

OVERVIEW

In 2022, IOM's Missing Migrants Project documented the deaths of 6,876 people during migration worldwide, an increase compared to the 6,083 recorded in 2021 and the highest death toll recorded since 2016. In total, the Missing Migrants Project (MMP) has recorded 54,125 deaths and disappearances on migration routes since data collection began in 2014, though it is likely that many more lives are lost and remain undocumented.

This brief marks an official release of the MMP 2022 datasets disaggregated by cause of death, country of origin, sex, and age. These global trends are complemented by a methodological note on data challenges and possible next steps. For in-depth analysis of all regions, see separate publications providing regional overviews for Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia hosted at missingmigrants.iom.int/publications.



Figure 1: Migrants traversing the harsh desert terrain in Djibouti on the perilous Eastern Route.
Photo: IOM Djibouti 2021/Alexander Bee

CAUSES OF DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES DURING TRANSIT WORLDWIDE

Drowning continues to be the main cause of death for people on the move worldwide, with more than 3,700 documented in total in 2022, including 2,257 during attempted crossings of the Mediterranean Sea, followed by 479 in North Africa, and 337 in the Caribbean. On sea routes across the world, there were many cases of “invisible shipwrecks”—cases of entire boats which are initially reported in distress or missing but no further information is ever verified—meaning that the number of drownings is likely far higher than what is recorded.

The number of deaths due to violence perpetrated against migrants nearly doubled in 2022, with nearly 1000 deaths due to violence worldwide. This is the largest number of migrants deaths due to violence documented in any year since 2014, with less than 500 deaths recorded in all prior years. The vast majority of violent deaths of people on the move occurred in Western or Southern Asia. In total, 847 total violent killings of migrants could be verified in these regions in 2022, or 53 per cent of the total migrant deaths recorded in these regions.

“I travelled with my friend by sea after we paid a smuggler a large amount of money. When we crossed the borders at night, we heard gunshots. Some of us were shot and injured. Some of those who survived carried me to Saa'da Hospital where I found out that I severely injured my spine.”
-Man who shared his testimony with IOM staff in Yemen.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Accidental death	15	22	305	87	157
Drowning	3,348	2,896	3,187	3,965	3,714
Harsh environmental conditions*	256	301	347	770	454
Sickness**	251	295	99	149	308
Vehicle accident / death linked to hazardous transport	597	708	186	750	800
Violence	270	399	189	493	981
Mixed or unknown	887	1,237	469	517	462
Total	5,624	5,858	4,782	6,731	6,876

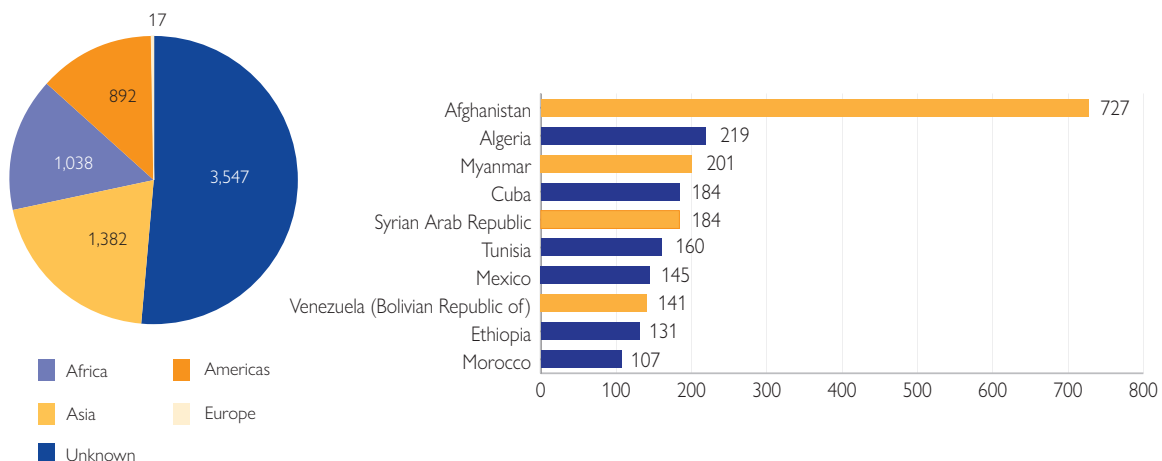
*Includes causes of death linked to exposure to heat or cold, and lack of adequate shelter, food, water
 **Includes deaths linked to preventable illnesses that went untreated due to the lack of access to adequate healthcare for migrants on many routes.

Figure 2: Causes of deaths during migration, 2018-2022

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF MIGRANTS IN MMP GLOBAL DATA 2022

The majority of people whose deaths are documented in the MMP database in 2022 and prior years are unidentified. More than 3,500 individuals were recorded with an unknown country of origin in 2022, including 1,395 people who were reported missing at sea and presumed dead. Identifying human remains is challenging in all circumstances, but for missing migrants identification is even more complex due to the transnational nature of migration and the fact that many bodies are recovered weeks or months after the death occurs, if at all.

Of the 3,329 people whose country of origin was identified in the MMP database in 2022, at least 1,372 (41%) came from countries with ongoing conflicts or otherwise associated with forced migration movements, including hundreds from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Syria, and Venezuela. Notably, though the 7.9 million Ukrainians displaced abroad comprised the population of refugees in 2022,¹ just 17 deaths of people fleeing Ukraine were documented in 2022.



Note: countries of origin highlighted in yellow likely include many forcibly displaced persons

Figure 3: Regions of origin and top 10 countries of origin of people who died during migration, 2022

¹ See UNHCR (2023) [Ukraine Refugee Situation](#) (accessed 4 January).

SEX AND AGE OF MIGRANTS IN MMP GLOBAL DATA 2022

Similar to data on the countries of origin of people whose deaths during migration are documented, disaggregation by age and sex is highly incomplete in MMP records. In 2022, 1,799 of 2,272 incidents (79%) involving at least one death or disappearance during migration had no information on either age or sex, reinforcing the evidence that many people who lose their lives on migration routes worldwide are never identified.

Of the 3,699 people for whom data on age and/or sex is available in the MMP 2022 dataset, 2,651 were males, 669 were females, and 379 were children under the age of 18. Data disaggregation by sex and age is highly variable across regions in the MMP database: more than 84 per cent of incidents in Asia and the Americas included this information in 2022, compared to just 52 per cent in the Mediterranean and 35 per cent in Africa.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA QUALITY

IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) counts migrant fatalities only at the external borders of a state or during the process of migrating towards an international destination. Collecting data on migrant deaths and disappearances² remains challenging due to the lack of systematic reporting on the deaths of people in transit. MMP collects data where available through official sources such as coast guards, police and other local authorities; non- and inter-governmental organizations, including focal points in IOM country offices; surveys with migrants or other key informants; and through media monitoring. Media sources—which may be the only available information source on routes with limited official reporting—can have incomplete or incorrect coverage, which pose additional challenges. The lack of consistent, reliable reporting means that this methodology has limitations in terms of consistency and comparability of data across geographies and time. As such, MMP are best understood as indicative of trends rather than fully representative of the true death toll in any region or route.

Region	One Media Source	Multiple Media Sources	Surveys with migrants or key informants	Inter-/ Non-Governmental Organizations	Official Sources
Europe	1.5%	8.8%	0.0%	62.8%	26.9%
Africa	0.9%	15.0%	29.5%	32.7%	21.9%
Asia	0.5%	7.6%	0.0%	89.1%	2.8%
Americas	13.5%	21.5%	6.6%	2.2%	56.2%

Figure 4: MMP data sources by region and by source type for 2022

² Understood as “missing and presumed dead,” typically in cases of presumed drownings where no body is recovered.

CONCLUSION

IOM has been gathering data on missing migrants since 2014, acting as the only global, open-source dataset on deaths and disappearances during migration on sea and land routes worldwide. This effort has helped raise awareness among global community on the issue demonstrated by high-level actions, including:

- Adoption of the MMP dataset as SDG indicator 10.7.3, “number of people who died or disappeared in the process of migration towards an international destination”³
- Inclusion of the issue of missing migrants into the UN Secretary General’s Progress Report on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration⁴
- Formation of a dedicated workstream on missing migrants and humanitarian assistance within the UN Migration Network

Despite these positive actions, the trends seen in 2022—in particular the continuation of thousands of lives lost each year, the lack of identification of those who die, and the growing number of deaths due to violence against migrants—the 6,876 deaths documented during migration worldwide represent a continuation and worsening of the global trend of migrant deaths documented by IOM’s Missing Migrants Project since 2014.

While data on this issue remains highly incomplete due to the lack of official data—and the inherent challenges of documenting phenomena linked to irregular migration—new surveys being piloted through IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix and the development of advanced media monitoring tools using artificial intelligence are used by MMP to fill these gaps.

While improving data is key to understanding and addressing the risks faced by people on the move, States have committed to saving lives and addressing the impacts of the over 50,000 deaths which have already occurred through inter alia the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. However, as highlighted in the UN Secretary General’s report on the Compact in December 2021, “the loss of migrant lives received relatively limited attention...despite its foundational role in fulfilling many other commitments”. IOM, as co-chair of the UN Migration Network Workstream on missing migrants, calls on all States to act now to save lives and prevent further deaths and disappearances during migration.

³ See SDG Good Practices (2022) [Measuring ‘Safe’ Migration: Collection of global data on migrant fatalities for Indicator 10.7.3](#).

⁴ UN General Assembly (2021) [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Report of the Secretary-General](#).

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