

UN agency says migrant deaths hit record number in 2024

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Geneva, March 22 (RHC)-- Nearly 9,000 people died last year trying to cross borders, the United Nations agency for migration says. The death toll set a new grim record for the fifth year in a row. The number of deaths on migratory routes has more than doubled since 2020.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded 8,938 migrant deaths in 2024. The real death toll is likely much higher given that many deaths go unreported or undocumented, the IOM said in a statement on Friday.

“The rise of deaths is terrible in and of itself, but the fact that thousands remained unidentified each year is even more tragic,” Julia Black, coordinator of the IOM’s Missing Migrants Project, said in the statement.

The IOM’s deputy director general for operations, Ugochi Daniels, said: “The increase in deaths across so many regions in the world shows why we need an international, holistic response that can prevent further tragic loss of life.”

“Behind every number is a human being, someone for whom the loss is devastating,” he added.

Asia was the region with the most reported fatalities with 2,788, followed by the Mediterranean Sea with 2,452 and Africa with 2,242. Final data are not yet in for the Americas, but at least 1,233 deaths (including 341 in the Caribbean) occurred in 2024.

At least 233 migrants lost their lives in Europe and 174 in the Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama, a new record. According to the IOM, migrants are all people who leave their place of residence for any reason, for any length of time, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Some seek asylum because they are fleeing war or violence.

News of the record death toll comes days after the agency announced it was suspending many “lifesaving” programmes around the world and firing hundreds of employees due to United States aid cuts, impacting millions of vulnerable migrants and refugees worldwide.

The Geneva-based IOM is one of several groups helping displaced people that have been hit by major U.S. aid cuts, forcing it to scale back or shutter programmes, which it said will have a severe impact on migrants.

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