

MISSING MIGRANTS

Middle East & North Africa

Mid-year Regional Overview

January - June 2023



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

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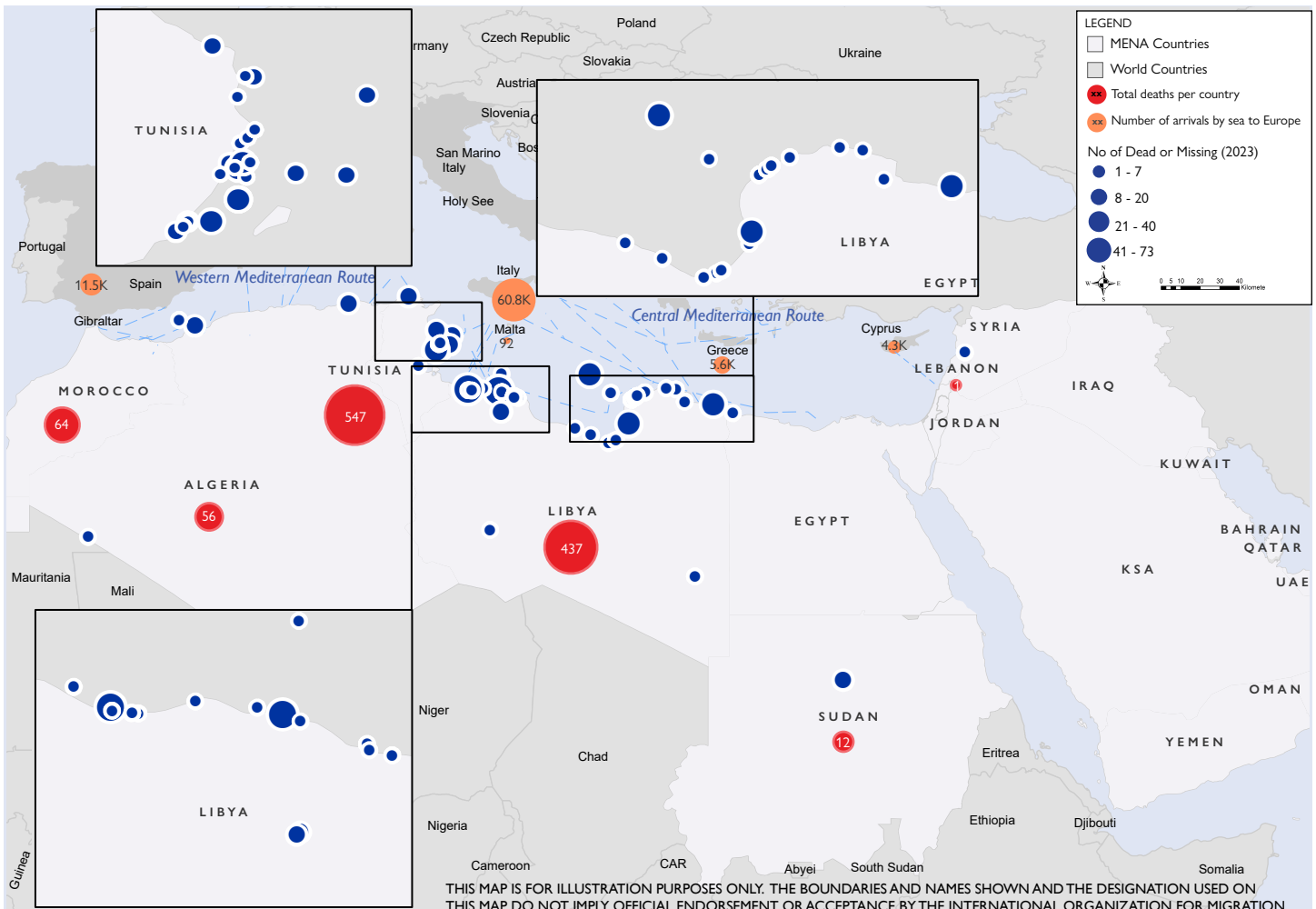
Overview

The first half of 2023 is marked by a series of perilous irregular migration journeys, resulting in numerous deaths and disappearances. The Missing Migrants Project (MMP) recorded a total of 2,740 deaths and disappearances globally in the first half of 2023, compared to 3,716 in the same period in 2022. The recorded migrant fatalities represent an undercount of the tragic incidents that take place in the region as documenting migrant deaths on these routes is hindered by the lack of public and reliable sources of information. The following snapshot provides a brief overview of key figures globally and a deep dive into the number of deaths and disappearances along different migratory routes originating from and within the Middle East and North Africa.¹ It is important to note that the data represented in the snapshot is provisional as of 24 July 2023, and that large datasets from the Sahara region are unavailable for 2023 as of this date.

Global Main Causes of Deaths on Migration Routes



Drowning has emerged as the leading cause of death in the first half of 2023, with 2,200 recorded incidents. The Central Mediterranean Route continues to be the deadliest route, accounting for a total of 1,727 deaths and disappearances along its shores. On migratory land routes, harsh environmental conditions such as dehydration, starvation, and exposure were the primary causes of death (95). It is worth noting that the Missing Migrants Project only registered 92 deaths attributed to violence. However, this number remains an undercount due to the absence of systematic and timely data sources and reports regarding migrant deaths on transit routes in the region.



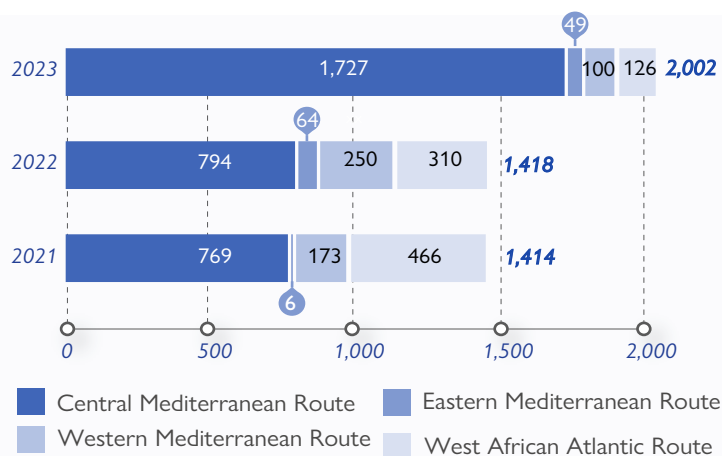
Map1: Migratory incidents that occurred within and from the Middle East and North Africa during the first half of 2023.

1. All data used in this snapshot are from the [Missing Migrants Project dataset](#), accessed 24 July 2023. 2. Vehicle accident: Incidents involving vehicle accidents and/or deaths that are linked to hazardous transportation conditions or practices. 3. Environmental conditions: Incidents involving harsh environmental conditions or lack of adequate shelter, food, water, or other essential resources 4. Sickness: Incidents involving sickness and/or lack of access to adequate healthcare, medical treatment, or medication.

Migration Routes from and within MENA

The Missing Migrants Project recorded 2,064 deaths and disappearances in the MENA Region during the first half of 2023. At least 110 deaths occurred on Northern Africa land routes, including 56 while crossing the perilous Sahara Desert where many deaths in remote areas remain largely undocumented. This marks a slight increase when compared to the first half of 2022, when 91 migrants died while transiting North Africa, including 54 deaths along the Sahara Desert route. Libya registered the highest number of deaths and disappearances on Northern Africa land routes with 83 deaths, followed by Sudan (12) and Tunisia (9). There is one incident reported on Middle East land routes which happened on route between Chadra and Andqet in Lebanon, yet the scarcity of official data and access on MENA routes suggest that the numbers are likely much higher than reported. The top countries of origin of those who died along North African routes are Bangladesh (8), Egypt (4), Mauritania (4) and Nigeria (3) yet the origin of the vast majority remains unknown.

MMP recorded at least 1,875 deaths and disappearances on Mediterranean Routes from North Africa in the first half of 2023 alone. This number represents a significant increase when compared to the number recorded in the same period last year (1,108). The majority of deaths occurred on the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR), which continues to constitute the deadliest route in the MENA region and globally. 1,727 deaths and disappearances were recorded on CMR in the first half of 2023, the highest number recorded for the same period of time since 2017. Most of the incidents along the Central Mediterranean occurred off the coasts of Tunisia claiming 538 deaths and disappearances, followed by Libya (354) and Algeria (17). The Western Mediterranean Route (WMR) registered a total of 100 deaths and disappearances both on routes to mainland Spain and to the Spanish enclaves in Northern Africa, Ceuta and Melilla. The majority of the Western Mediterranean deaths occurred in Algeria (37) followed by Spain (31) and Morocco (30). Meanwhile, 49 deaths were recorded on the Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR), majority of which occurred between Türkiye (15) and Greece (33). Additionally, of the migrants who died along the EMR this year, four individuals were from the Syrian Arab Republic, two were from Liberia and 37 nationalities remain unknown.

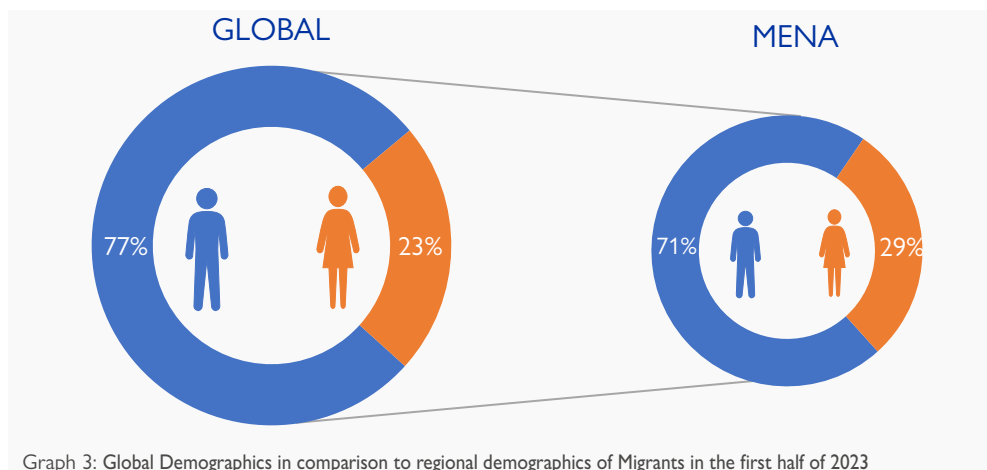


Graph 1: Migrant deaths on routes to/via MENA to Europe in the first half of 2021-2023

On the Western Africa-Atlantic Route (WAAR) to the Canary Islands, 126 deaths and disappearances were recorded, but civil society reports that are pending verification indicate that the true death toll is much higher. The majority of recorded deaths occurred off the North African coasts, where at least 107 people lost their lives. The nationalities of the vast majority of those who died on WAAR are unknown (97) but are mostly presumed from Sub-Saharan Africa, while the top countries of origin among those identified are Morocco (8) and Liberia (1) and Mali (1).

Demographics of recorded migrants deaths

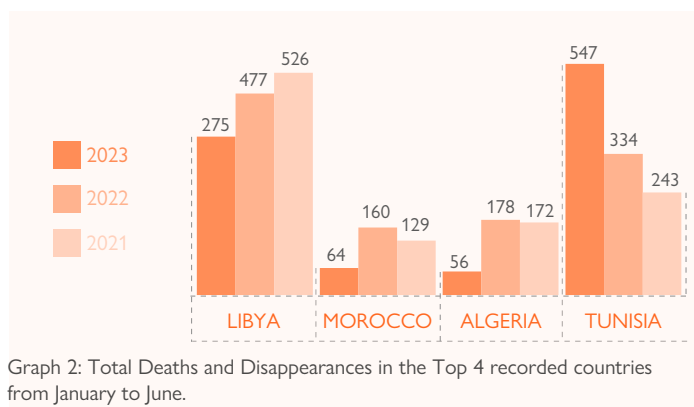
Of the 2,740 individuals recorded in the Missing Migrants Project database in the first half of 2023, data on age and/or sex is available for 699; the vast majority of the people who die on migratory routes remain unidentified. Of these 699, 452 were males, 133 were females, and 114 were children under the age of 18. The data disaggregated by age and/or sex recorded by IOM's MMP in the region represents 48% of the global number recorded. Of the 337 people disaggregated, those include 183 males, 74 females and 80 minors. It's worth noting that 7 out of 10 of the minors recorded globally take dangerous journeys on routes from and via the MENA region. Data disaggregation by sex and age is highly variable across regions in the MMP database because of the difficulty of obtaining timely and disaggregated data.



Graph 3: Global Demographics in comparison to regional demographics of Migrants in the first half of 2023

Top Countries of Incident in MENA

The majority of deaths and disappearances recorded in the region during the first half of 2023 occurred in Tunisia with a total of 547, a sharp increase from the same period in 2022 when 334 deaths and disappearances were recorded. The vast majority of incidents occurred off the shores of Sfax governorate. Additionally, 375 deaths and disappearances occurred on Libya land and maritime routes followed by Morocco where 64 deaths and disappearances were recorded by the Missing Migrants Project in the first half of 2023, a significant decline when compared to the number recorded in Morocco last year (160), although data for 2023 remains provisional.



Graph 2: Total Deaths and Disappearances in the Top 4 recorded countries from January to June.

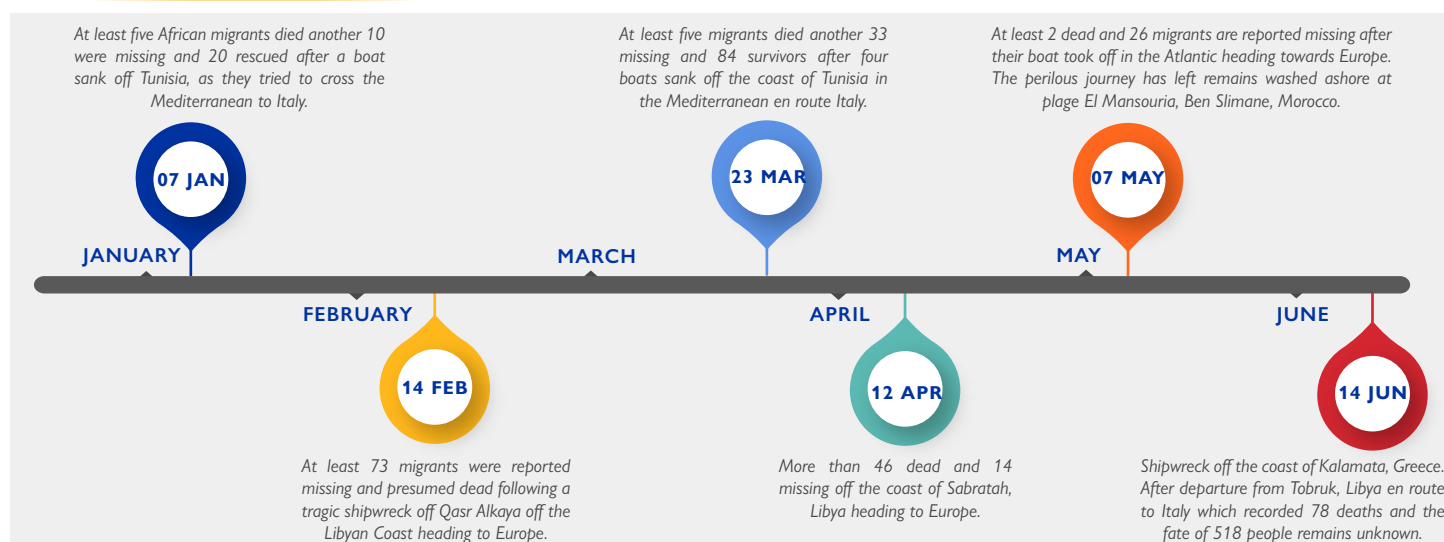
Methodology And Data Quality

IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) counts migrant fatalities during the process of migrating towards an international destination, including at the external borders of a state. Due to a lack of official data on these deaths, incidents recorded by MMP come from a variety of sources, and are ranked on a scale from 1-5 based on the source(s) of information available. Incidents ranked as level 1 are based on information from only one media source. Incidents ranked as level 2 are based on information from uncorroborated eyewitness accounts or data from survey respondents. Incidents ranked as level 3 are based on information from multiple media reports, while level 4 incidents are based on information from at least one NGO, IGO, or another humanitarian actor with direct knowledge of the incident. Incidents ranked at level 5 are based on information from official sources such as coroners, medical examiners, or government officials OR from multiple humanitarian actors. Collecting data on migrant deaths and disappearances remains challenging due to the lack of systematic reporting on the deaths of people in transit. The lack of consistent, reliable reporting means that this methodology has limitations in terms of consistency and comparability of data across geographies and time. As such, MMP are best understood as indicative of trends rather than fully representative of the true death toll in any region or route.

Region/Route	Official Sources	Inter/Non-governmental Organizations	Multiple Media Sources	One Media Source
Northern Africa Land Routes	21%	36%	36%	7%
Middle East Land Routes	67%	24%	10%	0%
Central Mediterranean Route	28%	55%	12%	5%
Western Mediterranean Route	0%	55%	46%	0%
West African Atlantic Route	14%	50%	29%	7%

Table 1: MMP data sources in MENA region January to June 2023 by migration routes/region and by data type.

Timeline of Major Incidents in the Region



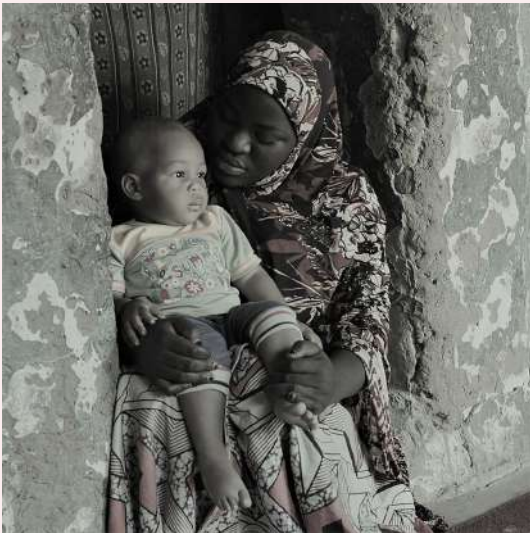


Photo: Hussien Moussa/ © IOM Libya 2021

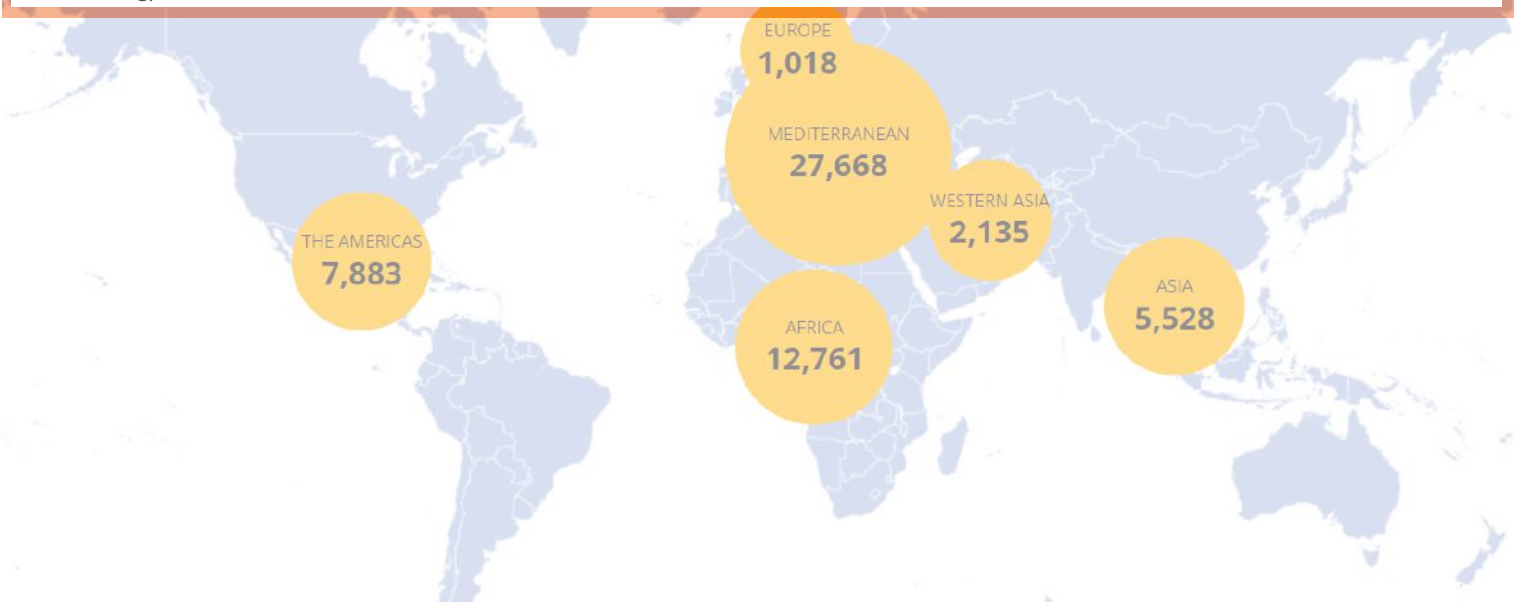
Tripoli, 11 July 2022 – When Ime left Nigeria in 2016, she did so in the hopes of finding new ways to provide for her family. At only 18, she owned a hair salon back in Nigeria, where she practiced her hobby turned craftsmanship for four years. Due to the challenging socio-economic situation in the country, Ime was forced to abandon her business and go to Europe to turn her life around. From Lagos, she travelled to Agadez in Niger, and then further on to Sebha in Libya.

“We spent more than a month on the road and faced many challenges. We were sitting in the back of the truck in the blazing sun. I was frightened each time I looked over at my friend who had travelled with me from Nigeria and the rest of the girls; I could read exhaustion across their faces,” Ime recalls. *“We were praying out loud to forget about our worries, which angered the smuggler and he tried to silence us. Those were the worst days of my life.”* It was 2016 when she first laid eyes on Sebha, and a week after, on Tripoli, and then later, on the boat that would take her on her first attempt to cross the sea. Hours into her journey, the boat malfunctioned, and they found themselves stranded at sea. The Libyan search and rescue guards found them and returned them to shore. *“I was just happy to be alive,”* she says.

Source: IOM Libya / The Cost Of Pursuing A Better Life: [The Relentless Journey Of Pain And Loss](#)

About Missing Migrants Project

IOM's Missing Migrants Project has recorded more than 56,928 deaths and disappearances worldwide of people who die in the process of migration towards an international destination, regardless of their legal status, since 2014. It is important to note that these numbers are an undercount due to the limitations of data collection, the lack of accessible systematic and timely data sources. The Missing Migrants Project currently gathers information from diverse sources such as official records as national and local authorities, intergovernmental and civil society organizations, and the media – the latter being the main source of data in many MENA countries which do not produce inclusive official reporting, which challenges the accuracy and completion of data. The Missing Migrants Projects publishes reports, briefings and infographics (available on the Publications page) with analysis of the data by geographic region, risks on irregular migration routes, issues related to the identification of missing migrants, the challenges and coping mechanisms of families of missing migrants and data collection methodology.



Missing Migrants Project records since 2014 people who die in the process of migration towards an international destination, regardless of their legal status. As collecting information is challenging, all figures remain undercounts. The locations in most cases are approximate. Each number represents a person, as well as the family and community that they leave behind.

For more MMP activities and publications, please visit missingmigrants.iom.int

For any comments or questions, please contact IOM's Middle East and North Africa

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