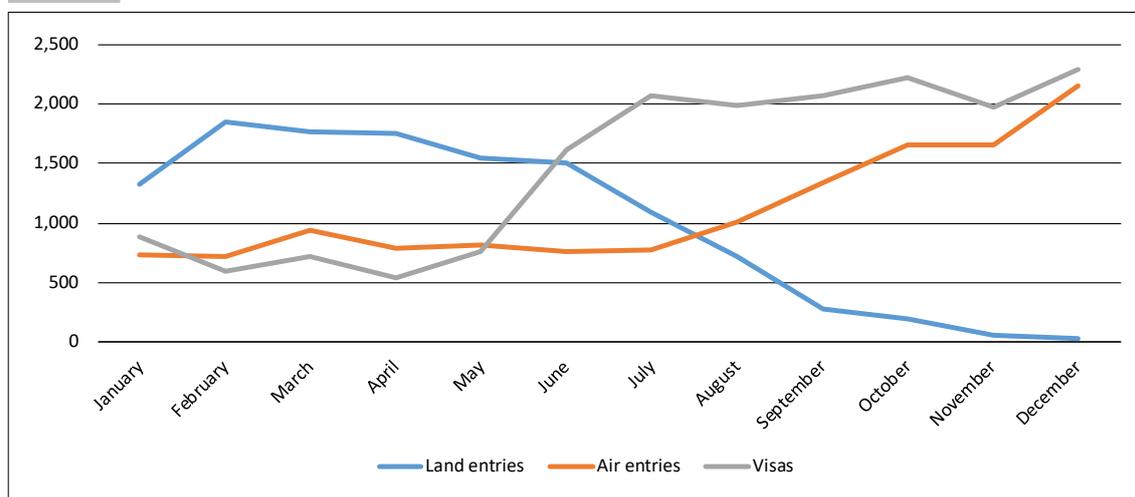
Following the earthquake of 2010, thousands of Haitians migrated to Brazil. As numerous Haitian migrants were falling prey to migrant smuggling and trafficking networks through what is known as “the jungle route” in 2012, the Government of Brazil established mechanisms to enable migrants to obtain humanitarian visas in Port-au-Prince. There was a limit of up to 1,200 visas per year.<sup>91</sup>

Despite this measure, many continued to enter illegally taking a dangerous long journey by land. For instance, the route from Quito to Acre, cutting across most of Peru, is approximately a 2,200-mile trip. As a consequence, in 2013, a new legislation was enacted in Brazil that eliminated the limit to the number of visas and allowed consular offices in other countries to issue humanitarian

<sup>91</sup> See Normative Resolution No. 97.

visas.<sup>92</sup> In 2015, in response to concern over the growing number of people travelling irregularly through the state of Acre via Peru, the Brazil Humanitarian Visa Application Centre was established in Port-au-Prince, with IOM support (IOM/National Immigration Council of Brazil (CNIg), 2016).<sup>93</sup> This was designed as a way to speed up the process of issuing humanitarian visas. Figure 15 shows that this measure has played a crucial role in fostering an increase in safer journeys by air.

**Figure 15. Haitians' entries to Brazil, January–December 2015**



Source: Departamento da Policia Federal/Ministerio da Justica e Cidadania, 2015.

The US Department of State (2016) describes most South American countries as source, destination and transit countries for men, women and children subjected to trafficking. In order to strengthen national capacities to respond effectively to the crimes of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, Brazil<sup>94</sup> and Colombia<sup>95</sup> joined the Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants (GLO.ACT).<sup>96</sup> Over the next three years, GLO.ACT will implement activities in the areas of assistance and protection to victims and vulnerable people, as well as in prevention, investigation and prosecution.

According to a press release from the Chilean Foreigners and Migration Department (Departamento de Extranjería y Migración, 2016), the smuggling of migrants is an increasing phenomenon, particularly in the north part of the country. In that zone, criminal bands of “coyotes” smuggle migrants at a high price through clandestine paths. For instance, the imposition of tourism visa restrictions to citizens of the Dominican Republic since 2012 has pressed migrants from this country to enter Chile using illegal routes.

To avoid detection by official authorities, migrants now have to take more circuitous and dangerous routes. These include travelling through the Amazon borders between Bolivia, Brazil, Peru and Ecuador, the dense jungle between Colombia and Panama, and the desert and land mine zone in Chile, where the geographic and weather conditions are harsh and extreme.

<sup>92</sup> Visas were issued as well in consular offices in Quito, Santo Domingo, Lima and Buenos Aires. See Normative Resolution No. 102.

<sup>93</sup> According to IOM/CNiG (2016), more than 30,000 visas have been issued in Haiti since the implementation of this legislation.

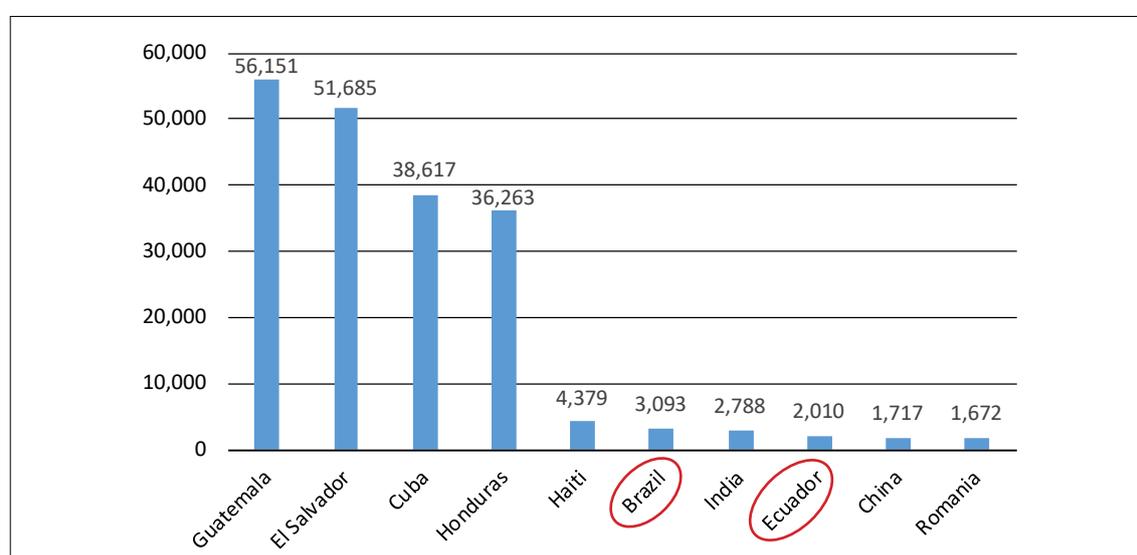
<sup>94</sup> On 24 April 2017.

<sup>95</sup> On 27 February 2017.

<sup>96</sup> GLO.ACT was launched on 24 April 2017 at the UN house in Brasilia. This action is a four-year joint initiative of the European Union and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime implemented in partnership with IOM and UNICEF.

The focus in this chapter is on non-South American nationals, because the recent changes in normative frameworks – explained in the last section – make movements of South American nationals within the region quite safe.<sup>97</sup> Usually, nationals from South America reach their extraregional destination countries (United States, European Union) with proper work permits or tourist visas.<sup>98</sup> This means that they can travel in a safe way; however, problems can arise if they overstay and become vulnerable due to their irregular situation, which means they could face the risk of deportation, being forced to return and so on. Nevertheless, cases of Brazilian and Ecuadoran migrant fatalities in 2016 (which are discussed below) indicate that dangerous routes are seen as options to reach the United States. Brazil and Ecuador were among the 10 top countries of origins of migrants – from outside Mexico – who attempt to cross the southern United States border without proper documentation.

**Figure 16. Country of origin of migrants apprehended attempting to cross the southern United States border without proper documentation (excluding Mexico), October 2015–August 2016**



Source: US Customs and Border Protection, 2016.

## 5.4. Migrant fatalities and data collection in the region

This section presents the most recent estimates and information on migrant fatalities in the region. It describes (using the available data) some detail about the fatal journeys that have occurred in South America. The first volume of *Fatal Journeys* stated that “Deaths throughout South America have not been prominent and very little information is known” (IOM, 2014:23). However, more than 30 deaths were recorded by IOM’s Missing Migrants Project in South America in 2016 compared to only 2 in 2015. According to the latest global figures, no deaths were recorded during the nine months of 2017; however, it is important to highlight that these numbers represent only deaths that are reported by government authorities, media the UN or NGOs, and many may not have been recorded. Given the risks discussed above, it is likely that the actual number of fatalities during migration are far higher. Examining the available data in

<sup>97</sup> Of course, there are some exceptions as will be explained in the following section in the case of Chile.

<sup>98</sup> In the case of European Union, it is common to have double citizenship (Italy, Spain and Portugal).

2016, most of these deaths occurred in Colombia, mainly on the Colombia–Panama border in the Darien Gap<sup>99</sup> and the Uraba Gulf.<sup>100</sup>

**Map 11. Darien Gap and Uraba Gulf Area.**



Source: [mapcarta.com](http://mapcarta.com) with author's own modifications.

Note: Names and boundaries indicated on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

In this area, apart from risks as a result of the natural environment, there is the presence of illegal armed groups and smugglers (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2012). Media and official sources have reported on several incidents there in 2016.<sup>101</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* reported that “in January, a smuggler boat loaded with migrants from Pakistan, Somalia and Sierra Leone capsized off the coast of Colombia, drowning 15” (Linthicum, 2016). Then, in 21 February 2016, Colombian National Army rescued 49 migrants (from Cuba, Bangladesh and Nepal) in Uraba Gulf in Antioquia Department. In that case, the boat sank and two Colombians traffickers (“coyotes” or *chilingueros*) were detained.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>99</sup> The Darien Gap is a break in the Pan-American Highway consisting of a large swath of undeveloped swampland and forest within Panama’s Darien Province in Central America and the northern portion of Colombia’s Choco Department in South America. The Pan-American Highway stretches from Alaska down to Chile with only this gap — a nearly 60-mile section of dense rainforest along the Colombia–Panama border.

<sup>100</sup> Uraba Gulf is an inlet within Colombia and is nearby to Punta Uraba, Punta Jose Antonio and Punta El Predio.

<sup>101</sup> See for example articles from *La Patria*; *Hoy Los Angeles*; *El Nuevo Herald*; *Noticias RCN*; *Noticias RPTV*; *TV Marti*; *Noticias Sin Fronteras*; among others.

<sup>102</sup> See [www.noticiasrcn.com/tags/golfo-uraba](http://www.noticiasrcn.com/tags/golfo-uraba)

## PANEL ONE: Official figures from National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences



According to Carlos Eduardo Valdés, Director of the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences of Colombia, 20 migrants died in the Uraba region trying to reach Panama from 1 January to 15 September 2016. In an interview, the Director reported that most of them had drowned in the Uraba Gulf or had suffered a violent death.

In order to avoid detection by authorities, a common route for migrants attempting to cross the Ecuadorian border into Colombia involves walking through illegal passages near the Rumichaca International Bridge (UNODC, 2012). In August, some locals from Santa Fe (a rural area in Colombia close to the city of Urbina, in Ecuador) alerted local authorities that a dead body was found on a path usually taken by migrants. According to the testimony from a Colombian National Police, a man of 34 years old from Haiti, who had Brazilian work permit, died on Sunday, 15 August.<sup>103</sup> He was part of a group migrating from Brazil to Colombia through Ecuador but was left behind, and had died from natural causes.

A few days later, on 19 August, a woman from Haiti (around 40 years old) died from natural causes in San Juan de Pasto<sup>104</sup> bus terminal (in Colombia). She was travelling with her husband, and they planned to catch a bus to Medellín and then to Turbo in Department of Antioquia. They started their journey in Brazil, then entered Ecuador before crossing into Colombia (*Diario del Sur*, 2016).

In Chile, at the southern part of the continent, three deaths were recorded in 2016. On the Chilean–Bolivian border, two Dominican women died of hypothermia due to extreme desert temperatures, while on the Chilean–Peruvian border, a Peruvian migrant died after stepping on a land mine. In the north of Chile, both Dominican women died in November 2016 (same month, different days). These events were covered by Chilean and Dominican media.<sup>105</sup> Their relatives claimed they had paid thousands of dollars to “coyotes” to take them to Chile. After the first death, the local government in Tarapaca, Chile opened a judicial investigation regarding smuggling of migrants. On 7 February 2016, a citizen from Peru died after stepping on a land mine. This tragedy was reported in many articles,<sup>106</sup> and the following day, there was an official statement about it from the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>103</sup> See articles from *Nortvision* and *El Telégrafo*, among others.

<sup>104</sup> Department of Nariño's capital city.

<sup>105</sup> Among others: <http://cosecharoja.org/chile-una-muerte-develo-una-red-que-lucra-con-inmigrantes/>; [www.elmostrador.cl/noticias/pais/2017/02/16/migrar-para-morir/](http://www.elmostrador.cl/noticias/pais/2017/02/16/migrar-para-morir/); <http://eldia.com.do/maribel-pujols-murio-en-el-desierto/>; <http://acontecerdominicano.co/dominicana-sale-detras-de-sus-suenos-la-abandonan-y-muere-congelada-en-el-desierto-c/>; <https://dimeloya.com/sucesos/muere-mujer-dominicana-al-intentar-cruzar-la-frontera-peru-chile/>; <http://zolfm.com/noticia/21102/reportan-otra-dominicana-muerta-entre-peru-y-chile-por-trafico-de-personas>

<sup>106</sup> Among others, see articles from: *Diario Correo*; *TelesurTV* and *Terra Noticias*.

## PANEL TWO: Official statement by the Government of Peru<sup>107</sup>



**MRE** Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores

**Comunicado de Prensa sobre peruano fallecido por mina antipersonal en territorio chileno**

El Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores confirma que la madrugada del domingo 7 de los corrientes, el ciudadano peruano Francis Reynaldo Mamani Aquino falleció como consecuencia del estallido de una mina antipersonal en territorio chileno, en inmediaciones de la frontera con el Perú.

La Policía Nacional del Perú informó que dicho ciudadano ingresó a Chile a través de una vía no autorizada. De acuerdo a las autoridades locales, el cuerpo del señor Mamani habría sido trasladado hasta territorio peruano por las personas que lo acompañaban, quienes posteriormente comunicaron por teléfono su deceso. El levantamiento del cadáver se produjo en el lugar denominado "El Salto", próximo a la frontera con Chile a la altura del Hito Nro. 14. El jefe de la Región Policial de Tacna, Gral. PNP Edgar Villalobos, señaló que las pesquisas se han efectuado en coordinación con las autoridades de Chile, puesto que la explosión que ocasionó el accidente sucedió en territorio chileno.

Al lamentar dicho fallecimiento y extender las condolencias a los familiares del occiso, el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores reitera que las salidas del territorio nacional y los ingresos a los países vecinos deben efectuarse a través de los puestos de control fronterizo autorizados.

Lima, 08 de febrero de 2016

On 8 February, the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed the death of a Peruvian man due to a landmine in Chilean territory. That citizen had entered Chile illegally. He was with other people who brought him back to Peru and left him in a place called "El Salto". The statement explained the case, gave identification details and reported on talks with the Government of Chile. Finally, the Government urged people to cross through official border controls.

During 2016, the Missing Migrants Project recorded 13 South Americans to have died or disappeared while attempting to migrate to the United States. The relatives of 12 Brazilians launched a formal inquiry on 15 November 2016, after having lost contact with their loved ones nine days earlier as they travelled by boat in the Caribbean near the Bahamas. The Government of Brazil officially reported their deaths not long after.<sup>108</sup>

## PANEL THREE: Brazilian Missing Migrants

According to the statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2016) on 26 December 2016: "The Brazilian Government has been working on the case of Brazilian nationals who vanished during an alleged maritime crossing between the Bahamas and the United States." Initially, 19 people were reported missing, but the last update confirmed 12. The Government of Brazil continues to seek information on this incident through the Brazilian Embassy in Nassau and the Consulate General of Brazil in Miami. It has been in permanent contact with United States and Bahamian authorities, as well as with the missing Brazilians' families.

Last 5 October 2016, a migrant from Ecuador was found dead in a truck in Mexico coming from Guatemala. According to the Instituto Nacional de Migraciones – Mexico, he was attempting to enter the United States, hidden in a truck with 60 other people and had paid around a thousand dollars for the journey. In that incident, three people from Guatemala and one from Ecuador died from asphyxiation and dehydration (El Universo, 2016).

These isolated incidents show the fragmentation of data related to missing migrant cases. Much of the information is extracted from media reports, along with some official statements made by governments regarding specific incidents. Compiling data on migrant deaths, (which ideally includes basic details, such as age, gender and origin of those involved, and the location and the manner of death) is a clear challenge in South America.

<sup>107</sup> Available from [www.telesurtv.net/news/Muere-peruano-al-pisar-una-mina-en-frontera-con-Chile-20160209-0037.html](http://www.telesurtv.net/news/Muere-peruano-al-pisar-una-mina-en-frontera-con-Chile-20160209-0037.html)

<sup>108</sup> IOM's mission in Brazil received, under request, an official report sent by Itamaraty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) with the detailed activities and actions carried out by them regarding the case so far in April 2017.

## 5.5. Final remarks and recommendations

South America is a source, destination and transit region for thousands of migrants who wish to improve their living conditions. Intra-regional migration patterns have intensified in recent years. Moreover, a new normative framework,<sup>109</sup> along with regional law, has resulted in an increase in safer, regular migration and mobility for South American nationals within the region.

The recent trends of transcontinental migration to South America have included migrants from Africa and Asia, and continental Caribbean migrants. Some of this migration is irregular, and in some cases, the migrants are victims of trafficking. As border controls in some countries have been strengthened, migrants have sought assistance crossing international boundaries from smugglers. Criminals are increasingly providing smuggling services to irregular migrants to evade national border controls, migration regulations and visa requirements.

In South America, although the number of people recorded to have died while migrating is not high in comparison to other regions, migrant fatalities are becoming an increasing matter of concern. It is necessary to highlight the real and serious dangers migrants are taking to reach their final destinations – whether these are South American countries or countries to the north. In South America, there are key data gaps, problems and challenges regarding information on missing and dead migrants. However, it is a topic that is becoming more visible in the region and is therefore more likely to become an issue on official policy agendas.

The obstacles and the limitations involved in data collection in this context deserve urgent attention. The first and main action point to improve this situation is to advocate for the importance of gathering data on the contexts in which migrants are dying to ensure that State actors, NGOs and international organizations make all possible effort to protect migrants' fundamental rights. Although many may take part in data collection on dead and missing migrants, ultimately it should be a State-led process.

Relatedly, specific procedures for informing, recording and identifying migrants who die should be established. All levels of governments should be involved, from local authorities (who are often the first to manage these cases) to national agencies. At the national level, States are entitled to engage in discussions and agreements with other States to effectively exchange case data that leads to improvements, for instance, to the process of identification and the repatriation of remains.

Sustainable Development Goal 10.7 calls on States to facilitate “safe migration”. Even though there is no agreement on how safe migration should be measured, one clear indicator is the number of dead and missing migrants. Therefore, as for other regions, there is an urgent need to produce accurate statistics on this topic, to improve data comparability and to produce regional and global estimates. The ultimate aim is to collect reliable information to develop evidence-based policies to address unsafe migration.

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<sup>109</sup> As previously mentioned in this chapter, the MERCOSUR Residence Agreement has contributed to the facilitation of regular migration movements within the region.

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- 2016 Stats and summaries. Available from [www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats](http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats) (accessed November 2017).

US Department of State

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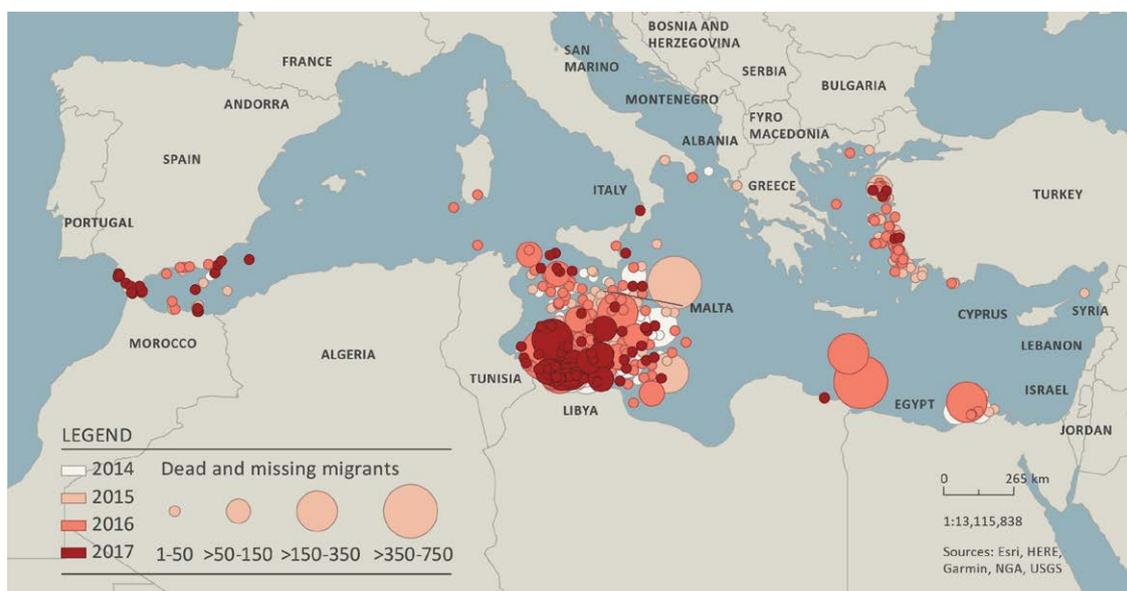
# Chapter 6 Europe and the Mediterranean

Ignacio Urquijo Sanchez and Julia Black<sup>110</sup>

Between January 2014 and September 2017, nearly 15,000 migrant fatalities were recorded in the Mediterranean Sea. Another 294 deaths during migration within Europe were recorded during this period. In total, these figures represent approximately two thirds (66%) of the total number of deaths and disappearances recorded worldwide by the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Missing Migrants Project. As discussed in the first part of this report, there are many reasons why the data currently available only represent a partial picture of the numbers of migrants who die or go missing every year.<sup>111</sup> Estimating migrant deaths in any region is difficult because of a lack of reliable and comparable data. Definitions of "migrants" and "deaths" are often inconsistent, as data sources in each country and region can vary significantly, making comparisons difficult.

This chapter provides an overview and assessment of the key sources of data and databases on missing migrants in Europe and the Mediterranean. The chapter first analyses the available data on border deaths in Europe, before presenting the main databases and assessing the quality of data collected. Finally, this chapter identifies best practices in existing data collection efforts in the European context and recommends action points to improve data on missing migrants.

## Map 12. Migrant deaths and disappearances recorded in the Mediterranean



Source: IOM's Missing Migrants Project, data from January 2014 to June 2017

Note: Names and boundaries indicated on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

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<sup>111</sup> See A. White and A. Singleton (2017), Methodological challenges in recording migrant deaths, In: *Fatal Journeys Volume 3: Improving Data on Missing Migrants (Part 1)* (F. Laczko, A. Singleton and J. Black, eds.). IOM, Geneva. Available from [http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/fatal\\_journeys\\_volume\\_3\\_part\\_1.pdf](http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/fatal_journeys_volume_3_part_1.pdf)

## 6.1. Background: Recent migration trends and policy context

More than 1.7 million migrants have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe since 2014, according to IOM figures (IOM, 2017a). More than 1 million arrivals were recorded on the Eastern Mediterranean route during this time, and arrivals via the Central Mediterranean have made up an increasingly larger proportion of the total since 2016. The Western Mediterranean route represents only 2.1 per cent of total arrivals to Europe between January 2014 and September 2017, but nonetheless has seen 434 fatalities during this period. Notably, 5,143 migrant fatalities occurred in the Mediterranean overall in 2016, the highest figure recorded since at least the year 2000. The number of deaths was lower in the first nine months of 2017 than in the equivalent period of 2016, whereas the rate of death<sup>112</sup> increased from 1.2 per cent in 2016 to 1.6 per cent in 2017.

There are three primary routes to the European Union: (a) Eastern Mediterranean route, from Turkey to Greece; (b) Central Mediterranean route, from North Africa to Italy; and (c) Western Mediterranean route, from North Africa to Spain. In the past, migrants have also travelled to the Spanish Canary Islands from West Africa, but flows have decreased since 2006. Since August 2017, a dangerous route over the Black Sea has also seen several hundred crossings (Gillet, 2017), which is an indication of a possible new migratory route into Europe. In late September 2017, 40 migrants drowned in the Black Sea off the coast of Turkey, the first-ever migration-related shipwreck in the Black Sea recorded since at least 2000 (IOM, 2017b).

Migration to Europe involves a complex mix of phenomena, including not only the journey to the continent, but also longer-term movements and migration decision-making involving multiple stops and stays of varying duration (Crawley et al., 2016). Partly as a consequence of this complexity, irregular migration on routes within Europe is difficult to trace. Deaths during overland migration are less likely to be reported than oversea crossings due in part to the fact that migrants generally die alone or with one or two companions once they have reached mainland Europe. Official sources that might capture these deaths do not currently make public their data on migrant fatalities, so the 294 fatalities recorded within Europe since 2014 are underestimates of the true number of deaths during migration. Since 2014, 82 fatalities have been recorded on the Western Balkans route, between Greece and Central Europe, and another 52 between the now-closed migrant camp in Calais, France, and the United Kingdom (IOM, 2017b). In 2017, several migrant deaths were recorded on train tracks between Italy and France. This, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have argued, is linked to the border closure in Ventimiglia (Quadroni and Luppi, 2017; Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), 2017).

Due to the limitations of data on migrant deaths within Europe, this chapter focuses largely on the three Mediterranean crossings.

**The Western Mediterranean** route is used by migrants crossing the Mediterranean to the south of the Iberian Peninsula, as well as those who attempt to reach Ceuta and Melilla – two Spanish enclaves in North Africa – from Morocco. There are comparatively few migrants travelling irregularly via the Western Mediterranean compared to the Eastern or Central Mediterranean routes; nonetheless, it was the route taken by the 12,122 migrants arriving in Spain between January and September 2017, up from 3,808 during the equivalent period in 2016.

**The Eastern Mediterranean** route, between Turkey and Greece, was the main point of irregular entry to Europe in 2015. The number of migrants crossing dropped sharply after the implementation of the European Union–Turkey statement in late March 2016 (European Council, 2016). Migrants arriving via the Eastern Mediterranean in 2015–2016 were largely from the Middle East and South Asia. Of the arrivals between 2014 and 2016, 40 per cent were recorded

<sup>112</sup> Calculated by dividing the number of migrant fatalities on each route by the sum of the following: (a) migrant arrivals in Italy, Greece and Spain respectively; (b) number of migrant fatalities in the Mediterranean, and for the Eastern and Central routes respectively; and (c) number of migrants rescued by the Turkish and Libyan Coast Guards (IOM, 2017b; Italian Ministry of the Interior, 2017; Hellenic Police, 2017; Turkish Coast Guard, 2017; IOM Libya, 2017a and 2017b).



The Italian Coast Guard rescues migrants bound for Italy. © Francesco Malavolta/IOM 2014

as Syrian citizens, with another 21 per cent as Afghan nationals, and 13 per cent as Iraqi nationals (Hellenic Police, 2017). Between January and September 2017, 45 fatalities were recorded on this route, 806 deaths were recorded in 2015 and 434 in 2016, 84 per cent of which took place before the European Union–Turkey statement was released in March (IOM, 2017b).

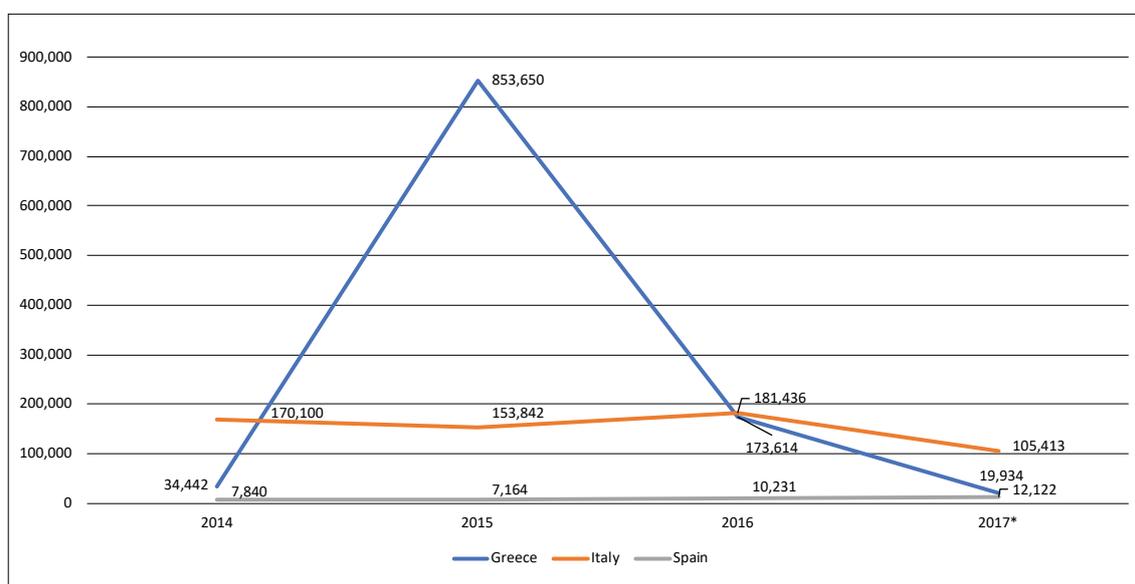
**The Central Mediterranean** route has been the primary irregular route to Europe for migrants since March 2016. Migrants on this route travel primarily from Libya to Italy, with some migrants arriving in Italy depart from Egypt, and a smaller proportion leaving from Tunisia and Algeria. Since 2014, migrants using the Central Mediterranean crossing have come predominantly from the Horn of Africa and Western African countries of origin, though Bangladeshis made up 9.1 per cent of arrivals in Italy between January and September 2017 (Italian Ministry of the Interior, 2017).

The first six months of 2017 saw an unprecedented 83,752 arrivals recorded in Italy. This number was an increase of 19 per cent from the 70,222 recorded in the first six months of 2016. Between July and September, the number of arrivals plummeted. While 61,821 arrivals were recorded on the Central Mediterranean route between July and September 2016, 21,661 were recorded in the same period of 2017, representing a 65 per cent decrease. Unsurprisingly, the number of fatalities recorded in the Central Mediterranean also dropped, from 3,073 recorded during the first nine months of 2016 to 2,471 in the first three quarters of 2017 (IOM, 2017b).

Arrivals and fatalities recorded on the Central Mediterranean route decreased between July and September 2017, but the number of deaths during this period is higher than expected. While arrivals in Italy decreased by 65 per cent, the number of deaths recorded in the Central Mediterranean decreased by only 47 per cent. Between July and September 2017, 312 deaths were recorded, compared to 589 in the equivalent period of 2016.

Due to the complex nature of migration to Europe via the Mediterranean and the lack of data along the Central Mediterranean route in Africa, no one reason can be given for the sharp decline in crossings, or for the relatively high number of deaths since July compared to the number of attempted crossings. Anecdotal and survey reports indicate that many migrants are in detention or otherwise stranded in Libya, where they face significant risks of abuse and exploitation (Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Mediterranean, 2017), which most obviously hinders those that wish to cross to Europe, but may also deter others from travelling via Libya. There are indications that fewer migrants are attempting to travel via the Central Mediterranean in recent months, as the number of outgoing migrants identified at flow monitoring points in the Niger – a major transit country for sub-Saharan migrants travelling to Europe – has decreased from 221,992 from February to July 2016 to 32,017 in the equivalent period of 2017 (DTM Niger, 2017). Interestingly, few smugglers offered trips between North Africa and Italy on social media during the summer of 2017, which is likely linked to increased instability in Western Libya, the main launching point for boats carrying migrants across the Central Mediterranean (European Asylum Support Office, 2017).

**Figure 17. Arrivals by European State and by route, 2014–2017\***



Source: IOM, 2017a.

Note: \*2017 data from 1 January to 1 October."

## 6.2. Risks undertaken during migration to and within Europe

### 6.2.1. Risks during migration via the Mediterranean

Migrants who undertake any Mediterranean crossing to Europe face the risk of injury and death relating to the nature of the overseas journey, increasingly dangerous smuggling practices, and in some cases, risky rescue operations. According to the available data, the Central Mediterranean crossing is likely the deadliest route to Europe; on average, 1 migrant in 50 to attempt the crossing to Italy has died between January 2014 and September 2017, compared to roughly 1 in 900 on the Eastern Mediterranean route and 1 in 87 on the Western Mediterranean route.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>113</sup> See White and Singleton, 2017.

The reasons for the high number of deaths in the Mediterranean are discussed in chapter 1 of the first part of this report. There is evidence that since 2016, the boats used on the Central Mediterranean route are less seaworthy and more heavily overloaded than previously. Analysis of MSF search-and-rescue data indicates that a higher proportion of rubber dinghies were used by migrants attempting the Central Mediterranean crossing in 2016, and that these boats were more likely to be overloaded. Rubber dinghies are considered less robust than wooden boats as they are smaller and may deflate during operation. MSF estimates that rubber boats in the Central Mediterranean carried, on average, two to five times their capacity in 2016 (MSF, 2017). This may be linked to Operation Sophia's mandate to destroy boats used by smugglers in the Mediterranean (European Union Naval Force Mediterranean Operation Sophia, 2017), which is thought to have led to decreased availability of wooden boats and an increase in the use of single-use rubber dinghies.

### 6.2.2. Risks during migration within Europe

Many of the risks faced during the Mediterranean crossing are still present once migrants reach Europe. According to a recent United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report (2017a), cases of abuse and violence against migrants take place throughout Europe, and there are accounts of violence and pushbacks by State authorities. Experiences of violence and death "are not limited to the sea crossing but can be found along the entire route" (Crawley et al., 2016:11).

Specific routes within Europe also pose different threats to migrants travelling irregularly. Causes of death relating to vehicular injuries make up 65 per cent of migrant deaths recorded in Europe since 2014. Since September 2016, at least 12 migrants have been killed travelling irregularly between Italy and France, many of whom were hit or electrocuted on train tracks near Ventimiglia, Italy (IOM, 2017b). Though there was significant media attention devoted to the 71 migrants found in the back of a truck in Austria in August 2015, many migrants die in smaller numbers on planes, trains, buses, trucks and cars across Europe. However, as such accidents rarely make headlines, and no official statistics on migrant fatalities are made publicly available, it is likely that many migration-related deaths in Europe go unrecorded.

Transit through Europe also poses many natural hazards for migrants. Between January 2014 and September 2017, 41 deaths have been recorded due to harsh natural conditions during the journey through Europe. More than half (53%) of these migrants died of hypothermia during the winter months, while another 22 drowned, either near the now-defunct Calais migrant camp or in rivers on the Western Balkans route (ibid.). However, risks facing migrants on the Western Balkans route are not limited to death. For example, a survey of more than 4,000 migrants in 50 locations in Italy reported that 73 per cent of adult respondents and 88 per cent of all children<sup>114</sup> interviewees stated that they had experienced at least one instance of physical abuse. Though most abuses reported occurred in Libya, 2.5 per cent stated that they experienced physical violence in Bulgaria, and such abuses also reportedly occurred in Italy and European States on the Western Balkans route (DTM Mediterranean, 2017).

Those who survive migration to and within Europe and are physically unharmed can experience psychological trauma. One study found that nearly a third of migrants interviewed in Italy and Malta had witnessed fellow travellers dying during migration to Europe (Crawley et al., 2016:8). Ahmed, an Afghan teenager who arrived in Lesvos in the summer of 2015, saw how one of the inflatable dinghies, which departed at the same time than the one he was using, sank while crossing the sea from Turkey to Greece. "Everybody died, women and children included," Ahmed reported. Other reports state that even before boarding a boat to cross the Mediterranean Sea, 36 per cent of the people have already seen somebody die during the overland trip (Khachani, 2006).

<sup>114</sup> Aged 14–17. Children under 14 were not surveyed due to ethical concerns.

## 6.3. Assessment of available data

The data publicly available about migrant fatalities in the European context are scattered across a handful of databases created by universities, NGOs and international organizations. Each of these databases uses a different methodology to collect the information and, in some cases, they contain data only for a certain period of time, or only in a specific area, such as deaths in the Mediterranean. This makes comprehension of the overall picture of migrant fatalities to and within Europe extremely difficult, and results in a general underestimation in the extent of migrant fatalities (IOM, 2014:19) and, in some cases in which only media is used as a primary source, there could be an overrepresentation of the share of deaths that occur in particular regions. This section gives an account of the available sources of data on fatalities during migration to and within Europe, and assesses each resource's advantages and disadvantages.

### 6.3.1. What is available?

#### *IOM's Missing Migrants Project*

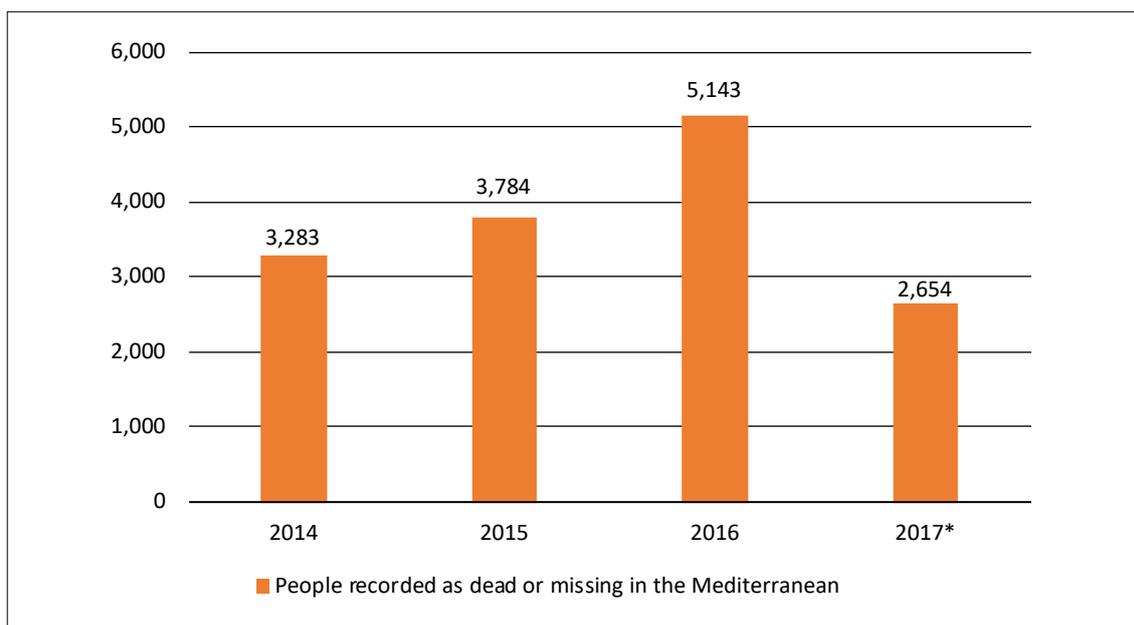
Since October 2013, IOM's Missing Migrants Project<sup>115</sup> has been collecting information about migrants and refugees who lost their lives along mixed migration routes worldwide, including fatalities in the Mediterranean and Europe. It does not include deaths that did not occur during the migration process, such as those which occurred once the person has arrived in the destination country (IOM, 2014:19). As such, it excludes deaths in migrant detention facilities and refugee camps, which may be included in other databases.

Missing Migrants Project data are updated several times per week and available for download. The variables include, when known:

- The date of the incident;
- The number of people who died and/or went missing during migration;
- Their nationality, age and sex;
- The cause of death;
- The month when it happened; and
- The location in which incidents of death took place, including estimated coordinates.

Missing Migrants Project data are compiled from a variety of sources, including national authorities, media reports, NGOs and interviews with survivors at landing points. While Missing Migrants Project data are widely used in academia and news media, the project is not an official source of data and is best understood as a minimum estimate of migrant deaths and disappearances. As such, any use of the data set should carefully consider the shortcomings of the available data, especially when used for policy recommendations.

**Figure 18. Missing Migrants Project data on border deaths in the Mediterranean, January 2014–September 2017**



Source: IOM, 2017b.

Note: \*1 January–30 September 2017.

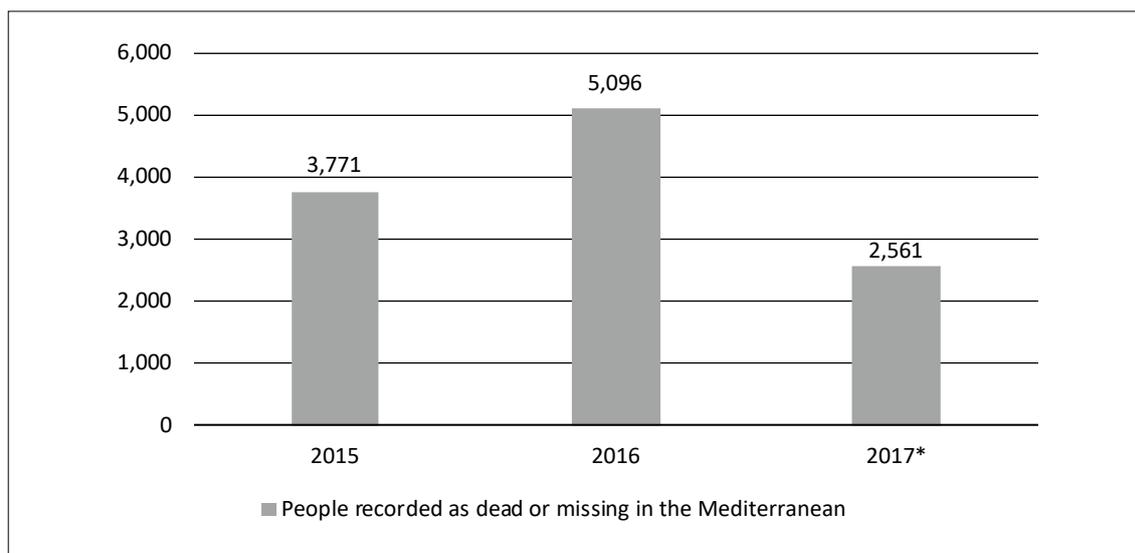
### **UNHCR’s Refugees Operational Portal**

The Refugees Operational Portal<sup>116</sup> is a coordination tool for refugee situations provided by UNHCR. It provides an estimate of dead and missing migrants in the Mediterranean and also the main routes where the events happened from 2015 until the present, though the underlying data are not disaggregated or shared publicly. Details about dead and missing refugees and migrants are only found in publications embedded in the Portal, where it is possible to find information about incidents involving migrant fatalities in the Mediterranean; however, the information is scattered.

The data are obtained from a variety of sources: (a) reports from survivors and family members collected by UNHCR staff; (b) governments; (c) coast guard or navy vessels; and (d) news, media and civil society sources. The organization emphasizes that “figures on dead and missing at sea represent conservative estimates of a number that could possibly be higher than reported” (UNHCR, 2016).

<sup>116</sup> Available from [data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean)

**Figure 19. UNHCR data on border deaths in the Mediterranean, January 2015–September 2017**



Source: UNHCR, 2017b.

Note: \*1 January–30 September 2017.

### **The Migrants' Files**

The Migrants' Files<sup>117</sup> is a database that includes information about events during which somebody lost his or her life in an attempt to reach or stay in Europe between 2000 and June 2016. It includes migrants who died in North Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean and those who were already in Europe when they died and not only while crossing borders. The Migrants' Files database shows, when known, the cause of death, the date when it happened, the number and nationality of the deceased, the location of the incident and the source from where they recorded the information.

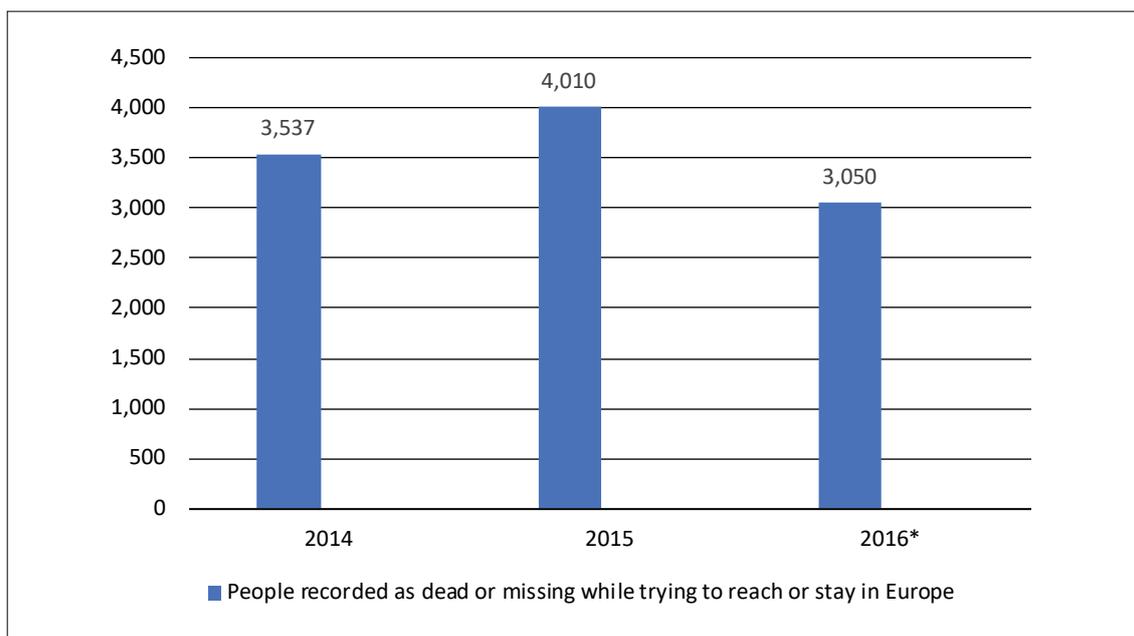
The Migrants' Files was created by a consortium of journalists, using and updating information from news outlets that are partially already collected in two databases: (a) UNITED for Intercultural Action,<sup>118</sup> created by a Dutch NGO, based primarily on news media; and (b) Fortress Europe,<sup>119</sup> a blog created by the journalist Gabriele Del Grande, who is also primarily collecting information from the news. The Migrants' Files stopped collecting information on June 2016. The decision to stop updating the database came as they "outspent the €17,000 in grants that the project received" and "more importantly...[as] the goal we set ourselves has been reached" with the establishment of other, similar data collection projects by the International Organization for Migration and others (The Migrants' Files, 2016a).

<sup>117</sup> Available from [www.themigrantsfiles.com](http://www.themigrantsfiles.com)

<sup>118</sup> Previously called UNITED Against the Racism. Available from [www.unitedagainstracism.org/campaigns/annual-campaigns/fortress-europe/](http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/campaigns/annual-campaigns/fortress-europe/)

<sup>119</sup> Available from <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.ro/>

**Figure 20. The Migrants' Files data on border deaths in the Mediterranean, January 2014–June 2016**



Source: The Migrants' Files, 2016b.

Notes: \*1 January–24 June 2016.

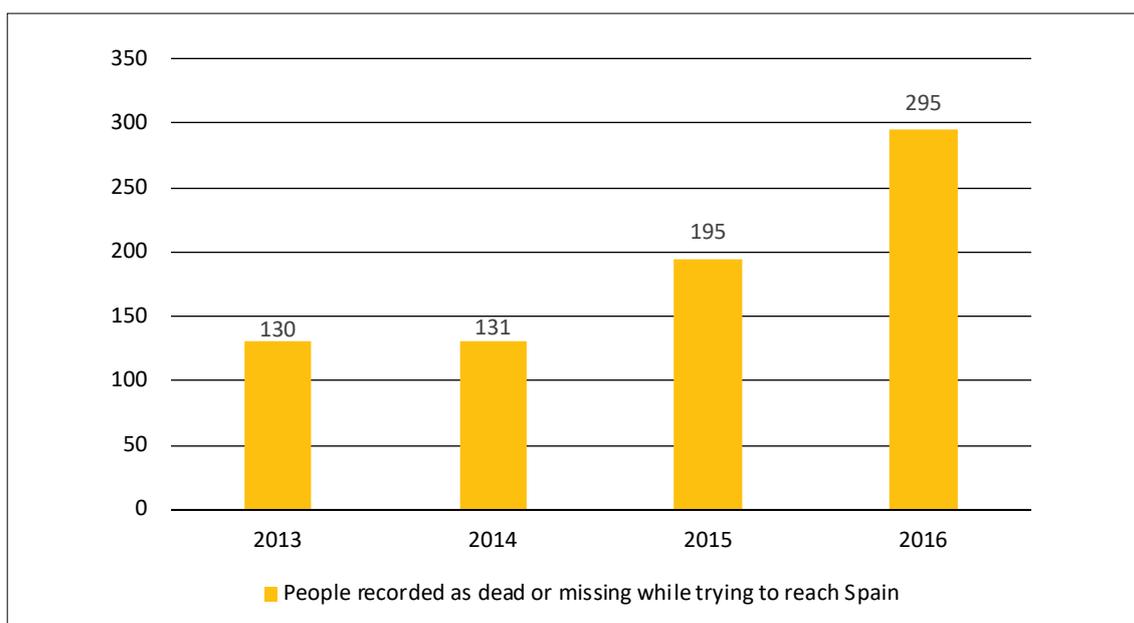
### *The Andalusian Association for Human Rights*

The annual report of the Spanish NGO Andalusian Association for Human Rights (APDHA)<sup>120</sup> includes data on people who died trying to enter irregularly in Spain. The report presents information about the number of migrants and refugees who died or went missing on their way to Spain, which includes those that occurred on the Western Mediterranean, as well as those that occurred en route to the Canary Islands. Though the report is not a database, it contains an annex detailing each incident in which a migrant death or disappearance was recorded en route to Spain. This annex shows, when known, the location where the body was recovered and the plausible origin of the person, though this may only be recorded as “Maghreb” or “sub-Saharan Africa”. There are also contextual details about the incidents included where available.

The database relies primarily on news reports as the main source of information. For data about those migrants who died in the rest of the Mediterranean, the APDHA uses estimates from IOM's Missing Migrants Project.

<sup>120</sup> The latest report is available from <https://apdha.org/media/informe-frontera-sur-2017-web.pdf>

**Figure 21. APDHA data on deaths en route to Spain, January 2014–December 2016**



Source: APDHA, 2017.

### *The Deaths at the Borders Database*

The Deaths at the Borders Database (DatBD)<sup>121</sup> is a collection of official, State-produced evidence of people who died in the Mediterranean trying to reach Greece, Gibraltar, Italy, Malta and Spain from 1990 to the end of 2013. This database is unique in that it collects data only about the bodies found in or brought to Europe and registered by the authorities of the mentioned countries, distinguishing itself from other databases that are primarily incident-based.

DatBD was created by the Free University of Amsterdam using information collected from official death management systems in Gibraltar, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain, primarily death certificates archived by civil registries. In some cases, secondary sources, such as coroner's reports, coast guard and police reports, burial permits and judicial orders, were also taken into account.<sup>122</sup>

This database contains the most complete and detailed data on migrant deaths, but excludes estimates of missing persons at sea. It includes, when known, the following information:

- Information about where the body was registered and by what judicial authority, including:
  - Date of inquest/investigation;
  - Date of medical examination;
  - Forensic medical institute in charge of the investigation;
  - Label used by administration;
  - If there was a death certificate or a cemetery register; and
  - If it was registered in a coroner archive.

<sup>121</sup> Available from [www.borderdeaths.org](http://www.borderdeaths.org)

<sup>122</sup> To learn more about DatB's methodology, see: Last et al. (2017), "Deaths at the borders database: evidence of deceased migrants' bodies found along the southern external borders of the European Union", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(5):693–712.

- Details about identification and burial of the decedent, including:
  - Identification status and details of identification; and
  - Date of authorized burial, date buried and the location of the burial.
- Demographic information, such as:
  - Sex, age or estimated age;
  - Stated nationality by the administration, which may be assumed based on certain characteristics;
  - Descriptions of race/ethnicity;
  - Place of birth; and
  - Place of last known residence.
- Information about the death, such as:
  - Date and location where the body was found;
  - Estimated date of death;
  - Estimated location of death;
  - Circumstances of death;
  - Details of incident, including primary and secondary cause of death; and
  - The certainty that the death was border-related.

A private version of this database also contains the names of the identified bodies; however, this information is not public.

DatBD stopped collecting data after 2013. The approach taken involves time-consuming work that involves travelling to remote areas in order to collect the information. The creation of this database required the participation of 13 researchers who visited 563 civil registries over a year (Last, 2015a). For most of these registries, updating the database would require travel to the same destinations again.

### ***Other collections of information about border deaths***

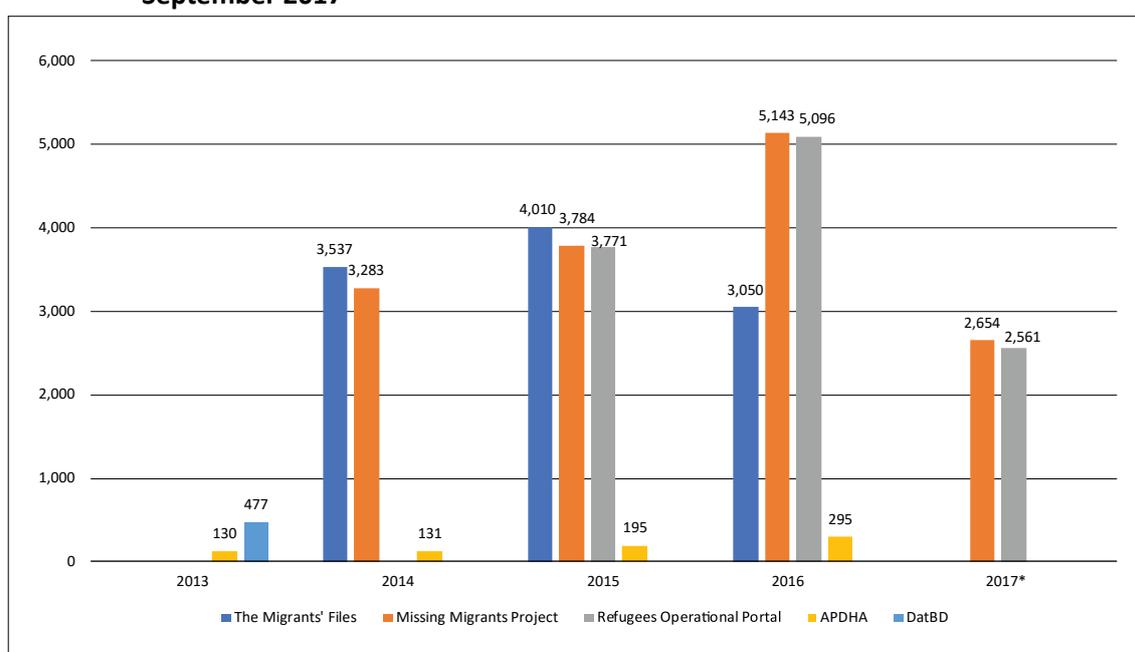
Other efforts to compile and analyse information about those who died en route to or within Europe exist. However, these sources studied are highly fragmented or cover only a short period of time. For example, Carling (2007) used the UNITED list and other news articles, compiling this information for a specific area and period of time. MSF also publishes news and reports about deaths and missing people in the Mediterranean Sea, using information from their own rescue operations.<sup>123</sup> However, MSF does not publish an extensive and comprehensive database using this information. Some official figures are published from governments of European States, but with a limited or unclear definition of “migrant death” and often-incomplete information about the migrant decedents and the circumstances of their death. Currently, no regional authority publishes data on migrant fatalities to and within Europe, nor is it clear whether any authority collects comprehensive information on migrant fatalities. There are estimates of the number of deaths at sea trying to reach the European Union in some reports such as in Irregular Migration via the Central Mediterranean (European Commission, 2017); however, these are usually based on one of the aforementioned unofficial sources of data on migrant fatalities.

<sup>123</sup> For instance, see [www.msf.org/en/article/central-mediterranean-msf-doctor-recounts-finding-deaths-sea](http://www.msf.org/en/article/central-mediterranean-msf-doctor-recounts-finding-deaths-sea) or [www.msf.org/en/article/central-mediterranean-22-people-die-sea-209-more-are-rescued](http://www.msf.org/en/article/central-mediterranean-22-people-die-sea-209-more-are-rescued)

### Comparison of Mediterranean databases

The following chart shows the total amount of border deaths in the region compiled by the mentioned databases. Nevertheless, it is important to note, as explained above and shown below the table, that each of the databases collect information with a different methodology and even in different geographical areas.

**Figure 22. Comparison of data on border deaths in the European context, January 2013–September 2017**



Sources: The Migrants' Files, 2016b: Includes people recorded dead or missing trying to reach or to stay in Europe. Last update on 24 June 2016.

IOM's Missing Migrants Project, 2017: People recorded dead or missing in the Mediterranean while attempting to reach Europe. Data shown here from update 2 October 2017.

UNHCR'S Refugees Operational Portal, 2017: People recorded dead or missing in the Mediterranean while attempting to reach Europe. Data shown here dated 27 September 2017.

APDHA, 2017: People recorded dead or missing trying to reach Spain. Last update March 2017.

DatBD, 2015: People found dead while trying to reach Southern European countries. Data available only through December 2013.

Note: \*1 January–30 September 2017.

### 6.3.2. How reliable are the available data?

The reliability of the data on migrant fatalities en route to and within Europe depends on the method and sources used to collect the information. The main factors that affect the reliability of such data are the physical and administrative remoteness of migrant deaths, the definition of border deaths, as well as the use of media sources.

#### Physical and administrative remoteness of the death

Unfortunately, because of the nature of migration to Europe, which includes in most cases crossing the sea while trying to remain undetected, there are deaths that will remain undiscovered when shipwrecks occur with no survivors. For this reason, Missing Migrants Project and other incident-based data represent, at best, a minimum estimate.

There is no common methodology in the European Union to register the recovered bodies, which means that even when a body is discovered on land, there are many chances that information about the deceased will remain unnoticed or only be registered in an archive not connected to any centralized database. This is the case for information collected by most national governments in Europe, which store fatalities data in thousands of civil registries, without an online system to access them. DatBD made a tremendous effort to collect the varied information during the year 2014; however, the database was not updated from that year on, because it would have required sending a dozen field researchers to collect information from the same hundreds of archives each year. Moreover, because the database was built using death certificates of bodies that have been recovered, this does not include information about missing bodies. This makes the included data reliable, but the total estimate of fatalities is lower than the true total, given that an unknown amount of people go missing at the sea whose bodies are not recovered.

Furthermore, data collection based on bodies recovered relies on the capacity of European authorities. The quality of the registrations of people who died trying to reach Europe depends on the civil servant in charge of each registry. This explains why, even when the amount of information about two border deaths is similar, it is highly probable the information recorded will be different. During the fieldwork undertaken for the creation of the DatBD, the field researchers discovered different types of inconsistencies in the registry of bodies. For example, there is no common label to refer to border deaths in the registries, depending on each civil servant without any common criteria to work with. The labels found in the death certificates included “Unknown body”, “Black unknown”, “No name”, “Unidentified”, “Illegal migrant number 1” and “sub-Saharan African”. In some cases, even when the name was known, it was not filled under the item “Name”, but under “Other information”, which makes the identification of the deceased even more difficult (Pérez, Urquijo and Last, 2016). One of the consequences of this situation is that almost two thirds of the people “have not been identified by the local authorities charged with investigating their deaths” (Last, 2015a:4). Therefore, there is a need for developing common data procedures for deaths registries across Europe.

### *The definition of border deaths*

Varying definitions of border deaths are used by the various organizations collecting data on fatalities within and en route to Europe, which makes assessing the reliability of these data difficult. DatBD considers “border deaths” to be “people who have died attempting to migrate irregularly to Europe by crossing the southern external borders of the EU without authorization, whose bodies were found on or brought to the territories of Spain, Gibraltar, Italy, Malta or Greece” (Last, 2015b:1). Missing Migrants Project counts as “border deaths” those “migrants who have died or gone missing at the external borders of states, or in the process of migration towards an international destination”, excluding those happening inside the European Union and “during deportation, or after forced return to a migrant’s homeland” (IOM, 2017c).

The Migrants’ Files – and by extent, the UNITED list and Fortress Europe blog – uses a broad definition of “border deaths”, which in some cases comprises people who died in detention centres (including suicides), deaths during transit through the European Union, victims of racist attacks or even the deaths of homeless migrants (The Migrants’ Files, 2016a). The Andalusian Association for Human Rights uses the definition established by IOM when showing the general trends in the Mediterranean; however, it uses the definition of the Migrants’ Files when showing information about those who died or went missing on their way to Spain. There is no stated definition of “border deaths” on the Refugees Operational Portal by UNHCR, nor by MSF. In both cases, they seem to count those dead and missing trying to reach the European Union irregularly by sea.

### **Media coverage**

Data from the Migrants' Files, APDHA and, in part, the Missing Migrants Project and the Refugees Operational Portal use information from media reports. The coverage of migrant deaths by the media is not complete. In many cases, the media attention focuses on one spot at a time. For example, during the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015, there was a proliferation of articles from certain Greek islands, while information from the same spot went unnoticed during previous years, even if there were also migrants and refugees dying in their attempt to reach the European Union using the Eastern Mediterranean route. Cases involving smaller incidents in other parts of the Mediterranean may remain undiscovered because there is no media coverage in many of the areas where migrants die. It has also been noticed that a single incident can be double-counted, such as when information from the day the ship went missing and information from the day when some of the bodies were recovered is included as two separate cases. Moreover, the information involving victims is often an estimate, as in many cases, it is based on comments of the survivors made just after the highly stressful moments of the rescue, in many cases without a follow-up of the incident (IOM, 2014:33). Finally, the data published about the victims are frequently very vague, not including, for instance, the age, sex, nationality or name of the person, which are necessary for a comprehensive analysis. The third chapter of part one of this report discusses the issues surrounding media coverage on migrant fatalities in greater depth.

## **6.4. Action points**

Though there are a number of good practices in data collection on migrant fatalities in the European context, the lack of publicly available data from official sources means that information on border deaths remains only an estimate.

### **6.4.1. Best practices in data collection efforts**

At a macro level, and in the context of the academic world, the Human Costs of Border Control project is noteworthy, as it was in charge of the creation of the above-mentioned DatBD, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research by means of a grant for Thomas Spijkerboer, Professor of Law at the Free University of Amsterdam. Over the year 2014 and part of 2015, 13 researchers, coordinated by Tamara Last, visited 563 local civil registries in Spain, Italy, Greece, Malta and Gibraltar and collected information from death certificates. This represented the first effort to collect official, State-produced evidence on people who died while attempting to reach Europe's southern borders.

Also at a macro level, the Migrants' Files, created by a consortium of journalists and discontinued in 2016, and Missing Migrants Project, run by IOM, are two excellent examples of centralization and publication of information that allows researchers and policymakers to understand the trends in migration to Europe and the level of mortality occurring on the various routes. Both projects provide in-depth discussion of the definition of "border death" used in the respective databases, and provide an account of their methodological approaches and their shortcomings.

At the micro level, there are several examples of good practices from people working with border deaths. For instance, there are coroners collecting more information about the bodies than required, cemetery workers keeping track of the graves where unidentified migrants are buried and civil servants filling more information than the required by the protocol in the death certificates (IOM, 2014:97). Similarly, the work of the LABANOF Institute in Milan and of the Italian Special Commissioner for Missing Persons have improved forensic practices used in the recovery and processing of migrant bodies in Italy significantly in recent years.

Closely related to the issues with data on migrant fatalities is data on missing persons reports. Family members of those who die during migration often have no means of knowing what happened, and they remain “unrepresented in discussions about the management of bodies and the broader crisis, and largely unable to engage with the authorities who can identify their loved ones” (The Mediterranean Missing Project, 2016:3). One of the relevant findings of DatBD is that almost two thirds of migrant bodies registered by European authorities are not identified (Last, 2015a). There is no centralized organization in Europe to which families of people who have lost a relative, or suspect that this happened, could turn in order to confirm the deceased or recover information about the body. Moreover, while governments in Europe and European Union border agencies such as Frontex may publish information about the number of border crossings, they do not publish data on border deaths (IOM, 2014:96). Most of the information about these cases is archived in thousands of particular registries, and it is not currently aggregated by any European authority.

In this area, two efforts represent best practices when dealing with data on missing persons and their families. The Mediterranean Missing Project,<sup>124</sup> an Economic and Social Research Council-funded collaboration between the University of York, City University London and IOM, conducted research in this area from September 2015 to October 2016. Their aim was to systematically collect data and comparatively study management of migrant bodies in the Mediterranean and how the relatives of the missing people are affected by their loss. The project found that the needs of families should be central to any investigation, and that respecting these needs could also lead to the possibility of collecting ante-mortem data to enable identification (The Mediterranean Missing Project, 2016:3). The project Restoring Family Links, managed by the International Committee of the Red Cross, goes one step further and uses the information collected in databases such as those previously mentioned to enable family members to better search for a lost relative (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2017); however, any successful identification efforts are limited by the many challenges to collecting data on migrant deaths and disappearances.

#### **Text Box 5. Areas of priority action to address challenges related to the identification of dead and missing migrants**

*by Stefanie Rühl<sup>125</sup>*

The identification of migrants who have perished or gone missing at sea is reliant on a three-step process. Each step involves different actors and requires a different set of skills:

**(a) Collecting post-mortem data:** Law enforcement authorities generally undertake the examination of the remains of an unidentified body as part of their investigation, collecting and storing post-mortem data. Post-mortem data refers to data collected from and around the body, such as possessions and witness statements from the shipwreck. In a second step, comprehensive missing persons reports must be obtained, as both ante- and post-mortem data are required to enable the identification of those who have perished or gone missing at sea.

<sup>124</sup> Available from [www.mediterraneanmissing.eu](http://www.mediterraneanmissing.eu)

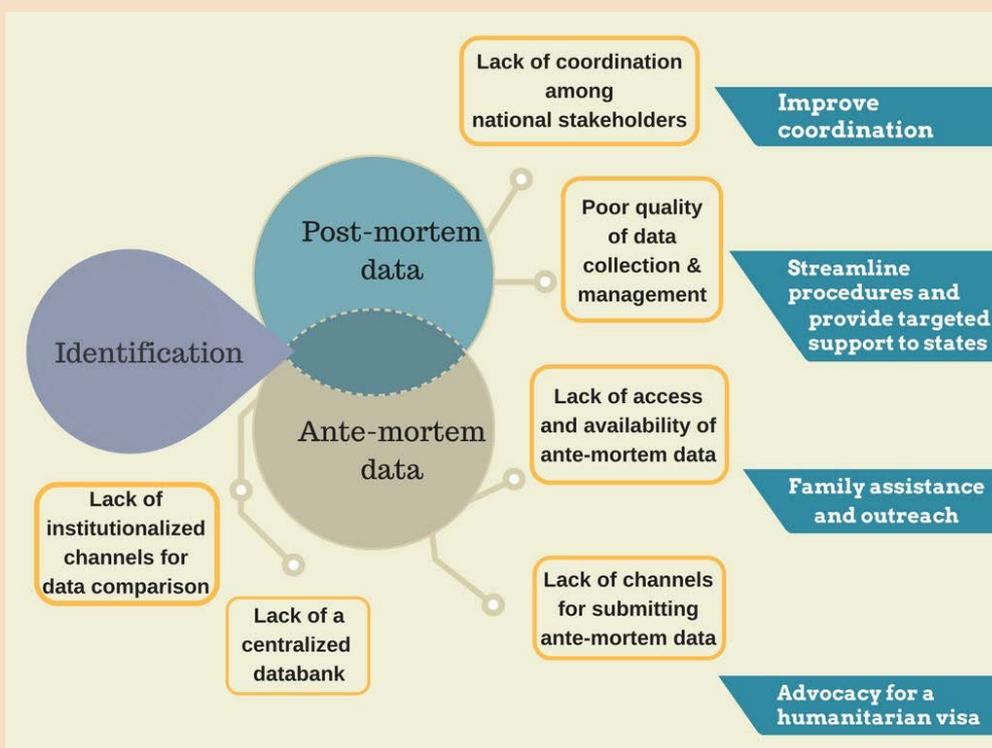
<sup>125</sup> Stefanie Rühl is a Programme Officer in the Migrant Assistance Division based at IOM headquarters in Geneva.

**(b) Collecting ante-mortem data:** Given the challenges in accessing and collecting ante-mortem data, a comprehensive outreach programme – targeting families in countries of origin and connecting them with the relevant authorities – is necessary to obtain comprehensive missing persons reports. Medical reports and other ante-mortem data collected from families can then be compared with data sets with information on unidentified remains. Initiatives could also directly target migrants undertaking perilous migration journeys to encourage them to share identifying information that could be used later in case of need.

**(c) Comparison:** The comparison of ante- and post-mortem data enables the identification of those who have perished at sea or gone missing. Mechanisms and agreements for data sharing must be in place between institutions in countries of origin and destination to facilitate the comparison of information.

Specific challenges are linked to the collection and comparison on ante- and post-mortem data, as well as to the engagement with and support to families in their efforts to search for information about their missing relatives. For example, authorities in the countries of reception may be unprepared or under-resourced to deal with the nature and volume of this unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

**Figure 23. Challenges and possible interventions relating to the identifying missing migrants**



Source: Rühl, 2017.

## Areas of priority action

### ***Build a transnational architecture to manage data about missing migrants***

International norms have been agreed for tracing missing people and for investigating and recording deaths in humanitarian disasters and situations of internal displacement, for identifying mortal remains, and for upholding the rights of families. There remain, however, gaps in the coverage and application of international human rights law, which has seldom been applied in situations of death or loss in the course of migration. As a result, States' responses to migrant deaths on Mediterranean crossings have been determined by national law and practice and often been characterized by a policy vacuum around the issue of the missing.<sup>126</sup>

### ***Improve coordination between stakeholders***

One of the key obstacles to effective data management resulting from the policy vacuum surrounding the identification of dead and missing migrants is the absence of standard operating procedures for dealing with the bodies and their identification. A number of different agencies are dealing with different aspects of the problem (retrieval, identification, burial of dead bodies, collection and management of data from bodies) often working with limited coordination. This has adverse impacts on families in search of their loved ones. Institutionalized channels for coordination are needed to promote standard procedures both at the country and at the regional level, to standardize data collection and storage, ensure that the collected data is comparable and that mechanisms for data sharing are in place.

While the establishment of a transnational architecture to manage the processes around the identification of dead migrants is hindered by a variety of major obstacles, rendering the attainment of this objective a long-term goal, standardization in the information collection on the deceased and improved coordination between stakeholders are important steps towards enhancing the quality and comparability of post-mortem data.

### ***Improve the capacity of national authorities to collect and manage post-mortem data***

Based on an assessment of the specific needs related to resources, manpower and expertise to collect and manage post-mortem data in each context, tailored assistance programmes can support authorities in their efforts. This may entail securing funds for equipment or additional staff, or capacity-building programmes to foster standardization in the information collection on the deceased and harmonization of processes. Technical assistance and surge funding can strengthen the response capacities of national authorities, for instance enabling coast guards to interview all survivors of a shipwreck with the help of certified interpreters, and systematically collect testimonies from survivors and eyewitnesses.

<sup>126</sup> S. Grant, *Dead and Missing Migrants: The Obligations of European States under International Human Rights Law*, IHRL Briefing (Mediterranean Missing Project, London, 2016). Available from [www.mediterraneanmissing.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Mediterranean-Missing-Legal-Memo-290816.pdf](http://www.mediterraneanmissing.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Mediterranean-Missing-Legal-Memo-290816.pdf). See also chapter 2 in *Fatal Journeys Volume 2: Identification and Tracing of Dead and Missing Migrants* and the *Last Rights Project* for a discussion of international human rights law and the identification of dead and missing migrants.

### ***Improve the availability and accessibility of ante-mortem data***

The most important gap relates to the availability of ante-mortem data. Fatalities in the context of migration are open disasters, in which the number of deaths and the time frame in which they occur are not well defined. Those who have perished at sea or gone missing come from a number of different countries, which renders the comparison of post-mortem data with ante-mortem data very difficult. Concerted efforts are needed to ensure the inclusion of the families at all stages of the process and to collect ante-mortem data from families located in third countries.

### ***Address the needs of families***

The lack of clarity over the fate of those missing in migration has a dramatic impact on their families. Emotionally and psychologically, families are affected in ways that reduce their well-being both as individuals and collectively. The Mediterranean Missing's report on the situation of families – which applies the lens of ambiguous loss as a way to interpret impacts on families, as well as a route to therapeutic approaches – indicates that families of missing migrants lack support in the search and identification process, and in many cases are in need of economic, psychosocial and legal assistance.<sup>127</sup>

## **6.4.2. Recommendations**

Despite the many different approaches to collecting data on border deaths discussed in this chapter, significant challenges to understanding the risks migrants face during migration to and within Europe remain. Better data can lead to strong, evidence-based policies aimed at preventing loss of life, and can also improve the identification of the thousands of migrants that have died or gone missing during migration to and within Europe in recent years. With these two goals in mind, the following recommendations are made.

In the short term:

- Coordination and cross-checking between the various efforts to collect data on border deaths in the European context should be fostered in order to maximize accuracy and consistency on this highly visible issue; and
- NGOs, intergovernmental organizations and local, national and regional authorities should explore new methodological approaches to collecting data on migrant deaths and disappearances in order to better estimate the total number of fatalities, and to collect more accurate data on the gender, age and country of origin of migrants. For example, big data or data from families of the missing could improve accuracy.

In the long term:

- State authorities should standardize the collection of information from migrant bodies, and make disaggregated records public in accordance with internationally accepted data protection and privacy standards;
- Authorities in countries of transit and destination should improve the local capacity to collect forensic data to be collected at national level; and
- In the interest of improving identification, State authorities and regional organizations should establish clear standards for the exchange of data on missing migrants and establish a regional mechanism to coordinate such an exchange.

### 6.4.3. Concluding remarks

Data on migrants who die during migration across the Mediterranean will always remain estimates due to the physical remoteness of these events. However, monitoring by various official and humanitarian agencies since 2014 has meant that, in almost all cases in which a shipwreck was reported, an estimate of the number of dead and missing migrants has been recorded. The paucity of data continues despite the media and policy attention on the European so-called migration crisis in recent years. The available data on deaths during migration to and within Europe remain highly fragmented and incomplete. Data on deaths that occur during overland migration are also largely incomplete due to the lack of coordination between authorities dealing with migrants' bodies. The fieldwork carried out by the DatBD team indicates that the handling and processing of migrant bodies needs to be standardized by European authorities before the deaths that occur during migration to and within Europe can be truly understood.

Until that goal is reached, the understanding of fatalities during migration in the Mediterranean and Europe is limited to the largely unofficial sources available. While reporting on migrant deaths and disappearances in the Mediterranean has improved in large part due to monitoring by humanitarian agencies, data on deaths on land in Europe are largely sourced from media reports. This is problematic as the availability of such sources depends on the focus on the region during its migration "crisis". With the decrease in arrivals to Europe since 2016, it is unclear if reports on and monitoring of incidents involving migrant fatalities will continue. If not, the already inadequate data may become worse. Collecting reliable data over time is necessary in order to create strong evidence-based policies to save lives, and to improve identification of missing migrants; however, it will be difficult to do so without establishing better data standards and coordination channels in Europe.

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IOM's Global Migration  
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YEARS

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