

MISSING MIGRANTS PROJECT

QUARTERLY REGIONAL OVERVIEW Middle East & North Africa JULY 1 - SEPTEMBER 30, 2021

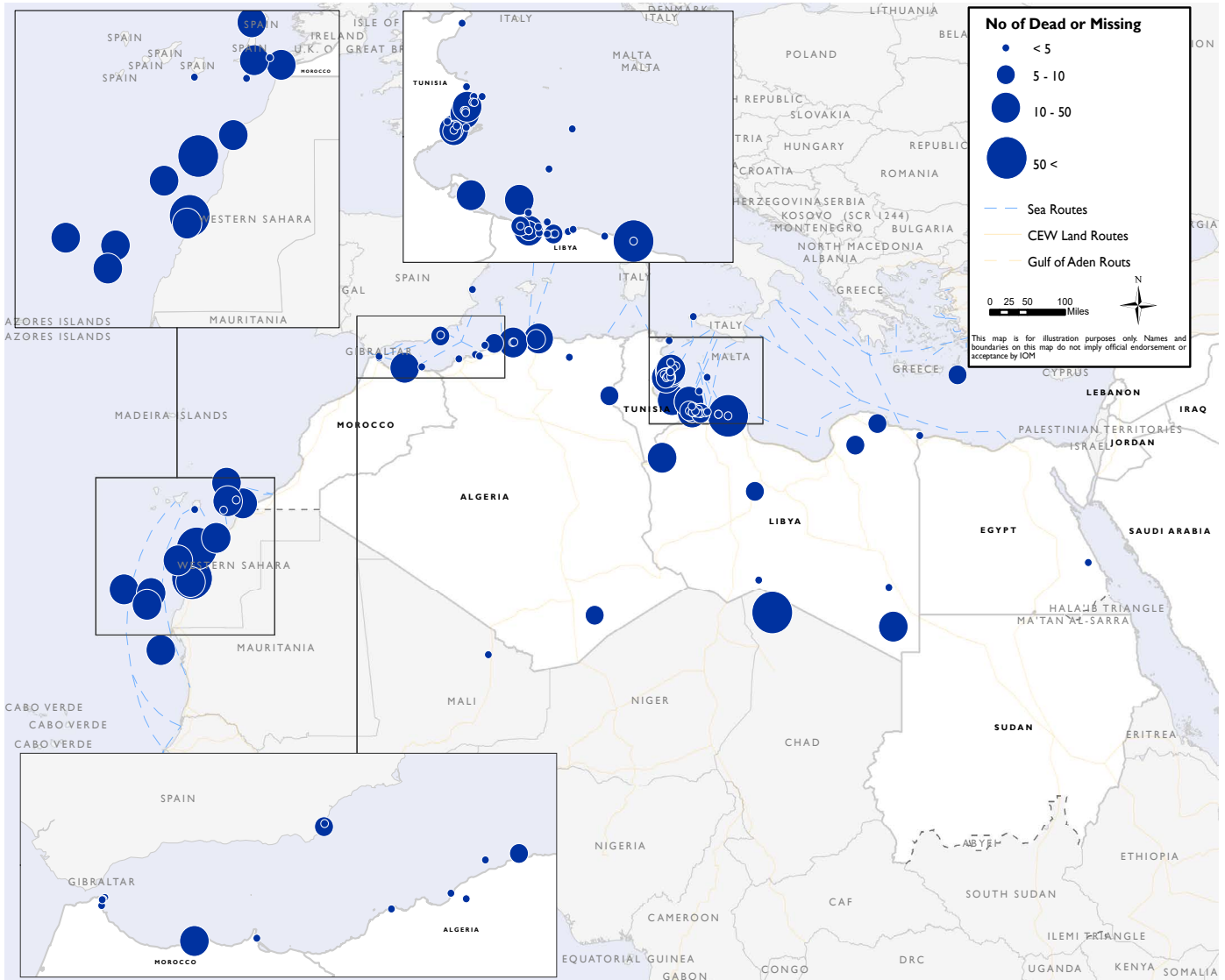


Figure 1: Map of migratory incidents that occurred within and from the Middle East and North Africa during the third quarter of 2021 (each dot represents an incident)

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OVERVIEW

Many migrants who have been affected by conflict and socioeconomic hardships and the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to embark on extremely perilous routes within and from North Africa. Although anecdotal reports indicate that many migrants die or disappear on these routes, the nature of their clandestine crossings especially across the desert means that less is known about what happened to them. The Missing Migrants Project (MMP) has recorded 64 migrant deaths on land routes in Northern Africa during the third quarter of 2021, bringing the total recorded in 2021 to 155, compared to 88 in the same period of 2020. However, many limitations on data collection suggest that the real number may be much higher. At sea, the phenomenon of “invisible shipwrecks”¹ has also persisted in an alarming manner along routes with little official reporting such as the Western Mediterranean Route (WMR) and the Western Africa-Atlantic Route (WAAR). The latter has been the deadliest migratory route recorded worldwide during the third quarter of 2021, in which the deaths of migrants (485) have surpassed the number of deaths on the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes combined (467). Overall, documenting migrant deaths on these routes is hindered by the lack of public and reliable sources of information, which means that the recorded migrant fatalities represent an undercount of the tragic incidents occurring in the region, and it is often not disaggregated by nationality, gender or age.



Figure 2: The remains of six migrants were found in August in Wadi Zimam, 90KM South of Suknah, Libya, after reportedly being abandoned by smugglers. © Libyan Red Crescent, 2021

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES DURING TRANSIT WITHIN MENA

NORTHERN AFRICA

At least 64 migrants perished while transiting Northern Africa during the third quarter of 2021, including at least 35 who died while crossing the Sahara Desert. This marks a significant increase from the previous quarter of 2021, in which the deaths of 35 migrants were recorded while crossing North Africa, and it is still an undercount due to the persistence of data limitations along the subregion’s land routes. So far in 2021, the deaths recorded inside Northern Africa while crossing the Sahara Desert alone (122) have exceeded the number of deaths on the Sahara Desert crossing for the same period of 2020 (73) and even for the entire past year (80). All recorded deaths along the Sahara Desert crossing during the third quarter of 2021 occurred in North Africa, mainly in Libya, where reports of violence by smugglers and potential traffickers surfaced, but incidents also happened in Algeria and Tunisia. The top countries of origin of the migrants who lost their lives in North Africa during the third quarter of 2021 are Egypt (19), Niger (16) and Sudan (14), while the nationality of 14 migrants are unknown. There were 20 men, two women and four children among those for whom there is sociodemographic data available. Harsh environmental conditions (such as dehydration, starvation and exposure) were the main cause of death on the Sahara Desert crossing (33), while vehicle accidents were more prevalent in other crossings within Northern Africa (14). However, the cause of death of ten people is completely unknown. Figure (2) represents the available data on desert deaths for the first three quarters between 2014 and 2021, for the most part provided by the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) surveys. However, MMC data has been available from 2016 to 2019 only, which explains the disparity for the other years.²

1. 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.

2. 4Mi ceased collection on fatal incidents after January 2020 due to a change in methodology, thus impacting records on migrant deaths in the desert.

3. The MMP uses the regional classification for Western Asia per the UN Statistics Division, while IOM RO Cairo uses the Middle East classification covering the following countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, KSA, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen.

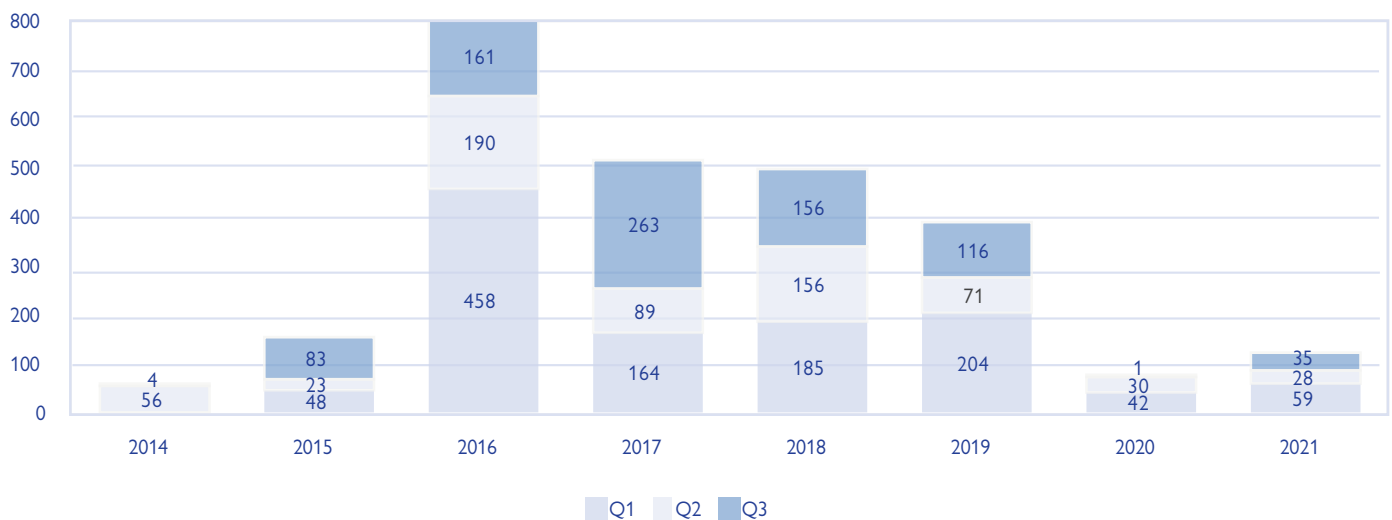


Figure 3: Sahara Desert fatalities recorded in Northern Africa for the first three quarters of 2014-2021

WESTERN ASIA

No migratory incidents were recorded on land in the Middle East³ for the third quarter of 2021. However, it is important to note the lack of data sources in the region and the challenges of distinguishing deaths during migration from conflict-related deaths, specifically in countries such as the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. All the incidents that were documented by the MMP in Western Asia during this period were on the Turkey-Europe land route at the Evros/Meriç River, which involved one migrant from Egypt and three from the Syrian Arab Republic.⁴

DEATHS OF WESTERN ASIAN MIGRANTS ON THE BELARUS-EU BORDER

Crossings of migrants, mostly from Western Asian countries, from Belarus to Lithuania, Latvia and Poland have increased since July 2021. There are reports of cross-border pushbacks of migrants, including asylum seekers and members of other vulnerable groups. Many migrants have been stranded at the Belarus-EU border in extremely harsh conditions, with limited access to basic needs and

assistance. At least 11 migrants died on the Belarus-EU borders in the third quarter of 2021, including one woman and one child. Six Iraqis, one Yemeni, and one Syrian were among the deceased. Three died from hypothermia, two from sickness and lack of access to adequate healthcare, and one from blunt force injuries.

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES ON MARITIME ROUTES TO EUROPE

THE MEDITERRANEAN ROUTES

Migrant deaths have persisted at an alarming rate in the Mediterranean Sea, where 480 fatalities have been recorded for the third quarter of 2021, a slight increase from the third quarter of 2020 (468) and a decrease from the third quarter in 2019 (616). Overall, deaths in the Mediterranean have drastically increased in the first nine months of 2021 (1,422) as compared to the same period in 2020 (875), partially given the complete mobility restrictions imposed during the first half of 2020 due to the pandemic. Most of the Mediterranean deaths (77%) in the third quarter of 2021 occurred along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR), where at least 254 migrants perished in 23 identified shipwrecks. Another 34 instances of remains washing ashore (117) on various Libyan beaches and off the Tunisian coast could not be linked to any known shipwreck. The locations of incidents varied – one boat capsized 25 kilometers off Sfax, Tunisia, one capsized six nautical miles off Sabratha, Libya, while two boats capsized 20 and 70 nautical miles off Zuwara, Libya. In one incident on 14 July, a boat was rescued in the Maltese Search and Rescue (SAR) Zone one day after its passengers sent out a distress call shortly after departing from Libya. Armed Forces Malta rescued 78 passengers but unfortunately three were already found dead on board, probably due to dehydration, exhaustion or a potential heatstroke. One man drowned and 22 migrants were also rescued on 22 August off the island of Levanzo, Italy after an SOS call from a Tunisian passenger prompted a search by the Italian Coast Guard.

4. Overall, MMP has recorded 17 deaths on the Turkey-Europe land route in the third quarter of 2021.

During this quarter, Tunisian shores were the site of the highest number of fatalities along the CMR, whereas the country also witnessed a sharp increase in attempted crossings. At least 193 migrants have died off the coast of Tunisia in the third quarter of 2021, including the remains of 31 people washing ashore mainly on the coasts of Mahdia and Sfax that could not be linked to known shipwrecks. Another 162 migrants have died in 14 shipwrecks where Sfax was the main location (64%), followed by Mahdia (14%). At least two of these boats were known to have departed from Libya while at least three had departed from Tunisia.

Off the coasts of Libya, at least 174 migrants lost their lives in the third quarter of 2021, including 107 migrants who died in eight shipwrecks. Additionally, the remains of 70 people washed ashore and could not be linked to any known shipwreck, mostly off Sabratha as was the case in the previous quarter of 2021. The nationalities of most of those who died on CMR (208) this quarter remains unknown, while the majority of those whose sociodemographic data is available were from Western Africa (59) followed by Northern Africa (33), Western Asia (all from the Syrian Arab Republic) (23), and Southern Asia (all from Bangladesh) (20). Among those as per available data were 123 men, 33 women and eight children. Overall, 139 people were lost at sea and no facts are known about their identities.

During the third quarter of 2021, 96 deaths were recorded along the Western Mediterranean Route (WMR), an increase in comparison to the third quarter of 2020 (83) and a decrease in comparison to the same period in 2019 (119). At least 72 people lost their lives in nine identified shipwrecks, including two invisible shipwrecks off Hoceima, Morocco and Tipaza, Algeria. Another 24 remains washed ashore Algeria, Morocco and Spain that could not be linked to any known shipwrecks. At least 65 migrants perished off Western Algerian coasts, mainly in Tipaza, Mostaganem and Boumerdès. The majority of those who lost their lives were Algerian (26), while one was identified to be Moroccan and the nationalities of the remaining 38 migrants are unknown. Multiple reports by civil society organizations and families of missing migrants suggested that six “invisible shipwrecks” may have occurred between Algeria and Spain in September alone, when departures from Algerian coasts increased, but they could not be verified at the time of publication. At least 14 migrants died off North Moroccan coasts, including 12 people presumed to be of North African origin (likely Morocco) who went missing after sailing from Hoceima, Morocco. The concerning loss of life has also persisted on the crossing to Ceuta and Melilla during the third quarter of 2021. Although the arrivals significantly decreased from the previous quarter, at least nine people lost their lives in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta (6) and Melilla (1), as well as in Fnideq, Morocco (2). Six were identified to be Moroccan men while the identity of the remaining three remains unknown.

Thirteen deaths were recorded on the **Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR)** during the third quarter of 2021 between Turkey and Greece. Eight migrants were reported to be from Western Asia while the rest were from Middle Africa.⁵

5. The MMP uses UNSD Geographical Grouping, whereas “Middle Africa” is composed of Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe.

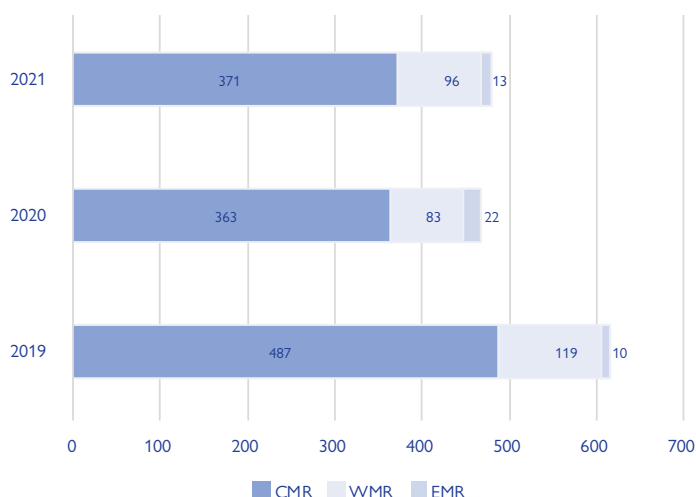


Figure 4: Recorded Mediterranean fatalities for the third quarter of 2019-2021



Figure 5: Italian Coast Guard rescues migrants and refugees bound for Italy. © IOM/Francesco Malavolta 2014

WESTERN AFRICA-ATLANTIC ROUTE

The third quarter of 2021 has been the deadliest quarter for migration on the Western Africa-Atlantic Route (WAAR) since the inception of the MMP in 2014, following a spike in attempted crossings since 2019. The deaths of at least 485 people were recorded on the route to the Canary Islands, surpassing the recorded deaths on the deadly CMR and amounting to 32 per cent of the total recorded deaths and disappearances worldwide during the third quarter of 2021. Most of the deaths on WAAR occurred off North African coasts (282), mainly the city of Dakhla, followed by 118 deaths in Spanish territorial waters with varying locations. For example, one boat was found around 500 kilometers south of El Hierro island while one was found 12 kilometers east of Lanzarote, Canary Islands. At least 85 migrants have also perished off the coasts of Mauritania and Senegal. It is believed that many more have drowned on this route, particularly in invisible shipwrecks, as reported by civil society organizations.

Most of the deceased recorded on WAAR in the third quarter of 2021 are women (165) followed by men (86) and children (45), the youngest being two years old. The nationalities of most of the people who lost their lives on this route are unknown (381). However, among those for whom data on nationality is available, 53 migrants come from West African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal, and Guinea) while 48 were Moroccans. The main cause of death recorded on WAAR is drowning (56%). However, 36 per cent of deaths were due to harsh environmental conditions (hypothermia, dehydration, starvation, exposure and exhaustion), reiterating the tragedy of the assistance gap along the long and perilous route in the Atlantic Ocean.

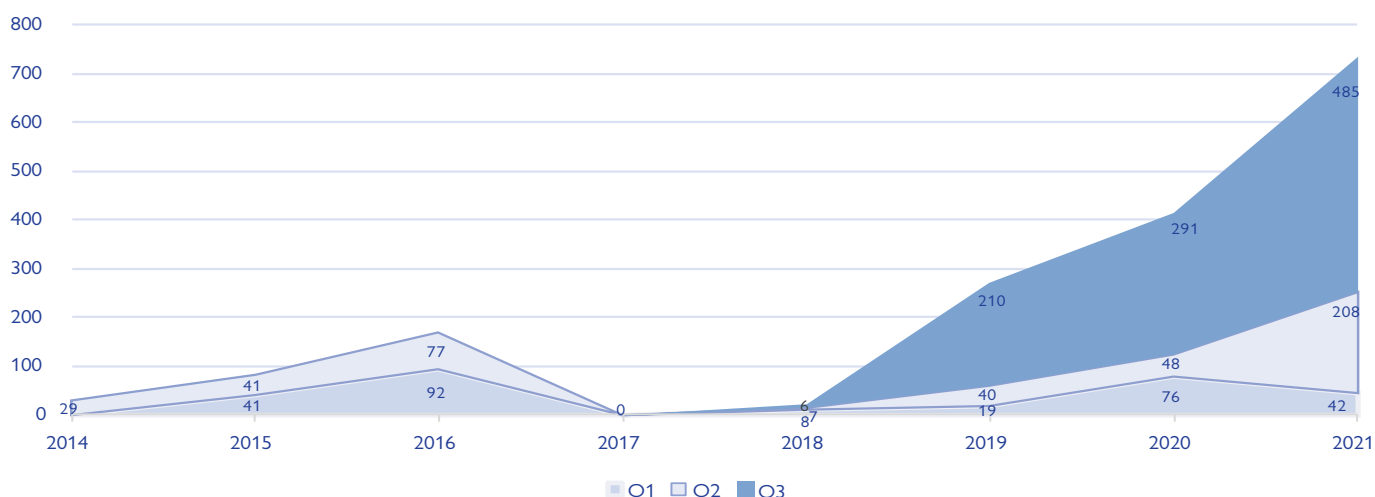


Figure 6: Western Africa-Atlantic Route fatalities for the first three quarters of 2014-2021

FAMILIES OF MISSING MIGRANTS ARE SCRAMBLING FOR ANSWERS

Families in the village of Tilbana, Mansoura, Egypt, gathered in front of the local police station after a boat carrying more than 65 migrants capsized off Libya on 23 October, including 12 migrants from Tilbana who were never found. Awad, the father of one of the missing, has not heard from his 19-year-old son after the boat sank. Awad said "I do not know anything about my son. If he is dead, I want his body. If he is alive, please reassure me."⁶

Another mass disappearance took place on 17 September off Algiers, Algeria, which left the families of 11 missing migrants torn.

Yahya, the father of one of the missing said in tears that he can no longer bear the mystery surrounding the loss of his 28-year-old son, noting that the mother of his son is bedridden and needs to see her son as soon as possible, adding: "Her heart is ironed with embers" waiting for her son's return. Yahya called on the authorities to help her search for him, dead or alive, so that they can rest, especially since the information they received was conflicting and mismatched, which left them with many question marks.⁷

6. Egypt Independent, 2021. Available at bit.ly/3CmMNs2.

7. Echorouk Online, 2021. Available at bit.ly/3vXf4mB.

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; non-governmental civil society organizations such as Alarm Phone 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.

Region/ Route	Official Sources	Civil Society Organizations	Multiple Media Sources	One Media Source
Northern Africa	50%	35.7%	14.3%	0%
CMR	7.3%	69%	20%	3.7%
WMR	31.4%	14.3%	31.4%	22.9%
WAAR	20%	56%	12%	12%

Figure 7: MMP data sources by route and by source for Q3 2021

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. The third quarter of 2021 however witnessed a slight improvement in terms of official reports, though information remains limited. Unlike last quarter, when no recorded incidents in Northern Africa came from official sources and 80 per cent came from non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations (IOM), half of the recorded incidents this quarter were reported by official sources. In the Mediterranean, the WMR saw more official reports by Spanish and Algerian civil authorities in comparison to none during the previous quarter. Meanwhile, the sources of data on the CMR remained nearly the same in comparison to the last quarter, mostly dependent on civil society and intergovernmental organizations (IOM).

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact mobility as additional restrictions on regular pathways for migration remained and new restrictions were introduced in Europe during the third quarter of 2021. Migrants fleeing new waves of unrest and the persistence of the pandemic-driven socioeconomic vulnerabilities in the region were compelled to undertake more perilous and remote crossings on unsafe vehicles and unseaworthy makeshift boats during the third quarter of 2021, particularly through North Africa, with the aim of reaching Europe. Reports on migratory incidents in North Africa indicate that several migrants ended up in the hands of criminal smuggling and trafficking groups before losing their lives. While there were several SAR operations in the Mediterranean, the recorded loss of lives of hundreds of people, including those who were onboard rescued boats, might have been proactively prevented. The need for efficient

state-led SAR has been particularly evident on desert crossings and WAAR. In the Sahara Desert, migrants have likely strayed for days before dying from environmental conditions. Many migrants who have died on WAAR have spent days drifting in the Atlantic Ocean before being found. The biggest tragedy remains in those who were never found and whose families may never know what happened to them. The MMP data continues to be limited in the third quarter of 2021 due to the restricted access to reliable information in the region, which calls for the improvement of information collection and exchange by all actors on missing migrants. Nevertheless, the continuing documentation of hundreds of deaths raises critical alarms, especially as we commemorate the eighth anniversary of the tragic Lampedusa shipwreck that took the lives of more than 360 migrants on 3 October 2013.