



CAMINANDO FRONTERAS

MONITORING the RIGHT to LIFE 2024



THE DATA COLLECTED IN THIS REPORT IS CLOSED ON DECEMBER 15, 2024.

Report of the Human Rights Observatory of Ca-minando Fronteras
Edition: December 2024
<https://caminandofronteras.org/>
Photographs: Ca-minando Fronteras
Layout: Crash Estudio Gráfico
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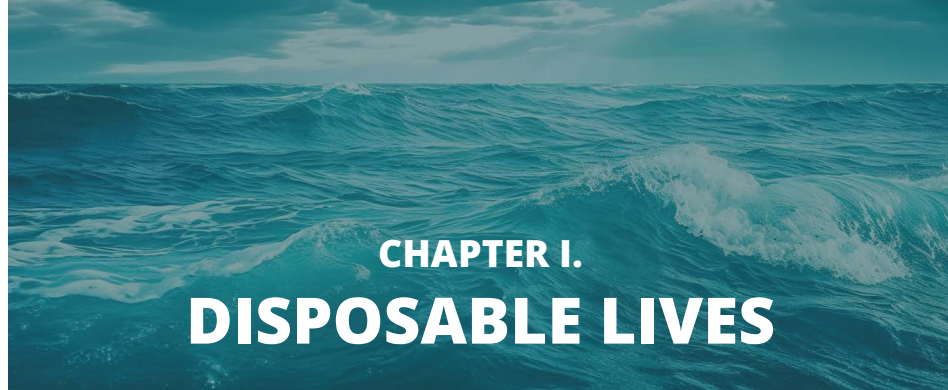
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CHAPTER I. DISPOSABLE LIVES

In 2024, the number of victims documented by Ca-minando Fronteras on the western Euro-African border once again exceeded the previous year's figures, confirming the growing impact of necropolitics on people on the move.

The number of victims rose by 58% between 2023 and 2024, reaching a total of 10,457 (data collection for this report concluded on 15 December). Whereas the average number of victims per day stood at 18 in 2023, that figure rose to 30 in 2024.

The Atlantic route towards the Canary Islands remains the most lethal in the world and there has been a sharp increase in boats setting off from Mauritania. 70,51% of the tragedies documented among people travelling in wooden boats from West Africa occurred among those who had departed from Mauritania, which became the main departure point on the route to the Canary Islands in 2024 after growing more prominent towards the end of 2023.

As the number of lives lost rises unrelentingly, the Spanish State continues to pursue policies focused on controlling migration with support from Europe and to deny their impact on the right to life. These policies are based on dehumanising and criminalising migrants, leaving them vulnerable to human rights violations and rendering their lives disposable¹.

The concept of bare life², a life stripped of rights, protection and social and political meaning, allows the lethal policies applied along the western Euro-African border to be normalised within society. When it becomes entrenched, this situation allows groups of people to be abandoned to a certain death with complete impunity.

“On 26 October, Ca-minando Fronteras received an alert from a boat carrying 150 people, eight of whom were women, which had set off from the coast of Senegal on 21 October. They were desperate for help. We activated our protocols and notified the search and rescue services. That same day, the Spanish authorities were able to locate the wooden boat in a spot on the edge of the areas of search and rescue responsibility³ of Spain, Morocco and Mauritania.

The boat carrying the migrants was drifting west a long way from shore in an area where boats had disappeared on previous occasions. The Spanish authorities ordered a ship to be sent to assist the migrants until it was decided which country would be responsible for rescuing them. Spain had the means to reach the boat despite the distance, but Morocco was unsure that it would be able to get to an area so far from the coast in the middle of the ocean. The process of transferring responsibility from one country to another took several days.

Ca-minando Fronteras continued to monitor the situation and on 27 October, the Spanish authorities informed us that a ship had been sent to the location and that they were waiting for Morocco to take action.

The next day, 28 October, they confirmed that Morocco would take responsibility for coordinating the rescue and that the merchant ship that had initially assisted the migrants was no longer near their boat. Rabat had no updated data on the position of the migrants' boat and told us that it may have continued to drift towards Mauritanian waters.

We spoke to the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Mauritania that day and were told that they had no information. They suggested that we called the authorities in Senegal.

Some hours later, in the afternoon, the Mauritanian authorities confirmed that they would be coordinating the rescue operation.

Powerless to help, the families' anguish grew as the 150 people remained adrift at sea.

On 29 October, we continued to contact the rescue services in Spain, Morocco and Mauritania, but none of them had any information about the boat.

Finally, on 31 October, the boat was carried by the current to Mauritania and arrived in Nouadhibou⁴. When it reached the coast, there were 122 people still alive, including three children, a baby, a teenage boy and six women. There were two corpses in the boat. The survivors explained that 26 people had died during the difficult journey and their corpses had been thrown overboard.

1. In the context of migration, the concept of 'disposable lives' refers to the perception that some migrants are superfluous within global dynamics. Philosophers, such as Achille Mbembe with his analysis of necropolitics, explore how systems of power control mobility and access to basic rights, pushing migrants to the periphery of human society. The term is particularly relevant in contexts where exclusionary migration policies cause migrants to die at the borders, be abandoned in the desert or be rendered invisible because their lives are considered worthless to the dominant system. See: *Necropolitics* (2019) by Achille Mbembe and the studies on forced migration by UNHCR.

2. The concept of 'bare life' is central to the work of Giorgio Agamben and his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995) especially. It describes an existence reduced to biology, stripped of political rights and legal protection and exposed to sovereign violence. Bare life refers to a life that may be excluded from the political community, as we see in refugee camps, prisons and zones of exception. In contemporary contexts, the concept is used to analyse the way in which certain groups (migrants, stateless people) are deprived of their fundamental rights and treated like bodies without political value that are to be managed or discarded by the sovereign power.

3. A search and rescue (SAR) area is an expanse of water assigned to a particular state, which is responsible for coordinating rescue operations to protect people in danger in that area. The concept is defined in the 1979 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue and the boundaries of search and rescue areas can be a source of political tension, especially in places where irregular migration occurs.

4. For more information on the shipwreck, see: "Naufrage en Mauritanie: 25 morts et 125 rescapés, dont 4 dans un état grave". *Pulse* (3 November 2024) <https://www.pulse.sn/news/societe/naufrage-en-mauritanie-25-morts-et-125-rescapes-dont-4-dans-un-etat-grave/1gv6vjfk>



Mauritanian boats in the port of La Restinga, El Hierro.

According to the Mauritanian authorities, 37 people were admitted to hospital and the families began the distressing task of searching for their loved ones among the survivors, fearing that they would be among the dead.

The boat had been at sea for 10 days and none of the countries contacted by the migrants for help had responded by launching rescue operations. Instead, they kept transferring responsibility from one country to another until 28 people had died in an entirely avoidable tragedy.”

These deadly conditions, which are becoming increasingly entrenched, represent a challenge for migrant communities, their families and social organisations as they seek to defend and protect lives. The number of victims continues to grow and the act of documenting deaths or preserving the victims’ memory carries the threat of persecution and stigmatisation.

The authorities responsible for implementing necropolitics do not want these figures to be published or admit that they had been made aware of the risks to lives.

Against this backdrop, self-organisation by migrants’ communities of origin and families is gaining momentum in response to the lack of action by the authorities. While we were preparing this report, we were able to read and review the lists of missing people drawn up in villages in the Sahel, Senegal and Mauritania.

We have also seen lists of boats produced by families in Algeria and Morocco. Thousands of people have gone missing again this year, their absence devastating their communities, families and friends.

Their voices can be heard in this report, crying out at their disappearance and death and questioning their fate. They call for justice and an end to impunity.

Our Human Rights Observatory is a tool to help families in their efforts to find their loved ones, bring justice and preserve the memory of the victims. Every figure presented here represents a life that is gone forever, a death that will go unpunished. Together, they illustrate the failure to safeguard the right to life and the triumph of the grotesque business of the necroborder⁵.

At our Observatory, we work to raise awareness of the causes of deaths among migrants and seek to identify those responsible using a participatory action research (PAR) methodology. The research presented in our reports would not be possible without the primary sources supplying us with data.

Our helplines for people at risk and their family members provide information that is then analysed by our teams. Just like every year, this report aims to provide communities and families with the information they need to bolster their fight to save lives⁶.

It will continue to serve this purpose until these deadly policies are eradicated.

5. The concept of the ‘necroborder’ was developed by sociologist and philosopher Carlos Valencia to describe borders as spaces where migration policies not only seek to prevent transit but also cause or enable the deaths of migrants. It is linked to ‘necropolitics’, a term coined by philosopher Achille Mbembe, who explores how power structures decide who may live and who must die.

6. Another of the documents that we distribute to families and communities is a very simple practical guide to searching for missing people on migration routes. See: Ca-minando Fronteras (2021) Guide for Families of Border Victims. <https://caminandofronteras.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Guide-for-Families-of-Border-Victims.pdf>

10,457
victims

on access routes to
Spain during
the year 2024

30
people

died per day
on the western Euro-African border
during the year 2024

VICTIMS WOMEN AND CHILDREN



421

women

have died attempting to reach Spanish coasts

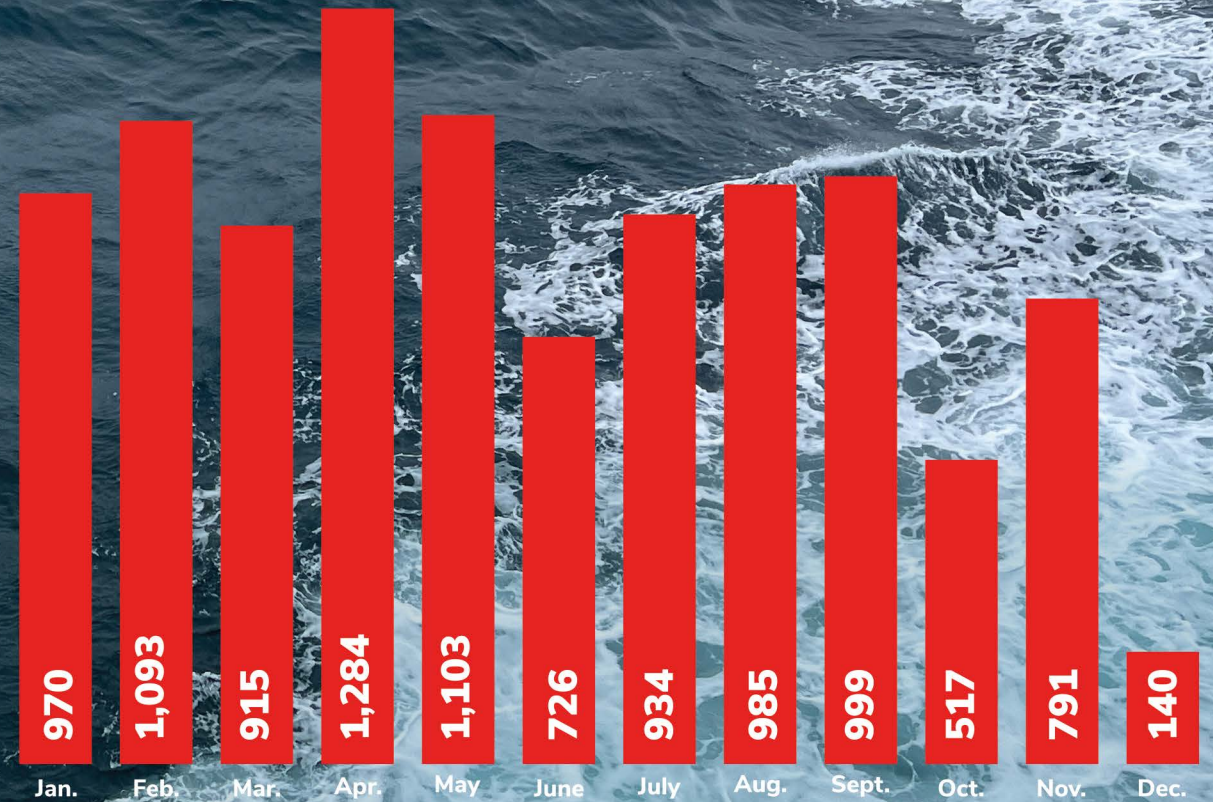


1,538

children

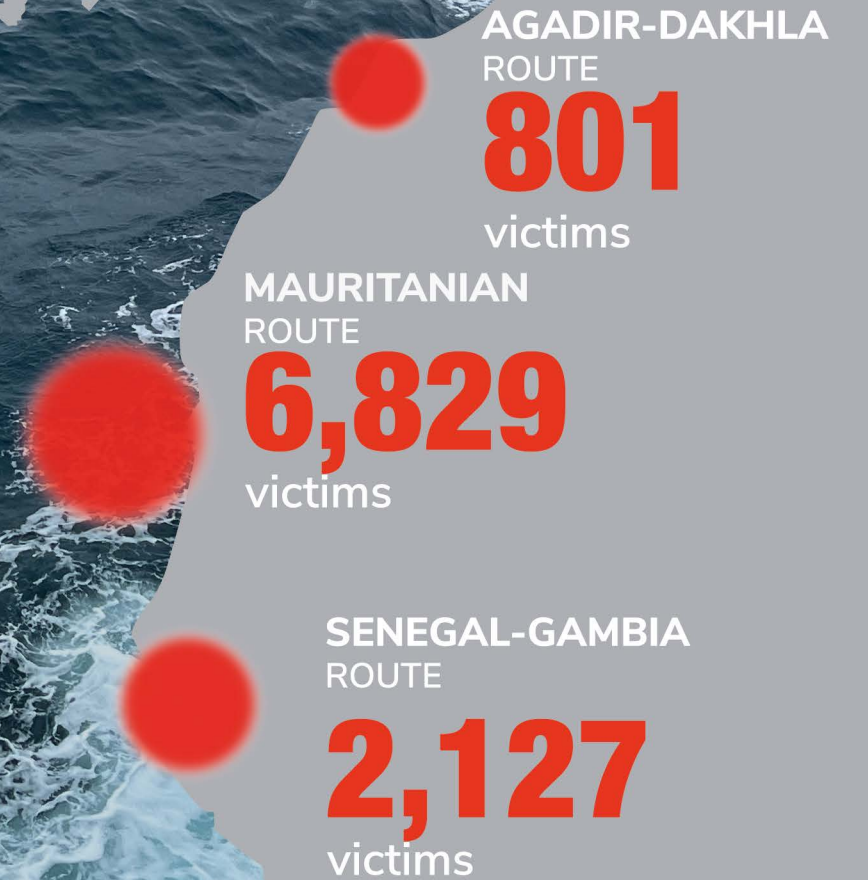
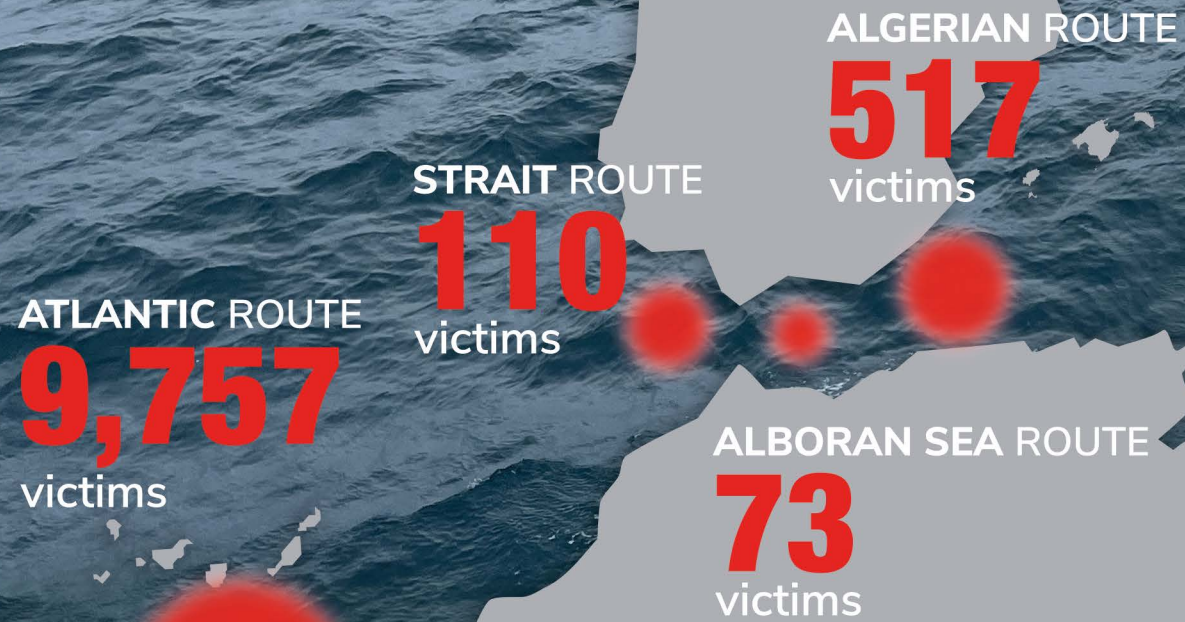
VICTIMS BY MONTHS

April and May account for the majority of victims



VICTIMS OF MARITIME ROUTES

VICTIMS OF THE ATLANTIC ROUTE



MISSING BOATS

131

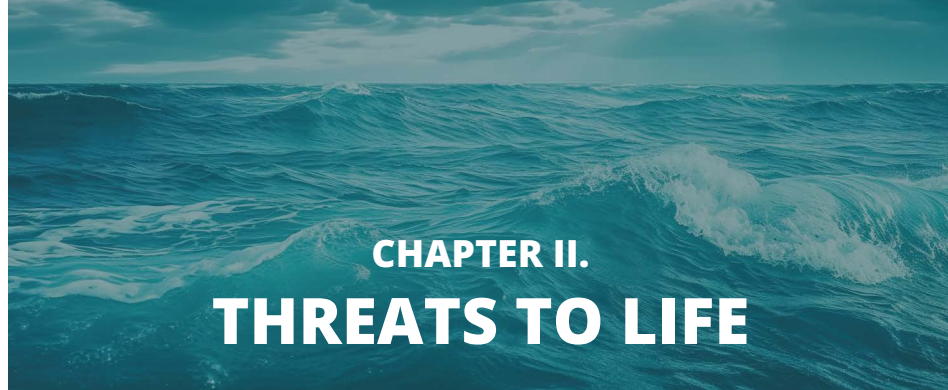
**boats have disappeared
with everyone
on board**

ORIGIN OF THE VICTIMS

**People from 28 countries
have died attempting to reach
Spanish coasts**

Algeria
Bangladesh
Burundi
Burkina Faso
Cameroon
Comoros Islands
Democratic
Republic of
Congo
Egypt
Ethiopia
Gabon
Gambia
Guinea Bissau
Guinea Conakry
Iraq
Mali
Mauritania
Morocco
Nigeria
Pakistan
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Somalia
Sudan
Syria
Tunisia
Yemen





CHAPTER II. THREATS TO LIFE

A human rights crisis is occurring on the migration routes leading to the Spanish State due to the failure to render assistance to people in danger and the prioritisation of migration control over protecting lives. At the borders themselves, the situation is warlike⁷ and increasingly deadly practices pose a threat to human life

Throughout 2024, Ca-minando Fronteras has continued to analyse migration tragedies, identifying an increase in deaths due to the failure to launch rescue operations, the effects of border externalisation and the criminalisation of people on the move.

The findings of our research point to an arbitrary use of search and rescue operations, which are skewed towards migration control, as one of the main causes of deaths at the borders. This widespread practice was identified on every route leading to the Spanish State and has been noted in several of our reports in recent years⁸.

More dangerous routes have become established, such as the Atlantic route towards El Hierro and the Algerian route towards the Balearic Islands, which are considered to be among the riskiest due to their length and difficult conditions. They are a clear example of the impact of deterrence policies on the western Euro-African border⁹. As a result of this trend, boats carrying migrants have gone missing at an alarming rate: the case of the wooden boat that washed up on the coast of the Dominican Republic is particularly illustrative and tragic¹⁰.

People arrive at the start of their maritime journeys in an extremely vulnerable position, prompting them to accept very dangerous conditions that put their lives at risk in the route. Flimsy boats are used, departures take place even in very poor weather and there is a lack of food and water, as well as inadequate navigation equipment. Three of the tragedies documented occurred as a result of violence on board the boats, which was triggered by the extreme conditions in which the migrants were travelling and resulted in shipwrecks that took the lives of 47 people.

Far from being interpreted by states as a sign of vulnerability that requires measures to protect lives, these situations are viewed through the lens of a 'migration war'. In this context, the priority is to prevent people from reaching Europe at the expense of thousands of human lives.

Over the years, this policy has transformed search and rescue services into another instrument for migration control, leading directly to an increase in the numbers of deaths on migration routes.

The failure to launch adequate search and rescue operations has become a recurring practice on these routes. Many boats in danger do not receive immediate assistance, even when their GPS location is provided.

The situation is worsening with the trend towards passive searches¹¹, which are ineffective in emergencies.

Prolonged exposure to risk at sea leads to more deaths. There is only a short window for rescue when migrants set sail on flimsy inflatable boats in the Atlantic and when young people attempt to swim around the breakwater separating Morocco and Ceut.

During our research, it became clear that the search and rescue services took an arbitrary approach to analysing the level of risk facing boats carrying migrants, despite none of the vessels meeting basic nautical safety standards.

This led to delays or inaction even when boats were clearly in danger, abandoning migrants who had called for help in critical conditions and causing avoidable shipwrecks and deaths.

11. In passive searches, the authorities issue an alert to commercial and recreational vessels in the area where the boat in need of rescue is positioned, effectively making them responsible for locating the boat and allowing the public authorities to avoid mobilising rescue operations.



Muslim Cemetery in Melilla.

7. The report 'Guerras de frontera' [Border Wars], published by Centro Delàs in collaboration with the Transnational Institute and Stop Wapenhandel, examines the ways in which the European arms industry benefits from migration tragedies, with a particular focus on sales of arms and security technologies that are used at Europe's borders and in countries transited by refugees. It shows how arms manufacturers have gained business as a result of the intensification of security-based policies at the borders, which have resulted in the militarisation of transit zones. See: https://www.centredelas.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Guerras-de-frontera-web_corregido_web.pdf

8. See: Ca-minando Fronteras (2022) Victims of the necrofrontier 2018-2022. For memory and justice. <https://ca-minandofronteras.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Report-Victims-of-the-necrofrontier-2018-2022.-For-memory-and-justice-Right-to-life-ENG.pdf>

9. These strategies have been widely criticised due to their humanitarian impact, as they make migrants extremely vulnerable to violence, abuse and death on migration routes. Many of these policies contravene the principles of international protection, such as the right to asylum, leading to fierce debate over their morality and efficacy and their potential as a tool to boost profits for arms companies and criminal networks.

10. Ca-minando Fronteras accompanied family members in their search for the boat and was able to identify it when it arrived in the Dominican Republic and provide information to relatives in the migrants' countries of origin. We participated in an investigative television documentary in the Dominican Republic, where we discussed the causes that had led the boat to wash up on the island. See: El informe de Alicia Ortega. Noticias SIN (August 2024) Viaje sin regreso.

Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0Ing0SEgc8>

Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm4XgUKl0hg>



Graves of victims of a boat that sank off the coast of La Restinga, in the La Frontera Cemetery, El Hierro.

12. According to a report by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), people and organisations who defend migrants' rights have come under increasing pressure as a result of policies aimed at deterring migration. As part of these policies, solidarity has been stigmatised and criminalised. See: OMCT and FIDH (2021) Europe: Open Season on Solidarity. https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/Europe-Open-Season-on-Solidarity_2021-11-15-150546_kuut.pdf

Social organisations and migrants' relatives are unwilling witnesses to these practices, which jeopardise the right to life on migration routes.

It is for this reason that the Spanish rescue services continue to criminalise civil society¹², questioning the information provided about people in danger and even threatening those who contact them to raise the alarm.

Monitoring by organisations and family members is vital to reveal the truth about what is happening at the borders¹³.

Negotiations between the Spanish State, Morocco, Senegal and Mauritania prioritise migration control and the geopolitical benefits that come with it over human rights¹⁴.

The focus on intercepting migrants instead of protecting lives transfers responsibility for rescue operations to third countries with limited resources and capacities in exchange for economic and strategic incentives¹⁵.

The distorted interpretation of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea¹⁶ has transformed rescue operations into a daily negotiation in which the fate of people in danger is decided by political interests.

Analysis of the tragedies that occurred in 2024 reveals that a significant number of deaths on migration routes to the Spanish State are not unavoidable accidents, but the direct result of migration policies that prioritize business over the protection of life.

These policies are implemented through:

- ⚠ The failure to provide assistance.
- ⚠ The externalization of responsibilities.
- ⚠ The criminalization of those who seek help or those who provide critical information about the situation at the border.

13. The Office of the Public Prosecutor in Spain launched an investigation into the failure to render assistance to a boat that was shipwrecked in June 2023 on the basis of the monitoring and family support work carried out by Ca-minando Fronteras. See: Agencia EFE (12 July 2023) "La Fiscalía denuncia omisión de socorro en el naufragio de la patera que esperó diez horas a ser rescatada". https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/islas-canarias/2023-07-12/fiscalia-denuncia-naufragio-patera-rescate_3699104

14. Fundación Por Causa (April 2024) Externalización: caos, corrupción y control migratorio bajo la apariencia de cooperación europea. https://porcausa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/InformeExternaliz_COMPLETO_04_25.pdf

15. The report "Financing Militarisation and the Border War in the Mediterranean" examines how Spanish banks such as BBVA and Santander fund the militarisation of the borders in southern Europe, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis by enabling military and border control activities that violate the fundamental rights of migrants and cause deaths at sea. See: https://centredelas.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/informe59_RE_BancaArmada_FinancingBorderWar_ENG_DEF_fin.pdf

16. The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (1974), known as SOLAS, sets out international rules to ensure safe navigation and protect human lives at sea. It also includes clauses on the rescue of people in danger at sea and stipulates that states are obliged to cooperate with rescue operations.

ANALYSIS OF THE TRAGEDIES

Of the 76 tragedies, Ca-minando Fronteras did not have sufficient data to be analyzed and show the preponderance of the causes that produced fatalities.

On the other hand, of the remaining 217 tragedies, the following factors stand out (in the same tragedy, different causes may be concluded):

In 69% of the tragedies analyzed during our intervention, the direct inaction of search and rescue services was decisive in the occurrence of the tragedies.

- **"The necessary search means were not activated"** is present in 27% of the tragedies analyzed.
- **"Delay in the activation of the search"** appears in 17% of the cases. This delay is usually associated with complications in communications between countries.
- **"Lack of coordination between countries"** this problem is present in 10% of the monitored incidents.
- **"No rescue even when there are positions"**, represents 15% of the tragedies analyzed, which shows the difficulty in taking action despite the availability of the location.

Of the rest, the following factors stand out:

- **"Boats that lost their way"**: appears in 29% and refers to navigation difficulties, especially on routes with long distances or adverse weather conditions.
- **"Long distances with insufficient resources"**: is present in 14% and highlights the limitations in rescue resources and the logistical difficulties in dealing with migratory routes.
- **Others: 3%.**

CHAPTER III. WOMEN AND CHILDREN AT THE BORDER: SYSTEMS OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

The denial of the presence of women and children on migration routes, and, by extension, among the victims, is part of a strategy of propaganda aimed at perpetuating the hegemonic narrative¹⁷ on border control.

This invisibilisation may be understood through the lens of the criminalisation of child migrants¹⁸ and structural violence against women¹⁹, which take specific forms at the borders.

In most discourses, especially those that promote racism and hatred, migrant women and children are instrumentalised. These two groups are used to perpetuate a deadly system, on the one hand, and to bolster a propaganda campaign that presents the 'white saviour'²⁰ as the sole guarantor of their survival, on the other.

This chapter analyses the presence of women and children on the routes monitored by Ca-minando Fronteras and the situations and risks that can cause them to fall victim to the border.

Women facing racism, violence and exploitation

The migration routes with the highest percentage of women travellers were the Atlantic routes.

In 2024, women continued to travel on the inflatable boats that set off from the coast between Agadir and Dakhla.

Most of them were transit migrants, who had spent a long time en route and had faced multiple forms of violence and discrimination both in their countries of origin and during their migration journeys.

As migrants, they had suffered racism, rejection and violence from systems that viewed them as a threat to security simply for being on the move.

17. In practice, the hegemonic narrative is often conveyed by the militarisation of the borders, the use of advanced surveillance technology and the strengthening of bilateral agreements between countries to curb irregular migration. This narrative dehumanises migrants, downplaying the tragedies that they face on their journeys and the human rights violations that they suffer. See: Red ACOGE (November 2024) *Inmigracionalismo 10: tratamiento mediático de las migraciones en España*. https://inmigracionalismo.es/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/INFORME_INMIGRACIONALISMO_2024.pdf

18. Hegemonic narratives tend to associate child migrants with criminality or addiction, dehumanising them and denying their rights. See: Jiménez, M. (2019) *Infancia, adolescencia y juventud extranjeras que migran de forma autónoma. Entre la agencia, las moviidades y las fronteras*. <https://journals.antropologi.info/author/mercedes-g-jimenez/>

19. The report entitled "Invisibilizadas: mujeres migrantes en el choque de fronteras" [Invisibilised: Migrant Women at Border Crossings] by Alboan and Entreculturas reveals the multiple forms of violence and rights violations suffered by migrant women, with a particular focus on Central America, Spain's southern border and North Africa. It highlights the way in which migration policies in Europe and North America worsen women's living conditions, exposing many of them to gender-based violence, labour exploitation and social exclusion due to their irregular status. It also shows how these women, despite often being classified homogeneously as 'migrants', have different backgrounds and experiences that are overlooked in migration discourse and policy. See: <https://www.mujaresenmarcha.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/0.-INFO-ME-VF-MeM-Invisibilizadas-nov23.pdf>

20. The concept of the 'white saviour' has been extensively discussed in academic and critical cultural circles and cannot be attributed to a single author. However, it has primarily been explored in the work of authors such as Teju Cole and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who explore the dynamics of power, racism and paternalism in their writing. The concept echoes the figure of the coloniser or intervener, who, by seeking to help racialised communities, perpetuates structures of power and domination.



A woman calls a family member from Senegal.

In these very violent situations, they were exposed to deportation, pushbacks, forced displacement and sexual violence. On the Atlantic routes, women tended to travel with their children, many of whom had been born during their migration journeys, and they were extremely vulnerable as mothers.

They survived through begging, prostitution and low-paid work, where they were frequently exploited. Many women were recruited by trafficking networks that took advantage of the lack of protection in transit countries and the impunity exercised by migration control systems.

“My mother set off from Tan Tan with my little sister, who’s 10 years old. She wanted to protect her, that’s why she had to leave. We haven’t heard from them since 3 November. It’s so distressing. We don’t know if they’re alive or dead. We’re so scared of losing them, there are no words to describe how my family are doing. My mother only wanted to protect my little sister and now she’s dead.

There are only 11 survivors from the inflatable boat they were travelling on, but we don’t know if they’ve found her body. My sister is alive, but she’s in a very serious condition in hospital. We can’t even travel to be there with her.” M., daughter and sister of two victims of border violence.

Women have been present on this route since inflatable boats first began to appear in the Atlantic, representing between 10 and 20% of the migrants on board each boat.

In 2024, there was a considerable increase in the numbers of women travelling on wooden boats from Senegal, Gambia and Mauritania. Many of them described being displaced from their countries of origin, especially those setting off from Mauritania, who had fled armed conflict and the impact of climate change on their regions²¹.

These women come from very poor areas and many are forced to work in conditions of slavery in Mauritania in order to pay for their journey, which they view as a liberation from the structural violence that weighs on them.

Women have also become increasingly prevalent on the Algerian route towards the Balearic Islands. Coming from Central and West Africa, they transit through Libya²² and Tunisia²³, where they face hazards such as slavery, deportation to the desert, systematic sexual violence and racially motivated femicide. These risks have pushed them towards Algeria, where they embark on the most dangerous part of the route in the western Mediterranean.

“I never thought I’d see women being killed just because they were black, because they were women, because they were fleeing, but that’s what happens in Tunisia, they kill you. I’ve lost a lot of companions.

Some of them were killed by the Tunisian marine rescue services who were meant to save us. I was there, I saw it with my own eyes. Nobody can deny it’s true, they punctured our inflatable boat and abandoned us.

Some fishermen took us to the shore and then the soldiers left us in the desert and I saw more women die. We’re nothing to the soldiers in Tunisia, just lumps of meat to be raped and murdered. It’s more than racism, it’s persecution and murder aimed at getting rid of us. Now I’m here in Algeria, I don’t know what’s in store for me here but I’ve been through so much that I’m prepared to face whatever comes.” F.M., a woman from Cameroon.

21. The situation in the Sahel has deteriorated continuously in recent years, with armed conflict affecting several key countries in the region, including Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. According to reports from the United Nations and other international organisations, more than 3.3 million people are estimated to have been forced out of the region due to conflict and the climate crisis, which has exacerbated food insecurity and political tensions. See: <https://eacnur.org/es/actualidad/noticias/emergencias/que-esta-pasando-en-el-sahel-crisis>

22. Amnesty International has documented cases of women in detention centres in Libya, who have been subjected to torture, rape and extortion until their relatives paid a ransom for their release. Some of them have died in custody due to violence or medical negligence. See: <https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/press-release/2020/09/libya-new-evidence-shows-refugees-and-migrants-trapped-in-horrific-cycle-of-abuses/>

23. Doctors Without Borders has compiled accounts by people from sub-Saharan Africa that provide evidence of torture, abuse, arbitrary detention, removal to the desert and violence in Tunisia. See: <https://rebelion.org/tunez-entre-el-mar-la-violencia-o-el-desierto/>

24. Patricia Fernández Vicens criticises the prevalent view of minors as migrants over children. She explains that immigration law often denies child migrants their basic rights, such as adequate protection and presumption of under-age status. In her opinion, “children do not move because of pull factors, but because they are fleeing” in search of safety and rights that are not guaranteed in their countries of origin. See: <https://efe.com/canarias/2023-11-30/fernandez-vicens-los-ninos-migrantes-han-sido-dia-na-del-discurso-de-odio-toca-revertirlo/>

25. Several organisations have condemned the fact that hateful discourses targeting child migrants criminalise and dehumanise them, contravening international principles such as the principle of non-discrimination and the presumption of innocence. At the start of the legal year, the Office of the Public Prosecutor observed that “history will judge us if, when we speak of child migrants, we refer to them as if they were mere merchandise, numbers or stickers to be swapped on the market of words”. See: <https://cadenaser.com/cmadril/2024/01/19/ong-alertan-que-los-discursos-de-odio-como-el-de-ayuso-aumentan-las-agresiones-fisicas-y-verbales-hacia-las-personas-racializadas-y-migrantes-radio-madrid/>
https://www.eldiario.es/politica/fiscal-general-advierte-siembran-semillas-odio-menores-migrantes-historia-juzgara_1_11630550.html

26. Minors rescued at sea or intercepted by the National Police or the Civil Guard are excluded from this protocol, as they receive immediate attention from the state. See: <https://noticias.juridicas.com/actualidad/noticias/19542-canarias-aprueba-un-protocolo-de-recepcion-y-proteccion-de-menores-inmigrantes-no-acompanados/>

27. For more information, see: <https://tiempodecanarias.com/noticia/politica/cronologia-de-un-reparto-meses-sin-acuerdo-para-la-derivacion-de-los-menores-migrantes>
https://www.eldiario.es/canaria-sahora/migraciones/parlamento-canario-vox-coincide-gobierno-reformar-ley-extranjeria-reparto-menores-migrantes_1_11844352.html

28. Save the Children has called for measures to protect child migrants arriving in the Canary Islands and Ceuta. Despite acknowledging the challenges facing many public authorities when it comes to protecting these children, it has demanded structural measures to protect child migrants’ rights and lives. See: <https://www.savethechildren.es/notasprensa/crisis-migratoria-en-canarias-y-ceuta-elegir-entre-dejarlos-desatendidos-o-proteger-sus>

29. Approximately 55% of minors in care in the Balearic Islands are child migrants. See: <https://www.europapress.es/illes-balears/noticia-mallorca-pide-celeridad-delegacion-gobierno-cecion-espacios-acoger-menores-migrantes-20241108135520.html>

Child migrants: vulnerability and challenges at border crossings

The presence of children and teenagers on the Atlantic route, in the Strait of Gibraltar and on the route to the Balearic Islands rose significantly this year, but protection and guarantees of safety from the public authorities were severely lacking. 2024 was characterised by the trading of responsibilities between the Spanish institutions tasked with protecting child migrants. While the situation is devastating for children who survive the migration journey, it is even worse when they join the ranks of the dead and missing and are stripped of all dignity.

“I’ve lost my two children, my only children. I had to shut their eyes and drop their bodies into the sea. They put us on the boat, there was no GPS or food and the engine broke.

We called for help, but nobody came. We spent 11 days at sea. My children were dying, I gave them my ration of food but they were dying.

They passed away in my arms. My little girl, my little boy, my darlings. I couldn’t save them. I ask Allah to kill me too, that’s all I want now.” M.C., a woman from Guinea.

Viewing minors as migrants rather than children is a common practice in government discourses and administrative and institutional practices²⁴. Along with the instrumentalisation of child and teenage migrants as a bargaining tool between politicians, this vision makes them the target of hateful discourse²⁵.

The Canary Islands Government activated a protocol²⁶ whereby child and teenage migrants arriving on the islands were protected purely on the grounds that they were in police custody, with no need to declare them to have been abandoned in order for them to be taken under the care of the child protection services.

Attempts were made to implement the protocol following a request from the authorities on the Canary Islands, which were calling for children to be sent to other parts of the Spanish State due to the saturation of the islands’ facilities²⁷.

In the current political context, where debate focuses on saturated facilities, protection, criminalisation and stigmatisation in the Canary Islands, Ceuta²⁸ and the Balearic Islands²⁹, many children and teenagers have gone missing and are overlooked by the public authorities, exposing them to serious threats to their physical and mental health.

Into the sea

In Ceuta, swimming remains one of the main methods used to cross the border, especially for children and teenagers from Morocco and Algeria.

Although a small number of girls have attempted to make the crossing in this manner in recent months³⁰, the majority are boys from Morocco and other parts of North Africa, such as Tunisia and Algeria. In recent years, younger children have tried to swim across the border, including some aged under 10 years old.

The dynamics of migration from Morocco remain similar to those observed previously on this route, with socioeconomic decline, poor prospects and limited access to rights being the main drivers of migration among young people especially³¹.

The terrible conditions on this border crossing are the most precarious of all migration routes along the western Euro-African border. Some children jump into the sea wearing wetsuits, while others have little more than a buoyancy aid. They prefer poor weather conditions to avoid being detected by surveillance systems³².

The Atlantic: the children’s route

Located on a former military base in Las Palmas, the Canarias 50 Centre houses adult migrants, including men and women with children. Although officially there should not be any children at the centre, children who have not been identified as such live alongside the adults.

“You can see them in the street, in groups, holding hands and playing like the children that they are. You can see they are children straightaway. How is it possible that they’re not with the child protection services? There are multiple reasons for this: the system is saturated and fails to identify them as minors, someone advises them to say they’re adults or they prefer to travel on to Europe and wish to avoid being classed as children.

Many children are going missing. Given that there are more and more child migrants on this route, this lack of protection raises questions. What has happened to them? Where do they end up?” explains an expert.

In 2024, there was a considerable increase in the number of children coming from Mali. The spread of armed conflict had heightened fears of forced recruitment, kidnapping for forced labour and widespread violence.

30. Echarri, C. (12 October 2024) “Wisal, la menor que quiso cruzar a Ceuta: ‘Me enfrenté a la muerte’”. El Faro de Ceuta. <https://elfarodeceuta.es/wisal-menor-qui-so-cruzar-ceuta-enfrente-muerte/>

31. Jiménez, M. (2011) Intrusos en la fortaleza: menores marroquíes migrantes en la frontera sur de Europa. <https://repositorio.uam.es/handle/10486/6842>

32. Echarri, C. (16 August 2024) “Cientos de marroquíes intentan cruzar a Ceuta en una noche de niebla”. El Faro de Ceuta. <https://elfarodeceuta.es/cientos-marroquies-intentan-cruzar-ceuta-noche-niebla/>



Children play with their mothers in Morocco.

These conditions had prompted many families to prioritise sending their children away for their own protection.

Climate change also played a key role in the region, worsening desertification in the north and east of Mali and triggering internal displacement and conflict over natural resources.

Farmers, especially those from the Fulani ethnic group, struggled to find pastures and that led to increased competition for land and clashes between communities.

“In parts of the Sahel, migration has shifted from being a family and community project and an investment in the future to a strategy for protection.

Families send their children away, even at a very young age, to save them from violence or a lack of opportunities, despite their central role in subsistence economies.” P.F, expert on asylum.

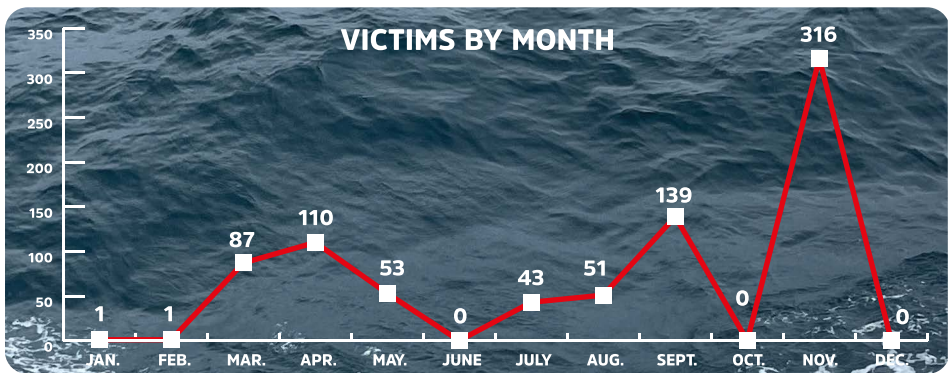
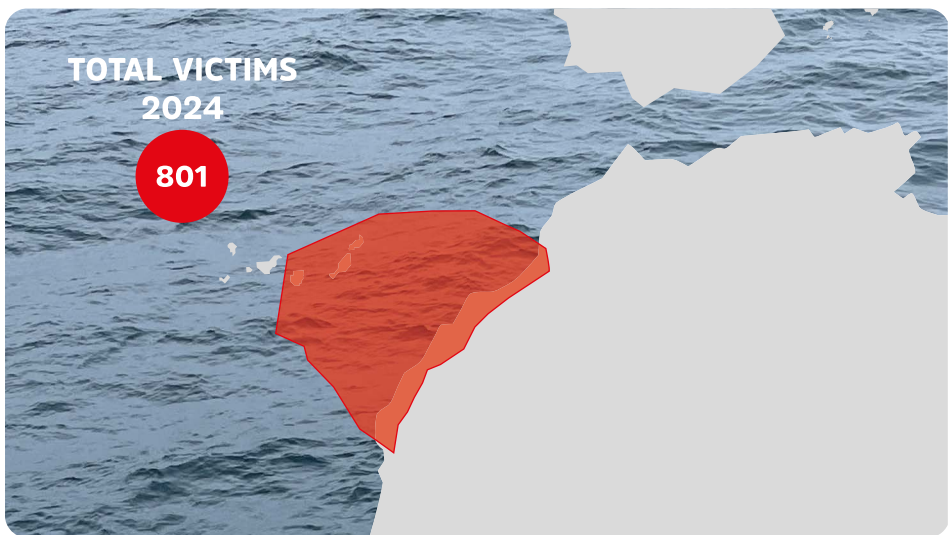
Meanwhile, girls and young women were also setting off on Atlantic routes from Guinea, Ivory Coast and Senegal. They had left their countries in an attempt to escape forced marriage, genital mutilation and structural violence against women³³.

In some areas in conflict, the practice of kidnapping girls and forcing them to marry soldiers continued. The issue facing these girls is that many of them are not identified as children due to shortcomings in the system or because they are encouraged by other adults to declare themselves as such, leaving them without protection and vulnerable to danger.

33. Op. cit. Nb: 19. (Invisibilizadas. Mujeres migrantes en el cruce de fronteras).

CHAPTER IV. ATLANTIC ROUTES

THE AGADIR/DAKHLA ROUTE



Since 2019, the migration route departing from the coast between Agadir and Dakhla has become established as a route primarily travelled by inflatable boats similar to those used on the Mediterranean routes.

These boats, known as ‘zodiacs’ among migrants, are extremely flimsy and very dangerous in the Atlantic, where the sea is much rougher than in the Mediterranean.



Boats in Mbour, Senegal.

CA-MINANDO FRONTERAS HAS MONITORED 21 TRAGEDIES, INCLUDING 12 MISSING BOATS, WITH A TOTAL OF 801 VICTIMS.

As in 2023, our Human Rights Observatory observed a pattern of multiple departures within short periods of time.

This practice heightens the risk of tragedy and demonstrates the need to bolster search and rescue services and ensure effective coordination between the states responsible for protecting the right to life along this route.

In 2024, there was an increase in the number of mixed inflatable boats carrying people from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan African transit migrants, most of whom came from West Africa, especially Guinea Conakry, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Mali, and East Africa, especially Sudan. Asian people were also observed, the majority of whom were from Bangladesh.

The number of victims began to rise in March and tragedies became considerably more prevalent in the last quarter of the year. Most of the shipwrecks recorded on this route occurred on boats that had set off from the Tan Tan region. Boats are now departing from areas that are further and further away from the Canary Islands.

As noted in Chapter III, a considerable number of transit migrants travelling on inflatable boats are women who have spent long periods of time in Morocco and have children, many of whom were born during their migration journeys. These women were primarily fleeing armed conflict, structural violence and exploitation in their countries of origin and transit.

The area between Agadir and Dakhla is the most illustrative of the way in which migration control practices based on externalisation are prioritised over protecting lives³⁴. Relations between the Spanish State and Morocco are shaped not only by bilateral agreements on migration but also by the wider geopolitical context in the region.

34. See: <https://apnews.com/article/39f71aa1da0bf20d28b28adcc62af8b1>

In our research, we have observed how unwritten protocols are applied on a daily basis, with the Spanish State putting pressure on Morocco to manage rescues through its search and rescue services. Instead of protecting lives, negotiations around search and rescue operations are based on political interests.

“The main thing is to stop them reaching Spain, nothing else matters. It doesn’t matter if our young people do not survive. That’s the idea and our communities have a very clear vision of the reality. They know that there is a high risk of death, not only because of the dangers along the way but also because of political decisions that leave them to die. It’s nothing new, it’s easier now because the machine is well-oiled, as they say. They’ve been doing it for a long time and they all know now what they have to do. Spain tells Morocco to go, Morocco may or may not go, what’s important is that it has said it will and so Spain is no longer responsible. What happens next is our story, the story of our dead, the story of our drowned, the story of our fight for life.”
C.A., Guinean leader.

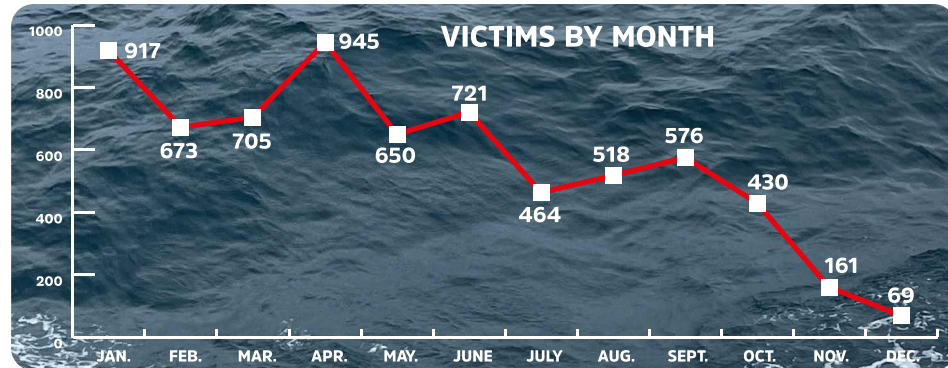
An analysis of the tragedies on this route reveals a combination of factors that exacerbate the situation. Overloading of flimsy boats, which will only float for a short time, leads to shipwrecks when the response from the rescue services is delayed or inadequate. In the area between Agadir and Dakhla, several tragedies occurred despite the rescue services having the exact GPS location of the boat in distress.

Although the presence of the Canary Islands Regional Coordination Centre (CCRC)³⁵ ensures that alerts issued by social organisations and family members are received, the Spanish maritime search and rescue services in the region are often sceptical of the information that they are given about the position of boats, questioning and criminalising social organisations, family members and victims. The way in which migration control systems operate, perversely using public institutions tasked with protecting life for the purposes of border control, is more than apparent in this region.

“We’re sinking, one of the inflatables is completely flat, there are people in the water already, we’re holding onto them so that they don’t drift away from the boat. We’ve been calling for hours, you’ve got our position, why isn’t anyone coming? We’ve called them all, they say Morocco is coming but nothing’s happening. They need to send something, even if it’s a plane. We won’t be able to hold on much longer, we’re all going to drown, nobody has mercy on us, may Allah spare us.” call received on our helpline from a sinking inflatable boat.

35. The CCRC was founded on 6 October 2006 with the aim of organising “actions to tackle illegal immigration in the Canary Islands”. For more information, see: https://www.guardiacivil.es/es/institucional/actividadesInstitucionales/actos/10_06.html

THE MAURITANIAN ROUTE



With the majority of the tragedies investigated in this report taking place on the route from Mauritania to the Canary Islands, it has become established as one of the busiest, most dangerous migration routes in 2024 due to shortcomings in rescue and protection mechanisms.

Wooden boats setting off from Mauritania accounted for a significant proportion of migration towards the Spanish State and this route saw more tragedies than any other.

OUR HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVATORY MONITORED 110 TRAGEDIES, WITH A TOTAL OF 6,829 VICTIMS AND 79 BOATS THAT REMAIN MISSING.

Departures by sea from Mauritania continued even during appalling weather conditions. The months between January and April were the deadliest.

The vessels on this route mostly carry people who are transiting through Mauritania, most of whom come from the Sahel region and are fleeing armed conflict, the effects of climate change and the various forms of violence associated with these phenomena, including labour exploitation, forced recruitment, forced marriage and sex trafficking, among others³⁶.

In 2024, there was a considerable rise in child and teenage potential refugees on this migration route. The number of women from parts of the Sahel where migrants were traditionally men also increased, giving rise to an incipient feminisation of the migration journey and departures from Mauritania.

In some areas, a resurgence of practices akin to slavery was documented. Families who had attained a degree of autonomy were reclaimed by their former owners as a result of famine and poor crop yields.

Forced labour in gold mines, recruitment to the military and paramilitary groups tasked with protecting the interests of extractivist companies combined to create a dangerous situation that prompted people to flee their countries in search of protection.

“They closed the border between Mauritania and Mali because of the attacks and we ended up stuck there, there were a lot of us. We thought the rebel groups would kill us but we held out in the middle of the desert. I lost sight of two of my friends and I don’t know where they are, but I managed to get across to Mauritania. I’d left home two months earlier; my neighbours had been recruited by military groups and I didn’t have it in me to kill anyone or pick up a gun. That’s why I thought that if I died at sea, it would be Allah’s will. I know that many young people disappear, they’re swallowed up by the sea. In my village, many brothers went missing on a wooden boat that set off in January and nobody knows where they are. The only person who knew I was going to cross the sea was my sister. I told her because I thought they’d gone for two months without hearing from me and if I died, at least my sister could explain to my father and apologise on my behalf. I’m here in Spain, thanks be to God, but I want to go to France.” M.S, Malian teenager, 16 years old.

In the last year, several border control agreements have been adopted. The migration partnership agreement signed by the European Union, Spain and Mauritania is aimed primarily at controlling migration and enhancing border security.

36. See: Soler Crespo, D. (19 September 2024) “La crisis yihadista en el Sahel agrava las migraciones”. Alfa y Omega. <https://alfayomega.es/la-crisis-yihadista-en-el-sahel-agrava-las-migraciones/>

The measures agreed include conducting joint research, training and equipping the Mauritanian security forces through Frontex and developing initiatives to improve search and rescue operations³⁷.

Although the agreement contains measures for search and rescue, our monitoring during 2024 revealed that despite receiving alerts from boats in distress, in most cases no search and rescue operation was launched to protect lives.

Meanwhile, the European Union has invested 210 million euros to enhance Mauritania's capacity to manage migration flows, including refugee reception and protection, and to facilitate the return and readmission of Mauritanian nationals with irregular status in Europe.

Despite the large sums of money invested, the appalling numbers of victims on this migration route show that there has been no impact on the protection of human rights³⁸.

According to our research, the response by the authorities to these tragedies has been inadequate. In the case of boats reported to be drifting, search and rescue operations are limited by the large size of the area and the lack of specialist teams to respond quickly

The Moroccan and Spanish authorities have worked together on some of these operations, but a lack of adequate means and delays in rescue operations were recurring problems.

In some of the cases documented, the maritime authorities were notified of boats in distress but took a long time to launch rescue operations. This pattern points to shortcomings in rescue protocols and poor coordination between the countries involved.

"The boat began to drift; we were being carried away by the waves. We were all really tired and when you saw someone sitting quietly, no longer crying or praying, it was because they were dying.

Lives were extinguished one after another and I thought I'd be next but it was my brother. I told him not to drink seawater, to hold on, but he kept drinking, then vomiting, and then he sat down and stopped speaking.

I couldn't bring myself to throw his body overboard, some other people did it. As well as my brother, I saw a whole family die. The father ended up throwing himself into the sea once he'd dropped the last of his children into the water.



The brother of a victim prays at the port of La Restinga, in front of the Maritime Rescue boat.

We had no strength left to stop him. I felt nothing when we were finally rescued. I had no strength in my body or soul. You're asking me if someone is helping me, if I've told anyone what I've seen, what I've suffered, and the answer is no.

Nobody is interested so I leave it all up to Allah. I only want to keep moving to France, work and help my family.

Well, there's one more thing I want. Do you know what it is? I want to be able to sleep without seeing the faces of everyone who died when I close my eyes." T.D., Malian shipwreck survivor.

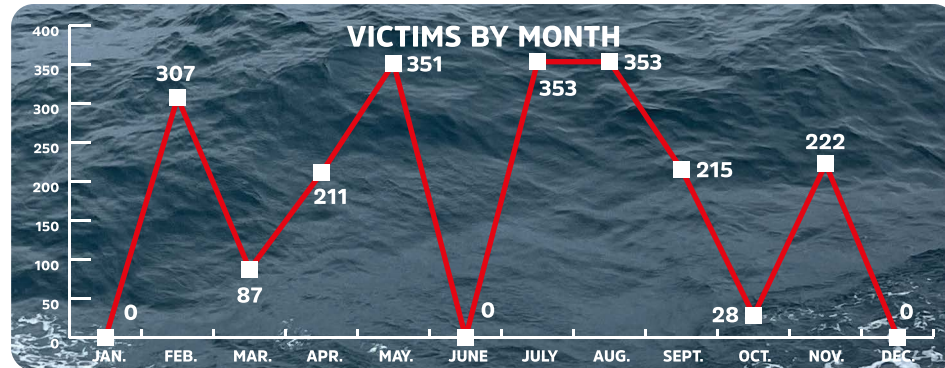
This pattern of inadequate responses reveals the shortcomings of the rescue system and the failure to protect migrants in emergency situations.

In many cases, the situation could have been handled more effectively if there had been a genuine commitment to human rights and migrant protection on these high-risk routes.

37. See: <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2024/09/30/pdfs/BOE-A-2024-19575.pdf>

38. Martín, M.; Hierro, L. & Stacey, D. (21 May 2024) "Detenciones masivas y traslados forzados: así se destierra con dinero europeo a migrantes en el norte de África". El País. <https://elpais.com/internacional/2024-05-21/detenciones-masivas-y-traslados-forzados-asi-se-destierra-con-dinero-europeo-a-migrantes-en-el-norte-de-africa.html>

THE SENEGAL-GAMBIA ROUTE



The number of departures from Senegal and Gambia has declined considerably since 2023, particularly during the first few months of the year, but rose again to normal levels from the second quarter.

In 2024, there were far fewer people travelling on this route and fewer tragedies as a result.

Our research shows that this situation may be explained by the level of political stability in the region and the hope of further improvements.

OUR HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVATORY MONITORED 26 TRAGEDIES, WITH A TOTAL OF 2,127 VICTIMS AND 8 BOATS THAT REMAIN MISSING.

Nevertheless, the number of victims on this route remained alarming and may be attributed to the sheer number of people travelling on the boats and the inadequate search and rescue operations launched when alerts are received³⁹. As in 2023, a considerable proportion of the people on this route were children and there was also an increase in the number of women and families on the boats.

“I’ve lost my whole family, all of them. I can’t go outside, I’m dying of heartbreak and shame, I can’t look my neighbours in the eye. My mother and all my brothers and sisters died at sea. I was in my ancestral village when I was told that my mother and siblings had boarded a boat to travel to the Canary Islands. My mother was desperate to give us a future, to get her daughters out of here, and I can’t blame her.

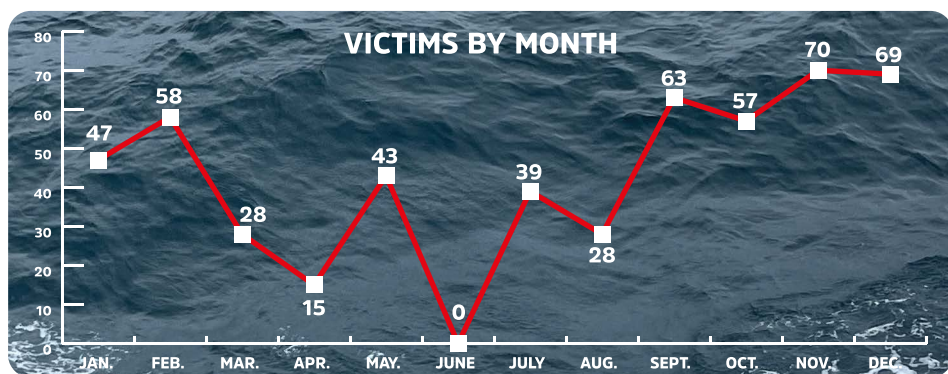
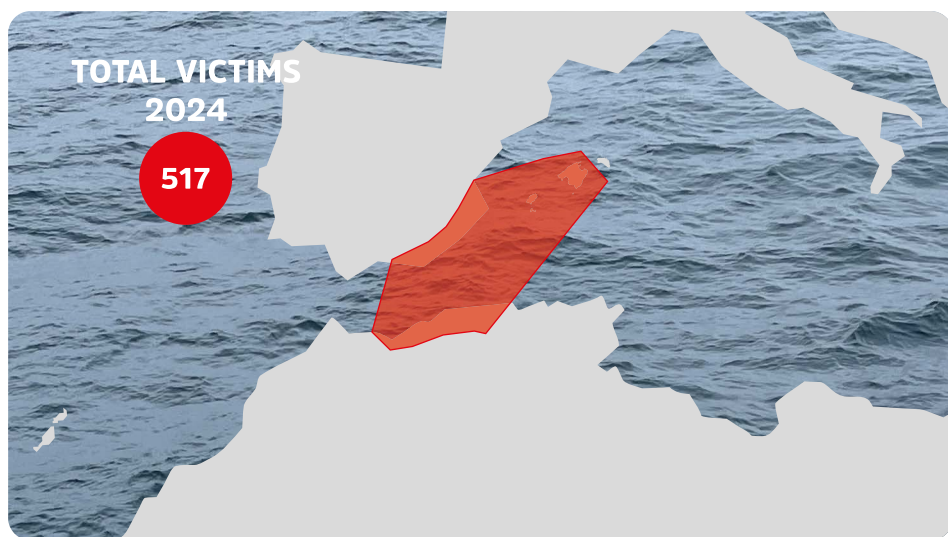
The boat was there, a lot of people got on without paying and they fled the village. But it all happened so quickly that they didn’t prepare for the trip, I don’t know if they had food, water or GPS, maybe that’s why they disappeared. During the first few days, I was waiting for news that they’d arrived but weeks went by and we heard nothing, months went by and we’ve still had no news. In the village, they’re telling me we need to perform a sacrifice for their souls, we’re Muslims and we have to pray and do our rituals, but I can’t contemplate doing it without the bodies. I want proof that they’re dead. I know that other families have already done the ceremony, but I don’t want to confirm the deaths to my grandmother and my uncles and aunts. So, I tell them I’m still looking, they might be detained in Morocco, I need to look a bit longer. I’m alone, so alone. They all left and they left me here alone. Perhaps I should have died at sea too.” K.L., daughter of a victim.

The tragedies recorded here show that current search and rescue practices are inadequate for the complexity of these routes and that effective protocols and improved search and rescue resources at sea would help save lives and mitigate the impact of shipwrecks.

39. Agencia EFE. Gran Canaria recibe el mayor cayuco de su historia, con 231 personas, 58 de ellas menores. El Confidencial. https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/islas-canarias/2024-10-21/gran-canaria-cayuco-historia-321personas_3987255/

CHAPTER V. MEDITERRANEAN ROUTES

THE ALGERIAN ROUTE IN THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN



This migration route is the busiest in terms of the number of people travelling on it, as well as the most dangerous of the Mediterranean routes leading towards the Spanish State.

OUR HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVATORY MONITORED 43 TRAGEDIES, WITH A TOTAL OF 517 VICTIMS AND 26 BOATS THAT REMAIN MISSING.

The Algerian route became established in 2020, although there had been a considerable rise in the number of boats departing from Algeria and heading for the coast between Almería and Alicante in previous years. In 2024, the emerging trend for growing numbers of people to head for the Balearic Islands, the most dangerous part of this route, continued.

This year, the area from which the boats departed stretched towards Algiers and the coastline to the east of the capital and the route taken passed through the central Mediterranean.

The longer distances and greater risk of getting lost and ending up in the deepest parts of the Mediterranean made the crossing more dangerous for migrants taking this route. There was a significant shift in the characteristics of the people crossing the Mediterranean via the Algerian route. Whereas people from Algeria were once predominant, there is now a growing number of people from the Sahel, West Africa, East Africa and Asia. Among other nationalities, there were migrants from Syria, Palestine and Yemen. Although the majority continue to be Algerian, 40% of the people using this route now come from other regions.

The consolidation of the Balearic Islands route was accompanied by a rise in the numbers of minors arriving on the islands. As well as teenagers travelling alone, there were also young children, most of whom were accompanied by their mothers. Many of them had crossed Libya and Tunisia and been pushed back to the desert, where they suffered appalling violence and watched numerous people die as a result of their abandonment and the application of migration controls⁴⁰.

The deportation of migrants from Tunisia to the Algerian desert triggered a serious humanitarian crisis in 2024. The Tunisian authorities abandoned thousands of people, including refugees, women, children and teenagers, in desert areas with no access to food or water⁴¹. These practices have been documented since 2023 and grew more prevalent in 2024 after the Tunisian president Kais Saied introduced harsher migration policies, diverting people to Algeria. The new measures are the result of pressure from the European Union, which has sent funds to Tunisia to control migration in the region⁴².

Among the people travelling on this route are women in transit, many of whom are pregnant or have children. Some of these children are the product of the violence suffered by women as part of border control practices. The human rights violations that they experience are similar to those faced by women crossing Morocco and Mauritania, making these transit countries a very dangerous place for women and children.

40. Holleis, J. & Guizani, T. Túnez: miles de migrantes "abandonados" en el desierto. DW. <https://www.dw.com/es/1%C3%B1ez-miles-de-migrantes-abandonados-en-el-desierto/a-69183088>

41. See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/04/joint-statement-tunisia-not-place-safety-people-rescued-sea>

42. For information on the human rights consequences of the agreement between Tunisia and the European Union, see: <https://timep.org/2023/10/19/the-eu-tunisia-memorandum-of-understanding-a-blueprint-for-cooperation-on-migration/>



Burial of a young girl in the San José Cemetery on the island of Ibiza.

Shocking images emerged in 2024 of people begging for help after they had been deported to the border between Algeria and Libya and abandoned⁴³.

“We saw women carrying babies die and we couldn’t do anything to help them. As you walked through the desert, you’d see the bodies, the bones.

Those images are impossible to forget, we can’t erase them but we have to keep going. I have nightmares every day. Some of the survivors sought ‘refuge’ in Algeria, if you can call it refuge, because we’re persecuted here too. One thing is certain though, we can’t go back.” A.D., Malian refugee.

When it comes to shipwrecks, there is a serious lack of transparency regarding search operations to find people missing at sea in the area around the Balearic Islands.

Passive searches near the coast are most prevalent and there is little cooperation between the countries that should share responsibility for rescue operations, including Algeria and France.

The criminalisation by the public authorities of social organisations and migrants’ relatives when they raise the alarm over a boat in distress or attempt to find missing people is increasingly concerning on this part of the route.

In 2024, Ca-minando Fronteras received threats on several occasions when it contacted the rescue services to alert them to boats in danger.

While the work of social organisations and family members was stigmatised by the public authorities and they were denied relevant information, several networks that were extorting money from migrants’ relatives were dismantled and found to be receiving inside information that enabled them to continue their scams⁴⁴.

Based on media reports, the investigation began in Cartagena but was extended to Murcia, Alicante, Almería and the Balearic Islands⁴⁵. As well as the people detained and charged, advisers to Spain’s central government are also being investigated⁴⁶.

The people alleged to belong to this network held information that allowed them to trick family members and charge them money for telling them that their loved ones were alive. They even went as far as to show them photos of autopsies and to tell the families that the corpses belonged to their missing relatives.

“A Spanish man who said he worked with migrants asked me for 5,000 euros in exchange for telling me where my sister’s body had washed up along the Spanish coast. I didn’t want to pay it, it didn’t feel safe, but I was desperate so I contacted your organisation and I travelled from France to Murcia to report her missing. I did the DNA test but after some time I still hadn’t received an answer.

Those men kept writing to me and asking for 5,000 euros. They told me they were 100% certain where my sister was. After I’d reported her missing, with your help I was able to find out from the police that her body was in Ibiza. It had been there for a long time.

The lawyer from your organisation did all the paperwork needed to bury my sister’s body in Algeria for free. I didn’t pay the 5,000 euros, but a lot of families do pay. You’re grieving and vulnerable, so you end up paying.” H.B., relative of a woman who died en route.

An analysis of the tragedies that occurred along this route reveals serious shortcomings in search and rescue protocols.

Alerts from family members often arrive too late, reducing the prospects of a successful rescue. In other cases, even if the alert was sent promptly, there were insufficient search and rescue resources to locate and save the lives of people in danger.

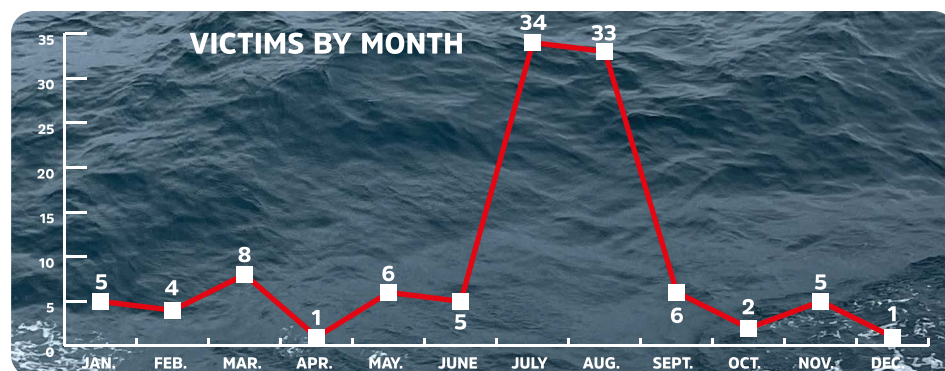
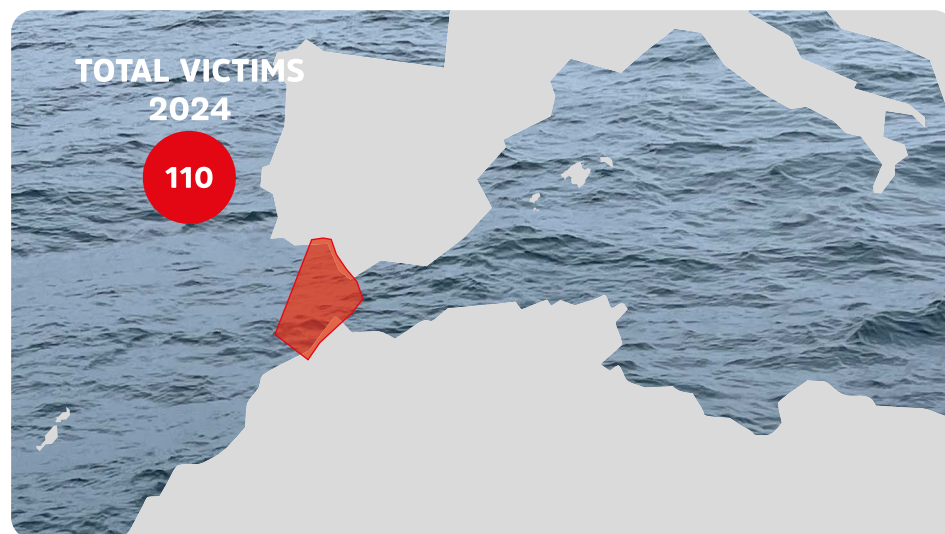
44. González, J. A. (11 March 2024). Veinte investigados en la Región de Murcia por anomalías en la identificación de cuerpos de argelinos. La Verdad de Murcia. <https://www.laverdad.es/murcia/veinte-investigados-cartagena-anomalias-identificacion-cuerpos-argelinos-20240311074652-nt.html>

45. Martín M. (9 June 2024). Competencia feroz entre funerarias: mordidas, engaños a las familias y fotos de cadáveres. El País. <https://elpais.com/espana/2024-06-09/competencia-feroz-entre-funerarias-mordidas-enganos-a-las-familias-y-fotos-de-cadaveres.html>

46. González, J. A. (26 May 2024). Investigan si el líder de la trama de los cadáveres traficó también con órganos en Marruecos. La Verdad de Murcia. <https://www.laverdad.es/murcia/investigan-lider-trama-cadaveres-traffic-organos-20240526081440-nt.html>

43. Speakman Cordall, S. (12 September 2024). In Tunisia, refugees and migrants are expelled to the desert, left helpless. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/12/in-tunisia-refugees-and-migrants-are-expelled-to-the-desert-left-helpless>

THE STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR ROUTE



In 2024, the Strait of Gibraltar route was marked by the deaths of children and teenagers as they attempted to swim to Ceuta, especially in the area around Tarajal Beach.

OUR HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVATORY MONITORED 79 TRAGEDIES, WITH A TOTAL OF 110 VICTIMS AND 5 BOATS THAT REMAIN MISSING.

On this route, the situation facing young people is so terrible that 20% of the victims are minors, representing the highest proportion recorded on migration routes leading to the Spanish State. The migration of children and young people underwent significant changes when the borders were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, cutting off the cities around Ceuta and limiting opportunities for work and future prospects.

Many of the children and young people came from the north of Morocco, especially Castillejos, Tetouan, Tangier and Kesar Sghir, as well as from rural areas such as Beni Ahmad, and regions in Morocco like Sale, Fez, Meknes and Kalaat Serghena. In the past, the desire to make the crossing was motivated by its proximity; today, social networks are playing an important role in migration in the region.

Crossings on this route are very dangerous and migrants use makeshift buoyancy aids. At best, children and young people wear wetsuits to help them float⁴⁷. Deaths on this route are closely correlated with the flimsy vessels used by migrants and the focus on migration control among rescue services represents a considerable danger, which is exacerbated by the fact that young people opt to attempt the crossing in foggy weather to avoid being detected⁴⁸.

“I’ve tried to cross the border to Ceuta more than once. Eight times, actually. I succeeded on the ninth. Before that, I was caught by the Moroccan police and they hit me after putting me in their patrol car. Sometimes, they’d take me to Fez and leave me in the street, naked apart from my swimming trunks. You feel humiliated and terrified. I only wanted to get into Ceuta to work and be able to help my family and my mother.

The time I managed it, it was a foggy night in August. I was wearing a blue wetsuit. I started swimming at midnight, it took me about 12 hours to get there. I’d swim and rest every two hours; the tide helped me a lot. It was night and the water was cold, my feet were hurting, but I kept going and resting. I reached the shore by the mosque, you couldn’t see anything, there was a lot of fog but the sea was calm. When I arrived, it was daylight. I was exhausted, my whole body hurt. This time, I was alone when I arrived but the other times I was with friends. Some of them managed to get there and we don’t know what happened to the others. In my neighbourhood, lots of boys went missing when they were trying to cross the border to Ceuta, nobody knows where they are but I think they’re dead. [He falls silent] Do you know when I’ll be able to see my mum again?” A.M., 15-year-old boy from Tetouan.

Once carried out in secret to avoid controls, in 2024, calls began to be sent out via networks for migrants to attempt to cross the border together⁴⁹. Some teenage girls also swim across the border to Ceuta, although they do not tend to be visible in the streets. These dangerous migration practices are exacerbated by the lack of any response from the government besides migration control measures, despite more resources being needed to protect lives.

47. Echarri, C. (3 July 2024). Cruzando fronteras con manguitos. El Faro de Ceuta. <https://elfarodeceuta.es/cruzando-fronteras-manguitos/>

48. Op. cit. Nbr. 32. (Echarri, C.).

49. Bouaziz, F.Z. (16 September 2024). Los jóvenes quieren cruzar a Ceuta: Adam, y otros dos chicos vuelven este lunes a sus ciudades después de haber intentado este domingo cruzar a Ceuta siguiendo un llamamiento en redes sociales. El Faro de Ceuta/EFE. <https://elfarodeceuta.es/jovenes-quieren-cruzar-ceuta-espana-van-ayudar-porque-soy-menor/>



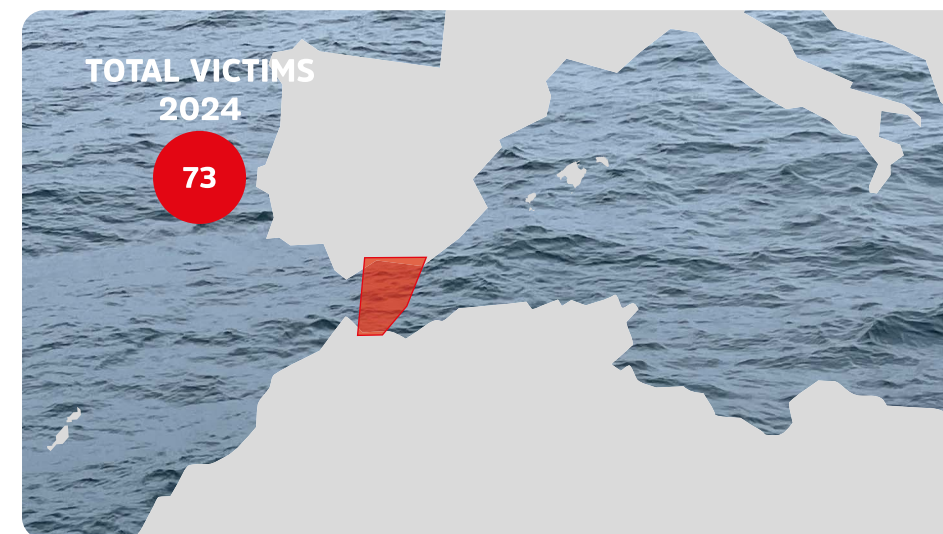
Settlement of people in the city of Casablanca, Morocco.

Those who are unable to cross the border successfully often try over and over again. Ca-minando Fronteras heard accounts from teenagers who had attempted the crossing up to ten times, some of whom had lost friends in the process. Grief for their friends who had gone missing on this route stayed with the young people who succeeded in crossing, as well as among those left behind in their neighbourhoods of origin.

The numbers of people going missing rose considerably in 2024, but there are no institutional protocols in place to launch search operations. Family members coordinate with other migrants who have made it across the border or contact social organisations led by people of Moroccan origin. The Faro de Ceuta newspaper has become a key source of reference, publishing photos of missing children and teenagers, which are also used by families when corpses are found in Ceuta.

“Many bodies wash up in Ceuta in a very poor condition after spending a long time at sea. Some of them have been partially eaten by the fish. There are some really awful cases. Once a torso arrived. There are bodies that have been identified whose relatives can’t afford to repatriate them, but they’re given a decent burial in Ceuta. Like the rest, we try to add their names and surnames and not just assign them a number. If they haven’t been identified, we’ve got no choice but to give them a number. For the families and for anyone with a bit of humanity, it’s very important to identify them.” community leader.

THE ALBORAN SEA ROUTE



The Alboran Sea route saw the fewest tragedies of any route to the Spanish State in 2024.

As in the Strait of Gibraltar, the majority of the victims on this migration route died while attempting to swim to Melilla in extremely dangerous conditions.

Migrants also went missing from boats and jet skis when attempting to cross from the area around Nador to the coasts of Granada and Almeria.

OUR HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVATORY MONITORED 14 TRAGEDIES, WITH A TOTAL OF 73 VICTIMS AND ONE BOAT THAT REMAINS MISSING.



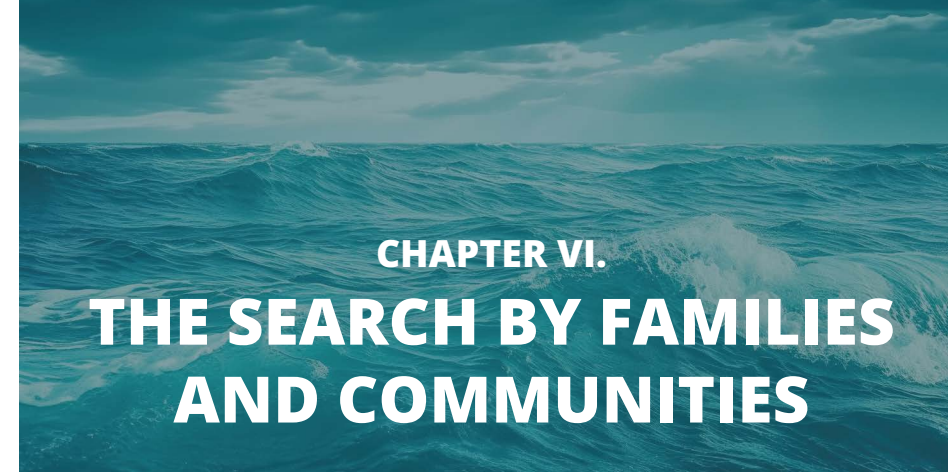
Grave of a person who died at sea in the cemetery of Melilla.

“I haven’t heard from them; I called the Spanish search and rescue services to tell them that they were in danger and that my mother had told me they’d left but they hadn’t called yet. They told me to call the Red Cross but they didn’t know anything and told me to call the police. I’ve just got off the phone to the Civil Guard but nobody will tell me anything. The main problem is that if my brother hasn’t arrived, the rescue services are wasting time and they aren’t looking for him, it’s awful. If my brother wasn’t North African, this wouldn’t be happening. In Morocco, my family has called, they’ve gone to the police station, but they’ve heard nothing. Tomorrow, I’ll go to Almería to look for him. He’s my brother, it’s as if people trying to cross the sea have no families or their lives don’t matter at all.” A.H., brother of a missing man.

Some of the boats reached Alboran Island, albeit largely during the first half of the year.

Passive search methods are systematically used on this route and the lack of transparency over rescue operations prevents organisations and families from quickly confirming whether missing people have been rescued or remain lost at sea.

Criminalisation and stigmatisation by the rescue services when it comes to information about missing boats from organisations and families is common on every Mediterranean migration route, with those who fulfil their duty to raise the alarm about people’s lives being at risk constantly challenged and questioned.



CHAPTER VI. THE SEARCH BY FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Our reports, research and data are intended to serve victims, their family members and their communities⁵⁰.

Searching for missing people and identifying those who have died along the western Euro-African border entails multiple challenges, with the public authorities employing practices that constitute systematic revictimisation. The cases followed by Ca-minando Fronteras in 2024 reveal the complexities and institutional barriers faced by families and communities.

It would be no exaggeration to speak of the dead and missing as second-class citizens, of families up against institutional racism and of communities and social organisations criminalised and stigmatised for offering their help and support.

Although progress has been made on reporting⁵¹ and good practices may be observed within some institutions, such as the judiciary police at the Civil Guard in Costa Teguisse in Lanzarote, Huércal in Almería and the General Command in El Hierro, families continue to encounter obstacles to their right to report incidents, as well as a lack of empathy and stigmatisation.

When someone disappears at the border, the search is inevitably transnational and the majority of the ante-mortem data needed to conduct the search properly are likely to be found in other countries. This is why it is so important to work with consulates in migrants’ countries of origin to take DNA samples, which are a tool for protecting the rights of victims and their families. Unfortunately, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs systematically refuses to conduct DNA tests and goes to every length to avoid meeting with families who are searching for missing loved ones.

The lack of proper assistance from the authorities pushes families into the hands of scammers. One relative had reported their younger sister missing to the police, but had received messages with photos allegedly of her corpse that sought to extort money from the family⁵².

These situations show how families’ desperation can be exploited in a context of legal and other obstacles that hinder their search.

50. For more information about our work with families and communities, see the following reports by Ca-minando Fronteras: *Tras la frontera* (2017). <https://caminandofronteras.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CCF-ITLS-Tras-la-Frontera.pdf>
Victims of the necrofrontier: For memory and justice (2022). <https://caminandofronteras.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Report-Victims-of-the-necrofrontier-2018-2022.-For-memory-and-justice-Right-to-life-ENG.pdf>

51. Ministerio del Interior. (2019). *Atención, protección y orientación a las familias de personas desaparecidas*. https://www.interior.gob.es/opencms/pdf/archivos-y-documentacion/documentacion-y-publicaciones/publicaciones-descargables/atencion-al-ciudadano/Atencion_proteccion_orientacion_familias_personas_desaparecidas_folleto_web_126190813.pdf

52. Op. cit. Notas: 44, 45 y 46.



Women and their babies in Morocco.

Feeling helpless, families coordinate to travel and report their loved ones missing. Many turn to extended family, community networks and municipal councils for help. Their uncertainty and the emotional toll on them are heightened by the fact that they often lack the means to search for their loved ones themselves⁵³.

Investigations into people who have gone missing at the border are limited. The criminalisation of migrants means that few resources are mobilised to search for them.

The doubts and confusion experienced by families due to a lack of information are a direct violation of their right to the truth. Migrants' families insist that it is not enough to take DNA samples alone because many corpses never appear and they call for other methods to be used to investigate, such as tracking the mobile phones of missing people.

The legal, social and psychological impact of people going missing and the process of searching for them have a profound impact on their relatives, who tend to exist in a state of unresolved grief.

It is vital for the authorities to apply the same guarantees when investigating and searching for people who have gone missing at the border as they do when anyone else goes missing in the Spanish State⁵⁴. Families' needs must be recognised and they must be assisted and protected by the public institutions.

Greater intervention is required at the national and international level, with policies that respect migrants' human rights and recognise the rights of dead and missing people and their families⁵⁵.

53. This uncertainty and emotional toll are described by Pauline Boss in terms of 'ambiguous loss', which occurs when people do not know if their loved one is dead or alive. Ambiguous loss has a serious impact on the psychological wellbeing of families, who tend to isolate themselves socially and emotionally as a result. The term refers to the experience of unending pain, grief and isolation. See: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/agonny-and-uncertainty-missing-loved-ones-and-ambiguous-loss>

54. In November 2024, the Fundación QSD Global held the first International Conference on Missing People in Seville, bringing together relatives of people who had gone missing for no obvious reason in Spain, relatives of victims of enforced disappearances in Mexico, relatives of people who were missing in the war in Ukraine and families of those who had gone missing at the western Euro-African border for the first time. See: <https://www.qsdglobal.com/sevilla-acogera-la-primera-conferencia-internacional-sobre-personas-desaparecidas/>

55. In May 2023, Ca-minando Fronteras organised the 1st International Conference for Families of Border Victims, where speakers included relatives of people who had gone missing at the border and experts and representatives of international organisations, who called for clearer, more transparent procedures for reporting missing people, improved identification of corpses appearing at the border, greater involvement of consulates and embassies from migrants' countries of origin in supporting families and easier access to visas for transnational searches, among other measures. See: <https://caminandofronteras.org/congreso-internacional-de-familias-victimas-de-las-fronteras-finaliza-con-gran-exito-de-asistencia-y-seguimiento-online/>

Organised Communities

The commune of Dialafara is located in the cercle of Kenieba, in the region of Kayes in Mali⁵⁶. It is the first commune on the border with Senegal, with the Falémé River dividing the two countries. The commune contains 36 villages and its capital is Dialafara. The main ethnic group in the region is Malinké, while the Sirikolé are the main ethnic group in the cercle of Yelimané and the region of Nioro. Many people left the region in the 1980s and 90s to travel to France.

In recent years, the Federation of Development Associations for the Commune of Dialafara in France (FADCDF) has worked to raise awareness around environmental issues and the need to protect the land. The threat of soil pollution, large-scale agricultural holdings and mineral extraction is having a serious impact on crops and rural life.

The practice of gold mining in the Falémé River, often by unlicensed companies, affects security in the region. On several occasions, there have been reports of murders committed by armed groups hired to defend corporate interests. The contamination of the water in the Falémé River has made it impossible to cultivate the land and the exodus of young people is now unstoppable⁵⁷.

There is no future in the rural communes: climate change, extractivist violence and instability have pushed people off their land.

In recent years, people from the commune had occasionally gone missing during their migration journeys, but the disappearance of a boat that had set off from Nouakchott on 8 January 2024 with 108 people on board had a major impact on the area. At least 36 teenagers and young people on the boat were from Dialafara. Since then, aware of the impact of these incidents on the families and on society more broadly, the FADCDF has begun to record the numbers of people going missing.

"In some villages, two, three, seven people have gone missing. Some families have lost their only child, some have lost several members of their family in a single boat. Many of the young men were married and leave wives and children behind." S., community leader.

Community representatives showed us updated lists for each village, with the dates on which the boats had departed. Everyone on the lists was missing.

56. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialafara>

57. For more information on extractivism and its consequences for the people living near the Falémé River, see: <https://lequotidien.sn/gold-mining-around-the-faleme-water-a-source-of-tension/>

The families were scared to report their loved ones missing in Mali and turned to social organisations in search of answers, as misinformation was everywhere in the villages of the commune. One false report suggested that the boats had arrived in Morocco.

In response to this news, the mayor of the commune proposed a mission to Dakhla once a committee had been established to search for the missing people. Unfortunately, the mission was unsuccessful and the desolation of their collective grief plunged the commune into despair. The young people were neither in Dakhla nor at centres such as Birguindouz, disproving the report that they were being held in detention centres in Morocco⁵⁸.

Social and political representation of victims

A wooden boat from Mauritania was rescued 171 miles southwest of El Hierro with just 15 survivors on board, including three teenagers.

They had been adrift for 15 days and they were exhausted. They explained that many people had died, but that their bodies had been left at sea. Inside the boat, the bodies of five men bore witness to the horrors they had experienced⁵⁹.

The brother of one of the victims contacted us. According to the survivors, his brother was one of the last to die. We informed him that there were five bodies.

He was living in France but the possibility, however small, of finding answers and having a body to bury prompted him to travel to Tenerife. He arrived in a border city with no knowledge of the language, administrative procedures or his rights.

Those difficulties were heightened by the emotional burden of having to represent his family while coping with the grief of his own loss. At times like these, it is a relief to have support and Aquí Estamos Migrando⁶⁰ accompanied him as he reported his brother missing and had DNA samples taken.

He returned home, weighed down by uncertainty. He went to work every day, while his mother called to ask if he had heard anything.

58. This article from a Senegalese news outlet explains how the survivors of a shipwreck were sent to the centres of Birguindouz and Dakhla. See: <https://laviesenegalaise.com/migration-irreguliere-une-nouvelle-pirogue-de-migrants-secourue-par-la-marine-royale-marocaine>

59. Agencia EFE (3 January 2024) "Rescatan cinco cuerpos del cayuco en el que murieron entre 30 y 40 personas al sur de El Hierro". <https://efe.com/canarias/2024-01-03/rescatan-5-cuerpos-del-cayuco-en-el-que-murieron-entre-30-y-40-personas-al-sur-de-canarias/>

60. See: <https://www.instagram.com/aquiestamosmigrando/>

Time passed slowly and there was no response from the Spanish authorities. After supporting the family for several months, they decided to come with us to Strasbourg to present our 2023 report on border victims⁶¹. The report represented the losses of thousands of people and the family repeated the difficulties they had faced and the help they needed several times to the MEPs.

At last, the results of the DNA test arrived: the man's brother was among the five bodies salvaged by the authorities. His mission almost complete, he returned to Tenerife. He was calmer, but his grief and pain were still acute. Once again, Aquí Estamos Migrando made things easier for him and provided him with the contacts he needed to have his brother's body sent home.

One Saturday in June, the body arrived in Mali and we organised a video call with the deceased man's mother, aunt, cousin and other family members. In his village, several people had disappeared. In the neighbouring villages, the number of missing people continued to rise. At least they had been able to give their loved one a decent burial and inform the other families of what had really happened.

61. For more information, see: <https://x.com/EuroPodemos/status/1755269565104157144>



The Bouyaghi family traveled to Strasbourg to demand Truth, Reparations, and Justice.

Prosecute to protect

A boat sank off the coast of Granada: there were two survivors and three corpses, but everyone else travelling on board was missing⁶². A woman contacted us, hoping that one of the bodies belonged to her nephew. The presence of scammers seeking to profit from the corpses of migrants prompted us to offer the family legal representation. The information we had about these criminal networks and the details leaked from the investigations⁶³ obliged us to be as cautious as possible.

In Almería, we carried out all the relevant legal proceedings, including visual re-identification, DNA sampling, filing a complaint, appearing in court and requesting a fingerprint comparison from the Algerian authorities.

Even when all these measures are taken to ensure that the process runs smoothly, while the bodies are being identified, families continue to receive contradictory information from networks of scammers and calls from people who claim to be from funeral parlours, offering them 'quicker options'. The risk of extortion is always present and legal representation is necessary at a time when families feel quite powerless.

Our work brings results – not as quickly as the families need at such a distressing time, but at least it is guaranteed to be done properly. The body of the woman's nephew was repatriated in July and we requested his personal effects and the death certificate for the family.

In our experience, despite their loved ones being identified in the Spanish State, many families do not manage to obtain the death certificate that they are legally required to be given. Obtaining the personal effects of the deceased, which have considerable sentimental value and help families grieve, is very difficult in most cases and our work in this area is a way to restore the rights of the families.

Waiting for burial

On 28 September, we were informed that a wooden boat in the waters off El Hierro had sighted lights on the island. We notified the rescue services and in the early hours of the morning they informed us that there had been a shipwreck and that the boat had turned over during the rescue operation. We began to gather the information we needed to understand what had happened and support the families. Eventually, we found out that 90 people had been travelling on the

boat, including four teenagers aged 17, 15 and 14 years old, and two children aged 11 years old⁶⁴. The information that we had been given by the authorities that morning was that only 27 survivors had been rescued and nine bodies had been salvaged.

Some of the family members who contacted us that day and in subsequent days were living in Catalonia. Ca-minando Fronteras organised support from Catalonia to El Hierro for a family who searched for their brother among the survivors but did not find him. They later visited the Civil Guard to report him missing. At the station, as well as leaving their brother's details, they learned that his body was not among the corpses recovered during the accident. They recognised one of the dead men as the brother of a distant cousin who was also living in Catalonia. They put us in contact with the family and we organised support for them to travel from Catalonia to El Hierro. Unfortunately, when the families were catching the flight from Barcelona, they were informed that all the bodies had been buried despite the families being given no time to take action.

On this mission, our lawyer accompanied the uncle of one of the missing men and the brother of one of the deceased to confirm that he was definitely among those who had been buried. The Department of Health and Social Services at the Island Council of El Hierro also met them to offer support to the families at a very difficult time.

Then, all the necessary paperwork was processed at the Civil Guard command and the courts. The most difficult moment was at the cemetery in La Frontera, where six people had been buried, including the man's brother. The group spent a long time looking at the tombs and praying, filled with shock and grief at the confirmation of their loved ones' deaths. The families expressed their astonishment that the burials had taken place so quickly, without giving them time to get organised, and that the authorities had not done more to find the families.

This was the gravest tragedy to have occurred along the coast of the Canary Islands yet the maritime search and rescue services have not launched an investigation into the causes of the accident, as they would have in any other nautical tragedy, despite the survivors' account contradicting the official version.

Nevertheless, the judge tasked with identifying the bodies has called for the causes of the shipwreck to be investigated as part of the legal proceedings. This investigation is very important as there are 63 families in Catalonia, Senegal, France and Mali who are waiting to learn the truth about what happened in the early hours of 28 September 2024.

64. Agencia EFE. (4 October 2024). *Supervivientes de la tragedia de El Hierro cuentan cómo el cayuco se partió en mitad del rescate.* <https://efe.com/canarias/2024-10-04/el-cayuco-de-la-tragedia-de-el-hierro-se-partio-durante-el-rescate/>

65. Agencia EFE. (28 September 2024). *El naufragio de El Hierro puede convertirse en la mayor tragedia migratoria ocurrida en Canarias.* <https://efe.com/canarias/2024-09-28/el-naufragio-de-el-hierro-puede-convertirse-en-la-mayor-tragedia-migratoria-ocurrida-en-canarias/>

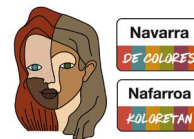
62. Sánchez, N. (22 March 2024). *Tres muertos y siete desaparecidos en el naufragio de una patera al Sur de Motril.* El País. <https://elpais.com/espana/2024-03-22/varios-muertos-en-el-naufragio-de-una-embarcacion-al-sur-de-motril.html>

63. Op. cit. Notas: 44, 45 and 46.

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WITH THE SUPPORT OF:



This publication has been produced with the financial support of the Ministry of Social Rights, Consumption and Agenda 2030. The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of the subsidized entity and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Ministry of Social Rights, Consumption and Agenda 2030.