



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Inputs to the Secretary-General's Report on Oceans and the Law of the Sea 2025

Migration by Sea

- IOM continues to carry out capacity development support to coastal States on the international and regional legal frameworks applicable to migration by sea, including law of the sea, human rights law, transnational criminal law, among others, in the form of training and awareness-raising sessions, aiming to build national capacities for the protection of life at sea targeting national actors, including coast guards and other relevant stakeholders.
- IOM and UNHCR's online course on the Protection of Migrants and Refugees Moving by Sea, launched in 2023, has been completed by over 850 participants. The online course is available on IOM's E-Learning platforms I-Learn for IOM staff and E-Campus for non-staff, as well as on UNCHR's platform for UNHCR staff, and on the International Institute of Humanitarian Law open online platform for all. The course is being translated into Arabic, French and Spanish.
- (As shared in the last edition of the report) - IOM developed a training curriculum on "Protecting the human rights of migrants at sea" for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, targeting government officials, coast guards, UN staff and other relevant partners. The curriculum aims to strengthen the handling of maritime interceptions and search and rescue (SAR) operations at sea, providing an extensive overview of international instruments and their application on the day-to-day SAR interventions and aiming to strengthen the capacity of key actors, including healthcare providers, to effectively respond by integrating health considerations into SAR operations.
- IOM also continues to provide legal, policy and operational support to Member States, including the development and revision of national laws and policies as well as offering legal advice, further promoting the adoption and integration of a rights-based approach to migration governance.
- In the area of advocacy, IOM continues to jointly work with UNHCR and other key actors to launch advocacy and awareness-raising actions (within the Inter-Agency Group on the Protection of Refugees and Migrants Moving by Sea operating since 2021, with regular meetings convened by UNHCR) and the regular liaison and support to the UN human rights system mechanisms.
- Poverty, conflict, and environmental challenges, combined with the lack of safe and regular migration pathways, have driven thousands of people worldwide to undertake perilous sea journeys in search of safety, security and a better future. Inadequate state-led search and rescue in several regions, coupled with restrictions on NGO-led search and rescue and safe and predictable disembarkation mechanisms, further compound the fatal risks that migrants face at sea. Since 2014, IOM's Missing Migrants Project has documented 75,706¹ deaths and

¹ As of 5.06.2025, <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>

disappearances along migration routes globally. Alarming, 2024 alone has seen 9,191 deaths, making it the deadliest year on record. A significant number of these tragedies took place at sea, with more than 57 percent of missing migrants since 2014 having lost their lives by drowning.

According to IOM's Missing Migrants Project, between September 2024 to May 2025:

- At least 3,650 people lost their lives during maritime migration journeys worldwide.
- Over 1,600 people drowned in the Mediterranean Sea – a 14 percent increase from the previous period – with two-thirds still missing.
- At least 725 people have died on the Western Africa-Atlantic Route to the Canary Islands – nearly three times as many as in the previous period. 60 percent of these deaths were due to causes other than drowning, including violence, illness, hypothermia, starvation, and dehydration.
- A minimum of 900 Rohingya refugees have died in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, a significant increase from previous years. Half of these deaths occurred during the 2025 monsoon season, when the journey is significantly more dangerous, highlighting both the growing desperation and the intensifying need to escape conflict and hardship in the region.
- At least 139 people have perished on sea journeys in the Caribbean Sea, mostly while trying to reach the US.

IOM has been at the forefront of efforts to collect and analyze data on missing migrants. Recognizing the need to do more to prevent these deaths and disappearances, identify those who have died and gone missing, and support their families, IOM has engaged in several initiatives in 2024 and 2025 to strengthen its work in this area. These include:

- Enhancing coordination and collaboration with the ICRC on missing migrants, including those lost at sea.
- Contributing to joint advocacy efforts with ICRC, IFRC and UNHCR, resulting in a set of actionable [recommendations](#) on saving migrants' lives, issued by the UN Secretary General in December 2024.
- Establishing the Missing Migrants Response Incubator for 2025 to support and consolidate IOM's operational efforts on missing migrants across the Organization.