

UNICEF says an average of eleven African children die weekly in attempt to reach Europe



United Nations, August 20 (RHC)-- A report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), informed that at least 11 children die every week on the migratory routes between North Africa and Europe. The news has aroused alarm in world public opinion, making visible a tragedy that goes unnoticed due to the indolence of many, especially those human traffickers involved in assisting them.

The figure implies double the number of deaths in relation to the same period of the previous year, and only in relation to the first half of this year 2023, as described in the same report. Conflict and climate change are forcing increasing numbers of children to embark on the dangerous journey.

Around 11,600 children have tried to immigrate since 2018 in the Mediterranean on a risky crossing to Europe, and of these about 289 children have died from January to June this year.

This number represents 1 in 5 of the 8,274 people who have died or disappeared on the route, according to the records of the Missing Migrants Project of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Since 2018, UNICEF estimates that around 1,500 children have died or gone missing while attempting to cross the Central Mediterranean Sea.

The European Union (EU) and Tunisia have officially signed a memorandum of understanding for a "strategic and comprehensive partnership, aimed at combatting irregular migration and boosting economic ties between the bloc and the North African country, which lies on a major route."

The figures must be much higher, taking into account that in many shipwrecks there are no survivors left and therefore reports are incomplete. There are other maritime migratory routes, in which a high number of children also die, especially the deaths that occur off the coasts of Greece and the Spanish Canary Islands.

"Children are dying not only in front of our eyes; they are also dying while we seem to keep our eyes closed. Hundreds of children are drowning in the world's inaction," said UNICEF leader Vera Knaus, stressing that the central Mediterranean is one of the deadliest migration routes for children.

In the first three months of 2023, 3,300 children - 71% of all those arriving in Europe by this route - were registered as unaccompanied or separated from their parents or legal guardians, putting them at greater risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. Girls traveling alone are at greater risk of violence before, during and after the journey.

It should be noted that parallel to the dangerous sea crossings, there are other dangers such as abuse or murder, lack of specialized institutional assistance, police repression and forced deportations without family coordination.

"In an attempt to find safety, reunite with family and seek a more hopeful future, many children embark on the shores of the Mediterranean only to lose their lives or disappear along the way," said Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF.

UNICEF continues its work to support countries in strengthening national child protection, social protection systems and improving migration and asylum systems to prevent and mitigate the risks faced by children on the move and to provide inclusive support and services to all children, regardless of their legal status or that of their parents.

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