

ANNUAL REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Asia Pacific

January 2023 - December 2023

OVERVIEW

More people have died while attempting to migrate to an international destination in 2023 than in any year recorded since IOM’s Missing Migrant Project (MMP) began documenting incidents in 2014. In the Asia-Pacific region¹, the total number of recorded fatalities in 2023 surged to at least 1,568 deaths and disappearances—exceeding the previous record high of 1,183 in 2022. Incidents in 2023 included 1,106 in Southern Asia, 427 in South-eastern Asia, and 35 in Eastern Asia.

Most of the deaths recorded in the region were of people from Afghanistan (1,078), followed by Myanmar (436); the majority of the decedents from Myanmar were Rohingya refugees. Most incidents occurred on land routes between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, followed by maritime routes in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. Identifying data on sex and age group were available for only 73 percent of the deceased (1,137). Of those incidents for which these data were available, 80 percent of the victims were male (907), 10 percent were female (113), and 10 percent were children (117).

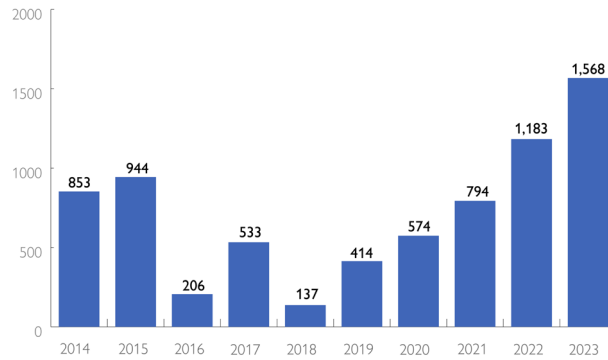


Figure 1: Recorded deaths and disappearances in the Asia-Pacific region from 2014-2023

Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project, 2024.

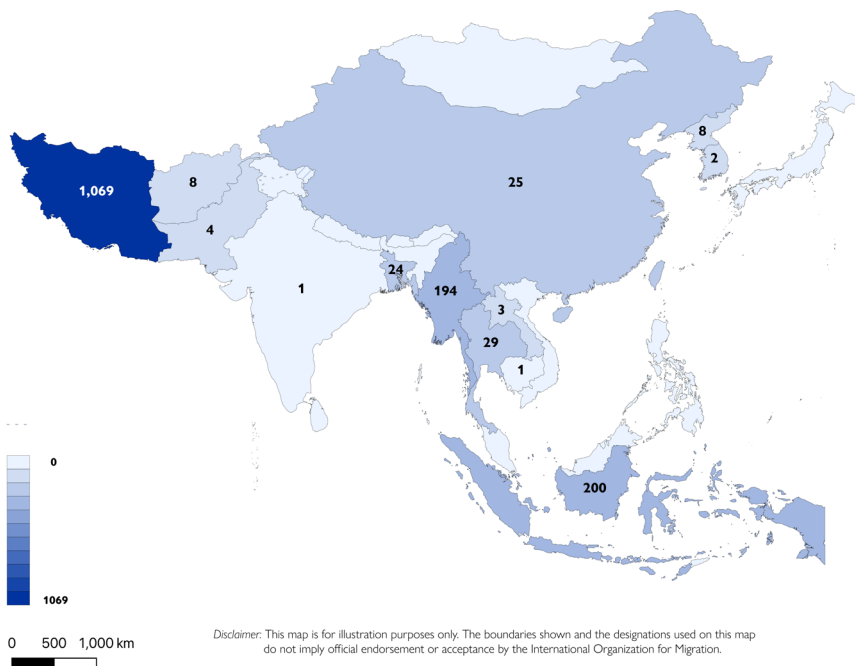


Figure 2: Recorded deaths and disappearances in Asia-Pacific by countries of incident in 2023

Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project, 2024.

¹ The Asia-Pacific region, as defined by MMP, encompasses the countries of Southern Asia, Eastern Asia, South-eastern Asia, and the Pacific according to the UNSD geographical grouping regional classification.

Despite the large number of recorded deaths and disappearances, the Missing Migrants Project data should be considered as the minimum estimate of the true number of migrant deaths and disappearances in the region. Due to the clandestine nature of irregular movements and difficulties in tracing migration fatalities as well as data collection challenges, the true death toll along these routes is likely much higher.

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES DURING TRANSIT WITHIN ASIA-PACIFIC

Southern Asia: Land Routes

In 2023, about 70 percent (1,082) of migrant deaths in the region occurred during migration attempts on land in Southern Asia. The overwhelming majority of those were Afghan nationals (1,078), while the rest were Pakistani (2) and Bangladeshi (2). Given the limited available information on nationalities, the number of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis is likely an undercount. Incidents on land in Southern Asia in 2023 included 391 deaths from sickness or lack of access to adequate healthcare (36%), 336 from vehicle accidents or due to hazardous transportation (31%), 139 from violence (13%), 117 from accidental deaths (11%), and 99 were attributed to other causes (9%).

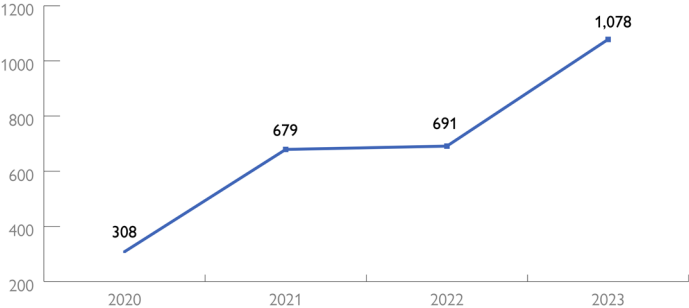


Figure 3: Afghan deaths during transit in Asia-Pacific from 2020-2023
Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project, 2024.

The majority of incidents involving Afghan nationals occurred in the Afghanistan-to-Iran region (1,047 out of 1,078), which is a common area for Afghans to pass through while attempting to move towards Türkiye and the European Union. Within Southern Asia, the number of incidents involving Afghan nationals in 2023 increased by more than 55 percent as compared to incidents in 2022 (691), possibly related to increased restrictions around the border areas where irregular migrants often attempt the crossing.

As with all nationalities, fatalities during migration of Afghan nationals should be understood as the minimum number of potential deaths due to challenges in accessing data on these fatalities. Factors that contributed to the undercount include violence in border regions, inaccessibility to certain areas due to landmines, and inadequate data regarding Afghan fatalities.

The Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea

2023 was the deadliest year for Rohingya refugees on the move since 2015. At least 416 deaths and disappearances were recorded in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.² The United Nations has described the Rohingya people as one of the most persecuted minorities in the world, and a group who have faced discrimination and violence in Myanmar for many decades.³ Most Rohingya refugees started their perilous maritime journeys from either Bangladesh or Myanmar in 2023, predominantly disembarking in Indonesia.⁴



IOM provided support and conducted interviews with Rohingya refugees who disembarked in North Aceh. © Fachmi / IOM Indonesia 2022

2 UNHCR, 2024. [Operational Data Portal: Myanmar Situation](#). Accessed 31 May 2024.
 3 OHCHR, 2017. *Human Rights Council opens special session on the situation of human rights of the Rohingya and other minorities in Rakhine State in Myanmar*.
 4 UNHCR, 2024. [Operational Data Portal: Myanmar Situation](#). Accessed 31 May 2024.

ROHINGYA REFUGEE DEATHS IN 2023



“2023 saw a significant increase of maritime movements in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal, with more than 4,300 persons attempting sea journeys embarking on 40 boats. Available data suggests the vast majority are Rohingya refugees that embark on perilous sea journeys from Bangladesh and Myanmar in search of effective protection in other countries. Most of them (66%) are women and children while 34% are men. Similar of previous years, most of the boat movements happened in the fourth quarter of the year (59%), when climate conditions are more favorable. At least 416 Rohingya refugees were recorded as dead or missing in 2023, representing an increase of 19% compared to 2022. Analysis of movement trends for 2023 demonstrated a particular increase of disembarkations to Indonesia compared to previous years. 20 boats landed on Indonesian soil with over 2,500 Rohingya refugees, many of them in significant distress and with critical needs. This total is greater than the previous five years combined and around a 340% increase compared to 2022.”

Message provided by UNHCR, April 2024

For more and up-to-date information on the Rohingya refugee maritime situation, consult the [Myanmar Situation Operational Data Portal](#) — Source: UNHCR

Yasmin Fatoum and her two young children set sail from Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh—the largest refugee camp in the world and home to one million Rohingyas—to seek a better life and escape violence and hardship in the refugee camp. Their unseaworthy vessel, which they shared with around 200 other Rohingya refugees, arrived on the shores of Aceh, Indonesia, but their boat was pushed back to the sea by villagers. One of Fatoum’s children died after the pushback due to sickness and a lack of food, and the body was thrown into the sea. After some days, the boat was finally allowed to dock, bringing relief to the people who survived but also grief, as the other three babies had died due to the same causes.

Source: BBC, 2023. Available at <https://archive.ph/ipA7c> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrRvP4bAPOI>



South-eastern Asia and Eastern Asia: Land Routes

Forty-six deaths and disappearances were recorded on routes in South-eastern Asia and Eastern Asia, where 35 deaths occurred during transit towards and away from Thailand and 11 occurred on the Viet Nam–China border. Among the 46 fatalities in South-eastern Asia and Eastern Asia, 36 occurred due to vehicle accidents or hazardous transport, where most accidents were connected to smuggling and reinstating work permits. The number of migrant deaths from vehicle accidents or hazardous transport in South-eastern Asia decreased by 13 percent in 2023 as compared to 2022 (53).

Traffic Accidents and Work Permits in Thailand

Thailand's population is aging, and migrant workers are crucial as they fill labour shortages and contribute to economic growth.⁵ Thailand relies heavily on migrant workers, especially from neighboring countries, including Myanmar, Cambodia, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Thailand does not provide the possibility for permanent residency through any of its regular labour migration pathways. This leads to the periodic need for regular labour migrants to return home to reinstate their work permits, which usually necessitates crossing a border.⁶ Labour migrants in Thailand often turn to motor vehicles as the primary means of transportation to cross borders. As Thailand has one of the most traffic-related deaths per capita in the world, this form of transportation puts migrants at significant risk of injury or death.⁷ On the 8th of April, 14 Cambodian passengers traveled in a packed van to Chanthaburi province bordering Cambodia to reinstate their work permits. The van crashed, resulting in the deaths of seven migrants, one of whom was pregnant.⁸

Source: Kiripost and Thai News Agency MCOT, 2023. Available at <https://archive.ph/K6JuT> and <https://archive.ph/UJUHf>

DEATHS OF ASIA-PACIFIC NATIONALS GLOBALLY

In 2023, the number of deaths and disappearances of Asia-Pacific nationals reached an unprecedented level, exceeding 2,000 cases worldwide. While most Asia-Pacific nationals were reported dead or went missing during migration within the Asia-Pacific region (1,568), at least 438 died or disappeared outside the region. MMP has recorded the deaths and disappearances of at least 13 different Asia-Pacific nationals globally in 2023.















Fatalities by Country of Origin			
Afghanistan	 1,181	Myanmar	 436
Pakistan	 231	Unknown	 61
Bangladesh	 31	Viet Nam	 27
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	 10	Cambodia	 9
India	 7	Islamic Republic of Iran	 4
China	 3	Lao People's Democratic Republic	 3
Malaysia	 2	Sri Lanka	 1
Total		2,006	

Figure 4: Deaths and disappearances of Asia-Pacific nationals in 2023

Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project, 2024.

The region with the highest reported number of incidents involving Asia-Pacific nationals, outside of the Asia-Pacific region, was the Mediterranean (364), followed by Europe (47), Western Asia (10), Northern Africa (8), North America (7) and Central America (2). The largest number of fatalities were from Pakistan (229)⁹ and Afghanistan (103). It is likely that there are a significant number of deaths involving nationals from the Asia-Pacific region where the nationality could not be confirmed due to a lack of identifying data.

⁵ International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2021. *Thailand Social Protection Diagnostic Review: Social Protection for Migrant Workers and Their Families in Thailand*. IOM, Thailand.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Global status report on road safety 2018. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. Licence: CC BYNC-SA 3.0 IGO.

⁸ MMP recorded seven deaths instead of eight due to discrepancies in fatality numbers from different news sources. As part of its methodology, MMP always records the minimal estimate.

⁹ On 14 June 2023, one of the worst shipwreck tragedies in the Mediterranean occurred off the coast of Pylos, Greece, with an estimated 400 to 750 people onboard. At least 209 of the victims are presumed to be Pakistani nationals. However, this is not yet reflected in the MMP data as it is pending more verification — read more at: <https://archive.ph/SyNh0>

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 disappearances remains challenging due to the lack of systematic reporting on the deaths of non-nationals in transit, and when available, data are often incomplete. MMP collects data through official sources such as the coast guard and local authorities; nongovernmental civil society organizations and focal points in IOM country offices; and media monitoring. However, media sources can have incomplete or incorrect coverage, which poses an additional challenge on routes with limited official reporting. This data collection methodology presents some limitations in terms of consistency and comparability of data given the availability of sources of data and information, but this does not diminish the value of the reported analysis.

In the Asia-Pacific region, data collection constraints mainly stem from the absence of data or the non-systematic collection methods employed by official sources. Data in the region are collected primarily from international organizations and civil society, as well as news and media sources. These methods can lead to extensive reporting in one area of the region, while other areas receive less coverage. For example, the number of Afghan fatalities reported by IOM Afghanistan (1,057) was based almost exclusively on the repatriation of Afghan remains from the Iranian border region, with little data reported from Afghanistan's other borders. Many organizations do not have the capacity to cover large geographic areas in the Asia-Pacific region, and often lack access to these areas due to conflict or other political factors. These reasons, as well as the clandestine nature of irregular migration, suggest that the number of recorded migrant deaths and disappearances in the Asia-Pacific region are likely lower than the true number and should be considered a minimum estimate.

Region/Route	Single Media Source	Multiple Media Sources	Civil Society Organizations/ International Organizations	Official Sources
Southern Asia	0.09%	2.22%	97.69%	0%
Eastern Asia	20.45%	79.55%	0%	0%
Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea	0%	0%	100%	0%
South-eastern Asia (Land Routes)	20%	80%	0%	0%

Figure 5: Sources of 2023 data on deaths and disappearances during migration in Asia-Pacific

Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project, 2024.

CONCLUSION

The Asia-Pacific region witnessed an unprecedented number of deaths and disappearances (1,568) during international migration in 2023, an increase of over 30 percent as compared to 2022, which was previously the deadliest year for migrants in the region. Each one of these deaths represents a family and community left behind. Despite the tragic number of deaths and disappearances in 2023, many incidents in the Asia-Pacific region do fall outside MMP's methodology, such as internal migration, among others. Migrants in this region die and disappear for a wide variety of reasons, highlighting the need for improving protection of vulnerable migrants and upholding human rights in the region.

The Missing Migrants Project informs the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator 10.7.3, "Number of people who died or disappeared in the process of migration towards an international destination," and is aligned with the Global Compact for Migration's Objective 8, to save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants. Since 2018, the Asia-Pacific region has experienced a continued increase in the number of recorded migrant deaths, despite the adoption of the SDGs. This signals a regional regression on this SDG indicator, and much work needs to be done to reverse these trends.

Documenting deaths and disappearances during migration is crucial. Signatories to the Global Compact for Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are committed to saving lives and preventing migrant deaths through the collection of such data. These data can allow families to trace and identify lost loved ones, alleviating the ambiguous loss many families experience when their loved ones are missing. Better data can also lead to the implementation of improved migration policies to promote safer migration and protect people on the move. No one should die in their pursuit of a better life. Better data collection and reporting are the first steps towards saving lives and leaving no one behind.



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CONTENT

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LAYOUT DESIGN, DATA VISUALIZATION AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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Please visit the Missing Migrants Project website for the latest data, publications, and other resources: missingmigrants.iom.int/

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