

Eight migrants die every day trying to reach richer countries, study reveals

Research into migrant deaths in Europe shows 22,000 missing, presumed dead, in past 14 years – more than half the global total

- [Peter Beaumont](#)
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A survivor from a sinking off Greece in May. Most European migrant deaths came in attempts to cross the Mediterranean. Photograph: Orestis Panagiotou/EPA

Migrants trying to reach more prosperous countries have died at a rate of eight every day for the past 14 years, the majority of them trying to get to Europe, according to the most comprehensive ever tally of migrant deaths.

Almost 40,000 people have died on migrant routes worldwide, according to estimates by the [International Organisation for Migration \(IOM\)](#), which added that 22,000 of them perished trying to get to Europe.

An estimated 4,077 died this year alone, suggesting a sharply escalating problem.

According to the IOM, the true number of fatalities is likely to be even higher than the figures in its report.

The research was undertaken by the IOM over six months for its report *Fatal Journeys: Tracking Lives Lost During Migration*, published on Monday. It called on governments and the international community to address what it described as “an epidemic of crime and victimisation”.

“Our message is blunt: migrants are dying who need not,” said the IOM’s director general, William Lacy Swing. “It is time to do more than count the number of victims. It is time to engage the world to stop this violence against desperate migrants.”



Migrants on a dinghy-style vessel after being rescued by the Italian navy on 22 September 2014. Photograph: Italian Navy/EPA

The disproportionately high death toll in the Mediterranean, the report concludes, “reflects a dramatic increase in the number of migrants trying to reach Europe”, with more than 112,000 irregular migrants detected by Italian authorities in 2014 – almost three times as many as in 2013.

IOM research records that since 2000, nearly 6,000 more migrant deaths occurred along the US-Mexico border and a further 3,000 deaths from Africa's Sahara desert and the Indian Ocean.

The research behind Fatal Journeys, which runs to more than 200 pages, began with the October 2013 tragedy when more than [400 migrants died in two shipwrecks](#) near the Italian island of Lampedusa.

The report paints a picture characterised too often by international indifference, even over the collection and distribution of the raw data on migrant deaths.

“Although vast sums of money are spent collecting migration and border control data, very few agencies collect and publish data on migrant deaths,” said Frank Laczko, the author of Fatal Journeys, and IOM's director of migrant research division.

According to Laczko, data tends to be scattered, with a range of organisations involved in tracking fatalities. Some experts believe that for every dead body discovered, there are at least two others that are never recovered.

The report was compiled as part of IOM's Missing Migrants Project, which aims to raise awareness about the risks would-be migrants face and deter them from using criminal networks where many fall victim to violence, sex abuse and people-trafficking.

One of the report's most shocking findings is that, despite the high and rising death toll, “no organisation at the global level is currently responsible for systematically monitoring the number of deaths that occur. Data tends to be scattered, with a

range of organisations involved in tracking fatalities often employing different definitions of border-related death.”

In one chapter discussing the deaths of migrants attempting to reach Australia – written by Leanne Weber and Sharon Pickering, two criminologists at Monash University in Melbourne – the authors point out: “No Australian government agency, law enforcement or migration-focused agency, at the state or federal level, publishes data on border-related deaths,” while drawing a stark comparison between the effort and money spent attempting to locate the Malaysian Airlines Flight MH370 – and the headlines dedicated to it.

“The importance of counting the dead and retrieving their bodies is universally acknowledged as a crucial step in acknowledging their loss and producing an account of their deaths,” it says.



Palestinian Shukri al-Assouli set off from Alexandria on 6 September with his wife and two children on a ship destined for Italy, but the vessel sank and he was rescued by a Japanese commercial ship and taken to Greece. His family is missing. Photograph: Ibraheem Abu Mustafa/Reuters

“The failure to comprehensively document and investigate deaths of asylum-seekers at sea or in immigration custody while other fatal incidents invoke large-scale and international ad hoc responses, as in the case of missing flight MH370, suggests that certain lives effectively count for more than others, both at a domestic level and within the international community.”

Besides counting fatalities, IOM’s Missing Migrants Project is part of a broader effort to use social media to engage communities around the world. With this month’s [Malta shipwreck tragedy](#), IOM offices worldwide received calls and emails and social media posts from family members across Europe and the Middle East seeking news about their missing relatives, many now feared dead. The project hopes to become a powerful voice of deterrence to keep future victims from embarking on these dangerous journeys.

“People are already looking for information about missing migrants on Facebook and other social media outlets. We know as well that people are trafficked around the world using Facebook,” said IOM spokesman Leonard Doyle.

“We want to leverage social media and in particular the hashtag #MissingMigrants to amplify the voices of those who have lost loved ones and warn future migrants against taking these risky journeys. We will not seek to dissuade migrants from risking their lives with posters or radio spots but rather with the most persuasive means out there: the voices of survivors and the family members of missing migrants.”



Migrants rest after they were rescued by the Libyan coastguard when their boat sank off the coastal town of Garabulli on 15 September 2014. Photograph: Mahmud Turkia/AFP/Getty Images

“The paradox is that at a time when one in seven people around the world are migrants, we are seeing an extraordinarily harsh response to migration in the developed world,” said IOM director general Swing.

“Limited opportunities for safe and regular migration drive would-be migrants into the hands of smugglers, feeding an unscrupulous trade that threatens the lives of desperate people. We need to put an end to this cycle. Undocumented migrants are not criminals. They are human beings in need of protection and assistance, and deserving respect,” he added.

- For a copy of the report, please go to [Fatal Journeys: Tracking Lives Lost During Migration](#) (pdf)