

Record number of migrants died in attempt to reach Spain this year

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More than 10,000 migrants perished – an average of 30 a day – in 2024 while trying to reach Spain, NGO says in new report.

A Spanish coastguard vessel tows a fibreglass boat with migrants onboard to the port of Arguineguin, on the island of Gran Canaria, Spain [File: Borja Suarez/Reuters]

Madrid, December 27 (RHC)-- More than 10,000 migrants died while trying to reach Spain by sea this year, a report released by a Spanish migration rights group has revealed, the most since it began keeping a tally in 2007.

On average, that means 30 migrants died every day this year attempting to reach the country by boat, the NGO Caminando Fronteras (Walking Borders) said on Thursday.

Tens of thousands of migrants left West Africa in 2024 for the Canary Islands, a Spanish archipelago close to the African coast that has increasingly been used as a stepping stone to continental Europe.

Caminando Fronteras said most of the 10,457 deaths recorded up until December 15 took place along that crossing, the so-called Atlantic route – considered one of the world's most dangerous.

The organisation compiles its figures from families of migrants and official statistics of those rescued. It included 1,538 children and 421 women among the dead. April and May were the deadliest months, the report said.

It blamed the use of flimsy boats and increasingly dangerous routes as well as the insufficient capacity of maritime rescue services for the surge in deaths.

“These figures are evidence of a profound failure of rescue and protection systems. More than 10,400 people dead or missing in a single year is an unacceptable tragedy,” the group's founder, Helena Maleno, said in a statement.

The victims were from 28 nations, mostly in Africa, but also from Iraq and Pakistan.

Many migrants, including women, also experience “violence, discrimination, racism, deportations and sexual violence, being forced to survive in extreme conditions” before departing, the report said.

Caminando Fronteras also noted a “sharp increase” in 2024 in boats leaving from Mauritania, which it said became the main departure point en route to the Canary Islands.

Seven migrant boats landed in the archipelago on Wednesday, Christmas Day, Spain's maritime rescue service said on social media site X. In February, Spain pledged 210 million euros (\$218 million) in aid to Mauritania to help it crack down on human smugglers and prevent boats from taking off.

At their closest point, the Canaries lie 100 km (62 miles) off the coast of North Africa. The shortest route is between the coastal town of Tarfaya in southern Morocco and the island of Fuerteventura in the Canaries.

But the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands is particularly dangerous because of strong currents.

Along with Italy and Greece, Spain is one of the three main European gateways for migrant arrivals.

Spain's Ministry of Interior says more than 57,700 migrants reached Spain by boat until December 15 this year, a roughly 12 percent increase from the same period last year. The majority of them came through the Atlantic route.

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