

# **Migrant, Refugee Deaths Increasing on Dangerous Mediterranean Sea Crossing**

The U.N. refugee agency says fatalities are rising along the Mediterranean Sea crossing to Europe, even as fewer migrants and refugees are making the dangerous journey.

Migration reached a peak in 2015, when more than a million refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean to Europe. That number declined to 123,300 in 2021. However, the U.N. refugee agency says more than 3,200 died or went missing at sea last year, an increase of nearly 1,000 over recorded fatalities in 2018.

In addition to the rising death toll at sea, UNHCR spokeswoman Shabia Mantoo says even greater numbers may have died or gone missing along land routes through the Sahara Desert and remote border areas.

She says deaths and abuses most commonly occur in and through the countries of origin and transit, including Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Libya.

“UNHCR has continuously been warning of the horrific experiences and dangers faced by refugees and migrants who resort to these journeys,” said Mantoo. “Many among them are individuals who are fleeing conflict, violence, and persecution. The data visualization focuses specifically on the route from the East and Horn of Africa to the Central Mediterranean Sea.”

Mantoo says refugees and migrants have few options but to rely on smugglers. She says they are exposed to a high risk of abuse from smugglers, whether they take the land route across the Sahara Desert or cross the sea from Libya and Tunisia toward Italy or Malta.

“In many cases, those who survive the journey through the Sahara and attempt the sea crossings are often abandoned by their smugglers, while some of those leaving Libya are intercepted and returned to the country, where they are

subsequently detained,” said Mantoo. “Each year, thousands perish or go missing at sea without a trace.”

The UNHCR is urging greater action to prevent deaths, provide alternatives to the dangerous jour

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Source: <https://www.voanews.com/a/6613275.html>

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