

MISSING MIGRANTS PROJECT

QUARTERLY REGIONAL OVERVIEW Middle East & North Africa APRIL 1 – JUNE 30, 2021

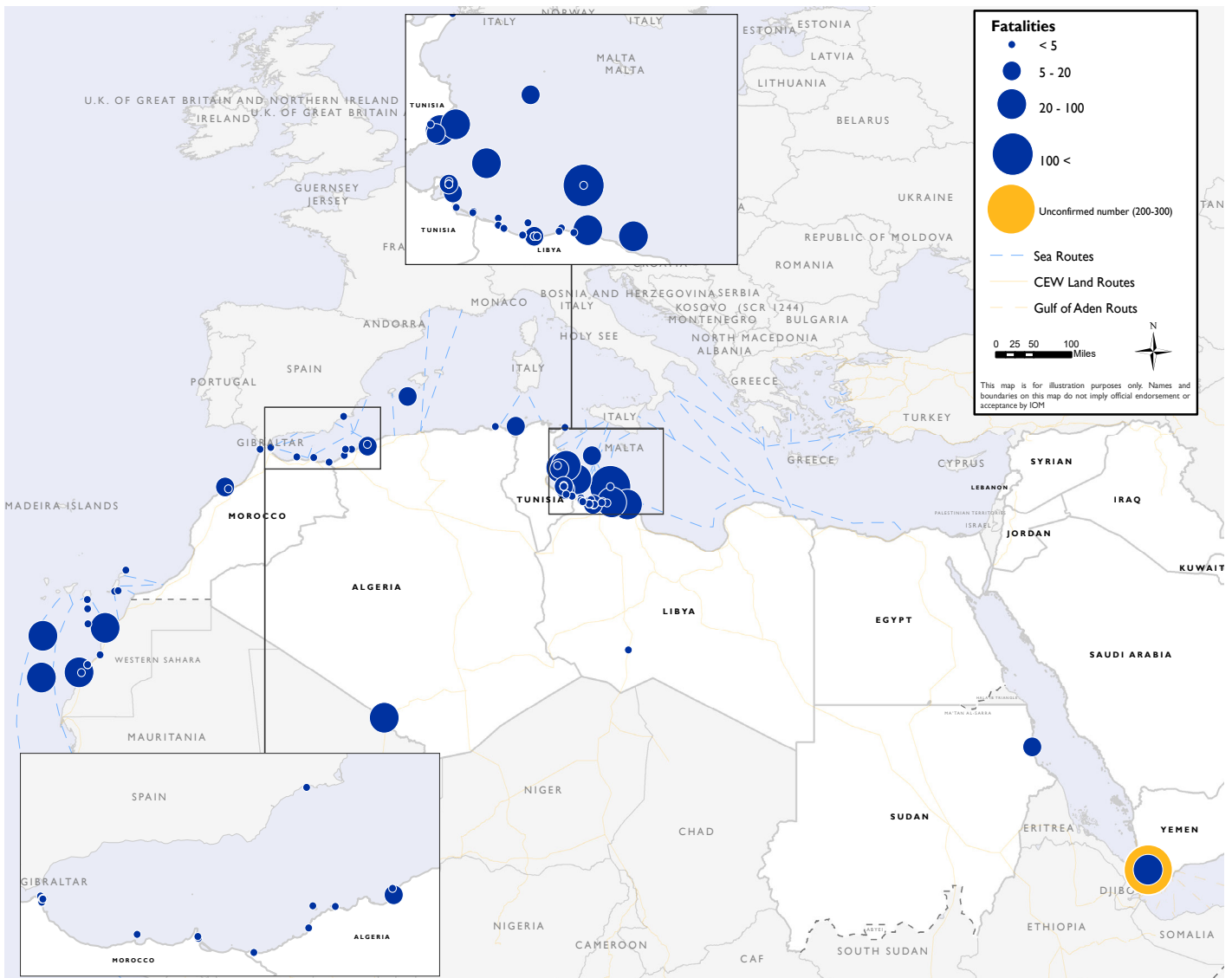


Figure 1: Map of migratory incidents that occurred within and from the Middle East and North Africa during the second quarter of 2021 (each dot represents an incident)

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OVERVIEW

While COVID-19 restrictive measures persisted in North Africa and Europe during the second quarter of 2021, many migrants continued to attempt extremely perilous crossings towards and from North Africa. The Mediterranean Sea continued to constitute the deadliest known route for migration in the world, accounting for more than half (511) of the total migrant fatalities recorded worldwide by the Missing Migrants Project (MMP) during the second quarter of 2021. However, an increase in reports of possible “invisible shipwrecks”¹ along the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes reiterate that the data is largely incomplete, as is the case on the Western Africa-Atlantic Route (WAAR). On this route to the Canary Islands, at least 208 migrants

lost their lives in three months, the highest number of deaths recorded in a single quarter on WAAR by IOM’s Missing Migrants Project (MMP) since its inception in 2014. MMP has also recorded 35 migrant deaths on land routes in North Africa during the second quarter of 2021, however many limitations on data collection, especially on the Sahara Desert crossing, suggest that the number may be much higher. Overall, the data for the second quarter of 2021 has been particularly impacted by the lack of access to reliable sources of information, with a lower percentage of public official data and less media reporting on the facts surrounding shipwrecks and accidents. This means that the recorded migrant fatalities represent an undercount of the tragic incidents occurring in the region.

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES DURING TRANSIT WITHIN MENA

NORTHERN AFRICA

At least 35 migrants perished while transiting in North Africa during the second quarter of 2021, including at least 28 who died while crossing the Sahara Desert. This marks a decrease from the 54 migrant deaths on the Sahara Desert Route during the first quarter in 2021, however limitations to access to data on this route means that the number is most probably an undercount. All recorded deaths along the Sahara Desert Route for this quarter occurred in North Africa, but involved migrants from Middle and Western Africa. Vehicle accidents were a primary cause of death in the Sahara Desert crossing for the second quarter of 2021, killing four migrants in the Libyan desert, while 24 migrants died from possible exposure and dehydration at the Mali-Algeria border, between El-Khalil, Mali and Bordj Badji Mokhtar, Algeria. Figure (2) represents the available data on desert deaths between 2014 and mid-2021, for the most part provided by the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) surveys.²

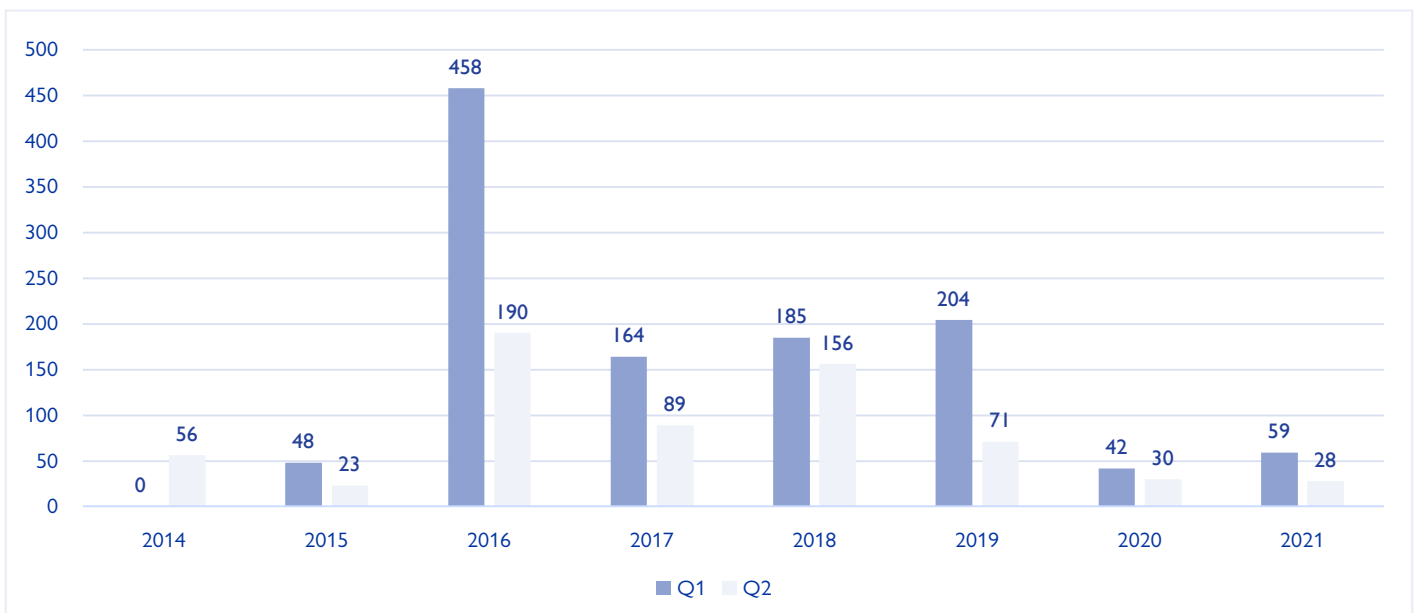


Figure 2: Sahara Desert fatalities recorded in North Africa for the first and second quarters of 2014-2021

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 Jan 2020 due to a change in methodology, thus impacting records on migrant deaths in the desert.

WESTERN ASIA

No migratory incidents were recorded on land in the Middle East³ for the second quarter of 2021. Meanwhile on the Horn of Africa-Yemen crossing, a major shipwreck occurred on 14 June in Bab El-Mandeb Strait, approximately 10 miles from the shores of Ras Al-Ara, Lahij governorate, Yemen. MMP has recorded 30 confirmed deaths of Ethiopian migrants among the passengers of the boat that departed from Obock, Djibouti. However, local media has reported that between 200-300 migrants went missing, which could not be verified as of this briefing's publication date. Overall, recorded deaths have significantly increased on the Horn of Africa-Yemen crossing during the first half of 2021 (94) compared to the same period in 2020 (zero) and in 2019 (71).



Figure 3: Wrecked boats in Obock, Djibouti. © Olivia Headon/IOM 2018

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES ON MARITIME ROUTES TO EUROPE

THE MEDITERRANEAN ROUTES

Migrant deaths have persisted at an alarming rate in the Mediterranean Sea, where 914 fatalities have been recorded for the first semester of 2021, a large increase from the same period in 2020 (402) and 2019 (615). This increase is mainly caused by the spike in deaths and disappearances along **the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR)**, considered to be the highest migratory route in terms of documented deaths in the world. Deaths on the CMR during the second quarter of 2021 increased by nearly four-fold from the same period in 2020. At least 445 people lost their lives whereas 389 migrants perished in 17 identified shipwrecks while there were 34 instances of remains washing ashore (56) that were often close to the main shores of Libya and Tunisia and could not be linked to any known shipwreck. One shipwreck occurred five nautical miles off Lampedusa, Italy, after departing from Sfax, Tunisia. The Libyan coasts were the site of at least 223 deaths of migrants, including the remains of 30 people washing ashore that could not be linked to any known shipwreck, mostly off Sabratha and Az-Zawiyah. At least 197 people lost their lives off the coast of Tunisia, including the remains of 18 people washing on the coasts of Medenine governorate near the Libyan borders (Ben Gardane, Zarzis and Djerba) that could not be linked to known shipwrecks. Medenine closely surpassed Sfax as the top location of incidents, as at least four boats

that capsized off Tunisia, causing 56 deaths, were reported to have sailed from Libya, mainly Zuwara. In three incidents the passengers were reportedly assisted by oil rig workers in the Gulf of Gabès before being transported back by the authorities. Meanwhile, at least nine people perished off the Eastern coast of Algeria, including eight young Algerians who disappeared after sailing from El Kala, El Taref in April.

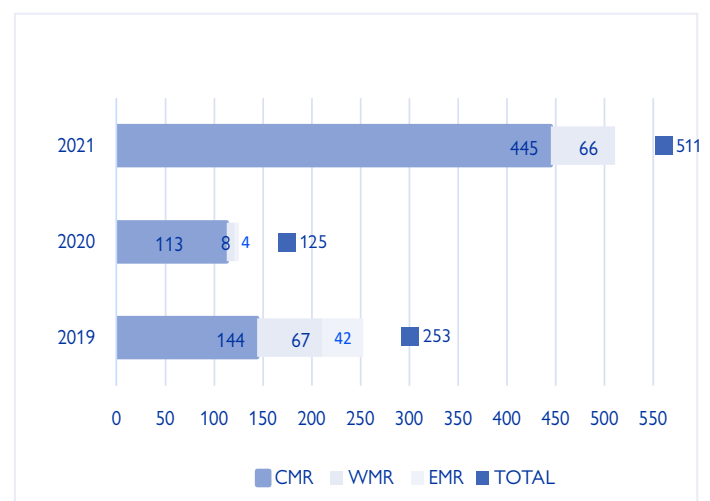


Figure 4: Recorded Mediterranean fatalities for the second quarter of 2019-2021

During the second quarter of 2021, 66 deaths were recorded along **the Western Mediterranean Route (WMR)**, a major increase in comparison to the second quarter of 2020 (8). At least 29 migrants perished off Western Algerian coasts, mainly the province of Mostaganem, including 11 young Algerian migrants went missing in May. The majority of those who lost their lives were Algerian (19), while one was identified to be Moroccan and the nationalities of the remaining 9 are unknown. On the other hand, at least 24 migrants died off North Moroccan coasts (Tangier and El Jadida), all presumed to be Sub-Saharan African migrants. Ceuta and Melilla have also witnessed a drastic increase in crossings during April and May, during which at least 12 people lost their lives in the Spanish enclaves (7) and Fnideq, Morocco (5), while one person drowned in Ceuta in June. Nine were identified to be Moroccan men while the identity of the rest remains unknown. No deaths were recorded on **the Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR)** during the second quarter of 2021.

3. The MMP uses a different regional classification for Western Asia as 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.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE LIVES OF MIGRANTS - CEUTA AND MELILLA

El Araby Kerekech used to work in a restaurant in Ceuta before returning to his city, Fnideq, in Morocco, after the onset of the pandemic where he worked in a fast-food restaurant. However, when COVID-19 measures impacted his restaurant and livelihood, he decided to join the hundreds swimming to Ceuta on 25 April. El Araby drowned in his attempt to reach Spain, leaving behind his pregnant wife and 2-year-old daughter.⁴

Melilla authorities found the body of a 41-year-old Moroccan man presumed to have drowned while swimming from Nador, Morocco on 19 June. Investigations showed that he had residency in Melilla where he was working in the hospitality business before the COVID-related border closure, suggesting that he was trying to return to his job.⁵

WESTERN AFRICA-ATLANTIC ROUTE

The second 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 208 people were recorded on the route to the Canaries, stretching from Dakhla and Bojdour, Western Sahara to the Canary Islands of El Hierro and Gran Canaria. It is believed that many more have drowned on this route, particularly in invisible shipwrecks, as reported

by civil society organizations.⁶ The nationalities of the majority of people who lost their lives on this crossing are not known, except for one incident in which 17 Senegalese migrants went missing off Dakhla after departing from Mbour, Senegal. The main causes of death recorded on WAAR are presumed hypothermia, dehydration or harsh environmental conditions, reflecting the tragedy of the assistance gap along the long and perilous route in the Atlantic Ocean.

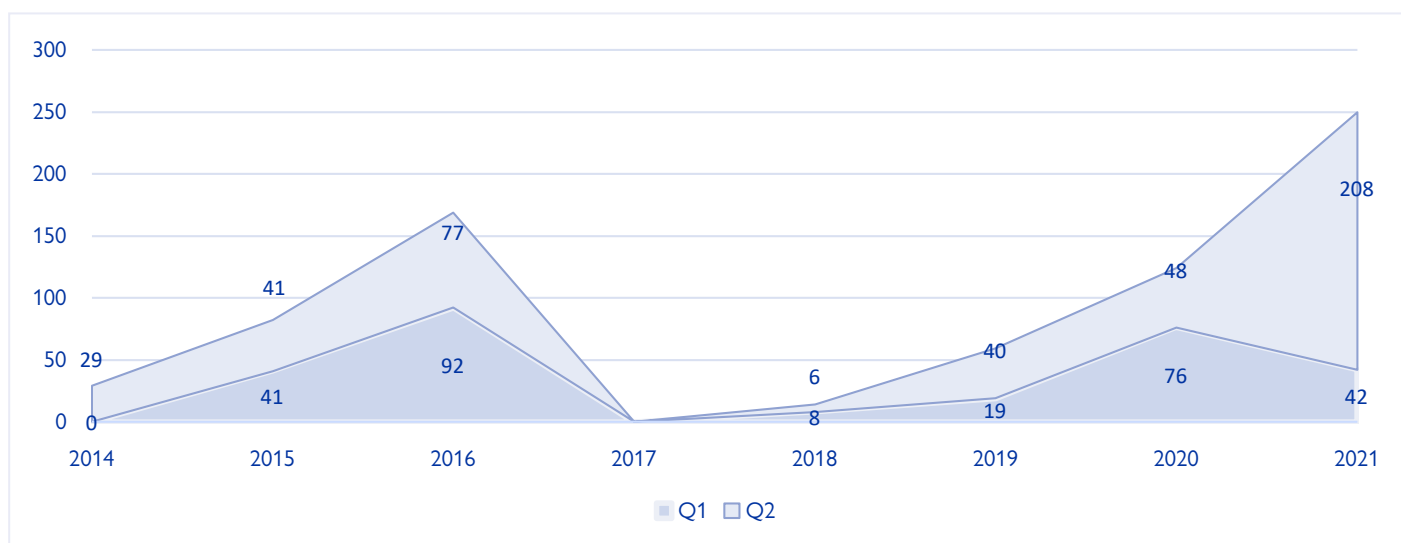


Figure 5: Western Africa-Atlantic Route fatalities for the first and second quarters of 2019-2021

DRIFTING IN THE ATLANTIC FOR THREE WEEKS: A SURVIVOR'S TESTIMONY

Aisha, a 17-year-old girl from Côte d'Ivoire, survived being stranded in a boat that drifted for 22 days at sea after sailing from Mauritania on 4 April. She was one of three survivors rescued by the Spanish Air Force 490 kilometers south of El Hierro, Canary Islands, because the other 56 passengers perished onboard. "Two days later [after departing] we had no water left, no food. On the fourth day, no more petrol. There were men who could no longer stand up and who screamed out of thirst. We used a shoe to give them some seawater. At the beginning, we'd say a prayer. At the end, no prayer. Not even the strength to throw a body in the water", Aisha recalled.⁷

4. Aljazeera, 2021. Available at bit.ly/3fSskRM.

5. Arrif Daily, 2021. Available at bit.ly/37tcY2B.

6. For example, the Spanish collective Caminando Fronteras reported that during the first six months of 2021, a total of 1,922 people are believed to have died or went missing in 57 shipwrecks, whereas 42 boats that departed from African shores towards the Canaries disappeared and all the passengers died at sea. Available at <https://bit.ly/3xXYRNf> and <https://bit.ly/3CStx6u>.

7. BBC, 2021. Available at bbc.in/3ytU6f4.

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 an incomplete or incorrect coverage, which poses an additional challenge on routes with no public official records such as the WMR, where only one incident has been officially reported (Junta de Andalucía) during the first half of 2021, and as the second quarter saw less reports from organizations and more reports from single media sources compared to the previous quarter.

Region/ Route	Official Sources	Civil Society Organizations	Multiple Media Sources	One Media Source
Northern Africa	0%	80%	20%	0%
CMR	7%	70.2%	19.3%	3.5%
WMR	4.2%	8.3%	62.5%	25%
WAAR	0%	21.4%	78.6%	0%

Figure 6: MMP data sources by region and by source for Q2 2021

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 continued to impact mobility as additional restrictions on regular pathways to migration remain, such as the case in Ceuta and Melilla. The pandemic has also exacerbated the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of societies in the region, forcing many people to traverse perilous crossings on unsafe vehicles and makeshift boats during the second quarter of 2021, particularly through North Africa, with the aim of reaching Europe and the Gulf countries. Although the first quarter of 2021 was marked with many tragic migratory incidents at sea, the observed lack of proactive SAR on maritime routes from Africa has also persisted through the second quarter of the year, which saw an increase in migrant deaths likely linked to the increase in departures when the weather

conditions improved. While the MMP data is limited due to the increasing gap in access to reliable information in the region, the recorded figures for the second quarter of 2021 still raise a huge concern about what seems to be an upward trend regarding the loss of lives on migratory routes such as the CMR and specifically the WAAR. The lack of data on missing migrants also profoundly impacts coordination with the families of missing migrants, reporting on migration governance indicators, and our understanding of migratory trends during the second quarter of 2021. Therefore, more efforts are needed to liaise between the state authorities and civil society organizations to improve the collection and exchange of data on missing migrants.