

## OVERVIEW

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is a primary region of origin, transit and destination for people traversing some of the deadliest migration routes in the world. Conflict and instability in some of the MENA and neighbouring countries coupled with the lack of adequate safe and regular migration options, have compelled many people to undertake perilous journeys from and through the region. More than half of the 6,877 deaths that IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) recorded in 2022 occurred on routes from and within MENA (3,789). 203 deaths were recorded on North African land routes—primarily during the Sahara Desert crossing—while an unprecedented 825 deaths were recorded on land routes in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> At sea, at least 2,028 people died on the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes from Northern Africa, while 174 of 378 total recorded deaths on the Eastern Mediterranean Route were caused by shipwrecks following departure from Lebanon. The West Africa-Atlantic Route to the Canary Islands, with boats primarily departing from Northern Africa, has further claimed 559 lives in 2022. While the high death toll documented in 2022 is already of concern, MMP figures for MENA are best understood as an undercount of the true number of lives lost during migration in the region due to the lack of official reporting and access.



Figure 1: Eighteen Chadians were found dead of dehydration in the Libyan desert district of Kufra in June 2022.  
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## DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES DURING TRANSIT WITHIN MENA

### Northern Africa

203 deaths were recorded on land routes in Northern Africa in 2022, with more than half occurring during the Sahara Desert crossing (125). This represents a decrease of 39 per cent from 2021 when 330 deaths were recorded in Northern Africa, including 227 deaths on the Sahara Desert crossing.

As was the case in 2020 and 2021, the majority of deaths documented on land routes in Northern Africa during 2022 occurred in Libya (117), followed by Algeria (54), Morocco (13), Tunisia (10) and Egypt (9). However, the scarcity of official data and difficulty of access by civil society and international organizations to land routes means that there are likely far more deaths which go undocumented. While data on the identities of those who die across Northern Africa are highly incomplete, among those with available information on country of origin, 58 were from Northern Africa, 28 were from Western Africa, seven were from the Middle East and two were from Middle Africa. The top countries of origin documented were Sudan (43),

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<sup>1</sup> "Middle East" is used here for understandability. The MMP website uses the regional classification for Western Asia per the U.N Statistics Division: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/>, while this briefing only includes countries in the Middle East/Western Asia that are covered by IOM Regional Office for MENA: <https://mena.iom.int/where-we-work>.

Chad (25), and Guinea (16). The nationalities of the remaining 68 people is unknown. Among those whose sociodemographic information is known, there were 87 males, 14 females and 24 minors among those whose death was recorded in North Africa. The main causes of death on North African land routes in 2022 were vehicle accidents (41%) followed by environmental conditions and lack of food, water and shelter (31%).

## Middle East

The war in Yemen continues to severely impact both Yemenis and migrants, including Africans traveling on the Eastern Corridor with the aim of reaching the Gulf countries via Yemen. Out of the 867 deaths recorded on the horn of Africa-Yemen crossing in 2022,<sup>2</sup> at least 795 people lost their lives on the route between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, mainly in the Sa'ada governorate at Yemen's Northern border. The vast majority of victims are believed to be Ethiopians. One shipwreck has also occurred in October off Mayyun island, Yemen after sailing from Obock, Djibouti, claiming at least 28 lives.

Additionally, at least two Syrians were also killed on the Syrian-Jordanian border and the Syrian-Türkish border, apparently while crossing from the Syrian Arab Republic. Violence has been the main cause of death of migrants on Middle Eastern land routes covered by this briefing in 2022, constituting 96 per cent of the total deaths recorded.

## DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES FROM MENA TO EUROPE

### Mediterranean Routes from North Africa

At least 2,406 people lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea in 2022, making it the deadliest year on record since 2017, when 3,139 deaths were recorded. The Central Mediterranean route (CMR) continued to be the deadliest migration route on record, with 1,417 deaths recorded, a decrease from 2021 (1,553) but an increase from 2020 (1,001). The other Mediterranean route from Northern Africa, the Western Mediterranean Route (WMR), has claimed at least another 611 lives in 2022, an increase from 2021 (384) and 2020 (343). The Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR) has also witnessed 378 deaths, an increase from 2021 (111) and 2020 (106). The remains of the majority of those who died in the Mediterranean remain unrecovered (61%). Out of the 1,330 victims roughly identified in the Mediterranean, 891 people originated from Africa, including 485 from Northern Africa. A further 307 nationals of Arab states in the Middle East have perished in the Mediterranean.

On the CMR in 2022, most deaths occurred in the coasts of Libya (807), largely as a result of 46 known shipwrecks that claimed at least 713 lives. Another 94 remains of migrants washed ashore that could not be linked to known shipwrecks, signifying possible "invisible shipwrecks"<sup>3</sup> with a higher death toll. The majority of deaths in Libya occurred off the city of Sabratalah (201) followed by Zuwara (147) and Garabulli (106). At least 123 deaths were recorded in the east of Libya, which saw a rise in embarkations in 2022. In Tunisia, at least 462 people drowned in 28 recorded shipwrecks, with another 22 remains of migrants washing ashore that could not be linked to known shipwrecks. The majority of deaths in Tunisia occurred in Mahdia (159), followed by Sfax (113)—which was the top governorate of departures and interceptions in 2022<sup>4</sup>—and Kerkennah Islands, opposite to Sfax (101). Four shipwrecks off Eastern Algeria have killed at least 33 people. Out of the 596 people identified by nationality, the majority came from Northern Africa (230) followed by Western Africa (123) and the Middle East (102). Additionally, 149 people were generally identified as

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<sup>2</sup> Please see [Missing Migrants Project's East and Horn of Africa Annual Regional Overview for 2022](#) for more information about incidents recorded on the Horn of Africa-Yemen crossing in Eastern Africa.

<sup>3</sup> An invisible shipwreck is an incident that is believed to have occurred but cannot be officially corroborated due to the absence of survivors or insufficient information about the location of the vessel, since it occurs away from the eyes of authorities, search and rescue operations and other actors at sea.

<sup>4</sup> FTDES. Report of December 2022: collective protests, suicide and migration, 2022. Available here: <https://ftdes.net/en/rap-port-decembre-2022-des-mouvements-sociaux-suicides-violences-et-migrations/>.

Sub-Saharan Africans without any further identifying information. The top countries of origin documented were Tunisia (160), Algeria (32), and Sudan (29). Among those whose sociodemographic information is known, there were 164 males, 61 females and 54 minors.

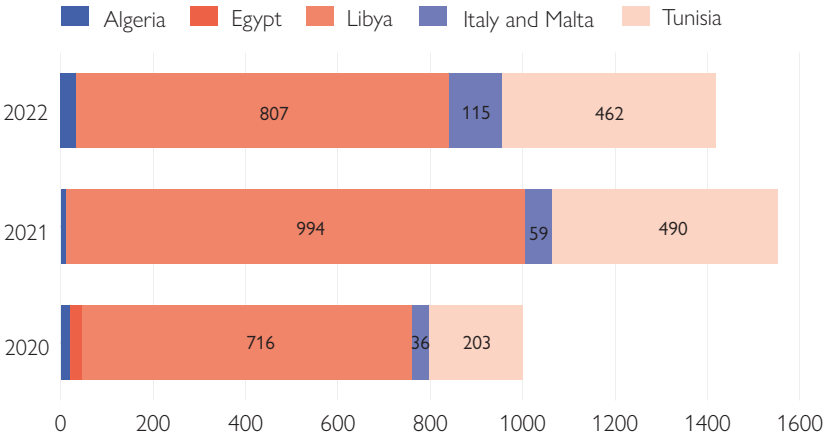


Figure 2: Migrant deaths on CMR 2020 – 2022

On the WMR, the majority of deaths occurred off of Algerian coasts, where 402 people died or went missing in 32 shipwrecks, of which 19 are recorded as invisible shipwrecks. Additionally, the remains of four people washed ashore and could not be linked to known shipwrecks. The majority of deaths occurred off Oran (140) followed by Tipaza (70) and Mostaganem (69). Out of the 173 deceased individuals identified on this crossing, Algerians composed 85 per cent. At least 47 people also died in the coasts of Northern Morocco. In addition, at least 45 people lost their lives while crossing to the Spanish enclaves in Ceuta (16) and Melilla (5) as well as in Fnideq (1) and Nador (23), the latter involving the tragic deaths of migrants who were met with force during their attempt to cross the Barrio Chino to Melilla in June 2022. This is a continuation of a pattern of deaths during the crossing to Ceuta and Melilla: 45 people also died at the borders of the Spanish enclaves in 2021. Out of those identified among the dead on WMR in 2022, 209 were from Northern Africa (83 Algerians and 26 Moroccans), 40 were from Sub-Saharan Africa and 26 were from the Middle East (primarily Syrians).<sup>5</sup>

While the majority of incidents on the EMR in 2022 occurred between Türkiye and Greece, two shipwrecks off the Lebanese coast led to 40 lives lost. Another boat, which originally left from Lebanon, capsized off Tartous, Syrian Arab Republic, leaving 122 people dead or missing. Another two shipwrecks of people that departed from Lebanon capsized off Türkiye and Greece in 2022, leaving 12 dead. On the EMR, out of 110 people identified by nationality, 84 came from Arab countries, including 26 from Lebanon, 25 from the Syrian Arab Republic and 25 from Egypt.

<sup>5</sup> Please see Missing Migrants Project’s Europe Regional Overview for 2022 for more information about recording incidents on the WMR, available from [missingmigrants.iom.int/publications](https://missingmigrants.iom.int/publications).

On 12 March 2022, a boat sunk off Tobruk, Libya with at least 27 Egyptians and Syrians on board. Mohamed R., one of the six Egyptian survivors, explained that when the smugglers brought his group to the coast to cross to Italy, “there was a worn-out fishing boat waiting for us, and the waves were very high. We all refused to board the boat because the fate of drowning was inevitable...We were beaten by the smugglers, and they made us board the boat at gunpoint, pushing it with their feet towards the waves, and they kept raising their weapons, preparing to kill us if one of us jumped out of the boat. It was completely dark, and the waves were high. We all tried to withstand it, but there was a storm on that day, in addition to the fact that the load of the boat was heavy, more than 34 people were lost.”

Mohamed recalled the waves taking the boat at great speed in the complete darkness of the sea: “We tried to hold each other’s hands, but the water entered the boat, we tried to get the water out of the boat with our hands so as not to drown, but the sharpness and strength of the water began to make holes in the boat from every direction, and there were no ships or other boats around us, and no one heard our call. A young man named Khaled M. who was with us told us to pronounce the Two Testimonies\*<sup>1</sup>, and we kept repeating it all the time, certain that death would inevitably happen, as if the angels of death surrounded the boat from every direction.” Mohamed continued: “Some of us took off our outer clothes, trying to put them in the holes to prevent the boat from sinking, and others continued trying to get the water out with their hands. We were trying for hours, as if it were years, until a high wave came, and the boat overturned. After that we kept calling each other, but the waves separated us. Our hearts were screaming from the horror of the scene, but my ears could only hear the sounds of the Two Testimonies, and after a few moments the voices disappeared, and the waves kept rising and taking me, wave after wave, until I lost consciousness, then other waves wake me up, and sometimes I dove deep and sometimes I floated, and I do not remember what happened after that.”

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\* An Islamic pronunciation of faith which Muslims also pronounce before their death.

Translated by author from Arabic from Cairo 24. 2022. Available at: <https://www.cairo24.com/1595991>.

## WESTERN AFRICA-ATLANTIC ROUTE

While arrivals via the West Africa-Atlantic route (WAAR) in the Canary Islands decreased in 2022 compared to 2021, the number of lives lost remained high, as did the challenges in determining the fate of boats embarking on the perilous crossings. At least 559 people died on WAAR during 2022, a decrease from 2021 (1,126), the deadliest year on this route since 2014, and from 2020 (877). However, reports from civil society organizations suggest that this is an undercount, with the NGO Caminando Fronteras estimating 1,784 deaths in 2022.<sup>6</sup>

The majority of deaths on the WAAR in 2022 occurred off North African coasts where 349 people died in 16 shipwrecks. Additionally, ten remains washed ashore in Morocco with no links to known shipwrecks. Another 17 shipwrecks off the Canary Islands, Spain have claimed 180 lives, with three remains washing ashore that are not connected to known shipwrecks.<sup>7</sup>

The remains of sixty-six per cent of the people who died on WAAR are still missing, while 84 per cent have not been identified. Out of the 111 people identified by nationality, 74 people were from Morocco. Only 133 people who died on WAAR were identified by sex and age: 66 males, 44 females and 22 children including five babies.

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<sup>6</sup> Caminando Fronteras, 2023. Available from: <https://caminandofronteras.org/2-390-personas-migrantes-perdieron-la-vida-en-2022-en-sus-trayectos-hacia-el-estado-espanol/>.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of deaths on the WAAR including departures from Western African countries and main countries of origin from Western Africa, see [Missing Migrants Project’s Western and Central Africa Annual Regional Overview for 2022](#).

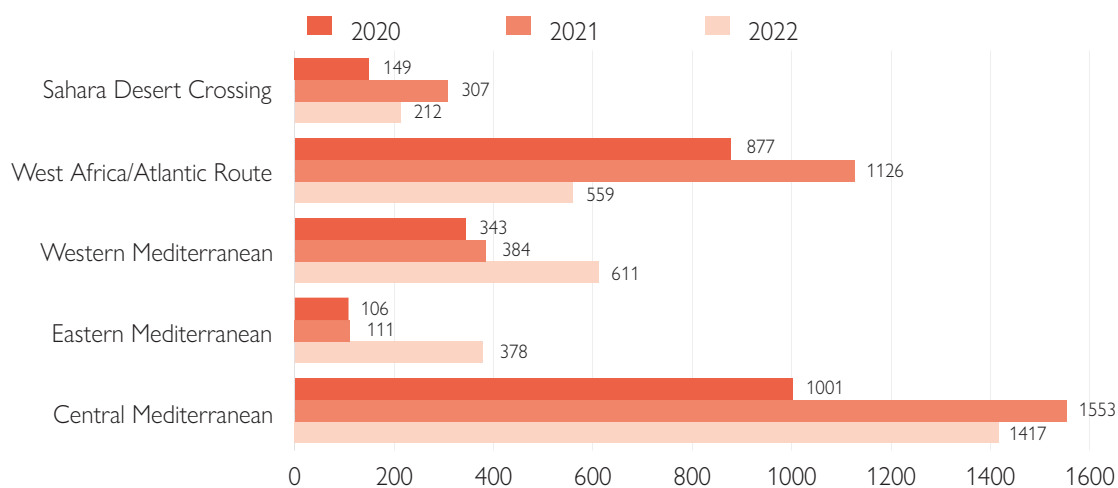


Figure 3: Migrant deaths on routes to/via MENA to Europe 2020-2022

## DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES OF MENA NATIONALS

Out of the 3,329 people who were identified by nationality among those who died during migration in 2022, 828 people came from Arab states. Most of the deaths of MENA nationals occurred within the MENA region. Seventy-eight per cent died in the Mediterranean Sea (643), while 74 people died on the Western-Africa Atlantic Route (all Moroccans), 58 in Northern Africa (from Sudan and Egypt), 35 in Europe (primarily Syrians), 16 in Western Asia (mostly Syrians in Türkiye) and two Sudanese in Western Africa. The top countries of origin are Algeria (213), Syrian Arab Republic (177), Tunisia (160), Morocco (106) Sudan (76) and Egypt (42).

## 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<sup>8</sup> remains challenging due to the lack of systematic reporting on the deaths of people in transit. In the MENA region, MMP collects data through official sources such as coast guards, police and other local authorities; non- and inter-governmental organizations, including 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. As such MMP are best understood as indicative of trends rather than fully representative.

Region/Route	Official Sources	Inter- / Non-Governmental Organizations	Multiple Media Sources	One Media Source
Northern Africa	27.5%	58.8%	10%	3.7%
Middle East	1.4%	95.9%	2.7%	0%
CMR	14.9%	70.9%	10.4%	3.8%
WMR	6.9%	62.7%	23.5%	6.9%
WAAR	18.5%	33.3%	40.8%	7.4%

Figure 4: MMP data sources by route and by source for 2022

<sup>8</sup> Understood as "missing and presumed dead", typically in cases of presumed drownings where no body is recovered.

## CONCLUSION

2022 marked another tragic year in the MENA region with more than 3,700 people dying while seeking safety and better livelihoods on routes to Europe and elsewhere. Although the MENA region is home to the majority of migrant deaths recorded globally, official and systematic reporting of deaths and disappearances remains scarce, with civil society struggling to account for many incidents that occur in the region.

The continuing death toll and struggle to document these deaths is an echo of the agony of families of missing migrants, many of whom are unable to find answers about the fate of their loved ones. The data presented in this briefing should be understood as human beings, who died in preventable tragedies. Proactive state Search and Rescue (SAR) systems at sea and in the Sahara are urgently needed, as are transnational information sharing mechanisms. It is also critical to protect people fleeing conflict and instability without discrimination by nationality, race or migratory status. A lot of people were found to have been deliberately killed on the spot while attempting to cross borders in the Middle East, which is often considered an administrative misdemeanor. Ultimately, the provision of safe and regular pathways is the ultimate solution to end migrant deaths.



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