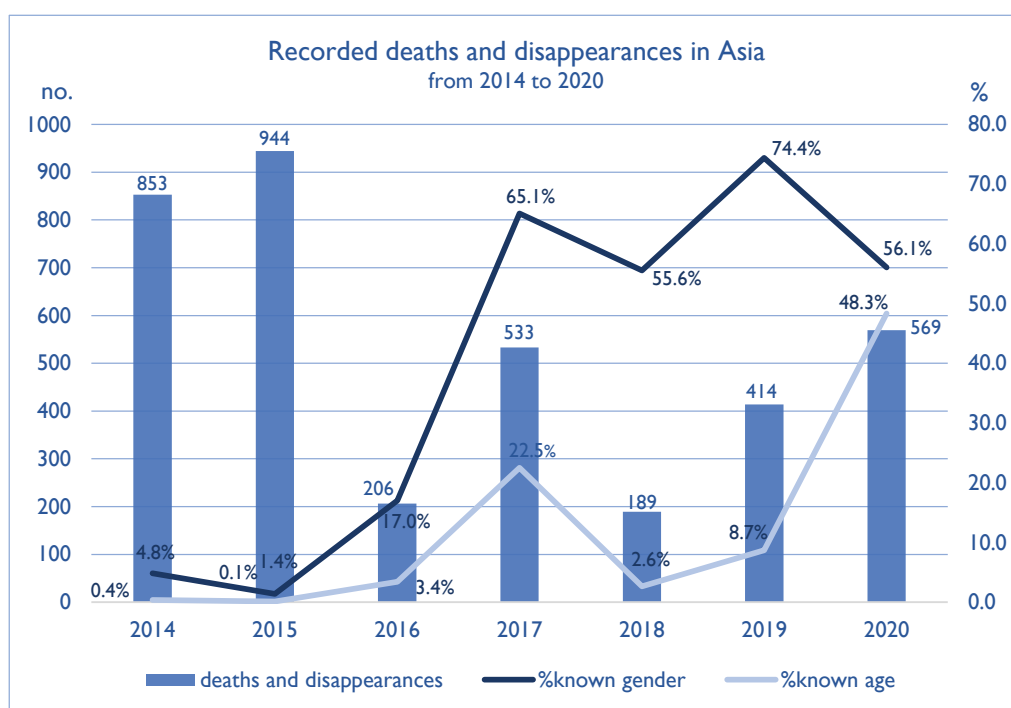


DEATHS DURING MIGRATION IN ASIA: WHAT IS KNOWN BASED ON MISSING MIGRANTS PROJECT DATA (JANUARY 2014 – JUNE 2021)

Over 42,000 people have died on migration journeys worldwide from 2014 to June 2021. However, this is an undercount due to various data collection challenges. The true number of migrants who died and disappeared during their journeys is unknown and available data also vary significantly from region to region. In Asia,¹ the records compiled by IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) indicate that at least 3,724 individuals lost their lives in their migratory journeys trying to reach other countries from 2014 to June 2021, with deaths at sea as the largest category recorded. Not only are the identities of the vast majority of these people unrecorded, basic information such as gender² and age, are also lacking. In 2020, the proportion of recorded incidents containing data on gender was 56.1 per cent and data on age was just 48.3 per cent.³



Source: Missing Migrants Project

DANGEROUS MIGRATION ROUTES IN ASIA

Most of the deaths on migration routes recorded in Asia occurred at the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh, and in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. Missing Migrants Project has recorded the deaths of more than 2,000 people between 2014 and 2020 on these routes. On the land border between Rakhine State, Myanmar and Chittagong Division, Bangladesh, Rohingya trying to cross the border face risks to their lives including violence or being shot by authorities, drowning in the Naf River,

¹ Excluding Western Asia. For more information about regional classifications used by Missing Migrants Project, click [here](#).

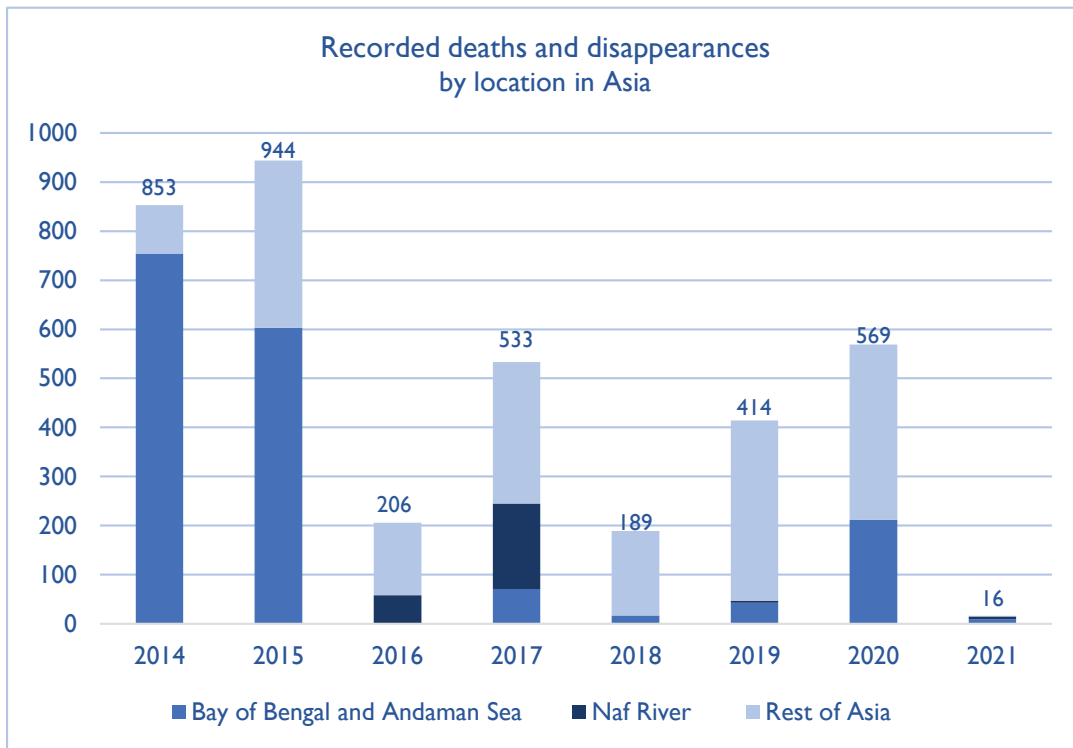
² Information on the gender of people in MMP records are based on a third-party interpretation of the victim's gender based on information available in official documents, autopsy reports, witness testimonies, and/or media reports.

³ For information on the data challenges involved with collection data on missing migrants, see: [Fatal Journeys Volume 3 Part 1: Improving Data on Missing Migrants](#) and [Fatal Journeys Volume 3 Part 2: Improving Data on Missing Migrants](#).

which runs along the southern part of the border between the two countries, and landmine explosions. On sea journeys across the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea towards the countries in Southeast Asia, deaths due to drowning, starvation, dehydration, sickness, and physical assault by smugglers have also been documented.



Rohingyas' perilous journeys in search of safety and a better life. ©IOM 2017/Muse Mohammed



Note: The number at the top of each bar represents the total number deaths and disappearances recorded by Missing Migrants Project by year.

Source: Missing Migrants Project

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES ON MIGRATION ROUTES IN ASIA AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mobility restrictions and other measures imposed by states amid the pandemic may have increased the risks of migratory journeys. There have been several reports of “boat pushbacks” and disembarkation being denied by authorities for migrants arriving by boat irregularly,⁴ with States citing the pandemic as a justification. Although reports of the conditions and even deaths on board some such boats have been reported by survivors of these incidents, it is likely only part of the picture.

⁴ The term “irregular” is used to refer to a mode of moving outside regular/legal migration channels – it does not necessarily carry a criminal connotation, is not against migrants’ dignity and does not undermine respect for the human rights of migrants (IOM, 2019a).

To migrate under COVID-19 measures and migration policies, migrants may be pushed into more perilous and deadly situations to avoid detection. Social distancing for people migrating irregularly is also difficult, meaning that they are at a higher risk of contracting the virus on their journeys. Unsafe quarantine conditions for irregular migrants apprehended by authorities on land have also been reported. There are no publicly available data on COVID-19 infections and deaths disaggregated during migration in Asia.⁵

Data collection on migrant fatalities during migration has also been increasingly difficult amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Mobility restrictions and other responses imposed in many countries have hindered the ability to collect data and to report on people going missing or dying on their journeys. In the first half of 2021, Missing Migrants Project recorded 15 migrant deaths during migration in Asia. One died from starvation and exhaustion while crossing by land from Myanmar to Thailand. Six drowned while attempting to cross the Naf River from Myanmar to Bangladesh, two of whom were women and four who were children. Another eight people died and one went missing at sea on their boat journey from Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh with the hope of reaching Malaysia. Their story is documented below.

STRANDED AT SEA: OVER 100-DAYS AT SEA FOR ROHINGYA REFUGEES

A boat with 90 passengers departed a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh on 11 February 2021. After a few days, the boat's engine broke down, and stranded at sea, the Rohingya refugees on board suffered from extreme hunger and dehydration. Eight persons died, and one went missing at sea, before the boat was provided relief in the Andaman Sea by the Indian authorities. Not being able to reach land, they set sail again with their fate unknown to their family members and aid agencies for over three months. After several months at sea in dangerous conditions, the small wooden boat carrying the 81 survivors (45 women, 17 men, 14 girls, and 5 boys), ran aground near the uninhabited Idaman Island in Indonesia on 4 June 2021. The refugees were assisted by local community and allowed to disembark by the Government of Indonesia.



All 81 survivors underwent COVID-19 screenings and received vaccines from Indonesian authorities. © 2021/Health Department of Aceh Timur District, Indonesia

REGIONAL DATA COLLECTION CHALLENGES

Currently, there is no systematic, official data collection on migrant deaths and disappearances during migration in Asia; as such, the data collected by IOM's Missing Migrants Project in the region relies largely on media and information collected by organizations working on specific populations of interest. Since March 2020, States' responses to COVID-19, including border closures and other measures, as well as strong media focus on the pandemic have decreased data coverage on deaths on migratory routes. Furthermore, since the military coup on 1 February 2021, in Myanmar, thousands of people have been displaced within the country, and large numbers crossing irregularly into India and Thailand.⁶ With the mobility restrictions in place in the wake of such conflicts and to slow the spread of COVID-19, the presence of international actors and journalists, who have been the key data sources on such incidents, is almost completely absent. Thus, it is important to consider that the decrease of data does not necessarily represent a real drop in the number of people dying during migration in the Asia region.

CONCLUSION

Migrants who die or disappear during their migration have families, children and loved ones who anxiously wait and search for them. Families of those who have gone missing seek answers: they want to know whether their relatives whereabouts or if they are dead or alive. If they have died, it is important that the remains of their missing loved ones are managed and honored appropriately.

⁵ Not included are thousands of deaths linked to COVID-19 cases of migrant workers, and deaths related to mobility restrictions and lockdowns.

⁶ For more information on the displacement and border crossings driven by the situation in Myanmar, see: Myanmar: Timely support and action by Security Council 'really paramount', says UN Special Envoy, and Quarterly Mixed Migration Update Asia: Quarter 2, 2021.

Besides the trauma and the sense of ambiguous loss, families of missing migrants also encounter psychosocial, legal and economic effects, which can be life-changing.⁷

Gathering more and better quality data on deaths during migration is crucial to provide the answers to families of missing migrants, as well as to fulfill States' commitment to work towards promoting safe, orderly and regular migration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Objective 8 of the Global Compact for Migration, which calls on States to save migrant lives and to "collect, centralize and systematize data" on missing migrants.

MISSING MIGRANTS PROJECT (MMP)

IOM's [Missing Migrants Project](#) is the only publicly accessible global database documenting lives lost during migration. The Project aims to counter the invisibility of lives lost during irregular migration journeys. Since 2014, MMP has collated data on deaths and disappearances along mixed migration routes worldwide from a wide variety of sources. The anonymized dataset, with disaggregated data on the location and cause of death of migrants is available on its website (missingmigrants.iom.int).

Missing Migrants Project data are used to inform and track progress towards target 10.7.3 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the "number of people who died or disappeared in the process of migration towards an international destination." The records collected by the Project are also one measure for the fulfillment of Objective 8 of the [Global Compact for Migration](#), in which 164 States have committed to "save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants." The Project has published four global [Fatal Journeys](#) reports, which provide in-depth analysis of thematic issues linked to missing migrants, as well as many other [publications](#) on the topic of migrant deaths and disappearances. This briefing is part of a series of regional papers highlighting the latest trends in deaths documented during international migration.

Definition of missing migrant used by in Missing Migrants Project data

There is no universally accepted definition of "missing migrant." MMP data include migrants who have died at the external borders of the states, or during the migration process to an international destination, regardless of their legal status. It also counts those who have disappeared and are presumed dead, usually in the context of migration over water. The count excludes migrant deaths in other contexts, such as deaths in countries of destination, in detention facilities, in refugees housing or camps, as well as migrant deaths as a result of lack of access to health care or labour exploitation. Lives lost in these contexts are no less devastating to families, but are not included in the scope of MMP data.

READ MORE ABOUT MISSING MIGRANTS IN ASIA IN 2021

Al Jazeera, "UN warns of 'mass deaths' in Myanmar after 100,000 flee fighting." June 9, 2021.

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Fortify Rights. "Thailand: Release Detained Refugees and Migrants, Prevent Further Detentions Amid COVID-19 Pandemic." May 1, 2020.

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Valentine, J. "A perilous journey: protection risks facing Rohingya en route to Malaysia." July 8, 2021.

⁷ For more information about the impacts of missing migrants, see: Families of Missing Migrants: Their Search for Answers, the Impacts of Loss and Recommendations for Improved Support-Country Report for Spain, United Kingdom, and Ethiopia.