

IOM REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA

Annual Regional Overview

January – December 2022

OVERVIEW

Since 2014, at least 53,000 people have lost their lives while on the move worldwide, of whom 1,145 were in the East and Horn of Africa (EHOA).¹ During the same period, an additional 805 people died at sea while crossing the Gulf of Aden from the Horn of Africa to Yemen.² In 2022 alone, 91 deaths were documented in the region including 29 at sea, while many more are known to go unreported. Moreover, when accounting for transit and destination countries along the same corridor outside the region, the number of people who lost their lives further increases. Along the extraregional leg of the Eastern Route, an additional 794 people died along the border of Yemen and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. On the Southern Route, stretching from the Horn to southern Africa, at least 58 people are known to have died in transit during the year. However, the number of people who die or disappear while in transit is expected to be much higher.

During 2022, migration picked up significantly across the three migratory corridors in the EHOA region,³ thus marking the end of the impact of COVID-19-related restrictions on mobility flows. This report provides an overview of the context surrounding people who die and go missing while on the move in the EHOA and beyond along its main extraregional migratory corridors. Qualitative and quantitative data are drawn from the IOM Missing Migrants Project (MMP) database, interviews with key informants, focus group discussions in communities of high emigration in Ethiopia⁴ and

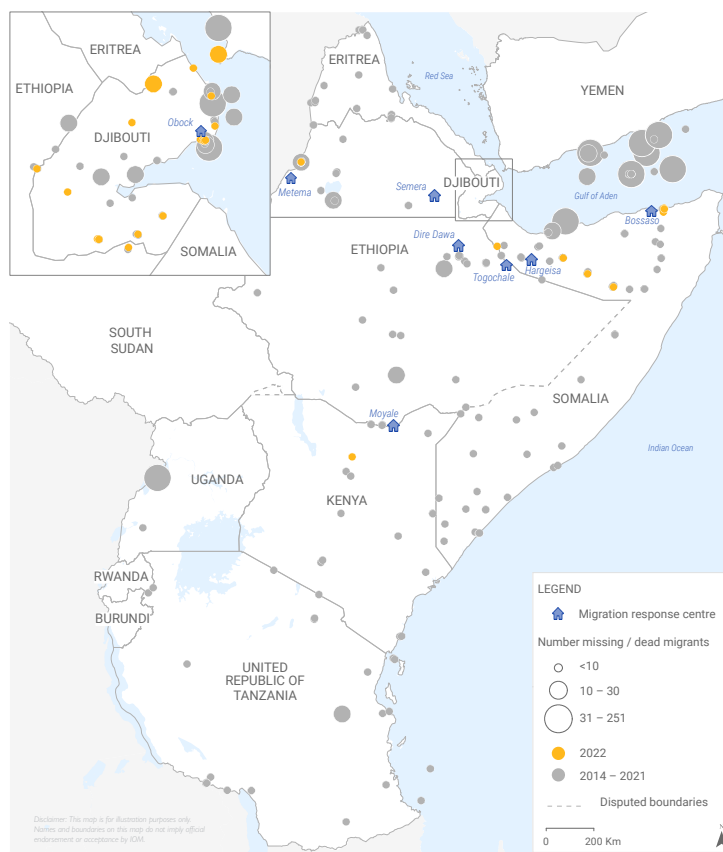


Figure 1. Number of People Dead or Missing, 2014–2022, and Migration Response Centres in the EHOA, 2022.

Source: IOM MMP and IOM Migration Response Centre database.

This report was authored by Merna Abdelazim, Daniel Ibañez Campos, John Muindi Kinuthia and Amalraj Nallainathan (data preparation); Melissa Magalhães (analysis and drafting); Julia Black, Andrea Garcia Borja, Naomi Burnett, Zineb Homman Loudiye and Laura Nistri (review); and Benard Onyango Ooko (GIS) at the IOM Regional Office for the East and Horn of Africa and the IOM Global Migration Data Analysis Centre.

¹ <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/africa>. Accessed 8 February 2023.

² <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/western-asia>. Accessed 8 February 2023.

³ In the EHOA, there are three main interregional routes: the Eastern Route towards the Arabian Peninsula (in particular Saudi Arabia), the Southern Route towards the south of the continent (in particular South Africa) and the Northern Route towards North Africa and Europe. Intraregional flows are classified as the Horn of Africa Route.

⁴ The Regional Data Hub (RDH) conducted focus group discussions in communities of high emigration in Ethiopia as part of a previous route-based research series. In this brief, qualitative data from these discussions supplement quantitative MMP data to illustrate the experiences of many migrants and their families. For information, see <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/resources/>

news media. Insights of the Eastern and Southern Routes are discussed, including mixed mobility trends, migrant profiles, drivers, hardships and vulnerabilities, and incidents of death and disappearance.

Next, the methodology used for the analysis is presented along with data quality and its limitations. Finally, policy developments relevant to the identification of missing migrants in the region are outlined, followed by a call to strengthen capacity to address critical data gaps and steps needed to reduce the toll of lives lost on the move.

The two main migratory routes discussed in this briefing, the Eastern and Southern Routes, originate in the EHoA and conclude at extraregional destinations. In this briefing, only data up to the arrival in Yemen on the Eastern Route and through The United Republic of Tanzania on the Southern Route are presented, as data on the many deaths thereafter are included in the Southern Africa and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) briefings.⁵ As data on deaths in the EHoA are scarce, contextual information on mixed flows and risks are provided to supplement these data.

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES DURING TRANSIT IN THE EHOA REGION

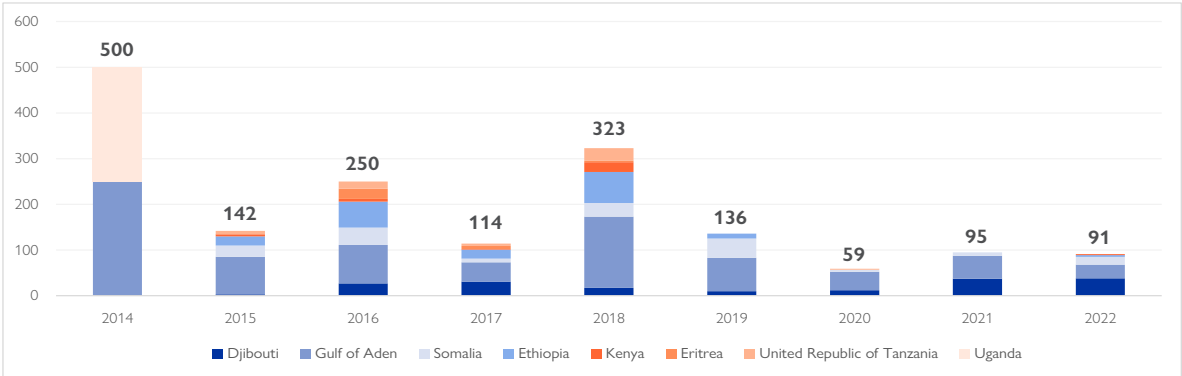


Figure 2. Deaths and Disappearances in the EHOA by Location of Death. Source: IOM MMP. Data accessed 17 May 2023.

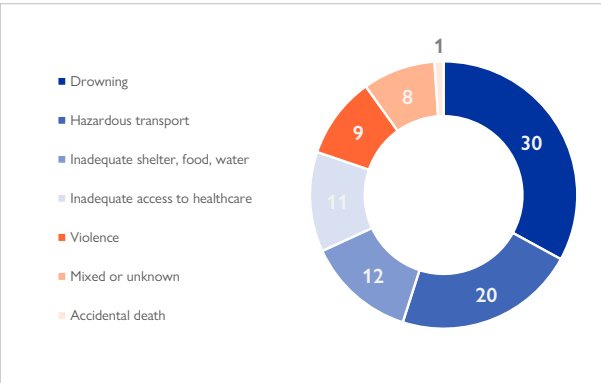


Figure 3: Deaths and Disappearances in the EHOA in 2022 by Cause of Death. Source: IOM MMP. Data accessed 17 May 2023.

Eastern Route

The Eastern Route constitutes the main migratory corridor in the region and follows a bifurcated path from Ethiopia through Somalia or Djibouti, across the Gulf of Aden to the Arabian Peninsula, through Yemen, and finally to Saudi Arabia and to a very limited extent to other Gulf countries.

In 2022, the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) tracked 441,000 movements in the EHoA region along this corridor, compared to 269,000 in 2021 (64% increase) and 158,000 in 2020.⁶ Those who travel this route were typically male (74% in 2022) and Ethiopian (97% in 2022), although the

number of women and girls on the Eastern Route doubled (+101%) in 2022 and formed a larger share of total migrants (26%) compared to 2021 (20%). Of the 39,700 children who made this journey in 2022, over one in three (38%) was unaccompanied. The increase in the number of women and children on the move is of

[role-economic-and-social-remittances-shaping-migration-flows-ethiopia](#).

⁵ Available at <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/publications>.

⁶ Figures on migratory movements are drawn from the IOM DTM. For more information, visit: <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/displacement-tracking-matrix>. Flow monitoring activities were suspended in Somalia from March to October 2022. To address this shortcoming, the RDH built a predictive model estimating the missing data (ARIMA – auto regressive integrated moving average).

concern, as these groups typically face heightened risks of exploitation, abuse and trafficking during migration journeys. Movements on this route remain overwhelmingly motivated by economic reasons (90%); however, in 2022, the EHoA faced several consecutive years of poor rainfall, resulting in the most devastating drought reported in decades in greater parts of Ethiopia, as well as in Somalia, Kenya and Djibouti. As a result, people who reported being driven to move by drought increased from 3 per cent of all movements in 2021 to 7 per cent in 2022.⁷ Similarly, a larger share of people reported being driven to migrate due to conflict (7%, compared to 2% in 2021), possibly due to localized conflicts in parts of Ethiopia and Somalia.



Figure 4. Arrivals in Yemen from the Horn of Africa. Source: IOM DTM.

Additionally, not all migrants who set out to reach the Arabian Peninsula succeed in their journey. In 2022, 7,440 migrants spontaneously returned to Djibouti and Somalia from Yemen, often after unsuccessful attempts to reach Saudi Arabia. These failed journeys can be very risky, as migrants have depleted their resources and can be further exploited by smugglers, which may impact the migrants’ capacity to return and reintegrate in their communities of origin, where they may face stigma and isolation from family members and peers. These experiences can also lead to remigration in an attempt to recover some of the resources spent on migration. In addition, although host communities may serve as key sources of support during the journey of irregular migrants, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the persisting violent conflict in Yemen, continue to strain hosts themselves, who struggle with shrinking economies and rising costs of basic goods linked to inflation. As a result, host communities have not been in a position to offer the same level of support as in previous years in terms of access to services, employment opportunities while in transit and free assistance.⁸

As such, the EHoA sees concurrent bilateral flows of migrants travelling to and returning from the Arabian Peninsula, demonstrating the dynamic nature of the migratory landscape in the region.⁹

In 2022, 885 migrants lost their lives on this route, where the most frequent causes of death were violence, drowning, vehicle accidents and sickness.¹⁰

To arrive on the northern coast of Djibouti or Somalia, migrants travel by mixed modes of transport, most frequently by hazardous and overloaded vehicles and on foot. In May 2022, a road accident in Djibouti claimed the lives of irregular Ethiopian migrants who were being transported in an overloaded vehicle. The minibus was travelling from Tadjourah to Obock at a high velocity to avoid the detection of law enforcement at control stops when it lost control, killing six passengers. Smugglers fled the scene, leaving survivors traumatized, injured and vulnerable.¹¹

Moreover, the desert in Djibouti sees extreme climatic conditions that can surpass 50° Celsius in the summertime. People making this journey often suffer from acute dehydration and heat exhaustion due to the arduous terrain and lack of drinking water along their journey. Given the lack of access to medical care in isolated areas, migrants may adopt coping mechanisms to survive such as drinking non-potable water, which makes them ill. Smugglers have been known to abandon migrants in remote stretches of desert if they

⁷ Quantifying mobility driven by slow-onset crises, such as the drought, is challenging, as confounding variables such as economic, health and conflict impacts are exacerbated by and difficult to isolate from environmental drivers. These impacts often occur simultaneously as a result of deteriorating environmental conditions.

⁸ <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/resources/mmc-iom-relationships-transit-december-2022>.

⁹ Between 2017 and 2022, Saudi Arabia forcibly returned 519,000 migrants to Ethiopia (93,500 in 2022). Upon arrival in Addis Ababa, the most vulnerable were provided with temporary assistance and support to reach their final destination.

¹⁰ This brief analyzes only data on the 91 migrants who died within the EHoA. For coverage on deaths along the extraregional legs of this route, including the 794 who died in Yemen, see the MENA 2022 Overview at <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/publications>.

¹¹ <https://storyteller.iom.int/stories/when-tragedy-strikes-migration-journey-ends-deadly-ethiopians-djibouti>.

develop an illness or if the migrant can no longer continue. Witnessing fellow travellers endure such hardships and die can be a harrowing and traumatic experience. Migrants also report suffering from sexual violence at the hands of smugglers, physical abuse to pay fees, extortion and withholding of identity documents.

“I was held by smugglers for a long time. They made me call my family to ask for a ransom. Eventually, I was beaten so intensely that they had to pay. I was taken to another man who violated [some of us]. He said that when I reach Saudi Arabia, I would have to work for one year and eight months to pay him back. Forty-five of us, all women, walked for two days to the border with two smugglers. As we were crossing, there was an explosion and 25 girls died.”

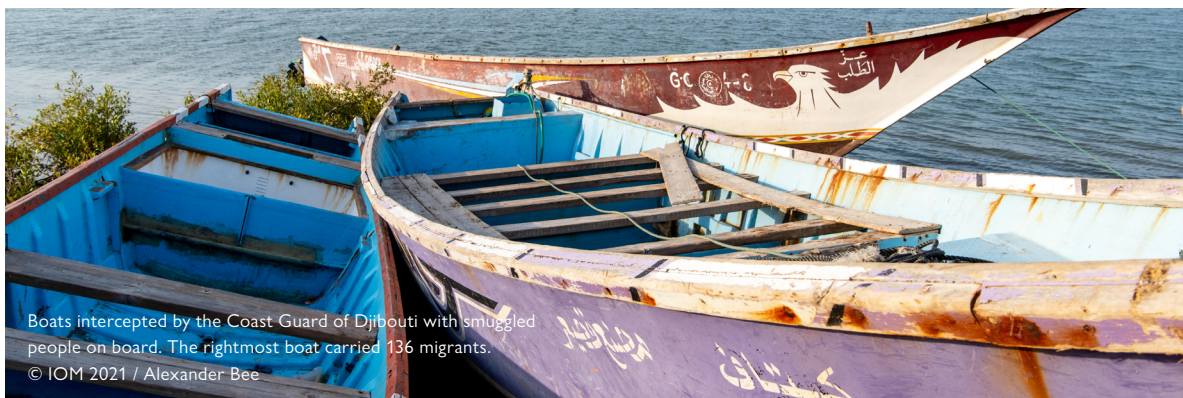
A 19-year-old woman who shared her testimony with IOM staff in Yemen

To respond to these needs, eight IOM migration response centres situated along movement corridors offer critical resources for migrants attempting this journey. At these centres, migrants may receive food and water, medical attention, non-food items, temporary shelter, assisted voluntary return, information on the dangers of irregular travel, and referrals to legal and family tracing services. In 2022, 13,500 migrants sought this life-saving assistance in Ethiopia (59%), Somalia (27%) and Djibouti (14%).¹² Migrants frequently reported suffering from hardships including lack of basic services (68%), detention (19%) and withholding of identification documents (5%), with variation between sexes. Of the 3,000 children (67% boys and 33% girls) who sought assistance in 2022, 64 per cent were unaccompanied. Moreover, women and girls were detained (26%) during their journey at higher rates than men and boys (16%), exposing them to higher risks of human rights violations and sexual abuse. Nearly a quarter of adults reported suffering from health problems, highlighting the challenges in accessing medical care while on the move.

“When I think of the money that I spent on my migration I feel regret, but when I think that I survived the suffering in my journey I thank God and feel happy. I lost many migrant friends in the desert who died because of thirst and hunger.”

Woman in Deder, Ethiopia interviewed as part of RDH research in communities of high emigration

On the Eastern Route, migrants crossing the sea to the Arabian Peninsula regularly journey from Obock in Djibouti, Bossaso in the Puntland region or Hargeisa in the Somaliland region on unseaworthy vessels that are overloaded.¹³ People being smuggled are often forced to discard their belongings to fit more passengers in the boat, and some leave behind their identity documents in a bid to avoid repatriation should they be intercepted. Smugglers have also been known to force migrants overboard when the stability of the vessel is precarious, and boats frequently capsize in the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden. In October 2022, a boat carrying at least 28 passengers departed from Djibouti and shipwrecked off the coast of Yemen



Boats intercepted by the Coast Guard of Djibouti with smuggled people on board. The rightmost boat carried 136 migrants.
© IOM 2021 / Alexander Bee

¹² The migration response centre in Obock, Djibouti also operates a mobile patrol that monitors surrounding desert regions and frequently administers life-saving interventions, particularly by way of immediate water and intravenous rehydration, medical assistance for injuries and transport to the shelter. See: <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/migration-response-centres>.

¹³ <https://storyteller.iom.int/stories/perilous-journeys-migrants-seeking-better-lives-out-horn-africa>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57468597>; <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1091272>; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/4/dozens-of-migrants-heading-to-yemen-thrown-overboard-feared-dead>.



due to inclement weather.¹⁴ Although the Yemen Coast Guard conducted a search, only three bodies were recovered—the remaining 25 people remain lost at sea and are presumed dead. Given the clandestine nature of these journeys, a boat manifest is seldom documented; thus, the number and identities of travellers onboard is difficult to ascertain, and the families of those who perish may never be notified.

“I travelled with my friend by sea after we paid a smuggler a large amount of money. When we crossed the borders at night, we heard gunshots. Some of us were shot and injured. Some of those who survived carried me to Saa'da Hospital where I found out that I severely injured my spine.”

Man who shared his testimony with IOM staff in Yemen

In addition to the deaths and disappearances captured in this database, more migrants are known to be detained,¹⁵ die or go missing in Yemen as a result of becoming mired in the armed conflict, particularly when encountering unexploded ordinances and remnants of war.¹⁶ In 2021, the transitory corridor in Yemen was increasingly under the tight control of smugglers, impeding humanitarian access, and reports were prolific on extortion, forced transfers, human rights abuses and sexual abuse, including of women and children. There are also reports of migrants ‘disappearing’ during forced transfers by authorities. Furthermore, several cases of migrant deaths and injuries were reported at the border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia.¹⁷ According to the MMP, at least 794 people lost their lives in 2022 during altercations at the border.

“We heard children are suffering in jail in Yemen. I know migrants who have been in jail for six months; we are worried for their lives. Other migrants died while on their journey because of the scarcity of food and drinking water they encountered. Some of them were beaten.”

Woman in Setema, Ethiopia as part of RDH research in communities of high emigration

Southern Route

The Southern Route is a perilous migratory corridor spanning from the Horn of Africa to southern Africa, most commonly to South Africa. In 2022, about 58,200 movements were observed along this route within the EHofA region, 21 per cent of whom declared South Africa as their intended destination.¹⁸ Ethiopian nationals are the most frequently reported group on the Southern Route (85%), followed by Somalis (14%). Like in the case of the Eastern Route, most people (78%) travelling this route do so for economic reasons.

¹⁴ <https://mena.iom.int/news/shipwreck-coast-yemen-claims-lives-migrants-horn-africa>.

¹⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2022/01/press-briefing-notes-yemen-airstrikes>; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/16/yemen-scores-die-migrant-detention-center-fire>.

¹⁶ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1119372>; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/13/yemen-houthis-kill-expel-ethiopian-migrants>. Please see the MMP MENA Annual Regional Overview for 2022 for more information about incidents recorded on the Eastern Route in Yemen, available at <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/publications>.

¹⁷ <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=27562>.

¹⁸ The number of movements through the Dhobley, Somalia flow monitoring point for the period of March to October 2022 are drawn from the ARIMA predictive model.

In the 1990s, people from the zones of Hadiya and Kembata in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' region in Ethiopia began migrating to South Africa in search of economic opportunities. The economies of these two zones of origin are dominated by agriculture, with few livelihood opportunities outside this sector, and Ethiopians in these densely populated communities struggle because of a scarcity of arable land. The Ethiopian diaspora that was established in South Africa during this time continues to grow today, with irregular migration on the Southern Route enabled by strong friend and familial networks that help to reduce the information and financial barriers of the journey.¹⁹

While 68 deaths were documented on the Southern Route in 2022, the route maintains a reputation of danger due to the extensive distance travelled, multiple border crossings, and use of multiple smugglers along the length of the journey,²⁰ meaning that the true number of lives lost is likely far higher. Those who travel this route commonly endure hardships such as exploitation and abandonment by smugglers, asphyxiation in trucks and transport containers, natural hazards and detention. In August 2022, immigration authorities in Zambia intercepted 51 irregular Ethiopian migrants and three smugglers who were transporting them through the district of Mbala to reach South Africa.²¹ Those involved stated they had spent four months on the move, during which they suffered from near starvation, transport as stowaways in sealed trucks and armed extortion.

In October 2022, the bodies of at least 25 people believed to be of Ethiopian origin were discovered by villagers in a mass grave and exhumed in Mzimba, Malawi, while four more were found in the nearby Mtangatanga Forest Reserve.²² The deceased were between the ages of 25 and 40 years and were transported along the road connecting The United Republic of Tanzania and Malawi. Authorities launched an investigation and an autopsy report revealed the migrants died of suffocation.

In December 2022, the bodies of a further 27 Ethiopian men were identified in Chongwe Ngwerere on the outskirts of Lusaka, Zambia.²³ Zambian police discovered the bodies of the migrants, aged between 20 and 28 years, carelessly deserted along the road. Responders reported that the men died due to extreme hunger and exhaustion while on the move, while an additional member the group was found at the brink of death and transferred to the hospital. These deaths highlight the violence, danger and exploitation that migrants are regularly subjected to along the Southern Route.

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES OF EHOA NATIONALS ABROAD

In 2021, the Ministry of Labour of Ethiopia conducted a household survey revealing that over 51,000 Ethiopian migrants were missing around the world, including people who travelled both regularly and irregularly.²⁴ In addition, since 2014, the MMP has documented at least 1,671 people from the EHOA who died around the world while migrating, namely in the Mediterranean (426), Western Asia (391), Northern Africa (80), Southern Africa (53) and Europe (47). Those who lost their lives were predominantly from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. The diverse coverage of the reported cases of EHOA migrants' deaths and disappearance can be considered as a proxy of the extraregional mobility trends interesting the region, as well as the level of risk that their journeys most often entail.

“When our children migrate, they may suffer from hunger, thirst, imprisonment, beating by police, and torture, and they might even die during their journey. Even though we don't have resources for unsuccessful returnee children because we already paid for their travel, we are so happy when they come back with their lives.”

Woman in Deder, Ethiopia as part of RDH research in communities of high emigration

¹⁹ <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/resources/southern-dream>.

²⁰ <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/resources/migrating-search-southern-dream>; <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/resources/southern-dream>.

²¹ <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2022/08/04/51-ethiopian-immigrants-apprehended-in-mbala/>.

²² <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-shocked-discovery-least-25-people-believed-be-migrants-mass-grave-malawi>; <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/oct/21/bodies-thought-to-be-ethiopian-migrants-found-mass-grave-malawi>.

²³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/13/ethiopia-to-investigate-after-27-bodies-discovered-in-zambia>.

²⁴ http://www.statsethiopia.gov.et/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Final-2021-LABOUR-FORCE-AND-MIGRATION-SURVEY_Key-finding-Report-17AUG2021.pdf.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA QUALITY

The IOM MMP database compiles verified information on people who lost their lives or disappeared during a migratory journey to an international destination. Those who lose their lives within their country of origin while attempting to migrate internationally may not be included in the database due to difficulties ascertaining their intended destination. Additionally, documenting deaths and disappearances presents a challenge due to the irregular nature of such journeys and the efforts made by migrants to move unnoticed. Moreover, migrants regularly travel through remote terrains, such as desert on the Eastern Route and forests on the Southern Route, and people who lose their lives in such isolated areas may never be discovered, identified or buried. IOM staff also regularly interact with people in transit who informally share anecdotes on deaths and disappearances witnessed during a harrowing journey, many of which are not verifiable due to lack of details, and therefore are not captured in the database. Furthermore, many cases are never captured in intake surveys due to the ethical challenges of requesting migrants to relive traumatic experiences witnessing friends and fellow travellers die during migration. Finally, some people may be hesitant to speak about deaths and disappearances for fear of retaliation by smugglers or legal consequences following an irregular journey. Therefore, the figures in the MMP database are underreported and are best understood as indicative of the main risk hotspots along key migratory corridors.

An enduring challenge to understand the scope of the lives that are lost in transit is the lack of a systematic, harmonized response mechanism to report through when bodies are discovered. Bodies located in the past by border authorities or remote communities have been informally buried due to the limited capacity to identify the person, document their death, issue certificates, share information in an integrated system, store records on official servers and trace family members. In such cases, their families may never receive knowledge about the death of their loved one.

The MMP dataset for the EHoA draws from incidents reported by official and unofficial sources, including for example national coast guards, ministries of health, military or local law enforcement; IOM personnel; survivor testimonies; community members who may be searching for a lost relative; and news media. Supplementary qualitative source material used in

	Official Sources	Inter-Governmental Organizations	Media Sources	Eyewitness
Percentage of Total Incidents	19%	74%	2%	4%
Persons Dead or Missing	14	45	29	3

Figure 5. Sources of 2022 Data on Deaths and Disappearances During Migration in the EHoA

this briefing is drawn from focus group discussions with Ethiopian communities of high emigration as part of a research series by the IOM Regional Data Hub for the EHoA, as well as from interviews with key informants in Djibouti, Somalia, South Africa and Yemen.

CONCLUSION

The deaths and disappearances of people on the move in the EHoA demonstrate the urgent need to expand safe regular pathways to migration and to implement policy measures to prevent further deaths. Migration serves both as recourse to extreme hardship, such as loss of livelihood, poverty and climatic events, as well as a potential advantage for host and origin communities that benefit from migrants' social and economic contributions. Well-governed migration foments prosperous communities and is an essential component to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. In the absence of policy decisions that facilitate safe, orderly and dignifying migration, many people have lost their lives seeking dangerous alternatives, while their families, with no knowledge of their whereabouts, experience enduring psychosocial challenges. Migrants who survive may suffer from trauma and feel disincentivized to speak about their experiences.

In recognition of the need to safeguard people from these abuses, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights passed a resolution in August 2021 to encourage States to take action, notably by reviewing exiting policies that infringe on migrants' rights and enable disappearances, coordinate mechanisms to identify the bodies of the deceased and strengthen data standards, in line with the African Charter, the African Union Migration Policy Framework and Plan of Action, the Global Compact for Migration and other international legal instruments.²⁵ In May 2022, the African Commission convened States to discuss an intergovernmental approach to respond to missing migrants and the needs of their families. The African Commission also held a high-level policy dialogue in August 2022 with experts on missing migrants, during which participants reiterated the need for a strategic plan of action, encouraged States to adopt continental commitments in their domestic laws and provided essential policy recommendations to reduce the toll of lives lost in origin, transit and destination countries. In Djibouti, South Africa and Zimbabwe, authorities are coordinating with experts to improve their forensic capacity to manage the remains of the deceased, document deaths and trace their families. Governments in the region, namely through the Intergovernmental Authority for Development in collaboration with United Nations entities, have also taken measures to strengthen disaggregated migration data, share best practices and address knowledge gaps.²⁶

Despite these efforts, lives continue to be lost and much remains to be done. Quality data on people who die or disappear in transit are limited, despite the evidence pointing to the urgent need of such data in the EHOA. The current count of verified people who lost their lives during migration captures only a snapshot of the trends surrounding a larger phenomenon, while many more deceased people go unaccounted for. In order to safeguard the rights of all migrants, meet the needs of the families of the disappeared and reduce the toll of lives lost on the move, policymakers must commit to improve the evidence base for good migration governance and to expand humane and legal pathways for migrants to relocate with safety and dignity.

²⁵ <https://achpr.au.int/en/adopted-resolutions/486-resolution-missing-migrants-and-refugees-africa-and-impact-their-fa>.

²⁶ https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbdl416/files/resources_files/regional_igad_1.pdf.



EU-IOM
Joint Initiative for
Migrant Protection
and Reintegration

