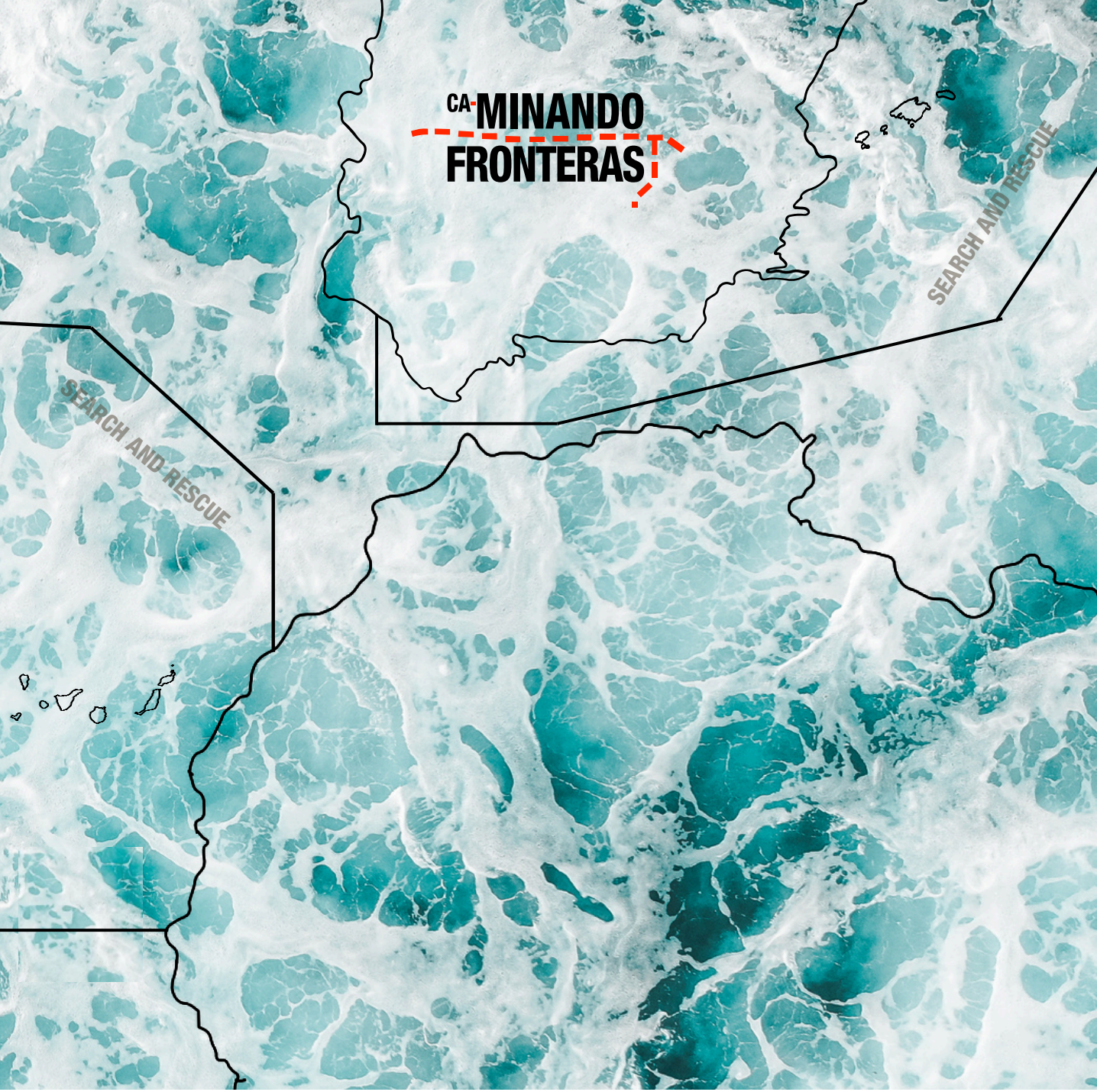


An aerial photograph of the Philippines, showing the archipelago's islands and surrounding waters. The map is overlaid with black lines that delineate specific search and rescue zones. The text 'CA-MINANDO FRONTERAS' is prominently displayed in the upper center, with 'CA' in a smaller font above 'MINANDO', which is above 'FRONTERAS'. A red dashed line with arrowheads at its ends is positioned behind the word 'FRONTERAS'. The words 'SEARCH AND RESCUE' are written in a sans-serif font and placed diagonally within two of the outlined zones: one in the upper right and another in the lower left. The overall color palette is dominated by the blues and greens of the water and land, with the black lines providing a stark contrast.

CA-MINANDO
FRONTERAS

SEARCH AND RESCUE

SEARCH AND RESCUE

MONITORING THE
**RIGHT
TO LIFE** 2025

THE DATA COLLECTED IN THIS REPORT IS CLOSED ON DECEMBER 15, 2025.

Report of the Human Rights Observatory of Ca-minando Fronteras

Edition: December 2025

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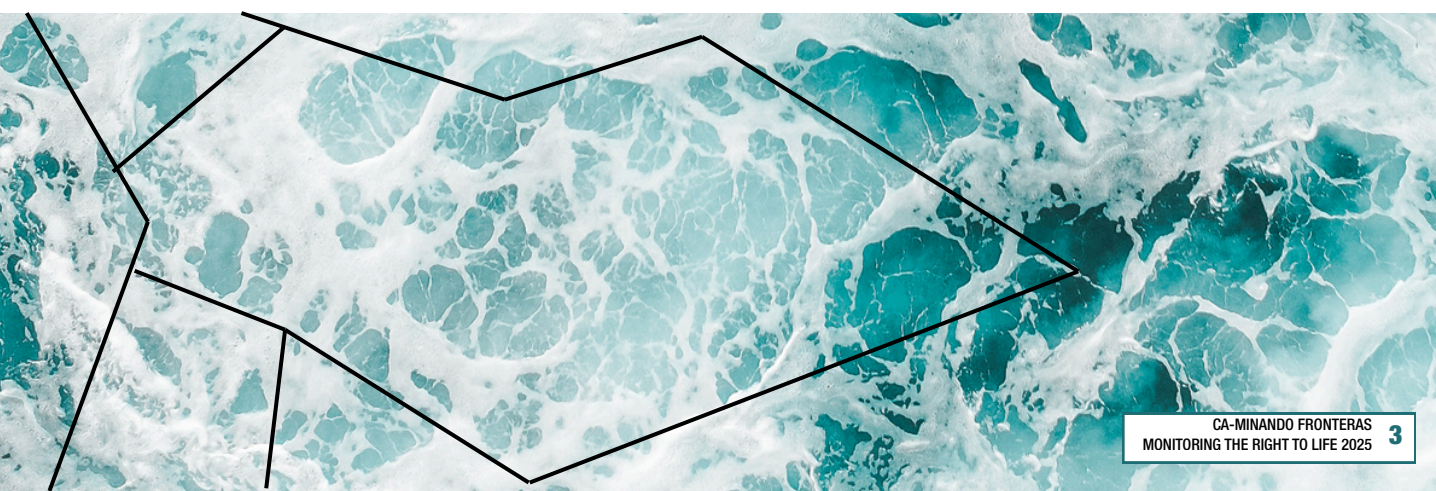
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MONITORING THE **RIGHT TO LIFE 2025**

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CHAPTER I

2025: THE YEAR OF THE DECLARATION OF GLOBAL PERSECUTION AGAINST MIGRANT PEOPLE

1. For a more in-depth analysis of the impact of Trump's decisions on migration policy and their implications for migrants, see the relevant publications by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.
Frelick, Bill. (February 2025). *Ten Harmful Trump Administration Immigration and Refugee Policies*. Human Rights Watch.
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/20/ten-harmful-trump-administration-immigration-and-refugee-policies>
Amnesty International. (February 2025). *Lives in Limbo: Devastating impacts of Trump's migration and asylum policies*.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/9029/2025/en/>

2. People are being deported to various countries, both within and beyond the American continent. See: Human Rights Watch. (November 2025). *"You Have Arrived in Hell": Torture and Other Abuses Against Venezuelans in El Salvador's Mega Prison*.
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/11/12/you-have-arrived-in-hell/torture-and-other-abuses-against-venezuelans-in-el-salvador>
Human Rights Watch. (April 2025). *"Nobody Cared, Nobody Listened": The US Expulsion of Third-Country Nationals to Panama*.
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/04/24/nobody-cared-nobody-listened-the-us-expulsion-of-third-country-nationals-to-panama>

3. Caro, Patricia. (September 2025). *El secretismo domina las deportaciones de Estados Unidos a terceros países*. El País.
<https://elpais.com/us/migracion/2025-09-05/el-secretismo-domina-las-deportaciones-de-estados-unidos-a-terceros-paises.html>

4. Plazuelo, Marta. (June 2024). *La Ley Ruanda: ¿Qué pasa con las deportaciones de migrantes desde Reino Unido?* RTVE.
<https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20240626/esto-merece-explicacion-que-pasa-deportaciones-ruanda/16152439.shtml>

5. Xhabafi, Erion et al. (April 2025). *Italy sends rejected migrants to detention centers in Albania*. Associated Press.
<https://apnews.com/article/italia-migrantes-albania-centros-deportacion-detencion-183c2929a265274c3dea1432ae67e81b>

6. Border externalisation in the United States occurs through the installation of border control technologies that pave the way for increasing violence along migration routes, as the Transnational Institute explains in its report *"The Everywhere Border"*. See:
<https://www.tni.org/en/article/the-everywhere-border>

Throughout 2025, the increasingly harsh migration policies introduced by the United States government¹ have transformed the global mobility landscape. It is as if an invisible war had been declared against people on the move, backed by shameless propaganda and complete impunity. The deportation policies adopted by the United States have reconfigured the globalisation of migration repression, establishing a model that externalises removals to third countries and leads in many cases to internment in prisons or detention centres conceived as spaces of non-rights². Some migrants have even been imprisoned on United States military bases in third countries³. This approach is not isolated: it reproduces and expands on methods tested by other countries, such as the United Kingdom with its plans to deport migrants to Rwanda, which were suspended by the Supreme Court⁴, or Italy with the creation of detention centres in Albania⁵. Together, these practices constitute a transnational system in which mobility is governed through institutional violence and denial of basic guarantees. In this manner, the United States governments' attempts to contain migration spill over into other countries, forming a blurred but profoundly violent border⁶.



Tijuana border wall (Caminando Fronteras).

Moreover, the persecution of migrants in the United States has been broadcast and livestreamed and the world has borne witness to roundups⁷, selective deportations and a campaign of fear with deportation⁸ as its political objective. The rescission of protected areas policies⁹ covering churches and other community facilities has heightened the climate of vulnerability, creating an environment in which being a racialised or migrant person exposes one to danger. These measures have profound psychological and social effects on individuals, but their collective impact¹⁰ extends around the world.

Border and territorial control are shaped by a necropolitics in which migrants' lives are considered expendable. This means that certain groups of people are murdered, left to die or exposed to extremely hazardous conditions and fundamental rights violations as part of a strategy of governance and spatial control¹¹. In this context, racialised bodies take on a central role as the contemporary global order not only discriminates on the grounds of nationality or migration status, but also racialises migrant subjects, marking them as "other" and categorising their existence according to political interests and market needs¹².

The discourse surrounding the Great Replacement Theory is a political and media manifestation of this logic, which is present within the European institutions: the theory holds that the native population is being replaced (or is at risk of being replaced) by racialised migrant bodies, most of whom are Muslim, who carry a dangerous otherness. It places migrants in the category of bodies to be contained or removed from full social life. However, there is a structural contradiction when the very same people who are to be excluded from the framework of rights prove indispensable to sustain the capitalist economic system¹³ and the care sector in particular. Here, the Great Replacement discourse is bent to suit market needs, allowing migrants to be present only insofar as they can be exploited and kept in a precarious, subordinate position. A narrative of fear coexists alongside material dependency, giving rise to a model in which migrants are needed but stripped of their rights to ensure that they are available to provide labour in profoundly unequal conditions in a system akin to slavery¹⁴.

In recent years, racialisation has become intertwined with Islamophobia: migrant men from Islamic countries or from places perceived to be Islamic are frequently portrayed as dangerous, as a cultural and/or religious threat and as symbols of the internal enemy attacking the social body considered "native". In the Spanish State, this intersecting identity (migrant + racialised + Muslim) reinforces the logic of exclusion and has served to uphold racist policies with regard to protecting lives and human rights on the territory. This imaginary sustains racism and allows it to grow.

7. Seijas, Nerea. (July 2025). ¿Qué es el ICE, la poderosa policía contra inmigrantes de Trump? El orden mundial.

<https://elordenmundial.com/que-es-ice-migracion-estados-unidos/>

8. Beauregard, Luis Pablo. (May 2025). Trump advierte a los indocumentados: "Si deciden quedarse aquí enfrentarán duras consecuencias y serán deportados al lugar y forma que se nos antoje". El País.

<https://elpais.com/internacional/2025-05-10/trump-advierte-a-los-indocumentados-si-deciden-quedarse-aqui-enfrentaran-duras-consecuencias-y-seran-deportados-al-lugar-y-forma-que-se-nos-antoje.html>

9. In the United States, protected areas are safe spaces for migrants, which the authorities are not allowed to enter. Since 2011, ICE agents have been under orders not to detain migrants in educational institutions, hospitals and humanitarian and religious buildings or during marches, funerals or protests, but this has changed since Donald Trump returned to power. See:

<https://factchequeado.com/teexplicamos/20250123/orden-dhs-redadas-ice-escuelas-iglesias-hospitales/>

10. Maritza Caicedo, a professor at UNAM, researched the impact of events in the United States in 2024 on migrants' mental health, finding that the rise of roundups made it necessary to conduct further research into the consequences for mental health. See:

https://www.dqcs.unam.mx/boletin/bdboletin/2025_4_78.html

11. For more information on the conceptual framework of necropolitics and necropower and its consequences at the borders and within states, with a particular focus on North America, see: Estévez, A. (2021). *Necropower in North America*. Springer International Publishing.

The author argues that a border control model based on internal containment within each state is being adopted around the world. See: López, A. E. (2025). La nueva gobernabilidad necro política de las migraciones: del régimen de deportación al régimen de desplazamiento forzado interno. *InterNaciones*, (29), 89-116.

12. Lázaro Castellanos, R. (2023). *Critical Reflections on the Western Welfare State, Racial Capitalism, and Migratory Movements*. *Social Sciences*, 12(5), 271.

13. This is the argument made by economist Immanuel Ness, who states that not only is migrant labour a key component of capitalism, but population movements for economic reasons are also a consequence of the imperialist extraction of resources from the Global South. For more information, see:

<https://www.elsaltodiario.com/migracion/entrevista-immanuel-ness-migracion-imperialismo>

14. In 2024, Oxfam published a report analysing the European agricultural sector, which revealed the conditions of semi-slavery experienced by migrants in the sector. Ruiz-Ramírez et al. (June 2024). *Esenciales pero invisibles y explotadas: una revisión bibliográfica de las experiencias de las personas trabajadoras migrantes en el sector agrícola europeo*. Intermon Oxfam.

<https://www.oxfamintermon.org/hubs/Oxfam-Website/ol-informes/esenciales-invisibles-explotadas-migrantes.pdf>



Migrant graves in the Calais cemetery (Caminando Fronteras).

15. Contexto. (September 2025). During the racist manhunt in Torre Pacheco, there were up to 33,046 hate messages per day on social media.

<https://ctxt.es/es/20250901/Firmas/50055/Observatorio-Social-caceria-racista-Torre-Pacheco-mensajes-de-podio-islamofobia-redes-sociales.htm>

16. Anthropologist Jacques Ramírez argues that violence against migrant, racialised and poor groups within society is rooted in emerging neofascist policies aimed at tightening social control. See: Ramírez Gallegos, J. De la era de la migración al siglo de la seguridad: el surgimiento de "políticas de control con rostro (in) humano". URVIO. 2018, no. 23. <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/5526/552657509001/html/>

17. The attack on a juvenile reception centre scheduled to open in Monforte de Lemos (Galicia) exemplifies the political debate and criminalisation surrounding teenage migrants. See: <https://www.elsaltodiario.com/galicia/ataque-racista-al-centro-menores-monforte-revela-estrategia-politica-xunta-acogida-migrantes>

18. As the Transnational Institute has documented in its reports, the migration control industry offers economic profits for companies implementing control measures, with serious consequences for human rights. See: <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/telling-the-story-of-eu-border-militarization>

Torre Pacheco¹⁵ provided a vivid example of how the criminalisation of migrants is not only possible but is part of a structural dynamic that justifies violence as a form of control¹⁶. The persecution of migrants by the Spanish state is also exemplified by its approach to child migrants, who are suffering increasingly harsh attacks. Child and teenage migrants have become the subject of institutional disputes and bargaining between autonomous communities and the central government, which transfer responsibilities between one another as if these children were a negotiable commodity rather than individuals with rights. In addition, attacks on reception centres are on the rise and they have become the focus of media pressure, hate speech and administrative decisions that prioritise containment over young people's wellbeing. In this context, vulnerable child migrants are weaponised in clashes between institutions and criminalised in a manner that affects both their present and future¹⁷.

The persecution of migrants around the world is not a new phenomenon, but it grows in scale and sophistication year after year. Border externalisation has given rise to a framework of international cooperation that has made a transnational business out of migration control, commodifying the right to mobility from origin to destination. These mechanisms operate through a combination of surveillance, detention and labour exploitation, producing a system whereby the right to move is controlled and restrictions on movement are rewarded with political and economic capital¹⁸.

The combination of necropolitics and discourses presenting racialised bodies as disposable leads to the normalisation of precarity for migrants. Migrant deaths¹⁹, extreme conditions during transit or detention and collective pushbacks are part of an approach to governance that is rooted in a system of institutionalised vulnerability. This conceptual framework allows us to understand why borders are not only physical barriers but also political machines for producing death and suffering, inclusion and exclusion, and valuable or disposable subjectivity.

This is a critical time for the international human rights system, as the minimum consensus underpinning it is crumbling and it is being replaced by a profoundly violent management model²⁰. The global failure to protect certain groups of people²¹ is particularly apparent at the borders, where exceptions become the norm and systematic violations of human rights, including the right to life, are justified on political and social grounds. Necroborders are one of the visible manifestations of this international crisis and of the gradual dismantling of guarantees that were once considered universal²².

19. The report by Caminando Fronteras titled "Victims of the Necrofrontier 2018-2022" provides evidence that death is being normalised at the border, with a specific analysis of the evolution of the western Euro-African border. See: <https://caminandofronteras.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Report-Victims-of-the-necrofrontier-2018-2022-For-memory-and-justice-Right-to-life-ENG.pdf>

20. Discussing the genocide in Palestine, lawyer Pablo Rafael Banchio criticises the human rights system for becoming industrialised and serving those in power, drawing attention to the urgent need for a process to build a holistic human rights culture. See: <https://revistadoctrinajuridica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/doctrina-juridica-xv34-3-37.pdf>

21. The critical situation facing the international consensus on human rights was acknowledged by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2024. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/01/integrating-human-rights-international-financial-architecture>

22. In its 2024/2025 annual report, Amnesty International warned that the global human rights system is in crisis due to factors that go far beyond United States government policy. See: Amnesty International. (April 2025). The State of the World's Human Rights. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/global-human-rights-crisis-trump-effect-accelerates-destructive-trends/>



Europe-Africa land border (Caminando Fronteras).



3.090

victims

**on access routes to
Spain during
the year 2025**

VICTIMS WOMEN AND CHILDREN



192

women

**have died attempting
to reach Spanish
coasts**

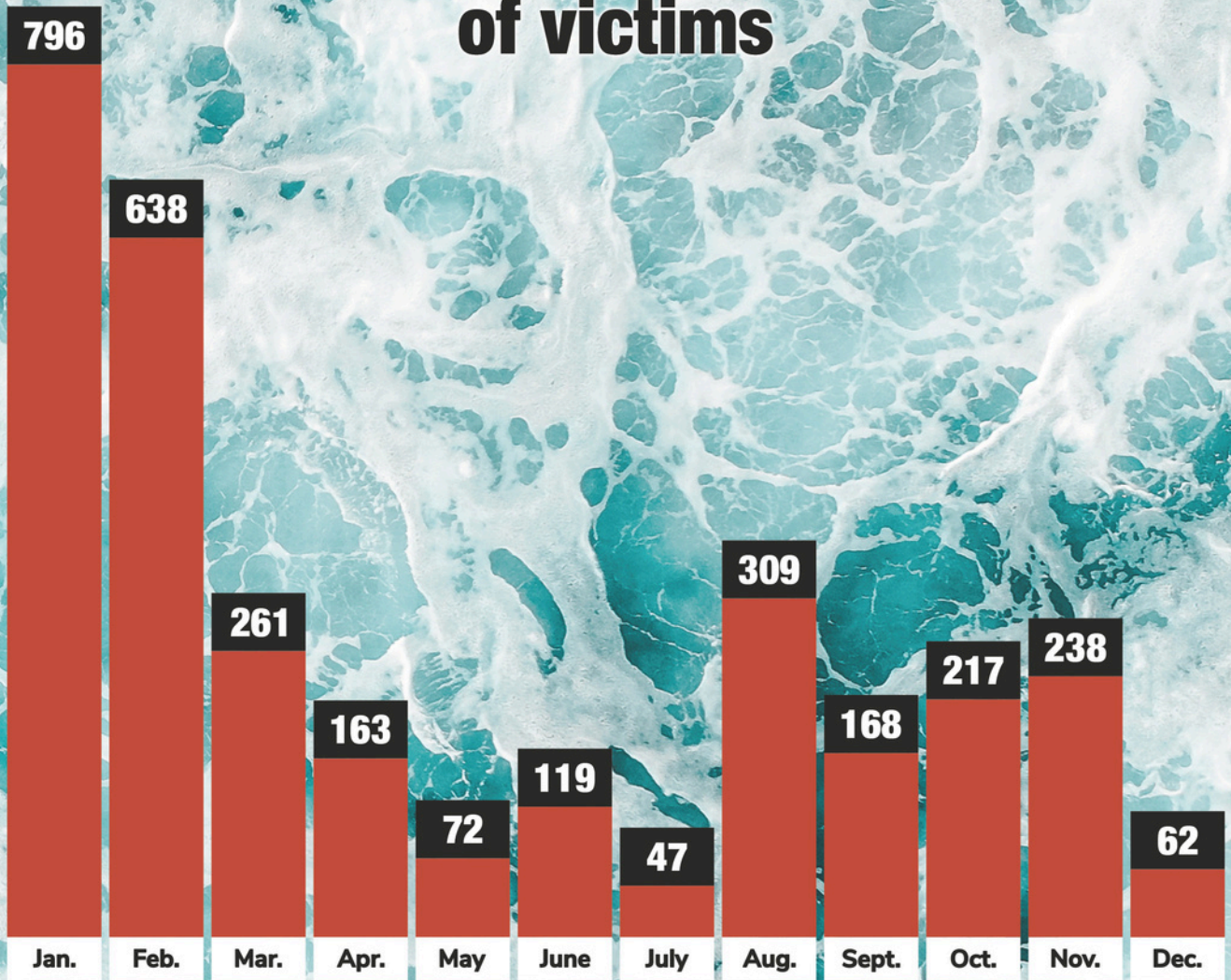
437

**children, girls
and adolescents**



VICTIMS BY MONTHS

**January and February
account for the majority
of victims**



VICTIMS OF MARITIME ROUTES

ATLANTIC ROUTE
1.906
victims

STRAIT ROUTE
139
victims

LAND ROUTE
(Ceuta-Melilla)
3
victims

ALGERIAN ROUTE
1.037
victims

ALBORAN SEA ROUTE
5
victims

VICTIMS OF THE ATLANTIC ROUTE

AGADIR-DAKHLA ROUTE

245 victims

MAURITANIAN ROUTE

1.319 victims

SENEGAL ROUTE

171 victims

GAMBIA ROUTE

160 victims

GUINEA CONAKRY ROUTE

11 victims

MISSING BOATS

70
boats

**have disappeared
with everyone
on board**

ORIGIN OF THE VICTIMS

PEOPLE FROM 30 COUNTRIES HAVE DIED ATTEMPTING TO REACH SPANISH COASTS



A map of the African continent is shown in a light brown color, set against a background of a satellite-style image of the surrounding oceans in shades of blue and white. Numerous red location pins are placed across the map, primarily concentrated in North Africa, the Sahel region, and East Africa, indicating the countries of origin for the victims. The pins are distributed across approximately 25 different countries.

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

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CHAPTER II

TRAGEDIES CONTINUE AND IMPUNITY DEEPENS

The decrease in the number of attempts by migrants to cross into Spain in 2025 has not led to a reduction in the dangers that they face during this journey. The risk to life was far higher than the previous year, as evidenced by the increase in the number of tragedies, which in 2025 reached 303 (data collected was closed on 15 December 2025). Although the total number of victims killed is lower because fewer people were on board the shipwrecked boats, this trend confirms that a substantial proportion of deaths on routes leading to the Spanish State cannot be explained as accidental or inevitable events, but are instead the predictable result of a system that continues to prioritise border control over protecting lives²³.

According to our analysis of the 303 tragedies that occurred along the western Euro-African border²⁴ in 2025, the number of victims appears to be significantly correlated with the presence of border control systems, which have a direct impact on the protection of people's right to life, especially at sea. Our findings indicate that the main cause of death is the influence of migration control policies on the use of search and rescue operations. This can be observed on all routes leading to the Spanish State and has been documented by Caminando Fronteras in previous reports²⁵. The arbitrary approach to rescue operations has led to delays and inaction, leaving boats that are clearly in danger to sink and causing avoidable deaths, as well as abandoning people seeking asylum in highly dangerous circumstances without protection.

During 2025, the Algerian route in the western Mediterranean saw a steady increase in activity, becoming the main transit route towards the Spanish State. Meanwhile, there was a significant decline in the number of migrants taking the Atlantic route, especially during the second half of the year, when new migration control mechanisms were adopted in Mauritania. This did not displace migrants towards the western Mediterranean route, however, as they are two completely different migration circuits with profiles, trajectories and dynamics that are not interchangeable and cannot be interpreted as a replacement for one another.

23. Sociologist Óscar Prieto-Flores has analysed the rise in deaths along the western Euro-African border since 2024, finding that border security and militarisation make migration routes more dangerous and deadly. See: Prieto-Flores, Ó. (2025). *Necropolitics at the Southern European Border: Deaths and Missing Migrants on the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Coasts*. *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics*, 1-17.

24. Western Euro-African border: a border region comprising the land and sea areas located between the Spanish State and the African coastline running from Guinea to Algeria. It is made up of four main sea routes – the Canary Islands route, the Strait of Gibraltar route, the Alboran Sea route and the Algerian route – and the land borders between Morocco and the Spanish autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla.

25. Consult all our reports at:
<https://caminandofronteras.org/en/reports/>

The Algerian route is primarily used by Algerian citizens, although Syrian and Palestinian migrants are also frequently present in smaller numbers. In 2025, Somali migrants joined the people from West African countries who had begun to travel along this route several years before.

The Algerian route has undergone considerable changes in recent years, with the journey to the Balearic Islands constituting the most dangerous section. For years, this route has been overlooked and invisibilised by the public authorities. It was not recognised as a migration route until September 2025²⁶. This continued invisibility has made the Algerian route the most dangerous in terms of loss of human life, compared to other routes into Spain. The situation was condemned by the Unified Association of Civil Guards (AUGC) in two statements²⁷ issued this year concerning maritime rescue operations. The facts mentioned in these statements corroborate the reality repeatedly reported by Caminando Fronteras in our research²⁸. The Algerian route has grown increasingly busy but remained invisibilised until September 2025²⁹.

With regard to other migration routes, one of the most dangerous forms of transit continues to be swimming to Ceuta and 2025 also saw an increase in the number of attempts to swim to Melilla.



Home raids (Caminando Fronteras).

26. Europa Press. (September 2025). El Gobierno aprueba la declaración de emergencia migratoria en Baleares con una inversión de 6,75 millones de euros. Diario de Ibiza.

<https://www.diaodeibiza.es/ibiza/2025/09/16/gobierno-aprueba-declaracion-emergencia-migratoria-121633183.html>

27. Both statements are available on the AUGC website:

https://www.augc.org/actualidad/augc-baleares-denuncia-grave-falta-coordinacion-en-rescates-maritimos-en-islas-baleares_23089_102.html
https://www.augc.org/publica/newsletter/augc-baleares-denuncia-situacion-insostenible-falta-medios-presion-migratoria_23084_102.html

28. To draw attention to the Algerian route, Caminando Fronteras published the report "Wall of Indifference: the Algerian route in the western Mediterranean" in 2022. See:

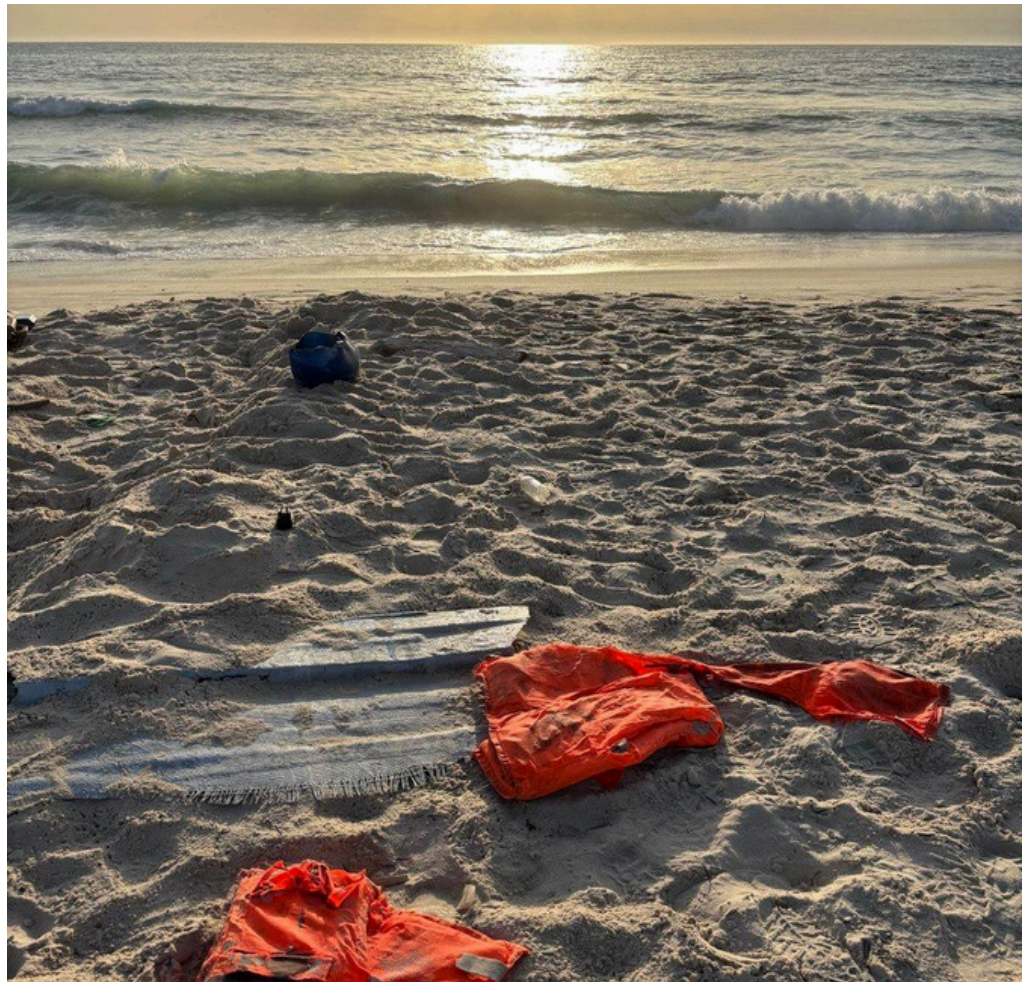
<https://caminandofronteras.org/en/monitoreo/wall-of-indifference-the-algerian-route-in-the-western-mediterranean/>

29. Europa Press. (September 2025). La ONG Caminando Fronteras alerta de la "invisibilización" de la ruta argelina peses a ser este verano "la más transitada". Eldiario.es

https://www.eldiario.es/iles-baleares/sociedad/caminando-fronteras-ruta-argelina-sigue-invisibilizada-negada-transitada-verano_1_12598009.html

The failure to mobilise search and rescue operations in a timely manner has become normalised and is now a structural pattern. Responses to boats in distress are highly discretionary and depend on political decisions or subjective criteria rather than respect for international obligations. This is exacerbated by the spread of passive search practices³⁰, which reduce the capacity to respond in order to protect lives. Our research has shown that rescue centres evaluate the level of danger facing boats in a discretionary manner, despite knowing that none of them meet basic maritime safety requirements. The lack of objective criteria leads to delays or failure to take action in critical situations, causing shipwrecks and deaths that could have been avoided.

In this context, the states that form part of the western Euro-African border continue to systematically contravene the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. When it comes to migrants, the priority is to intercept boats rather than protect lives and to transfer responsibility for rescue to states with limited capacity, often in exchange for economic benefits or strategic agreements, with the sole aim of stopping migrants from reaching the Spanish State.



Life jackets on the beach (Caminando Fronteras).

30. Passive search methods involve transferring information to other vessels and services transiting the area rather than mobilising specific search and rescue operations to look for people in danger. These passive practices are used indiscriminately with boats carrying migrants.

CAUSES OF TRAGEDIES

As documented by our Human Rights Observatory, in 2025 there was an increase in the number of tragedies compared to the previous year, with a total of 3,090 people recorded as victims. The Algerian route once again stands out as the deadliest, accounting for 70% of maritime incidents involving vessels.

Of the 70 recorded disappeared vessels, 47 correspond to this route, compared to 13 on the Atlantic route, clearly highlighting its extreme danger. This is compounded by an increase in victims during swim crossings, where the number of disappearances is particularly alarming, representing approximately half of the total in this type of attempt.

The rise in the number of tragedies at the borders of the Spanish State takes place within a context marked by the insufficient activation of rescue mechanisms and the outsourcing of border control and management to third countries—dynamics that exacerbate vulnerability and leave people unprotected during these migratory journeys.

Throughout the investigation, our organisation has documented a series of causes that have contributed to the loss of life, which may occur simultaneously within the same incident.

THESE ARE CAUSES LINKED TO GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND WERE DECISIVE IN THE OCCURRENCE OF THE TRAGEDIES:

Failure to activate the necessary search and rescue resources: **41%.**

Delayed mobilisation of search operation: **31%.**

No rescue operation launched despite position of vessel known: **10%.**

No rescue operation despite position of vessel known and the vessel reached coast of its own accord: **2%.**

Lack of coordination between countries: **21%.**

Vessels located by boats not linked to search and rescue services: **3%.**

Shipwreck during rescue: **3%.**

OF THE REST, THE FOLLOWING FACTORS STAND OUT:

Warning received too late: **15%.**

Long distances with insufficient resources: **9%.**

Overloaded boats in poor condition: **4%.**

Poor weather: **7%.**

The denial of victims, systematic concealment of information and absence of any rigorous analysis of the impact of migration control policies are a constant feature at borders. Access to rights for dead and missing people is increasingly limited and their families face persistent obstacles to reporting incidents, requesting information or mobilising search operations³¹. As well as prolonging the grief of those seeking answers, this lack of institutional recognition is also part of a context in which impunity has become the norm.

Impunity operates as a structural pillar of the global border regime, and its impact is felt every day on the western Euro-African border. The lack of independent investigations³², transparency from the authorities and political and legal accountability allows rights violations to be repeated without consequence. States fail to guarantee protection and evade all forms of accountability. Against this backdrop, necroborders function as spaces where violence is depoliticised and normalised and dead and missing migrants provoke no institutional response.



31. See: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants. Phenomenon of migrants going missing or subjected to enforced disappearance – human rights analysis (2025). Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/59/49>

32. The report by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants reminds states of their obligation to conduct “effective, thorough, [...] transparent, impartial and independent investigations” into migrant deaths and disappearances. See: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/59/49>

Injuries during migration (Caminando Fronteras).

EXTERNALISATION PRACTICES AND ALLOCATED FUNDING

In 2025, this logic of death and suffering was reinforced through increased or sustained funding for third countries to stem migration, extending the border all the way back into migrants' countries of origin. Increasingly global, lethal mechanisms are taking hold, expanding border territories and multiplying the spaces where lives are at risk as part of a global trend examined in the first chapter of this report.

MAURITANIA

Externalisation model:

Arbitrary detention, mass removals to desert areas on the border with Mali and Senegal, enhanced coastal patrols and direct cooperation with Spain and the European Union (EU) to control the Atlantic route.

No water or food provided during detention and deportation and no guarantee of access to healthcare. Torture and sexual violence, including against minors.

Presence of Spanish security forces as witnesses to systematic rights violations³³.

Allocated funding:

€210 million provided by the EU in March 2024 as part of a new migration cooperation agreement, with operational participation from Spain, which committed an additional €300 million³⁴.

€10 million each year from the Spanish Ministry of Interior for police cooperation. Funds are channelled through the Fundación para la Internacionalización de las Administraciones Públicas (FIAP)³⁵.

At least €1,080,625 in European funds provided via the FIAP to open two detention centres³⁶ as part of the project to counter trafficking and smuggling and manage irregular migration, with a total budget of €4.5 million for the 2021-2025 period³⁷.

€25 million allocated to interception at sea and disembarkation of migrants as part of a 2024 project implemented by Civipol (in cooperation with the French Ministry of the Interior)³⁸.

€28 million allocated to the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) Flexible Mechanism to control migration on the border with Mali³⁹.

33. Human Rights Watch (2025). *They Accused Me of Trying to Go to Europe: Migration Control Abuses and EU Externalization in Mauritania*. Human Rights Watch.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/08/27/they-accused-me-of-trying-to-go-to-europe/migration-control-abuses-and-eu>

34. Ibid.

35. Euronews. (February 2024). *La UE y España anuncian 500 millones para el desarrollo de Mauritania y el control migratorio*. Euronews.

<https://es.euronews.com/2024/02/09/la-ue-y-espana-anuncian-500-millones-para-el-desarrollo-de-mauritania-y-el-control-migrato>

36. Fernández, Pablo et al. (November 2025). *El Gobierno de España abre dos cárceles de migrantes en Mauritania*. El Salto Diario.

<https://www.elsaltodiario.com/fronteras/gobierno-espana-abre-dos-carceles-migrantes-mauritania>

37. European Commission (2023). *NDICI-Global Europe Programme for Morocco 2021-2027*.

https://north-africa-middle-east.gulf.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/morocco_en

38. Statewatch. *Outsourcing Borders: Monitoring EU externalization policy*. Bulletin 10. Migration Partnerships.

<https://www.statewatch.org/outsourcing-borders-monitoring-eu-externalisation-policy/bulletin-10/migration-partnerships/>

39. Ibid.

SENEGAL

Externalisation model:

Increase in interceptions at sea, reinforcement of coastal surveillance, cooperation with Frontex and creation of mixed investigation and migration control units.

Detention of Senegalese nationals on the pretext that they may be potential migrants.

Hospitalisation required upon arrival due to inhumane conditions during deportation.

No food for detainees during detention.

Allocated funding:

Tens of millions of euros in funds from NDICI and Team Europe Initiative (2023-2025) programmes allocated to border control and voluntary return⁴⁰. As part of the project, three search and rescue boats were delivered for migration control purposes.

€30 million euros allocated by the EU in 2024 to measures to counter irregular migration, in addition to its other budgets⁴¹.

€5.75 million from the European Commission to strengthen the Senegalese security forces in migration control⁴².

Collaboration with the European Union on various issues with a total budget of €115 million for 2025-2027, including migration management, for which there is no breakdown.

GAMBIA

Externalisation model:

Programmes to enhance migration management, training for police and border staff and cooperation with EU to counter human smuggling.

Allocated funding:

MISPEAC and MOCadem (2023-2025) projects funded by the European Union and IOM, with budgets of €3-5 million⁴³.

Agreement with the European Union on various issues with a total budget of €74 million for 2025-2027, including migration management⁴⁴, for which there is no breakdown.

40. European Commission (2024). NDICI-Global Europe: Multi-Country Cooperation with West Africa. Frontex (2023). Operational Partnerships with Senegal and West African States.

41. Agencia EFE (Octubre 2024). La UE destina 30 millones de euros adicionales contra la migración irregular en Senegal. Swissinfo. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/la-ue-destina-30-millones-de-euros-adicionales-contra-la-migraci%C3%B3n-irregular-en-senegal/87750287>.

42. FIAP. POC Senegal II. https://www.fiap.gob.es/en/proyectos_fiap/poc-senegal-ii-2/

43. International Organization for Migration (2024). MISPEAC Project Report 2023–2024: Migration Management in The Gambia. Banjul. European External Action Service (2023). MOCadem Project Overview.

44. European Commission. International Partnerships: The Gambia. https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/gambia_en

MOROCCO

Externalisation model:

Increased border controls in Ceuta and Melilla and on the Atlantic route. Detention campaigns against sub-Saharan migrants and internal deportations. Operational cooperation with Spain and Frontex.

Interception of vessels and deportation of their occupants.

Allocated funding:

Package of €500 million (2021-2027) from the NDICI programme, with more than €80 million in additional funds announced by Spain in 2024 to strengthen patrolling and surveillance systems⁴⁵.

€30 million from the Spanish government for police cooperation. Donation of vehicles by the EU and Spain⁴⁶.

€193 million under the regional migration umbrella for migration management, voluntary returns to Morocco and migration control during the 2021-2023 period, from the European Union NDICI⁴⁷.

ALGERIA

Externalisation model:

Roundups in migrant neighbourhoods, mass detentions and chain removals to Niger (migrants abandoned in the Assamaka desert) without legal guarantees or access to asylum.

Allocated funding:

No significant direct financial flows from the EU, but Algeria participates in regional fora and technical projects (via FTDES, Global Detention Project and EU-funded regional cooperation⁴⁸, as well as via NDICI on police cooperation implemented by Interpol)⁴⁹.

45. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Économiques et Sociaux-FTDES. (Junio 2025). Suppression of Movement: Migration Control, Manufactured Precarity and Racialised Border Regimes in Post-Hirak Algeria.

<https://ftdes.net/en/suppression-of-movement-migration-control-manufactured-precarity-and-racialised-border-regimes-in-post-hirak-algeria-in-the-name-of-sovereignty-at-the-service-of-rent-accumulation/>
Global Detention Project. (Julio 2025). Algeria: Detention and Deportation in an "Informal Corridor of Expulsion".
<https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/algeria-detention-and-deportation-in-an-informal-corridor-of-expulsion>

46. Martín, María et al. (Mayo 2024). Desterrados en el desierto. 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>

47. European Commission. (November 2024). Factograph-EU-Morocco relations.

https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/factograph-eu-morocco-relations-0_en

48. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Économiques et Sociaux-FTDES. (Junio 2025). Suppression of Movement: Migration Control, Manufactured Precarity and Racialised Border Regimes in Post-Hirak Algeria.

<https://ftdes.net/en/suppression-of-movement-migration-control-manufactured-precarity-and-racialised-border-regimes-in-post-hirak-algeria-in-the-name-of-sovereignty-at-the-service-of-rent-accumulation/>
Global Detention Project. (Julio 2025). Algeria: Detention and Deportation in an "Informal Corridor of Expulsion".
<https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/algeria-detention-and-deportation-in-an-informal-corridor-of-expulsion>

49. European Commission. Factograph-EU-Algeria.
https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a676129f-8d39-4a2a-8ad4-f719a6e13d2f_en?filename=factograph_SN_Algeria_V10.pdf

CRIMINALISATION OF MIGRANTS

Criminalisation has become more widespread as a tool for covering up institutional responsibility, creating a paradoxical situation whereby the mechanisms that should guarantee rights are used to persecute victims, family members and organisations defending migrants. Research in several European countries has shown that Frontex spent years sending information to Europol with no checks or guarantees for the people affected, with the sole aim of criminalising solidarity⁵⁰. This persecution occurs around the world and affects migrants' countries of origin, transit and destination.

SPAIN

Criminalisation practices:

- Detention of people accused of captaining boats, including minors⁵¹.
- Criminalisation of families mobilising to search for their loved ones.
- Separation of families upon arrival due to inappropriate application of the child's best interest, including child survivors of shipwrecks and massacres.

ALGERIA

Criminalisation practices:

- Accusations of human smuggling against people attempting to cross the Mediterranean and subsequent imprisonment⁵².
- Roundups and campaigns to detain and deport migrants to Morocco, Mali, Libya and Niger⁵³.
- Criminalisation of social organisations, leading to persecution of civil society⁵⁴.

MOROCCO

Criminalisation practices:

- Detention and imprisonment of individuals accused of captaining boats.
- Roundups and campaigns to detain and deport migrants to the desert and to Mauritania and Algeria.

50. Hierro, Lola et al. (Julio 2025). Frontex transfirió durante años ilegalmente a Europol datos de migrantes y activistas. El País.

<https://elpais.com/internacional/2025-07-07/frontex-transfiri%C3%B3-durante-a%C3%B1os-ilegalmente-a-europol-datos-de-migrantes-y-activistas.html>

51. Daniel Arencibia, a lawyer, has been conducting an exhaustive analysis of sentences handed down to boat captains since 2018. See:

<https://captainsupport.net/blog/the-criminalisation-of-boat-drivers-in-spain-and-the-canary-islands-la-criminalizacion-de-los-patrones-de-embarcacion-en-el-estado-espanol-y-canarias/>

52. Op. cit. footnote 48. (Global Detention Project).

53. Lemaizi, Salaheddine. (Junio 2025). Le droit d'asile au Maghreb : Un recul alarmant. ENASS.

<https://enass.ma/le-droit-dasile-au-maghreb-un-recul-alarlant/>

54. For more information on the impact of migration control policies on Algeria as a host society, please consult the conclusions of the report by the Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux (FTDS). See:

<https://ftdes.net/en/suppression-of-movement-migration-control-manufactured-precarity-and-racialised-border-regimes-in-post-hirak-algeria-in-the-name-of-sovereignty-at-the-service-of-rent-accumulation/#>

SENEGAL

Criminalisation practices:

- Detention of relatives for reporting missing people.
- Detention of relatives for reporting missing people.
- Campaigns to detain migrants, including Senegalese citizens suspected of being migrants.

MAURITANIA

Criminalisation practices:

- Systematic detention of people intercepted on boats.
- Roundups and campaigns to detain and deport migrants to Mali and Senegal.
- Blocking of access to humanitarian aid systems by social organisations.
- Police persecution of migrants, including in their homes, at their workplaces, on beaches and on public transport.
- Prison sentences of up to six years for people accused of facilitating transit for migrants.
- Arbitrary accusations of human smuggling against detained individuals, who are held in pre-trial detention for more than six months without trial⁵⁵.



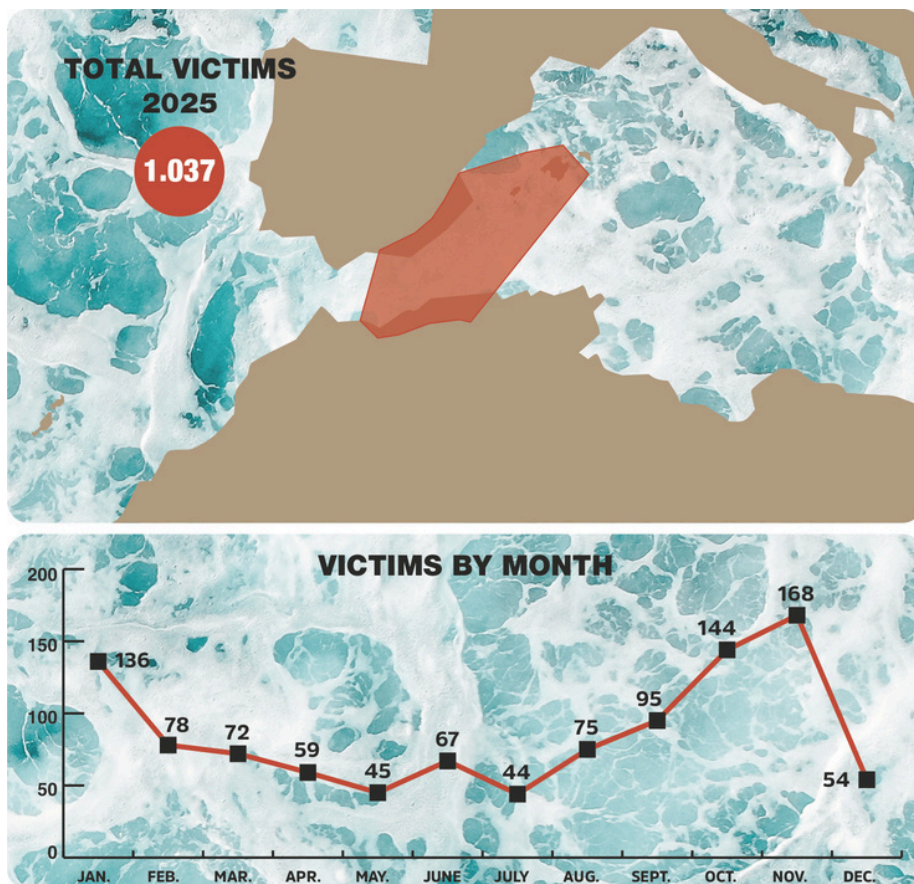
Pain on movement (Caminando Fronteras).

55. *Op. cit.* footnote: 33.

CHAPTER III

MEDITERRANEAN ROUTES ON THE WESTERN EURO-AFRICAN BORDER

THE ALGERIAN ROUTE IN THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN: SEA OF TRANSIT, DESERT OF RIGHTS



The Algerian route has remained active throughout the year, consolidating its position as the busiest migration route to Spain, surpassing the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands and the routes from northern Morocco. The shift towards the most dangerous part of the route, which leads to the Balearic Islands and to Ibiza and Formentera especially, has also continued. During the year, our Human Rights Observatory reported boats departing from areas in eastern Algeria, which would traditionally have headed towards the central Mediterranean but have now changed course to travel to the Pityusic Islands.

Our Human Rights Observatory documented 1,037 victims in 121 maritime tragedies, 47 of which involved vessels that disappeared entirely. The number of victims was especially high in January, October and November, when numerous deaths occurred.

This route, especially the area around the Balearic Islands, remains one of the least transparent regions when it comes to search and rescue operations to save people missing at sea. Passive searches continue and operations are limited to areas near land. The situation is exacerbated by weak cooperation between countries sharing responsibility for search and rescue areas⁵⁶. Delays in mobilising search and rescue services remain considerable⁵⁷, while passive search methods are used when proactive operations are required. The importance of addressing the issues affecting search and rescue services is apparent from the large numbers of bodies arriving on the coasts of the Balearic Islands throughout 2025⁵⁸, many of whom had drowned shortly before washing up on the beach.

56. 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. The Algerian route crosses SAR areas under the responsibility of Algeria and Spain, although the search for missing boats may also encompass areas under the responsibility of Morocco and France.

57. Navarro Adame, César. (Noviembre 2025). Un migrante de la patera de los 18 desaparecidos cerca de Ibiza: "Estamos en peligro. Nos vamos a ahogar". Diario de Ibiza. <https://www.diariodelibiza.es/ibiza/2025/11/20/pareja-pasajero-patera-18-desaparecidos-123945446.html>.

58. The media regularly report that the corpses of migrants have been found. See: <https://cadenaser.com/comunitat-valenciana/2025/07/27/investigacion-la-aparicion-de-un-posible-cadaver-en-avanzado-estado-de-descomposicion-en-el-prao-de-castellon-radio-castellon/>; <https://www.diariodemallorca.es/mallorca/2025/07/13/navegantes-mallorquines-encuentran-veces-cadaver-119661889.html>.



Calling for help on the Balearic route (photo sent by family members).

The authorities must consider whether these shipwrecks could have been avoided and open an investigation to establish how the right to life at sea can be protected effectively. Unfortunately, this has not been the case and instead we find cemeteries full of unmarked graves and people buried anonymously, with no funeral, no respect for their religious traditions and, most importantly, no notification of their families. The small cemetery in Formentera is full of niches where the gravedigger, overwhelmed by the human dimension of these tragedies, has written the date when the corpse appeared on each tomb in an act of remembrance for victims⁵⁹, and as a way of helping their families.

The Algerian route has a characteristic that is absent from other routes along the western Euro-African border: large numbers of people coming from the Horn of Africa, mainly Somalia, but also Sudan and South Sudan, which increased dramatically during 2025. Some boats on the route are made up entirely of people from these countries. Although the route was traditionally used by Algerian citizens, Algeria has recently become a transit country for people coming from East Africa, West Africa and the Sahel.

“We arrived in Libya and it was hell, we couldn’t live there. They locked us up in this place and they beat us all the time, they wanted money. It was really overcrowded and some people died. Then, I was able to escape. I was helped by some other Somalis and I managed to reach Algeria. Algeria isn’t much better than Libya, but life has no value in Libya, they’ll kill you for no reason at all. We all took a boat together, the weather was awful and I thought I was going to die. I kept vomiting and praying and we managed to reach Spain, alhamdulillah. I claimed asylum and started a new life, but I really struggle to sleep. I think about my family a lot, but at least we’re alive, alhamdulillah”, M.B., Somalia, asylum seeker.

Migrants experience numerous dangers during their journeys, including serious human rights violations. Two main routes from East Africa are used: one heading north crossing Libya and Algeria and one passing through the transit countries in Central and West Africa, leading to Algeria via Niger and Nigeria. This second route is mostly shared with people from Mali and Guinea, who try to reach Europe via Libya, Tunisia and Algeria.

During these long journeys, they face serious dangers while crossing Sudan and Libya, where there are high-risk civil conflicts, or while crossing the Sahel, where terrorist groups are active in several countries. The journey through the desert also exposes migrants to human rights violations, with reports of deaths, torture, arbitrary detention and forced displacement. This violence is all the more serious when it comes to child migrants, who now make up a larger proportion of people travelling on western Mediterranean routes. Most of these child migrants come from Algeria, Mali, Guinea and Somalia.

59. Caminando Fronteras was able to meet Pepin Escandell, the gravedigger at Sant Francesc cemetery, in September 2025. See: <https://www.diariodeibiza.es/formentera/2025/09/12/crisis-migratoria-dolor-heredado-muertos-121482500.html>

The sea crossing on flimsy boats poses a serious threat to life and migrants in transit are exposed to serious dangers, with the additional risk of poor weather conditions. On this route, unlike other routes along the western Euro-African border, boats containing a mix of nationals from the country of departure and transit migrants are uncommon.

“He’s 16 years old, he’s my brother. I was meant to cross with him that day but I couldn’t because there was a roundup in the building where I was working as a builder and they deported me to the desert. It took a while for me to make it back and when I returned to Algiers, my friends told me that he’d got onto the boat but they hadn’t heard from him since. I tried to call his friends’ phones but they were switched off and I’ve been looking for him ever since. I was told that the boat went missing, it never reached Spain. At first, I was hopeful. They said he might be in prison. Here, you can rot in prison just for being a migrant if you’re caught at sea. But I’ve lost hope of finding him in Algeria now. I don’t know how to tell my mum, I don’t know how to tell her that her youngest son is missing”, M.B., Mali, brother of a missing person.



Unnamed graves in Formentera (Caminando Fronteras).

THE BALEARIC ISLANDS: A LABORATORY FOR THE NECROBORDER

Recently, the Spanish government declared a migration emergency on the Balearic Islands route, which had been presented as an emerging area rather than as a consolidated border for years⁶⁰. The region has now become a laboratory, where criminalisation, necropolitics and the gradual erosion of international law, especially with regard to protecting the right to life, converge in the same space. The disputes over jurisdiction between different authorities and the polarised discourse present in the region offer an opportunity for the government to establish a border based on managing suffering⁶¹ and normalising death.

The islands of Ibiza and Formentera account for a large proportion of arrivals, while Mallorca acts as the main redistribution point for people travelling to the mainland⁶². The measures in place reveal a structural lack of coordination and resources, as well as a worrying normalisation of human rights violations as part of migration management.

Regional policy has focused primarily on security to the detriment of human rights and comprehensive protection, reflecting the current tensions between migrant reception and migrant containment policies⁶³. There is a worrying decline in spaces for dialogue with social organisations and local associations, which have been replaced by agreements between regional parliamentary groups calling for the persecution of solidarity⁶⁴. The Balearic Islands are an example of political adaptation to narratives of fear, control, criminalisation and the erosion of rights as tools for border management.

60. In the space of only one week, the government shifted from refusing to declare a migration emergency on the Balearic Islands route, which forms part of the Algerian route, to declaring such an emergency and investing €6.75 million in assistance for people arriving. See:

https://www.eldiario.es/illes-balears/politica/gobierno-deniega-contingencia-migratoria-balears-buscaba-evitar-acogida-menores-no-acompanados_1_12588528.html

61. In October, a family who travelled to Palma de Mallorca from France were denied the right to report their loved one missing. The authorities subsequently rectified the situation and respected the family's rights. See:

<https://www.diariodemallorca.es/mallorca/2025/10/26/ong-acusa-policia-frenar-palma-123021860.html>

62. The failure to provide support for migrants led to the mobilisation of the Plataforma Les Balears Acollim, which aims to meet basic needs such as food. See:

<https://www.elcorregallego.es/sociedad/2025/08/20/voluntarios-asumen-crisis-migratoria-baleares-120779935.html>

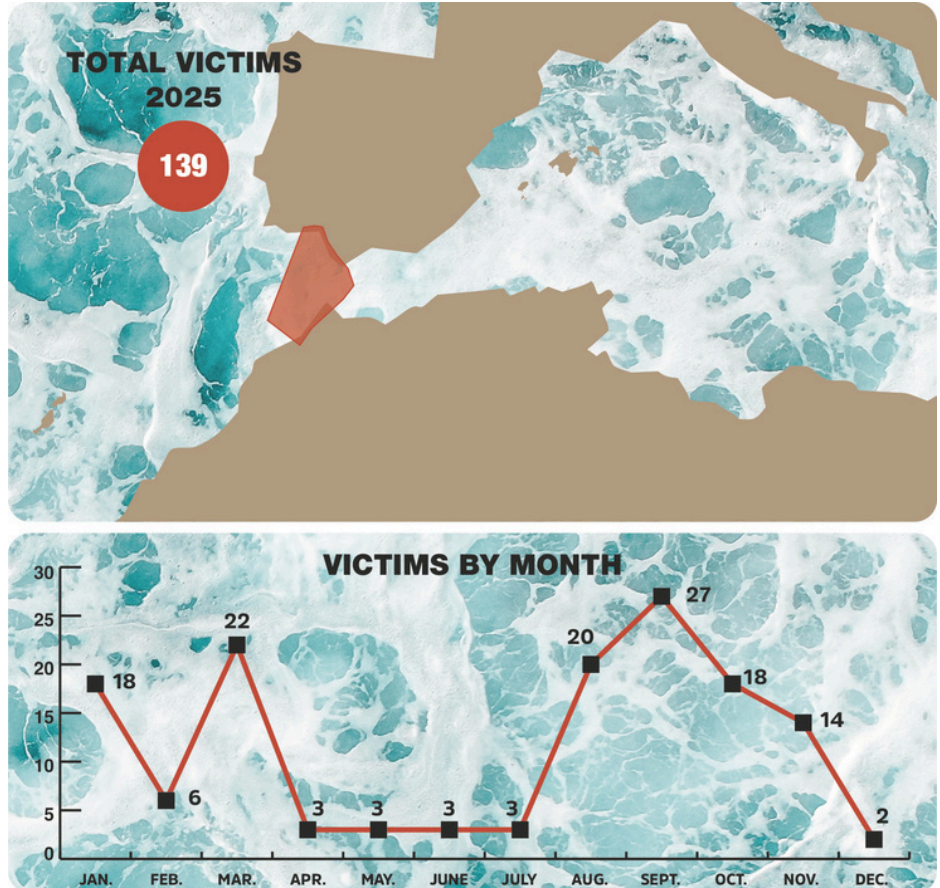
63. The recognition of the Balearic Islands route has been accompanied by intense politicisation, with negative consequences for the support and protection of newly arrived people. See:

<https://www.pressdigital.es/articulo/politica/2025-08-01/5384599-gobierno-baleares-urge-sanchez-pactar-argelia-frenar-ilegala-migrantes-baleares>

64. In June, third-sector organisations in the Balearic Islands expressed their concern over the criminalisation of migrants and the criminalisation of solidarity, with social organisations being linked to criminal networks. See:

<https://www.euronapress.es/illes-balears/noticia-tercer-sector-baleares-reclama-retirar-acuerdo-pv-vox-considerar-vulnera-derechos-fundamentales-20250613111226.html>

THE STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR–CEUTA ROUTE: SWIMMERS DEFYING DEATH



In 2025, there was a substantial increase in attempts to reach Ceuta and tragedies on the sea crossing to the autonomous city. Our Human Rights Observatory documented 139 victims, 24% of whom were children and teenagers. The proportion of deaths among child migrants has risen this year compared to 2024, when it stood at 20%. This figure places children and adolescents as one of the most vulnerable groups on this route.

The most frequent method used to cross to Ceuta continues to be swimming from the area around Tarajal Beach. Young people jump into the sea in the early hours of the morning, taking advantage of fog and poor weather conditions to avoid detection by surveillance systems. Many use makeshift flotation devices, small inflatable boats or, in the best case, wetsuits. It is not unusual for hundreds of people to attempt the crossing simultaneously, exponentially increasing the associated risks and rate of death⁶⁵.

65. People attempt to swim to Ceuta during poor weather conditions to avoid migration control mechanisms. For example, 54 minors arrived in Ceuta on 25 July 2025. See: https://www.infolibre.es/politica/medio-centenar-menores-migrantes-entran-nado-ceuta_1_2037787.html

Social media, especially WhatsApp, plays a central role in the self-organisation of these crossings by migrants. Videos, instructions, routes and recommendations on how to enter the sea circulate in groups. The phenomenon has given rise to a new name: those who cross the sea to Ceuta by swimming are known as *nadadores* (swimmers). These digital calls partly explain the peaks in the number of attempts recorded from July to September.

“I’ve tried to swim to Ceuta several times, I think it’s been seven times in total. I gave up on several occasions because I was too tired. On other occasions, I was arrested by the police and taken to the police station. They’d hit me a few times and then my mother would come and collect me. Every time I tried to cross, I knew I might die. On the day I finally made it, there was a lot of fog and you could barely see anything. I was wearing a wetsuit and trainers. There were two of us. We’d swim for half an hour and rest for 15 minutes. When we got too tired, we’d lie on our backs and let the water carry us. The most important thing was not to get separated: if one swam ahead, he’d stop and wait for the other. We knew that if we lost sight of one another, we wouldn’t survive. We spent almost six hours in the water. We set off at around 05:00 and we arrived at the beach in Ceuta around 10.30. I was wrecked. My arms, legs and head hurt... My whole body hurt. It was like it wasn’t my body anymore, like I was dead inside. Throughout the whole crossing, I could see my mother’s face in my mind. I was scared I’d never see her again”, S.M., Morocco, young male migrant.

When it comes to nationality, the majority of those attempting to swim to Ceuta are Moroccan children and adolescents from areas bordering the autonomous city, such as Castillejos, Tetouan, Tangier, Ksar Sghir and rural areas in the centre of the country. The profound, structural discontent among young people in Morocco was apparent in 2025 as Gen Z mobilised throughout the country. This spontaneous movement organised via social media arose following the deaths of eight pregnant women at the Hassan II regional hospital in Agadir⁶⁶.

During the protests, the young people demanded improvements to health, education and wealth distribution and criticised multimillion investments in football stadiums for the 2030 World Cup instead of measures to alleviate the social crisis. Hundreds of people were arrested at the protests and at least two people died, but the protesters failed to obtain a commitment from the state to make structural changes.

Given this lack of rights, it is not surprising that many choose to migrate as a way of escaping the situation in the country. With no government response to inequality, precarity and deteriorating basic services, young people view the sea crossing as an alternative route to better opportunities.

66. Oukerzaz, Hicham. (Octubre 2025). Sanctions à l’hôpital Hassan II d’Agadir : la coordination syndicale dénonce “une injustice”. Hespress. <https://fr.hespress.com/444561-sanctions-a-l-hopital-hassan-ii-dagadir-la-coordination-syndicale-denonce-une-injustice.html>.



Waiting at immigration crossings (Caminando Fronteras)

People in transit through Morocco have also been identified on the Ceuta maritime route, although in much smaller numbers. They come from Algeria, Tunisia, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The latter two nationalities tend to use small boats instead of swimming. The presence of women and girls on the route is growing, constituting a shift in the profile of migrants in the region⁶⁷.

“When the sun comes up, you can see lots of black floatation devices on the water. They’re left over from an attempt to swim across, big groups of kids usually try to cross together, they jump in and let God do His will. Some kids are rescued but others don’t survive, it gives you goosebumps thinking about it, but what can you do? Unfortunately, that’s everyday life along this border”, A.B., resident of Ceuta.

Many of the dead wash up along the coast in Ceuta and it is difficult to identify them, give them a decent burial and allow their families to exercise their rights. The majority are buried in the Muslim cemetery, while those who cannot be identified are recorded with a number. If a relative manages to obtain information at a later date, a DNA test is carried out and examined alongside photographs of the body, the clothes the person was wearing and any other distinctive characteristic on file at the court.

When the deceased is confirmed to be a member of another religious denomination, they are buried in the corresponding cemetery. The cumulative number of victims over the years is leading to space constraints in Ceuta’s cemeteries, reflecting the appalling effects of necropolitics⁶⁸.

67. For example, three teenage girls crossed to Ceuta on 6 November 2025. See: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20251106/11236035/tres-ninas-migrantes-acceden-nado-ceuta-grupo-seis-personas-agenciaslv20251106.html>

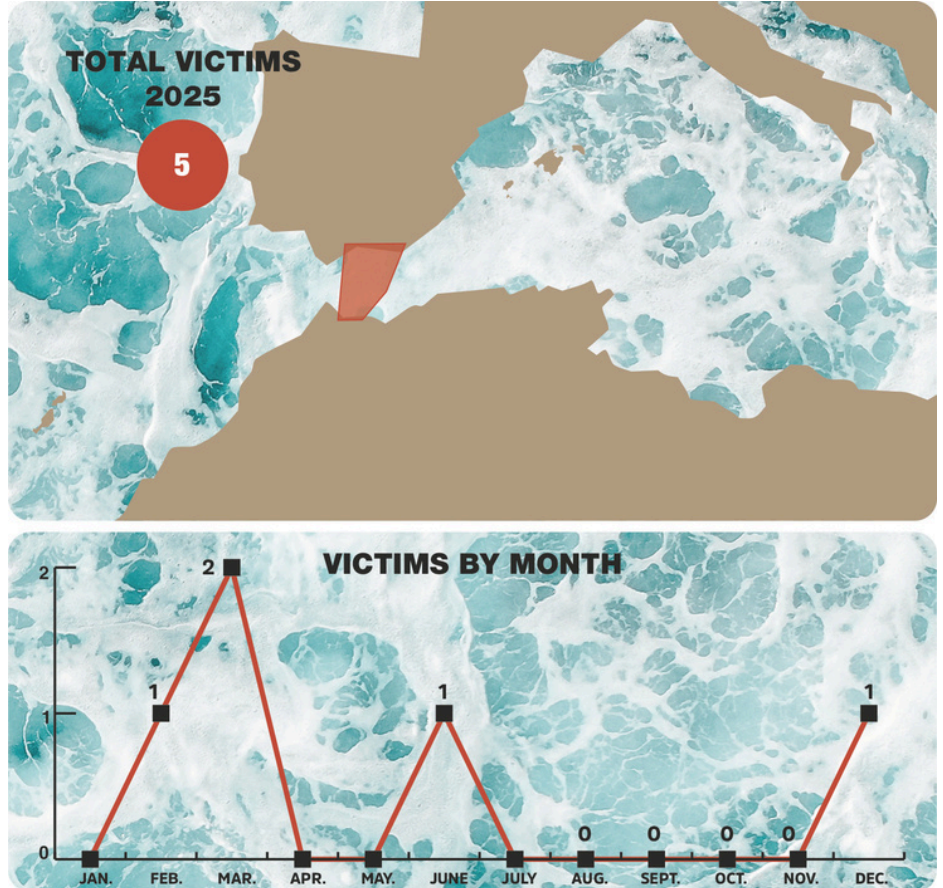
68. The lack of space in the Muslim cemetery in Ceuta has made new tombs an urgent necessity. See: <https://elfarodeceuta.es/habilitadas-tumbas-cementerio-sidi-embarek/>

“We’ve been looking for my cousin for a good while now, he’s an only child and his parents can’t handle the admin and search procedures. We found out from an article in El Faro de Ceuta that he’s buried in the Muslim cemetery in Ceuta. When I called up and gave his details, they told me that they might coincide with a body that’s buried there and they gave us the number of the tomb, but I’ve called the police and written to them and they don’t answer me. Nobody gives you clear information about the procedures. We have one simple request: we want to know where my cousin’s body is and complete all the procedures so that his remains can be exhumed and buried in his hometown where his parents can visit his grave. Wellah kalbena mehrouk 3li (our hearts are filled with pain) and we don’t know what to do, it’s a real labyrinth. May Allah be with us”, A.H., Algeria, cousin of a victim.



Ceuta Border Breakwater (Caminando Fronteras)

THE ALBORAN SEA-MELILLA ROUTE: SILENT RETURNS AT SEA



In 2025, the Alboran Sea route saw the fewest tragedies of all the migration routes to Spain. Our Human Rights Observatory documented 5 tragedies, with 5 victims.

It is important to note that there was a significant decline in the number of arrivals on the coasts of Granada and Almería in 2025, compared to 2024. Although inflatable boats continue to be the most common mode of transport from northern Morocco, the total number of boats and people rescued is considerably smaller than in 2024.

Meanwhile, the number of children and adolescents attempting to swim into Melilla is on the rise. They jump into the sea from areas increasingly far from the coast to avoid detection. It often takes them up to seven hours to swim to the city and one of the main routes used is via the river mouth.

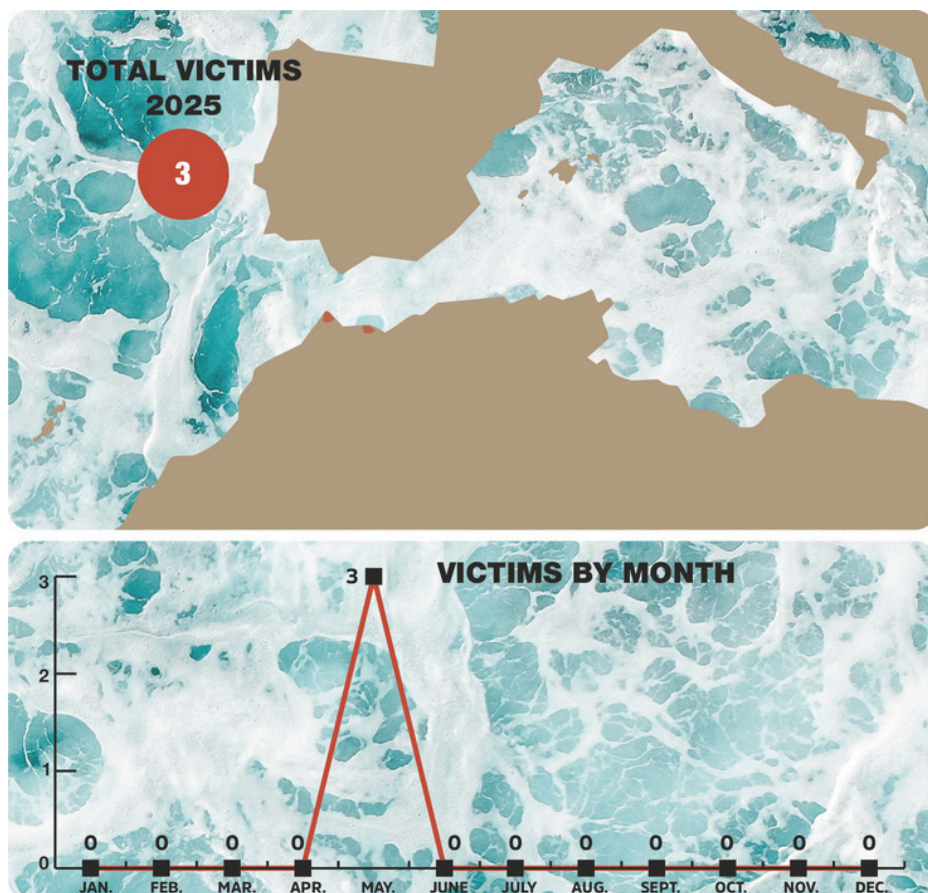
The people using this migration route are mostly Moroccan adolescents and adults, but some Algerians also attempt to cross here. Victims have reported pushbacks carried out while migrants are in the water.

“The Civil Guard pull us out while we’re swimming, they put us on their boats and they hand us back to the Moroccans, who take us to Nador. I’ve tried three times and I won’t stop until I’m dead”,
A.C., Morocco, teenage victim of a pushback at sea.



Melilla maritime border (photo provided by MDLR organization).

THE LAND ROUTE: BORDER FENCES CONTINUE TO DESTROY LIVES



The land route covers access to Spain via the Ceuta and Melilla border fences. During 2025, our observatory documented three deaths at the border fence in Ceuta: two of the victims were Sudanese and one Cameroonian. Two died of injuries sustained after falling off the fence and receiving delayed medical treatment, while the third is reported to have died from the blows he received from migration control officers. These incidents illustrate the persistent violence associated with border surveillance practices⁶⁹.

In the case of Melilla, as a result of the massacre⁷⁰ at the border fence and systematic roundups on the Moroccan side, almost no crossings were recorded in 2022. By contrast, small groups of people continue to cross the border fence in Ceuta despite the major risk to their physical integrity.

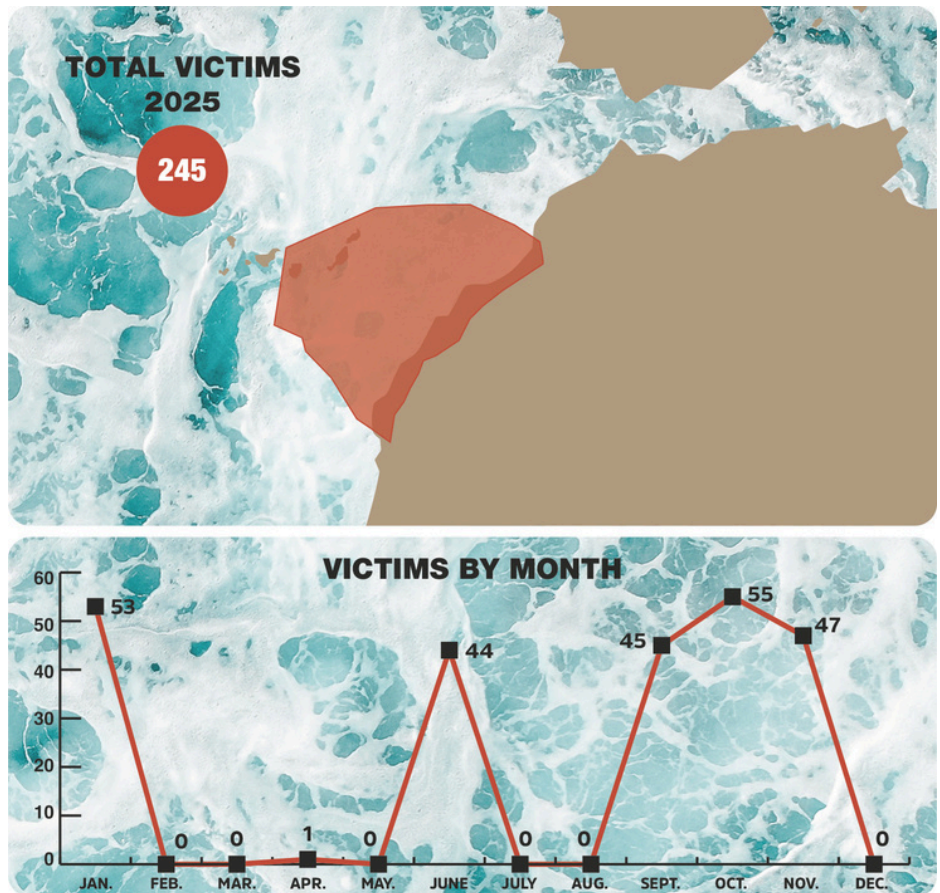
69. Rumours of a mass crossing on 15 October led to an intensification of the military deployment around the Ceuta fence. Campaigns to detain migrants continue, with those arrested being deported to other provinces in Morocco. See: <https://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-marruecos-refuerza-vigilancia-frontera-espana-possible-cruce-masivo-15-octubre-20251014190136.html>.

70. Caminando Fronteras published a report on the 2022 Melilla-Nador massacre drafted in collaboration with migrant communities in Morocco. Forty people were slaughtered and dozens went missing. See: <https://caminandofronteras.org/monitoreo/victimas-de-la-frontera-nador-melilla/>.

CHAPTER IV

ATLANTIC ROUTES

THE AGADIR–DAKHLA ROUTE: PLASTIC BOATS, BILATERAL NEGOTIATION TOOLS



In 2025, Caminando Fronteras monitored 10 tragedies on the Agadir-Dakhla route, including 5 missing boats, with a total of 245 victims.

Migrants setting off from the coast between Agadir and Dakhla tend to travel in inflatable boats, although wooden boats were also observed on several occasions this year. During the year, departures from this area declined due to surveillance pressures, prompting migrants to set off from further along the coast and making the journey even more dangerous.

This was particularly noticeable in the second half of the year, when the departure points of inflatable boats shifted. As well as departing from Tan-Tan and Tarfaya, which were the busiest areas in 2024, they now also set off from Dakhla and Cape Bojador.

Meanwhile, departures from the prefecture of Agadir have also increased, resulting in even longer journeys and a far greater risk to boats that are not designed for such long distances.

“The boat began to deflate several hours after we set off, one of the rubber plugs stopped working and everyone panicked. I remember how cold it was, how the waves rocked us from side to side. We switched off the engine that had stopped working to see if the boat would float better like that. It was my first time at sea, people were going crazy with fear. We telephoned for help and they said they were coming, but nobody came. In that situation, minutes seem like hours and the rescue boat eventually arrived, but it was too late for some people”, A.L., Ivory Coast, female migrant.



Forced displacements (Caminando Fronteras).

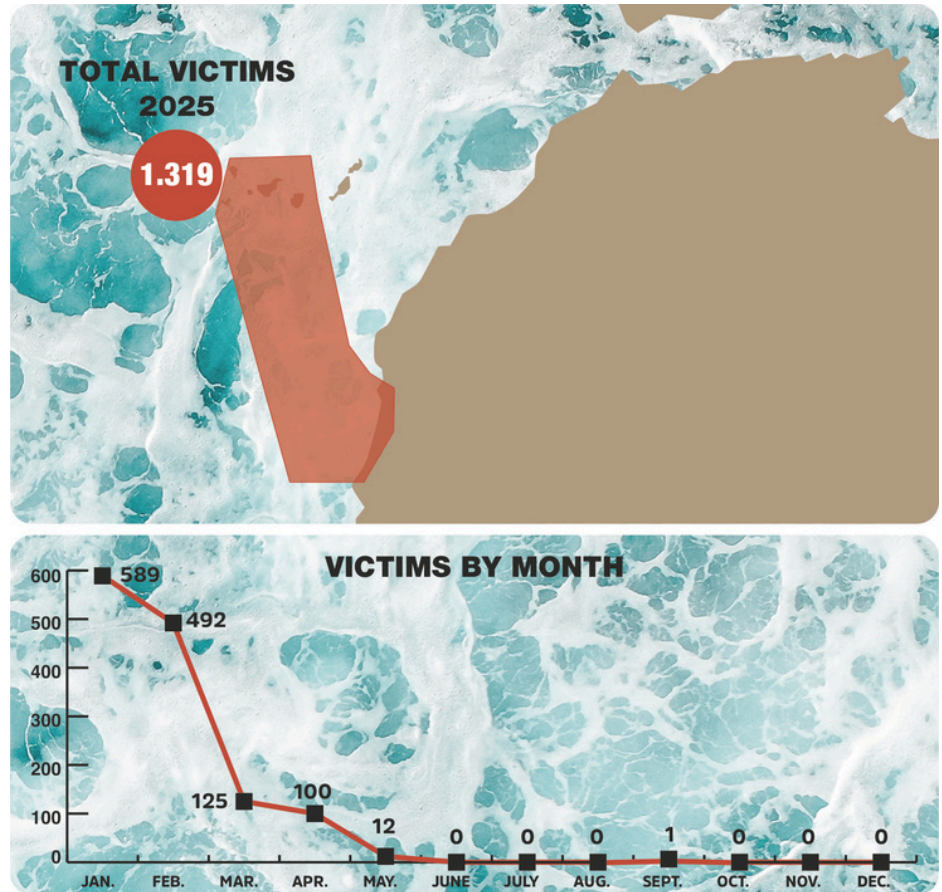
Along this section of the Atlantic route, the externalisation of migration control continues to take precedence over protecting lives. The dynamics between Spain and Morocco, which are strongly influenced by the bilateral agreements between the two countries and by regional geopolitics, result in inadequate coordination and systematic delays in responding to emergencies at sea. Our research shows that informal protocols remain in place whereby Spain, via Salvamento Marítimo, negotiates with Morocco to transfer responsibility for rescues at sea, maintaining a focus on migration control⁷¹. This means that the mobilisation of search and rescue operations is not governed by a concern for saving lives, but by political negotiations that determine who intervenes, when and with what resources, resulting in delays that put people's lives at risk.

Overloading of flimsy boats, which will only float for a short time, leads to shipwrecks when the response from the rescue services is delayed and inadequate.

It is also relevant to note that the number of Moroccans travelling on inflatable boats has risen in comparison with other nationalities in transit, making the use of mixed boats more common. Among the victims of the tragedies at sea that we observed were people from Guinea, Ivory Coast and Senegal, as well as people of Asian origin, who were mainly from Bangladesh and Pakistan. Women also travelled on the boats, accompanied by their children. In 2025, the numbers of Moroccan women taking this route rose.

71. In March, there were reports that the Royal Moroccan Gendarmerie and the Spanish Civil Guard were conducting mixed patrols for migration control purposes. See: <https://fr.hespress.com/444561-sanctions-a-lhopital-hassan-ii-dagadir-la-coordination-syndicale-denonce-une-injustice.html>

THE MAURITANIAN ROUTE: REFUGEES MERCILESSLY HIT BY EXTERNALISATION



The route from Mauritania continued to have the highest numbers of victims in 2025, despite fewer boats departing in the second half of the year. Our observatory documented 1,319 victims in 27 tragedies and 17 boats missing with everyone on board.

Departures from Mauritania have tended to take place during particularly poor weather, making the journey considerably more dangerous. With regard to the origin of the migrants travelling on boats from Mauritania, many are transit migrants from the Sahel and West Africa who are forced to flee by structural factors, including worsening armed conflict, widespread insecurity, political instability and increasingly severe effects of climate change on livelihoods⁷². The combination of violence, extreme poverty and environmental degradation makes it almost impossible for them to remain in their countries of origin and pushes many people to embark on very dangerous sea crossings.

72. *Op. cit.* footnote: 33.

The presence of children and teenagers on these crossings is a growing trend. They suffer long journeys, violence and a complete lack of protection in transit countries⁷³.

“He left our village without telling me, many young people are leaving. We older people can’t do anything anymore, but they’re afraid of being recruited by rebel groups. Things are really bad in our country. We hoped that it would get better but the violence has spread. That’s why he left and I was very sad because he was the smartest of all my children. There’s not a day when I don’t get up and ask his brother to check WhatsApp. I want to see if he’s been online, if he’s alive. I’ve been told that his boat is missing but I say to myself ‘perhaps he’s been kidnapped in the desert somewhere and one day he’ll come home’. His siblings have performed the rituals for his soul, but I refuse to participate in all that. I can sense that he’s alive and he’ll embrace me again one day”, M.K., Mali, father of a missing man.

The institutional response to tragedies at sea remains patently inadequate. When boats are reported to be drifting, search and rescue operations are limited by the huge size of the area and the lack of specialist teams able to act quickly. Although there has been collaboration between countries in some cases, there are still worrying delays in mobilising rescue missions, a lack of adequate resources and limited political will to protect lives.



Cayucos (Caminando Fronteras).

73. Save the Children, (June 2025). Crossing Lines: Realities of migrant children at EU external borders. https://www.savethechildren.es/sites/default/files/2025-06/Cruzando_fronteras_2025.pdf

This is exacerbated by the alarming fact that there is a large navigation area with very few search and rescue resources. Boats that drift off course in this area are at risk of being swept along by Atlantic currents for days or weeks, which explains why debris and vessels continue to wash up on the shores of Caribbean⁷⁴ and South American countries. This demonstrates not only the magnitude of the gap in protection, but also the urgency of establishing search and rescue mechanisms capable of covering areas where drifting off course is akin to a death sentence.

From the second half of 2025, there was far less activity on the Mauritanian migration route. According to social organisations, the Mauritanian authorities conducted mass detentions of migrants in an irregular situation, in transit or preparing to embark for Europe. Human Rights Watch has reported that 28,000 people were deported in the first half of the year, according to official accounts⁷⁵. Most of the people affected by these mass deportations were from Mali and Senegal, as well as other countries in West and Central Africa.

In recent years, Mauritania has become a focal point in the EU's policy of externalising borders to West Africa. Its geographical location between the Sahel and the Atlantic make it a strategic area and this geopolitical centrality has transformed the country into a space of control and containment rather than one of transit or protection.

The situation in the region explains much of this dynamic. Chronic instability in neighbouring countries, such as Mali and Burkina Faso, and worsening impacts of climate change, such as desertification, resource loss and internal displacement, have intensified migration flows. Meanwhile, the persistence of social structures shaped by systemic racism, inequality and traditional hierarchies derived from slavery prompt young Mauritians to leave the country.

The migration control imposed by Europe through externalisation has reconfigured the role of the Mauritanian state. Bilateral agreements with the EU totalling more than €200 million, with the promise of an additional €300 million for security cooperation⁷⁶, have reinforced the police apparatus and mechanisms for detention and removals. Migrants are persecuted in the streets and in their workplaces and homes; constant identity checks are performed; roundups are sometimes carried out with the presence of Spanish military and police personnel; and deportations take place without guarantees and often to countries experiencing severe humanitarian crises. The detention centres in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou⁷⁷, which are characterised by inhumane conditions and arbitrary detention, symbolise this growing repression.

Mauritania is not an isolated case but part of a broader regional trend in West Africa towards the progressive closure of mobility spaces. The criminalisation of mobility, arbitrary detention, institutional violence and persecution of civil society organisations lead to extreme vulnerability for migrants.

74. Throughout 2025, a total of four boats washed up in Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines after crossing the Atlantic, with no survivors. See: <https://cadenaser.com/canarias/2025/06/15/cayuco-s-africanos-en-el-caribe-la-muerte-cruza-el-atlantico-ser-las-palmas/>

75. Op. cit. footnote: 33.

76. Op. cit. footnote: 33.

77. In 2006, the Spanish state opened a detention centre in Nouadhibou known as "Guantanamo" because of the systematic human rights violations that occurred there from the outset. The centre was shut down in 2012. See: <https://www.europapress.es/epsocial/migracion/noticia-cear-exige-cierre-centro-inmigrantes-espana-construyo-mauritania-conocido-guantanamo-20090507142256.html>

In May 2025, in response to criticism over the lack of transparency in its migration management and violations of migrants' rights, the Mauritanian government passed two regulations⁷⁸ aimed at establishing standard procedures for operations involving the rescue, interception, disembarkation and subsequent management of migrants. The detention centres condemned for the human rights violations taking place within their walls⁷⁹ are a central component in this new operational framework.

In this context, civil society organisations are increasingly struggling to operate in the country, as they are criminalised and subjected to strict controls that limit their capacity for action. There are no policies on reparation and justice for victims and thousands of families across Mauritania are searching for their sons and daughters who have gone missing at sea, demanding their right to the truth. Despite this, the state lacks effective mechanisms to find and identify victims and the institutional response has been limited to managing the bureaucracy surrounding tragedies.

“There were more than 50 of us in a cell, wet and lying on the floor. We had no food and local people would come and bring us some because it was Friday and it’s their custom as Muslims not to leave anyone without food or water. But they treated us like animals, although we’re used to that because we migrants are worth nothing wherever we go. Then, they left me and others at the border with Mali and we were arrested there. I’m from Cameroon, there were about 10 of us from different countries. The Malians were angry because they kept returning people to their border, our family sent some money and that got us released”, S.I., Cameroon, transit migrant in Mauritania.

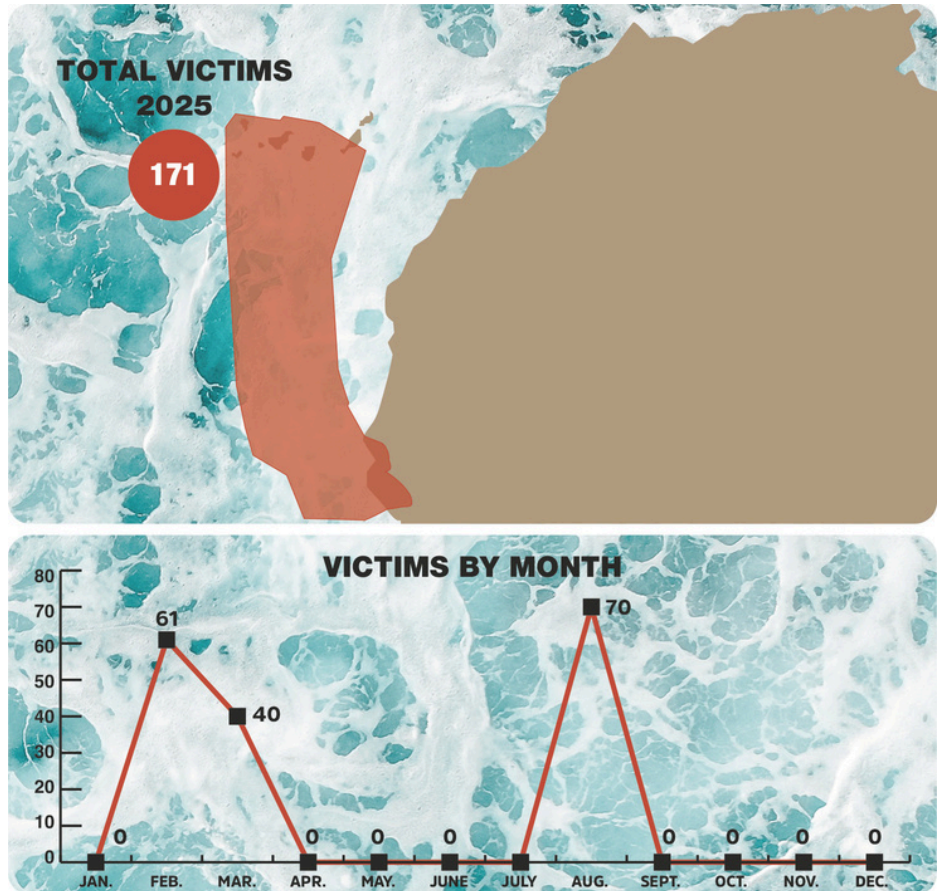
Deaths are instrumentalised to deter irregular migration, but there are no measures to protect lives and the discourse of fighting human smuggling is perversely combined with the criminalisation of the very act of migrating.

Against this backdrop, community and family practices emerge as spaces of resistance. Mothers’ associations and local networks play a key role in documenting cases of missing people, exerting political pressure and preserving collective memory.

78. Mauritania (2025). *Actes Réglementaires Arrêté Conjoint n°0590 du 30 mai 2025/ MIPDDL/ MDARFM/ MPIIMP/ portant Procédures Opérationnelles Standards relatives à la recherche, au sauvetage et à la prise en charge des Migrants*. P 39.
https://www.msgg.gov.mr/sites/default/files/2025-06/U.O.1582F_DU_30.05.2025.pdf

79. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Gehad Madi, visited Mauritania in September 2025 and published a report providing evidence of systematic human rights violations, especially in detention centres, including against minors. See: <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/SR-Preliminary-Observations-and-Recommendations.pdf>

THE SENEGALESE ROUTE: TRAPPED BETWEEN PROMISES OF A BETTER FUTURE AND PLUNDER OF NATURAL RESOURCES



Our Human Rights Observatory monitored 4 tragedies, with a total of 171 victims and 1 boat that have never been found.

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 these migration tragedies.

In 2024, political changes in Senegal promised improvements in social and economic rights, causing a decline in migration flows and travel towards Mauritania. During 2025, the number of departures rose but the presence of control measures reinforced and co-funded by the EU have transformed Senegal into another country in the region that implements externalisation policies.

“I had a lot of hope in the new government, I called for their election in the streets, I was even put in prison for it, but I’m seeing a lot of arrests now too. I don’t see them standing up to the people stealing our fish, they don’t say anything, they’re still vassals of the colonisers. They’re getting paid to stop our young people from leaving, but in exchange for what? It would be quicker for them to stop stealing from us, what they give us is worth nothing compared to what they steal from us”, T.S., Senegalese migrant.

Although most of the people departing from Senegal’s coastline are Senegalese citizens, boats setting off from the Gambia and aiming to reach the Canary Islands have also been intercepted in recent months. The Senegalese Navy has stepped up its presence in the area, intercepting boats in the open sea and prior to departure, in a context of growing migration pressure and regional cooperation to prevent departures⁸⁰.

However, according to the accounts we heard and the information available, these operations have been accompanied by detentions and practices that constitute human rights violations. Both Senegalese and especially Gambian migrants report prolonged detention, mistreatment and expedited removals with no guarantees, which are carried out without access to legal assistance or effective mechanisms for requesting protection⁸¹. This shows how tighter border controls can lead to abuse that directly impacts the safety and dignity of people on the move.

80. The Spanish and Senegalese governments have publicised their cooperation on migration control. See: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/serviciosdeprensa/notasdeprensa/interior/04aginas/2025/210325-malaska-senegal-cooperacion-migratoria.aspx>

81. In an interview for Follow the Money, the Senegalese authorities acknowledged the legal ambiguity involved in determining charges for human smuggling. For example, there have been cases of people who house migrants but are unaware of their intention to migrate or people who give food to their family members before they set off on their journeys, who have been accused of human smuggling in the Senegalese courts. For more information, see: <https://www.ftm.eu/articles/ordinary-people-caught-up-in-eu-migrant-crackdown-in-senegal/>



Senegal Workshops (Photo provided by the Diocesan Delegation of Migrations).

The Senegalese government has developed a national strategy to stop irregular migration, which is based on several pillars: information and prevention, dismantling of smuggling networks, tighter border controls and support for people returning to the country. According to Modou Diagne, permanent secretary of CILMI and Police Comptroller General⁸², this policy is not limited to a police response but is aimed at offering young people and women genuine alternatives to build their future in Senegal. Although the number of departures for the Canary Islands has decreased since the start of the year, the authorities recognise that there is still a serious problem requiring sustained attention. It is for this reason that the country adopted a long-term strategy for the first time in 2023, which will finalise in 2033⁸³. The strategy combines awareness-raising campaigns across the country, stricter controls and closer surveillance of land, sea and air borders.

“I couldn’t call my family until 10 days after we were arrested. We’d left the Gambia, there were lots of women from my village in the boat, including several from my family. The boat ran into trouble, and the Senegalese Navy followed us and arrested us. I don’t know what happened to the Senegalese people, but we Gambians were locked up in quite poor conditions. I got sick and I kept vomiting. I didn’t receive any medical care. When they sent us to the Gambia, my family took me to hospital and here I am. I wouldn’t be lying if I told you I was really scared”, A.C., Gambia, female migrant.

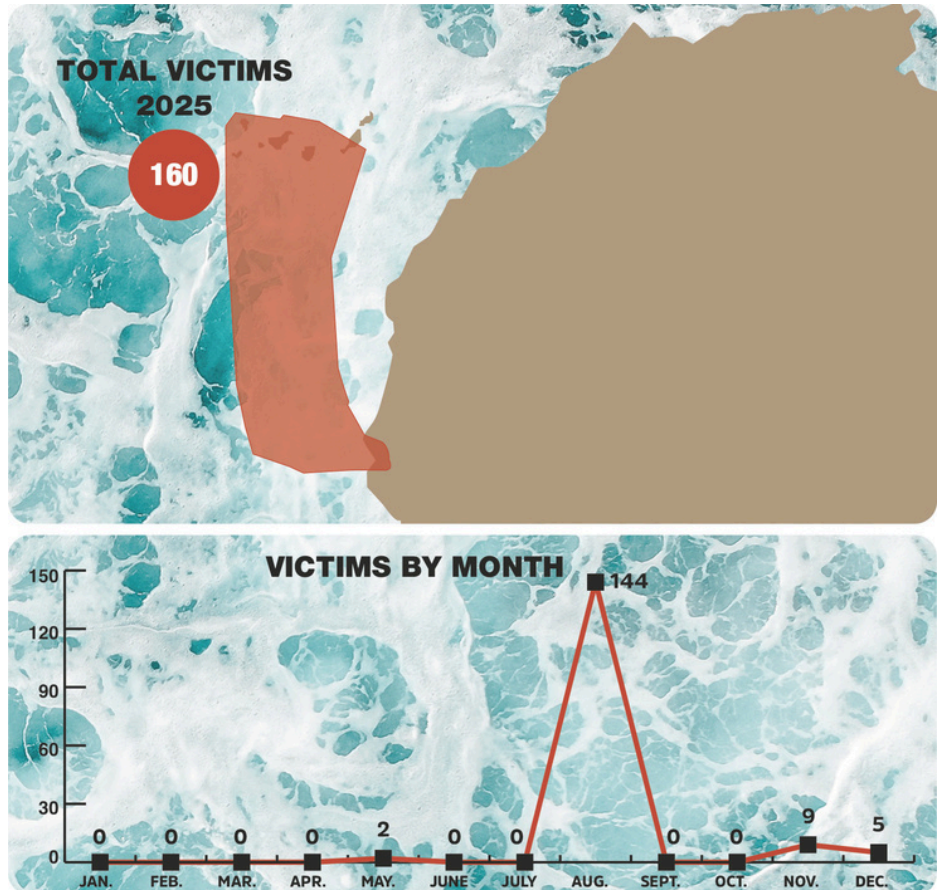


82. The Interministerial Committee for the Fight against Irregular Migration (CILMI), which reports to the Senegalese Ministry of the Interior, is organised via regional committees and departments. See: <https://lequotidien.sn/territorialisation-de-la-lutte-contre-la-migration-irreguliere-un-comite-departemental-mis-en-place-a-velingara/>

83. The National Strategy to Combat Irregular Migration (SNLMI) was presented by the Senegalese president Amadou Ba on 23 July 2023. See: <https://primature.sn/publications/actualites/validation-de-la-strategie-nationale-de-lutte-contre-la-migration>

Social demands in Senegal (Caminando Fronteras).

THE GAMBIAN ROUTE: SHIFTING ROUTES, PEOPLE ON THE MOVE



From the third quarter of 2025, larger numbers of boats were observed to be setting off on the Atlantic route towards the Canary Islands. The boats were primarily transporting Gambian and Senegalese citizens, with considerable numbers of women and children. Our Human Rights Observatory monitored 7 tragedies, with a total of 160 victims.

“My wife left the Gambia and I haven’t heard from her since. She left with her sister, but she hasn’t called us either and we don’t know where she is. Women want to leave too because there’s nothing here for them and they suffer a lot. On the boat they were travelling on, there were lots of people from Senegal. In the end, the Gambia borders Senegal and we’re the same, we’re almost from the same family. Now, with the controls and detentions in Senegal, people are coming here to cross the sea. I’m still looking for her. I went to Mauritania and Morocco because they told me she might be in prison in the desert somewhere, but I couldn’t find her.

It's a real burden for me because I live in Europe, so the family have tasked me with finding her, but I have to work and my bosses don't understand what it's like having people missing. People generally don't understand our suffering, only Allah understands my pain", B.C., Gambia, husband of a missing woman.

The Gambia has also adopted a much stricter migration control regime as part of a process of externalisation aimed at preventing departures before boats enter the water. From January to November, the Gambian authorities reported that more than 2,000 people had been arrested⁸⁴, new border complexes have been built and surveillance technology has been enhanced as part of a broader reform of the security sector. As on other routes in neighbouring countries, the main focus is not on rescuing people and saving lives, but on arresting, intercepting and imprisoning migrants. This increases the dangers facing people on the move.

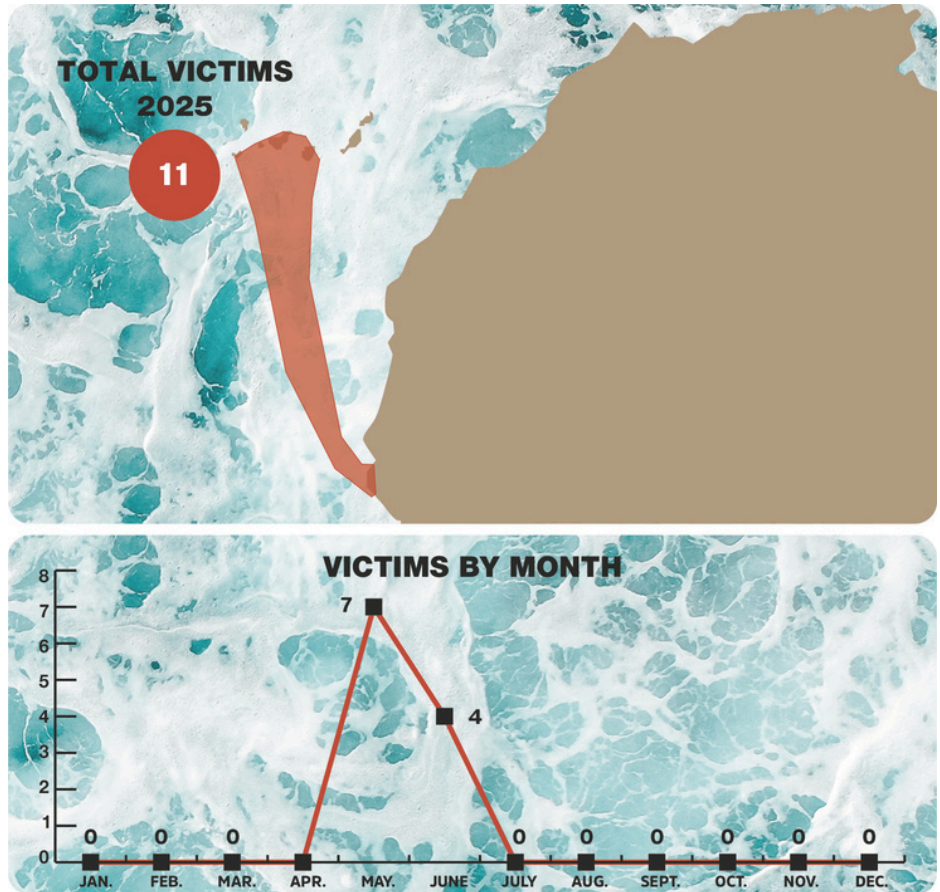
Reinforcing search and rescue protocols, collaborating with other countries to protect lives and allocating more human and material resources to maritime operations would allow quicker action to be taken in emergency situations, prevent avoidable deaths and reduce the impact of these migration tragedies.



84. According to the figures published by the Department of Immigration in the Gambia (GID), 2,041 people from the Gambia, Senegal and Guinea were arrested, including 348 women and 77 children. See: <https://gambiaj.com/crackdown-on-irregular-migration-gid-intercepts-over-2000-people-since-january-including-21-pregnant-women/>

Las Raíces Center, Tenerife (Caminando Fronteras).

THE GUINEAN ROUTE: THE LONGEST JOURNEY, WITH ONLY OCEAN ON THE HORIZON



In 2025, a new migration route began to emerge from Guinea⁸⁵, covering approximately 2,200 kilometres (750 kilometres longer than the route from Senegal). Guinea has become a new strategic departure point for boats carrying migrants, with a growing number setting off from Kamsar port. Throughout 2025, our observatory recorded 11 victims in 2 tragedies along this route.

Boats departing from Guinea carry mostly Guinean citizens. In 2025, women, children and teenagers constituted more than half of all passengers.

⁸⁵. Border externalisation continues, making maritime routes more dangerous. The Guinean route is becoming established as more boats set off from the country. See: https://www.eldiario.es/canariasahora/migraciones/guinea-conakry-hierro-ruta-2-000-kilometros-abierta-atlantico-hay-familias-viven-angustia_1_12731046.html

Deteriorating socioeconomic and political conditions in Guinea, which is experiencing structural poverty, instability and sporadic repression, prompt more and more citizens to leave the country. For many people, the journey is the only way to escape a bleak future. Guineans have extensive experience of migration as they are present on the other routes on the western Euro-African border⁸⁶ and face considerable dangers during transit⁸⁷. Despite the extreme level of risk on crossings lasting more than 10 days in the middle of the Atlantic, the Guinean migration route has continued to function in recent months.

“If you speak to my friends in the village, they’ll all tell you they’d take the risk because life back in our country is death. For many years, Guineans have been leaving, even children. Remember the children fleeing the Mamou region⁸⁸ through Morocco to head to Europe. There’s no faith in the government or in the future and we’re leaving, we want a future. Along the coast of Guinea, there are remains of the ports where the slaves set off on their deadly journeys and now we young people are doing the same thing of our own free will. Africa’s past and present are quite terrible. Inshallah Africa has a future, but in the meantime, we must make sacrifices”, B.C., Guinea, young migrant.

86. The report “*Laberintos de Tortura*” [Labyrinths of Torture] by Centro Sira compiles accounts from more than a dozen Guineans who describe the human rights violations that they suffered at different points along the migration routes in the central and western Mediterranean and the Atlantic. For more information, see: https://www.psicosocial.net/investigacion/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/informe_labirintos-de-tortura_qac_sira.pdf

87. People travelling on migration routes along the western Euro-African border face constant risks. Among them are numerous children and adolescents who are travelling without a parent or guardian. For more information, see: <https://efe.com/espana/2023-02-13/viaje-mamadou-cruzar-cuatro-fronteras-para-empezar-a-ser-un-nino/>

88. Dumont, Julia. (Abril 2019). Reportage : en Guinée, le quotidien des habitants de Dara, un village vidé de ses jeunes. Infomigrants. <https://www.infomigrants.net/fr/post/16474/reportage-en-guinee-le-quotidien-des-habitants-de-dara-un-village-vide-de-ses-jeunes>



Single-mother families (Caminando Fronteras).

CHAPTER V

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH ON MIGRATION ROUTES

SILENCE ON BOARD

On 3 January 2025, a boat carrying 203 people set off from Nouakchott. Among them were 38 women and five children. On 10 January, relatives informed our organisation of the boat's departure and some were certain that it had reached land. We immediately passed the information on to the search and rescue services in Spain, Morocco and Mauritania.

Since that day, there has been no news of the missing boat, no contact from the people on board and no debris or clues as to its whereabouts.

The boat's disappearance starkly reflects several of the structural factors shaping the Atlantic migration routes. Nobody was informed of its departure until seven days later due to the clandestine nature of the journey, reducing the likelihood of finding the boat's passengers alive.

There is also a lack of robust, standardised, multilateral protocols that allow operations to search for boats of this kind in extremely vulnerable conditions to be mobilised.

The administrative invisibility and lack of closure for the families are compounded by the fact that, to date, there are no remains, survivor testimonies or official record of the shipwreck. This complete lack of evidence and institutional recognition keeps families in a state of suspended grief, trapped in uncertainty due to the impossibility of confirming whether the missing people are dead or alive, and hinders access to formal support, reparation and justice processes.

All in all, the disappearance without trace of this vessel is symptomatic of a systemic failure where the lives of those who embark on these routes are left to chance, alerts from family members and the operational will of various states that prioritise control over systems designed to protect life.

SURVIVING AMID 72 ABSENCES

A Moroccan fishing boat sighted a vessel 300 miles off Dakhla. It rescued the 13 people who were still alive on board the wooden boat and transported them to Dakhla. The survivors arrived in the city on 11 March.

According to data confirmed by Caminando Fronteras, the boat had left Mauritania with 85 people on board on 17 February 2025. The other 72 passengers eventually died and were abandoned at sea. The victims were all men from Mali and Senegal and almost half were teenagers. The survivors explained that they had spent 23 days at sea in extreme conditions.

The route and circumstances of the rescue suggest that the boat had drifted for weeks in a busy area for migration, which was particularly active at that time and was well-known to the authorities of several countries with responsibility for protecting lives in SAR areas.

The survival of 13 people after 23 days at sea is quite exceptional, but they suffered greatly on board, experiencing hunger, thirst, desperation, disorientation, grief and trauma from living in close quarters with the corpses of their deceased comrades.

This is more than just an accident at sea; it is the consequence of a migration system that exposes people to intolerable risks. The delayed rescue points to systemic failures in detection, monitoring and response in a maritime corridor where these tragedies are frequent. The large number of missing people makes this incident a substantial humanitarian tragedy, which requires an institutional and political response that goes beyond a mere emergency reaction.

CRIES FOR HELP IGNORED, LIVES DROWNED BY INDIFFERENCE

In the early hours of 31 May, 54 people set off on a boat from the beach between Guelmim and Tan-Tan. Among them, there were seven women and a child. Thirty of the passengers were Moroccan, while the others came from West Africa. Caminando Fronteras was informed that the boat was missing on 1 June by relatives of the missing people on board.

We conveyed the information to the Spanish and Moroccan rescue services. According to the Spanish rescue services, the satellite telephone on the boat showed a position on land. Our organisation repeatedly warned the authorities that these telephones do not work properly or can fall into the sea and insisted on the need to continue searching for the boat.

On 3 June, after two days had passed, the families' desperation led to the spread of rumours about the possible location of the boat. We set out to verify the origin of the alleged positions, but we were unable to identify any reliable sources. On the same day, a Spanish plane was dispatched to patrol the area as there were other active alerts. It located a vessel and the Spanish authorities contacted us to confirm whether it was the missing boat. With help from the relatives, we confirmed that the boat was still missing.

On 3 June, one of the family members received a location sent via Google through a messaging application on a mobile phone. The message said that the inflatable boat was adrift and in danger because it was taking on water. When we sent the position to the Spanish and Moroccan rescue services, Rabat confirmed that it would take on the search operation. The authorities informed us that they would send a rescue boat but that it would take three hours to reach the location and there was no cargo ship in the area that could be mobilised.

Meanwhile, the passengers informed us that they were sinking and sent a video, which we passed on to the rescue services at 01:00 on 4 June. Eventually, the boat drifted to shore, but many people had already died. Only 20 people survived: seven Moroccans and 13 sub-Saharan Africans. Among the survivors, four had to be hospitalised. Seven bodies were recovered, including three sub-Saharan Africans.

The first location was sent via a family member at 22:00 on 3 June. The video showing the passengers in an extremely vulnerable situation was sent at 01:00 the next day. Despite this, the survivors were not found until 07:00 after they had washed ashore.

Subsequently, we received information that the Moroccan police were making life difficult for the families and that the survivors had been detained and would be prosecuted by the public prosecutor's office. Local social organisations reported to us that they were also struggling to access information due to the criminalisation of migration, affecting both migrants and their family members.

There was no single cause of the shipwreck, but rather a confluence of technical, operational, political and structural factors. These include migrants being forced to use increasingly dangerous boats and flimsy vessels unsuitable for the distance travelled, rescue operations that fail to materialise despite the critical situation, lack of coordination between rescue services and a context of criminalisation that continues to affect the victims and their families even after the shipwreck.

The tragedy is the result of a policy of negligence that fails to guarantee protection at sea despite emergency signals being issued and recorded.

AT THE MERCY OF LUCK, WITH NO OTHER PROTECTION

In the early hours of 17 August, eight Algerian citizens set off from Algiers. Our organisation received an alert from relatives on 24 August, and we informed the rescue authorities in Spain and Algeria as the boat remained missing. Unfortunately, it was too late.

On 3 September, a merchant ship located a boat 31 miles southeast of Alicante with only three survivors on board. Two of them were transferred to hospital with dehydration, malnutrition and second-degree burns. The third had similar symptoms but did not require hospitalisation.

The survivors said that five people had died during the crossing. When we received this information, our organisation contacted the relatives again. They had not yet been able to contact their loved ones, although they strongly suspected that they were the survivors. Eventually, the families managed to contact the survivors and confirm the tragedy.

The delayed alert, prolonged disappearance without active search operations and difficult navigation conditions meant that only luck, in the form of a chance discovery by a merchant ship, could save three of the passengers on board the boat. Human lives are not protected by effective search and rescue systems, increasing the likelihood of death at sea due to a lack of rescue efforts.

IGNORED VICTIMS, UNIDENTIFIED BODIES, BEREFT FAMILIES

On 13 August, 23 people (including seven women) set off from Algiers. With the exception of two Sudanese passengers, all the migrants were from Somalia. Our organisation was alerted to the disappearance of the boat by relatives of the passengers on 17 August and we informed the Spanish and Algerian search and rescue services immediately so that they could raise the alarm. However, they insisted that we contact the Red Cross to see whether they had any more information despite the relatives stating clearly that the boat was still at sea and needed to be located. The Red Cross is a social organisation with no responsibility for protecting the right to life at sea.

On 20 August, the missing boat was confirmed to have sunk approximately three miles south of Mallorca. At 10:30, a vessel located a person in the water who said that there was a boat drifting with 23 people on board. At 14:00, the boat was found with one deceased passenger and several survivors. The other people had been left at sea.

The outcome was 19 survivors, one body and three victims missing at sea, all of whom were from Sudan and Somalia. Our organisation contacted the family of the deceased man, whose body is in Palma de Mallorca, in both Somalia and Europe. Subsequently, we passed on their contact details and information about the man to the authorities responsible for identifying the corpse so that the rights of the victim and his family could be guaranteed.

As the days went by, his family became increasingly distressed. As Muslims, they wanted his body to be buried as quickly as possible in a Muslim cemetery. However, the authorities were not responding in the timely manner needed to ease the family's pain. Their grief was truncated by a series of administrative procedures that fail to remedy the situation or consider the unique vulnerability of these families.

Like so many others, the tragedy was caused by a multitude of factors that left the boat's passengers extremely vulnerable. The search and rescue services referred us to an organisation with no capacity to protect lives, delaying the formal mobilisation of rescue operations and demonstrating a lack of trust in the information provided by the families. This points to a lack of clear protocols for responding to delayed alerts (especially given that the vessel was near the Balearic coast), a tendency to shift responsibility to other organisations and operational delays that meant that there was no active search for the boat during a crucial period. On such dangerous journeys, every hour counts.

After the rescue, the tragedy continued on land as families and survivors faced the resulting administrative, emotional and cultural burden.

RESISTANCE AND LIFE





A report by:



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