

Monitoring the
Right To Life
on the Euro-African Western Border

January - May 2025

#RightToLife2025

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FRONTERAS**

This report analyses 113 tragedies that occurred along the western Euro-African Border between January 1 and May 31, 2025. Each of these tragedies has been documented and analysed by the collective Ca-minando Fronteras as part of our ongoing, uninterrupted monitoring efforts via emergency phone lines, 24 hours a day, every day of the year. The information we publish is based on a primary-source research methodology, drawing directly from migrants, families, communities, and close follow-up of the actions related to each tragedy.

Our investigations confirm the ongoing deadly impact of migration control policies, which remain focused on deterrence and border externalisation, rather than on the protection of life and human rights under extreme vulnerability. At Ca-minando Fronteras, we stress that these deaths are avoidable: they are the result of political decisions, calculated omissions, and a border architecture that normalises death as part of migration control systems.

Structural border control policies and the degradation of protection standards for life at sea directly caused decisive contributing factors in 47% of the cases analysed.

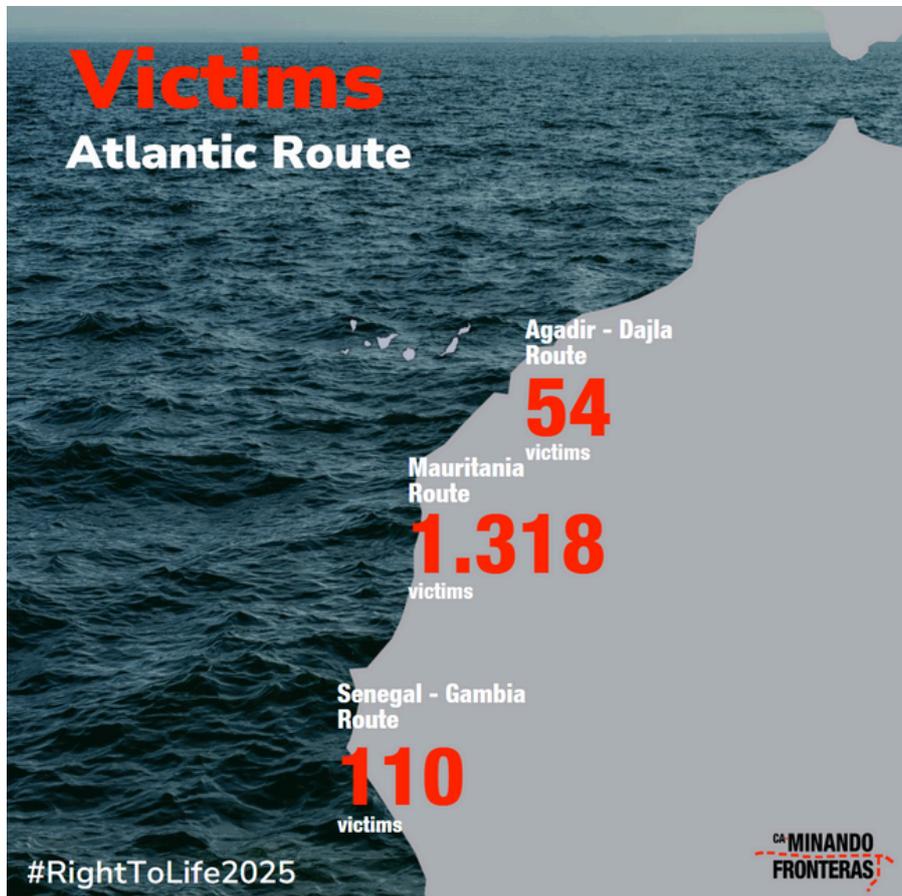
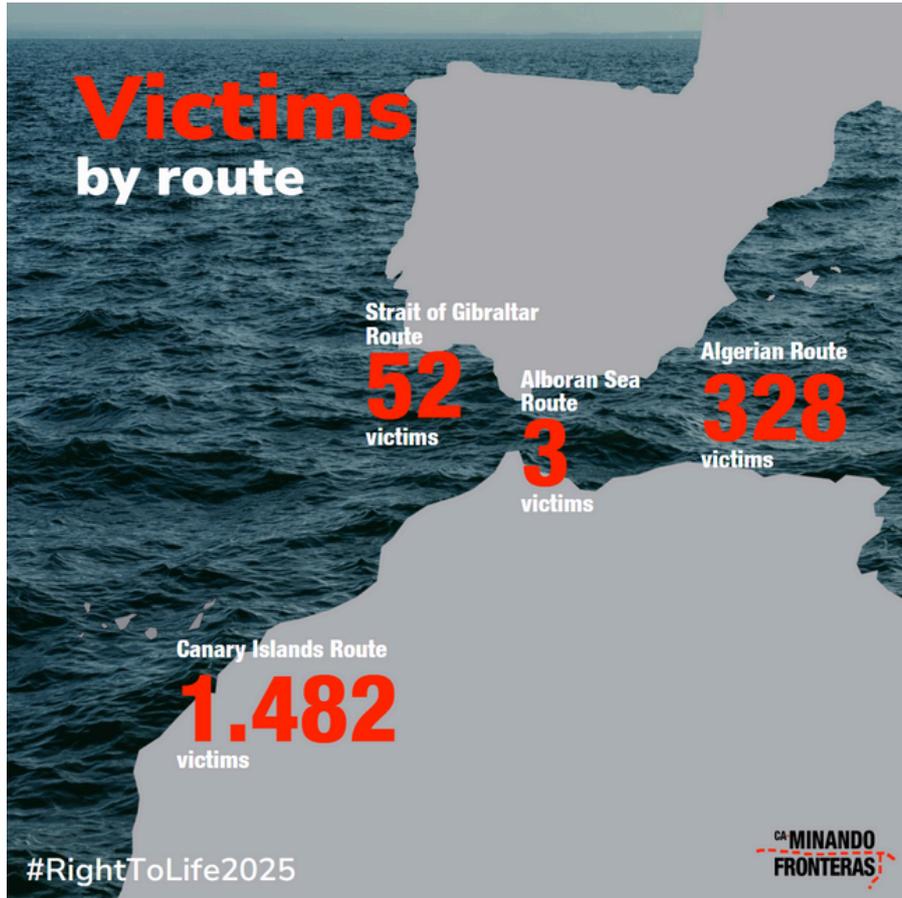
1.865
victims

**on the access routes to Spain
during the first five months of 2025**

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38
boats
have disappeared
with everyone on board

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People from **22** countries
have died attempting to reach
Spanish coasts

- Afghanistan
- Algeria
- Bangladesh
- Burkina Faso
- Cameroon
- Ivory Coast
- Ethiopia
- Gabon
- Gambia
- Guinea Bissau
- Guinea Conakry
- Comoros Islands
- Mali
- Morocco
- Mauritania
- Pakistan
- Dem. Rep. of Congo
- Syria
- Somalia
- Senegal
- Sudan
- Tunisia

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Main factors contributing to the increase in mortality

Failure to activate search and rescue operations: even when sufficient information was available to intervene. In numerous cases, the appropriate resources were not deployed or were clearly insufficient.

Inaction despite having exact location data: of shipwrecks: situations were documented in which, although alerts had been issued and obvious risk was confirmed, life-saving protocols were not applied.

Arbitrary decisions regarding the timing and manner of activating rescue resources: introducing a high level of subjectivity in institutional responses and revealing a lack of transparency in the application of established procedures.

Territorial inequality in the implementation of protection protocols: with criteria varying depending on the area of the western Euro-African Border, generating internal discrimination in the protection of migrants' human rights.

Arbitrary and discriminatory use of maritime safety standards: with rescue services applying a restrictive approach to migrant boats. These services often assume that, unless there is imminent sinking, there is no real urgency to intervene—even when the boats lack minimum nautical safety conditions.

Replacement of active search operations with low-efficiency passive methods[1]: significantly reducing the chances of rescue.

Limited deployment of aerial and maritime resources: undermining response capacity in emergencies at sea. The limited use of aerial means is especially alarming. During the reporting period, poor planning and lack of foresight were observed, particularly in high-risk areas, where aerial surveillance could have greatly reduced disappearances.

(1) In passive search methods, authorities issue an alert to commercial or recreational vessels navigating the area where the boat in distress is located. As a result, the effective responsibility for locating the vessel falls on these ships, while the competent public institutions do not mobilise any means of their own.

Significant delays in launching rescue operations: sometimes due to administrative hurdles or political decisions stemming from border externalisation agreements, where migration control prevails over the right to life.

Poor coordination between states: based not on humanitarian principles but on bilateral agreements aimed at stemming migration flows.

Inadequate rescue practices: compromising the safety of people on board, combined with a lack of rigorous investigation when accidents occur during rescue operations involving migrant boats.

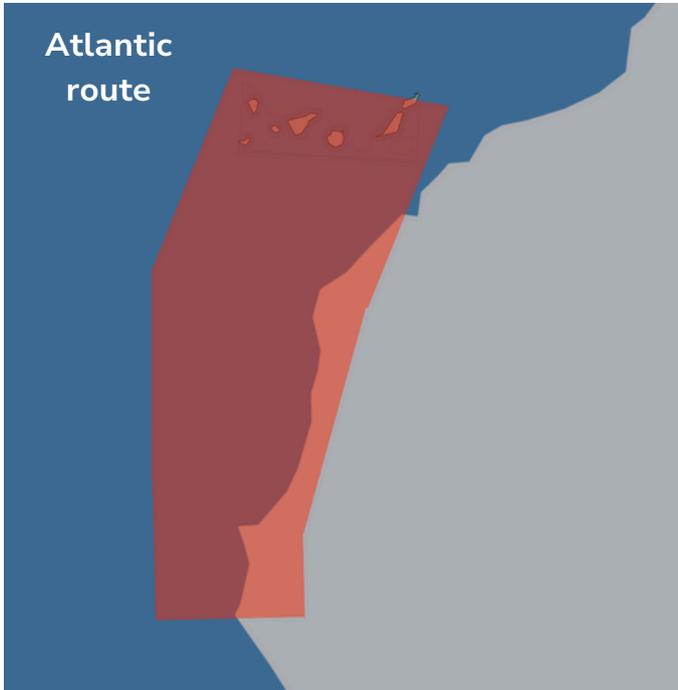
Use of violence during departure controls: both by criminal networks and state forces, exposing people to danger from the start of their journey.

Severe physical and environmental conditions: such as adverse weather and long distances travelled without sufficient means to ensure safety.

Boats in extremely poor condition: which lack the minimum standards of nautical safety required.

Accounts of Tragedies by Routes

Atlantic route



The Atlantic route to the Canary Islands continues to account for the highest number of mass shipwrecks and disappearances at sea. During this period, there has been a notable increase in tragedies involving boats departing from Mauritania, a trend ongoing since last year. On the other hand, there has been a significant drop in departures from Senegal and Gambia, with only a few isolated journeys originating from Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry.

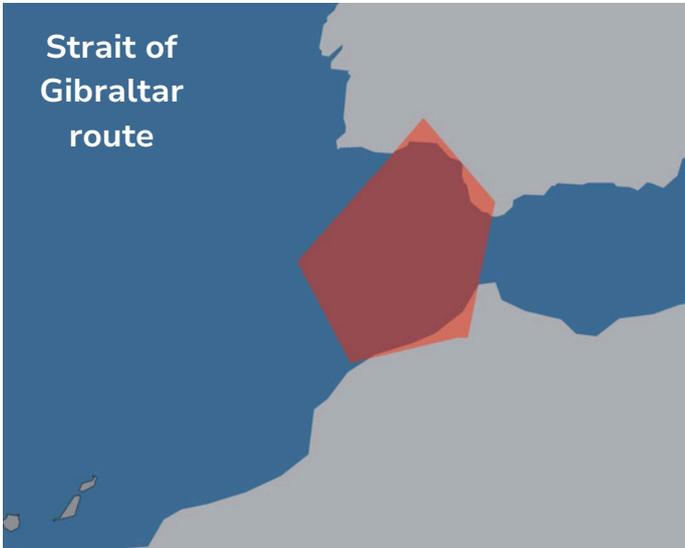
The presence of rubber boats departing from increasingly distant locations such as Guelmin, Sidi Ifni, and Tiznit remains. These crossings involve even longer distances and are made in extremely fragile vessels, significantly increasing the risk to life.

Throughout this period, the percentage of disappearances remains high, reinforcing the pattern of invisible mortality. A stark example is the arrival of boats on the coasts of Latin America—boats have been found in Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago. These are tragic situations in which people perish in extreme suffering, often due to dehydration, starvation, or prolonged exposure to the elements.

Given this context, a thorough review is urgently needed regarding the minimal deployment of aerial resources in key areas of the Atlantic, especially in distant, high-risk routes. Aerial surveillance could play a crucial role in preventing disappearances by shortening response times and significantly increasing the likelihood of life-saving rescues.

Accounts of Tragedies by Routes

Strait of Gibraltar route



The Strait of Gibraltar continues to be a recurring site of deaths and disappearances, particularly among youth and adolescents attempting to swim to Ceuta, equipped only with wetsuits or improvised flotation devices. This extremely dangerous crossing highlights the risks faced by migrants and the urgent need to establish effective systems of analysis and prevention to protect their lives.

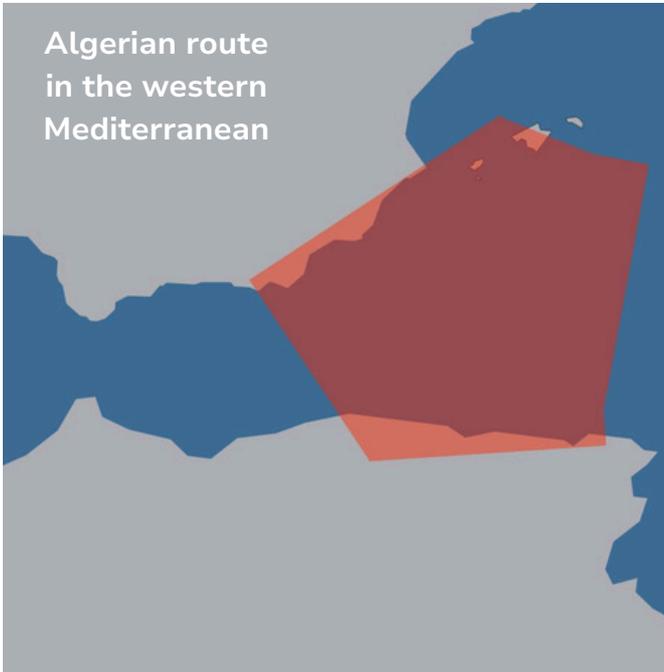
The discovery of bodies in an advanced state of decomposition and beyond identification has become a constant reality on this route, a stark reflection of the lethal and dehumanising impact of border control policies on migrant lives. Each unidentified body is also an unresolved absence, a life story cut short, and a family condemned to uncertainty.

Our monitoring team's analyses reveal a pattern of systematic institutional abandonment—both in terms of prevention and in the processes of locating, identifying, and returning bodies.

Together, these elements demonstrate how the Strait functions not only as a physical border but also as a symbolic and political space of rights denial, where the right to life, identity, and memory is systematically violated.

Accounts of Tragedies by Routes

Algerian route in the western Mediterranean



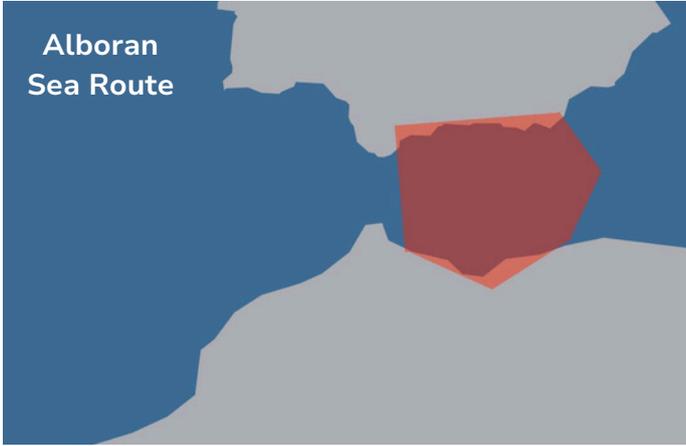
Tragedies recorded along this route reveal a significant shift in the origin of victims, particularly among people transiting through Algeria, with a marked increase in nationals from Somalia. This change in migratory profiles calls for a contextualised reading of African migration flows, shaped by political crises, structural violence, and forced displacement from the Horn of Africa to the Maghreb region.

One of the most alarming factors in this route has been the failure to promptly activate rescue means following alerts, alongside the lack of coordinated aerial surveillance capable of detecting boats in distress in time. This is compounded by weak international cooperation with Algeria and the absence of joint protocols, resulting in many disappearances going unmonitored and unresolved.

During this period, a noticeable increase in bodies washing ashore in the Balearic Islands has been documented, suggesting that some shipwrecks occurred relatively close to the coast—within reach of maritime or aerial intervention that could have made the difference between life and death. This raises urgent questions as to why these people were not located and rescued in time, despite alerts.

Accounts of Tragedies by Routes

Alboran Sea Route



This route recorded the lowest number of documented cases and is marked by a deep opacity of information that hinders accurate reconstruction of the tragedies. The scarcity of data is directly linked to the absence of early alerts and to people arriving on land in extreme vulnerability and with little information available.

Dying While Waiting: The Border as a Death Sentence

They left Nouadhibou at dawn on March 7, 2025. There were 183 people on board, including 7 women, traveling in a boat toward the Canary Islands. We issued the alert to authorities, and three days later, on March 10, the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC) confirmed that the last known position from a phone onboard had been registered on March 8. Maritime Rescue deployed a plane to search following projected drift patterns, but the boat was not located.

On March 16, six days after the last confirmed signal, the Guardamar Urania was preparing to intervene when the Moroccan Navy took over the operation. The next day, March 17, the boat arrived at the port of Dakhla. On board were 176 survivors, but seven people had died, and several others were taken to the hospital in serious condition.

This tragedy adds to the long list of invisible shipwrecks along the western Euro-African Border, where institutional inaction, border externalisation, and delays in deploying rescue efforts continue to cost lives. There were survivors this time, yes—but there were also deaths that could have been prevented.

“We ran out of engine power. We couldn’t move. We were calling, and the phones didn’t work. People started falling asleep... and dying. Not everyone made it. Most died in the final hours. I thought it might be some virus, because everyone was dying. My little brother too. Just before the rescue arrived. I kept praying for them to come quickly, but Allah wanted him with Him. I was very sick too. I ended up in the hospital. Allah wanted me to survive.”

Survivor of the tragedy.

The conditions in which they were found, combined with the delay in locating them, clearly show that at least some of those deaths could have been avoided with quicker and better-coordinated action.

Silence Over the Waters: Chronicle of a Preventable Shipwreck

On April 24, 2025, 23 Somali nationals set off from Algiers in a fragile boat headed toward the Balearic Islands. According to one family member, they departed alongside another vessel, forming a small convoy. Upon receiving the alert, communications were sent to Maritime Rescue and the Algerian Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC).

Fifteen days later, a boat was rescued 42 miles off the coast of Xàbia (Alicante) in an emergency operation. Sixteen people were found alive but in serious condition, and one person had died. Most were between 15 and 27 years old, all Somali except for one Nigerian boy. The boat had been adrift for a long time, and the passengers were suffering from injuries, dehydration, infections, and general exhaustion.

After the rescue, the families—who had already reported the departure—confirmed that their loved ones had made contact. They also stated that six people had died during the journey and their bodies had been thrown into the sea. These testimonies match the investigation, which found that the motor failed on the first day. According to Spanish security forces, “the boat was adrift for nearly two weeks. Survivors were eating just one date a day. When the water and milk ran out, many drank their own urine. Those who drank seawater did not survive.”

These deaths, like so many others, were not recorded in ports or hospitals but in the memories of those who endured them—and in the waters that concealed them. Had there been a coordinated search between both countries, 15 days of agony at sea might have been prevented.

“We hope they are being searched for. We ask God for that, because a rescue operation is needed. My heart has a silent strength, while the hearts of my family carry a quiet pain and a hope that cannot speak. Please, try to do something to save their lives. It’s been so many days... it’s urgent.” **Relative of one of the people onboard during the disappearance.**

Sea of Fifty-Two Absences

On January 26, 2025, a rubber dinghy carrying 52 people—including 7 women and a child—departed from Tarfaya. As soon as the alert was received, standard monitoring channels were activated. Spanish authorities indicated that coordination of the search fell under Moroccan responsibility.

That same day, although Morocco reported deploying a naval unit, no results were obtained. As hours passed and weather conditions worsened, the increasing urgency was evident. Given the fragility of rubber boats, every minute counted.

A few hours later, Spain began aerial intervention, sending a Maritime Rescue plane to fly over the southwestern Canary area. The search yielded no results.

The following morning, communication resumed between Spanish and Moroccan coordination centers, but still no news. Despite continued aerial searches by Spain, the operation made no progress. Weather conditions became increasingly adverse. On January 29, three days after the dinghy's departure, both Spain and Morocco intensified efforts, but no trace of the boat was found.

And with that, the fate of the 52 people vanished into silence. Despite all efforts, the people onboard remain missing.

“I don't know why they went out to sea like that. I don't know why she didn't tell me. It's so hard to accept that there's no trace. Did the sea swallow them? Is that even possible? Where are the bodies? Will they never turn up? I don't want to think about it. They say she's detained in some prison and that someday she'll call, but I don't believe it. I live in Europe, and I know that's not true.” **Relative of one of the missing women.**

A report by:



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