

Goal 10 Reduce inequality within and among countries

Target 10.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies

[Indicator 10.7.3 Number of people who died or disappeared in the process of migration towards an international destination](#)

Institutional information

Organization(s):

International Organization for Migration

Concepts and definitions

Definition:

The MMP data include migrants (regardless of legal status) who have died at the external borders of States or in the process of migration towards an international destination. This selection of data is based on the currently available sources and can provide some insight into the safety or otherwise of routes. Not included in the data collection is information about migrants who die, or go missing, in countries of destination or residence. Deaths in refugee housing, immigration detention centres or camps are excluded. The MMP data also exclude deaths that occur during deportation or after forced return to a migrant's homeland or third country, as well as deaths more loosely connected with migrants' precarious or irregular status, such as those resulting from labour exploitation or resulting from lack of access to health care.

Rationale:

The research behind the MMP began with the October 2013 tragedies, when at least 368 individuals died in two shipwrecks near the Italian island of Lampedusa. The MMP data aims to bear witness to the global phenomenon of migrant deaths, and is the only global database on this topic. It is hoped that by counting and accounting for these deaths, almost all of which are linked to irregular migration, policymakers, academics, and the general public will be better informed about the risks linked to unsafe migration.

Given that there are few official sources of data on deaths during migration, these data are best understood as a minimum estimate of the true number of migrant deaths worldwide. The MMP collects data from a variety of sources, which change over time given the large geography covered and the politicization of irregular migration – notably the criminalization of search and rescue actors in the Mediterranean and US-Mexico border – which affect access to relevant information. With this in mind, these data are best understood as indicative of the global nature of migrant fatalities, and should not be used to identify trends over time outside of the US-Mexico border, where official data is more frequently available compared to other areas of the world.

Concepts:

Migrant - An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types

of movements are legally-defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students.

Irregular migration - Movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination.

Comments and limitations:

The MMP database provides a global overview of data on migrant fatalities, but it is primarily dependent on secondary sources of information. Information is gathered from diverse sources such as official records – including from coast guards and medical examiners – and other sources such as media reports, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and surveys and interviews of migrants. The reliability and completeness of data vary greatly from region to region, from country to country and over time. [Table 1](#), in the methodology section below, illustrates the wide variety of sources used in the MMP database, and gives some insight into the various advantages and disadvantages of each. For example, some of the data are collected directly from migrants, either from survivors or through an increasing number of surveys of migrants. However, data from surveys and/or eyewitness testimonies may not be representative, and there may be a risk of double-counting if migrants report the same incident when asked whether they are aware of a migrant death or disappearance.

Methodology

Computation Method:

MMP is an incident-based database, meaning that each entry in the database represents a single occurrence in which an individual or group of individuals die during migration or at international borders in one particular place and time.¹ This approach is used instead of a body-based database due to the fact that many migrant bodies are never recovered, particularly in overseas routes such as the Mediterranean Sea, or remote terrains such as the Sahara Desert.

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Table 1: Missing Migrants Project data sources and their strengths and weaknesses

Data source	Data format	Where is this information available?	Strengths	Weaknesses
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¹ In some cases, official statistics are not disaggregated by incident, in which case the entry will be marked as a “cumulative total.”

Government: Data on repatriations	Database (bodies)	Mexico, Honduras, Bangladesh, Guatemala, El Salvador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible information, covers many cases (not just individual incidents) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available for very few countries • Can be outdated • Includes only information on the recovered bodies and not on missing persons
Government: Press releases, official statements	Incident reports	Some countries in Europe, South America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible information about individual events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available for few, isolated events • Often need to request more detailed information • Usually includes only information on bodies recovered and not missing persons • Media may only report most sensational cases • Different media may report same incident with risk of double counting
Government: Record of border deaths	Database (bodies)	US counties bordering Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Can) provide credible information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coverage is unknown, as many deaths are unidentified as migrants or not reported to consulates
Forensic data (i.e. from medical examiners/ coroners)	Database (bodies) or summary figures	US counties on United States–Mexico border, European countries (see e.g. Vrije Universiteit's Deaths at the Borders Database)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible and detailed information about individual incidents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data disaggregated by migrant deaths are rarely available (only one example: Pima County, Arizona) • Includes only information on bodies recovered and not missing persons • Extremely labour-intensive to request information and parse records; consequently often outdated
Coast guards/ police/ border patrol/ non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	Incident reports	Greece, Italy, Spain, Turkey, Libya, United States–Mexico border	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible information for individual cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completeness of coverage is unknown • Often includes only information on bodies recovered and not missing persons (e.g. Spanish coast guard reports)
Testimonies of shipwreck survivors	Incident reports	Mediterranean (IOM, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)), Bay of Bengal/Andaman Sea (UNHCR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicative data where little other information exists • Useful to estimate number of missing persons at sea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impossible to verify reports, survivors may provide range of estimates of missing persons (MMP always uses lowest estimate)
Testimonies of migrants: Survey programmes	Summary figures. Incident-based	Mediterranean (IOM), North Africa (MHub and Mixed Migration Centre),	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicative data where no other data sources exist, interviewees may 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impossible to verify reports for veracity or double-counting, sample size is

	database often available on request	sub-Saharan Africa (Mixed Migration Centre), Asia (Mixed Migration Centre)	• speak more honestly with interviewers who speak their native language and/or are also migrants	• generally small and unrepresentative • Breaks between funding can inhibit comparison • Dates of deaths are often imprecise
NGO reports	Summary figures, incident-based database often available upon request	South-East Asia (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), Middle East (several NGOs), Western Mediterranean (Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucía)	• (Can) provide credible information from local contexts, sometimes with specialized knowledge from NGO staff. Though usually these are summary figures released annually, NGOs are generally willing to provide underlying data if asked	• Cover only regional or localized areas • Often release data annually as summary figure, which are impossible to check for veracity and double counting • Definition of “migrant death” may vary
Media: Traditional media reporting	Incident reports	Coverage in Central America, United States –Mexico border, Europe; to a lesser degree in Asia and Africa	• Provides current information on events that may not be reported otherwise • Contextual information may be included that doesn’t come across in data sets	• Quality varies significantly, and information can be incomplete or inaccurate • Generally no follow-up reporting (e.g. the aftermath of a car crash) • “Big” news is more likely to receive pickup – i.e. smaller incidents not part of a “crisis” may not be reported • Requires frequent data mining/searching of sources
Media: Social media	Incident reports	Middle East, Central America, Mediterranean	• (Can) provide the most current information about incidents, can foster connections between data sources (e.g. IOM with local NGOs), information about cases not reported in news (e.g. European Asylum Support Office weekly social media monitoring reports)	• Little information is provided that can be incomplete or inaccurate • It can be difficult/unfeasible to follow-up to get more information and/or verify • False information can travel quickly • Requires frequent data mining/searching of sources

Disaggregation:

[Table 2](#), below, presents the list of variables that constitute the Missing Migrants Project database. While ideally all incidents recorded would include entries for each of these variables, the challenges described above mean that this is not always possible. The minimum information necessary to register an incident is the date of the incident, the number of dead and/or the number of missing, and the location of death.

If the information is unavailable, the cell is left blank or “unknown” is recorded, as indicated in the table below.

Table 2: Variables contained in the Missing Migrants Project database

Variable Name	Description
Web ID	An automatically generated number used to identify each unique entry in the dataset.
Region of incident	The region in which an incident took place. For more about regional classifications used in the dataset, click here .
Reported date	Estimated date of death. In cases where the exact date of death is not known, this variable indicates the date in which the body or bodies were found. In cases where data are drawn from surviving migrants, witnesses or other interviews, this variable is entered as the date of the death as reported by the interviewee. At a minimum, the month and the year of death is recorded. In some cases, official statistics are not disaggregated by the incident, meaning that data is reported as a total number of deaths occurring during a certain time period. In such cases the entry is marked as a “cumulative total,” and the latest date of the range is recorded, with the full dates recorded in the comments.
Reported year	The year in which the incident occurred.
Reported month	The month in which the incident occurred.
Number dead	The total number of people confirmed dead in one incident, i.e. the number of bodies recovered. If migrants are missing and presumed dead, such as in cases of shipwrecks, leave blank.
Number missing	The total number of those who are missing and are thus assumed to be dead. This variable is generally recorded in incidents involving shipwrecks. The number of missing is calculated by subtracting the number of bodies recovered from a shipwreck and the number of survivors from the total number of migrants reported to have been on the boat. This number may be reported by surviving migrants or witnesses. If no missing persons are reported, it is left blank.
Total dead and missing	The sum of the ‘number dead’ and ‘number missing’ variables.
Number of survivors	The number of migrants that survived the incident, if known. The age, gender, and country of origin of survivors are recorded in the ‘Comments’ variable if known. If unknown, it is left blank
Number of females	Indicates the number of females found dead or missing. If unknown, it is left blank.
Number of males	Indicates the number of males found dead or missing. If unknown, it is left blank.
Number of children	Indicates the number of individuals under the age of 18 found dead or missing. If unknown, it is left blank.
Age	The age of the decedent(s). Occasionally, an estimated age range is recorded. If unknown, it is left blank.
Country of origin	Country of birth of the decedent. If unknown, the entry will be marked “unknown”. This variable is not included in the public dataset due to data protection concerns but summary figures can be provided upon request.
Region of origin	Region of origin of the decedent(s). In some incidents, region of origin may be marked as “Presumed” or “(P)” if migrants travelling through that location are known to hail from a certain region. If unknown, the entry will be marked “unknown”. This variable is not included in the public dataset due to data protection concerns but summary figures can be provided upon request.
Cause of death	The determination of conditions resulting in the migrant’s death i.e. the circumstances of the event that produced the fatal injury. If unknown, the reason why is included where possible. For example, “Unknown – skeletal remains only”, is used in cases in which only the skeleton of the decedent was found.
Location description	Place where the death(s) occurred or where the body or bodies were found. Nearby towns or cities or borders are included where possible. When incidents are reported in an unspecified location, this will be noted.

Location coordinates	Place where the death(s) occurred or where the body or bodies were found. In many regions, most notably the Mediterranean, geographic coordinates are estimated as precise locations are not often known. The location description should always be checked against the location coordinates.
Migration route	Name of the migrant route on which incident occurred, if known. If unknown, it is left blank.
UNSD geographical grouping	Geographical region in which the incident took place, as designated by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) geoscheme. For more about regional classifications used in the dataset, click here .
Geolocation	The estimation of the real-world location of the incident, represented as coordinates. While the geolocation is available for all incidents, in many cases (particularly at sea or in remote areas) the coordinates are approximate.
Information source	The source(s) of information for the incident report. For online articles, a link and title of the page will be included in a separate
Source quality	Incidents are ranked on a scale from 1-5 based on the source(s) of information available. Incidents ranked as level 1 are based on information from only one media source. Incidents ranked as level 2 are based on information from uncorroborated eyewitness accounts or data from survey respondents. Incidents ranked as level 3 are based on information from multiple media reports, while level 4 incidents are based on information from at least one NGO, IGO, or another humanitarian actor with direct knowledge of the incident. Incidents ranked at level 5 are based on information from official sources such as coroners, medical examiners, or government officials OR from multiple humanitarian actors.
Comments	Brief description narrating additional facts about the death. If no extra information is available, this is left blank.

Treatment of missing values:

At country level

MMP data codifies the location of a death in several ways, including the country in which the incident occurs for the purposes of SDG Indicator 10.7.2. In many incidents, deaths recorded in the MMP database occur at international borders or at sea outside of national waters: in such cases the country of departure is used for the country variable. Geolocation data is available for all incidents from missingmigrants.iom.int/downloads, though this may be an approximation for cases at sea or in remote terrains such as deserts.

At regional and global levels

In the SDG 10.7.2 dataset, regional-level data is available for years 2014-current reporting year based on the United Nations Statistics Division's geoscheme. In the original MMP data, available for download from missingmigrants.iom.int/downloads, the location of MMP incidents are categorized in several ways based on the physical location in which they reportedly occurred. First, they are categorized by the geographical sub-regions of the United Nations Statistics Division's geoscheme. These regions are included for academic and statistical purposes. Generally, when migrant deaths and disappearances occur at sea, they are included in the region nearest to the body of water in which they occurred. For example, deaths in the Bay of Bengal are categorized under South-Eastern Asia. Some bodies of water, such as the Mediterranean Sea, border several UN sub-regions, and deaths in these areas are consequently left uncategorized.

The full, incident-based Missing Migrants Project dataset also categorizes incidents into a set of geographical regions defined by current migration patterns and contemporary common language usage.

These regions can be seen on the map, below, and differ from the UN geoscheme in several ways. Firstly, several regions have modified names - most notably, states in the UN-designated region of 'Western Asia' are categorized here under 'Middle East'. Secondly, some regions are combined because they have similar patterns of migration; for example, Europe is defined as one region instead of four. Additionally, the US-Mexico border is counted as a distinct region, as it has a particular migration context relating to instances of migrant deaths and disappearances. The Mediterranean is also included as a geographic region on this list for the same reason. The regional break-down for Africa also deviates from the UN geoscheme, again in the interest of grouping areas with strongly related migration trends. For instance, the Horn of Africa is counted as its own region, as migration in Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea have migration flows distinct from the UN-designated regions of Northern and Eastern Africa. Similarly, North Africa includes all deaths in the Sahara Desert, as well as those between north-western Africa and the Canary Islands. Eastern African countries not in the Horn, as well as those in the Western, Middle and Southern African regions are combined into 'Sub-Saharan Africa' as comparatively few deaths are recorded in this area.



Regional aggregates:

Regional aggregates represent the sum of the number of migrant deaths recorded in that region, per the UNSG geoscheme and the categorizations discussed in the section above.

Sources of discrepancies:

As the MMP dataset does not rely exclusively on official data, there may be discrepancies from government reports. The full incident-based dataset, including all sources, can be downloaded for comparison and verification at missingmigrants.iom.int/downloads.

Methods and guidance available to countries for the compilation of the data at the national level:

- There are no known international recommendations and/or guidelines specifically on the topic of data on migrant deaths.

Quality assurance

- As the data contained in the MMP dataset comes from a wide variety of sources, all data are verified by a team at IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre to ensure that:
 - The incident reported meets MMP's definition of a death during migration
 - The information contained in the report is accurate and complete

The latter process usually consists of searching for separate reports on the same incident which contain similar information, including contacting the relevant authorities for confirmation where possible. The 'Source quality' variable indicates the reliability of the information reported (see [Table 2](#) for details).

Data Sources

Description:

See [Table 1](#), above, for details on data sources used in the MMP database. For each incident recorded, the specific source of information is listed in the 'Information Source' variable, along with a link to the report if relevant, in the downloadable dataset available from mmp.iom.int/downloads.

Collection process:

Data is collected by IOM staff based at IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre and in its Regional Offices on an ongoing basis. This consists of (1) receiving information from the data sources listed in [Table 1](#), above, when relevant; (2) monitoring online news and social media for relevant reports; and (3) verifying all incidents as discussed in the 'quality assurance' section above.

Data Availability

Description:

The MMP is a global project, and as such collects data in all regions of the world. However, as mentioned throughout, the MMP data is only as strong as the data sources available, meaning that for remote geographies and developing countries less data tends to be available. Generally, MMP's coverage is strongest in the Mediterranean and the US-Mexico border, whereas for the rest of the world data coverage is believed to be poor. However, coverage should not be equated with data quality, as for example in the case of the Mediterranean Sea many bodies are lost and consequently the data on gender and age of the decedents is highly incomplete.

Time series:

2014-present (ongoing data collection)

Calendar

Data collection: Ongoing (updated twice weekly)

Data release: Data is updated on an ongoing basis and uploaded to missingmigrants.iom.int weekly, typically on Mondays and Thursdays.

Data providers

The MMP dataset does not disaggregate data at a country level, and no country currently collects and reports data on deaths during migration on its territories. Other data providers – including local authorities, NGOs, surveys with survivors and other sources – are outlined in [Table 1](#) above.

Data compilers

International Organization for Migration

References

URL: missingmigrants.iom.int

References:

- Singleton, A., F. Laczko and J. Black (2017) [Measuring unsafe migration: the challenge of collecting accurate data on migrant fatalities](#). In *Migration Policy Practice* VII:4-9.
- See full list of publications at mmp.iom.int/publications.

Related indicators

Indicator 10.7.2 is complementary to several related SDGs indicators. These include, but are not limited to:

- Indicator 8.8.1 “Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries, by sex and migrant status”;
- Indicator 8.8.2. “Level of national compliance of labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labour Organization (ILO) textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status”;
- Indicator 10.7.1. “Recruitment cost borne by employee as a proportion of yearly income earned in country of destination”;
- Indicator 10.c.1 “Remittance costs as a proportion of the amount remitted”

Indicator 10.7.2 is also complementary to other national migration monitoring frameworks, including IOM’s [Migration Governance Indicators](#) (MGI). The MGI operates as a policy benchmarking framework and offers insights into policy levers that countries could use to further develop their migration governance. It contains nearly 90 questions with regards to countries’ national migration policies, which fall under the same six domains as indicator 10.7.2.