

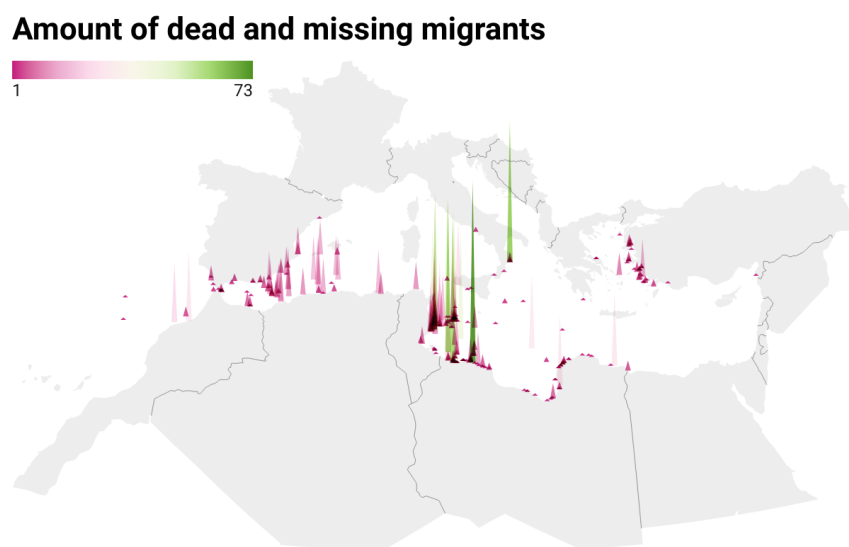
UNHCR data show that the number of refugees saved in the Mediterranean is falling

As the EU prepares itself for an election year with migration a core issue, new data reveals that crossing the Mediterranean Sea as a refugee is now more deadly than in the last seven years.

Recently released [data from the UNHCR](#) (United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees) and [from the IOM](#) (International Organization for Migration) show that in 2023, about 3,760, or 1.4% of the total number of refugees trying to cross the sea died, the most since 2016. The number is expected to rise with new casualties coming to light, as bodies get swept on the beaches of the Mediterranean.

Factors including “increasingly strict measures taken against migrants and asylum seekers in countries of departure and transit,” are making the trip more dangerous, says Shabia Mantoo, Spokeswoman of the UNHCR.

With over 38 thousand arrivals in August of last year, the number of migrants arriving on the shore have now reached their highest level since February of 2016. The European Union has been accused often of neglecting its duty to do everything in its power to rescue refugees and actively making the conditions “hellish,” as [described by Amnesty International](#).



*Sea Disaster off the coast of Pylos with 500+ dead was taken out for data clarity

Map: Martin Assmann • Source: The Missing Migrants Project • Created with Datawrapper

<https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/NBCT0/1/> (Recommended to see on Datawrapper)

“Expulsions, violent pushbacks and incidents of maltreatment continue to be reported by asylum-seekers and migrants along the major routes to and at EU external borders,” Mantoo says, confirming the reports from refugee advocacy groups.

The map shows that most recorded places where refugees died are mostly not across the European coastline, but across the African and Asian coastlines of the Mediterranean. Refugee organizations argue that this is by design, [alleging](#) that the EU is actively “pushing back” refugees towards where they came from.

Although the number of arrivals dropped by over 25% according to the UNHCR, the data from the International Organisation for Migration shows that the number of survivors from recorded events with fatalities dropped by 3%. So although less migrants were trying to cross in total, a smaller ratio of migrants involved in accidents were actually rescued.

Refugee Statistics 2016 vs 2023

Although the number of arrivals was about 25% lower in 2023, the numbers of dead and missing only fell by about 15%



Chart: Martin Assmann • Source: International Organization for Migration • Created with Datawrapper

<https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/wG4mi/2/>

Looking towards the future, Mantoo says that she expects the refugee movement “along the three Mediterranean and North-west African maritime routes towards Europe will continue at a high rate”.

She adds, that she and the UNHCR have been “continuously been calling for urgent action to address this desperate situation in the Mediterranean. Saving lives must remain the top priority, and we continue to call for more, coordinated state-led support”.

