

Irregular migration is becoming increasingly complex, elaborate and mosaic, making it harder to monitor and identify. A better understanding of irregular migration routes, journeys undertaken by migrants and migrant profiles is imperative to adopt measures to protect migrants and to respond effectively and appropriately to irregular migration<sup>(1)</sup>.

Collecting quality and reliable data, is key to gaining a better understanding of irregular migration and thereby making informed decisions and policies.<sup>(1)</sup> This is the purpose of IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP), whose findings are presented in this document.

This document highlights the resumption of migration from the coasts of West Africa to Spain's Canary Islands since 2018. While this route was active in the past, notably in 2006, a growing number of migrants have been taking this route. With a very low success rate, few manage to reach the Canary Islands.

Between January and November 2020, 16,760 individuals reached the Canary Islands irregularly after crossing by boat from the coasts of West Africa (Western African Maritime Route). This represents a 1,019 per cent increase in arrivals when compared to the same period in 2019<sup>(2)</sup>.

Data on the Western African Maritime Route remains sparse and incomplete. No coherent or harmonized approach to data collection currently exists. Existing data on arrivals as well as intercepted boats is collected by the Spanish government. Very little data exists on the actual number of departures and attempts from the West African coasts, while shipwrecks often go unreported.

(1) IOM Senegal, "New Migration Dynamics in Senegal: Understanding The Reactivation Of The Western African Route", 2019.  
(2) Spain, Ministry of the Interior, January-November data: <http://www.interior.gob.es/prensa/balances-e-informes/2020>  
(3) IOM, Missing Migrants Project, 2020

### IRREGULAR MIGRATION MOVEMENTS TO THE CANARY ISLANDS (SPAIN)

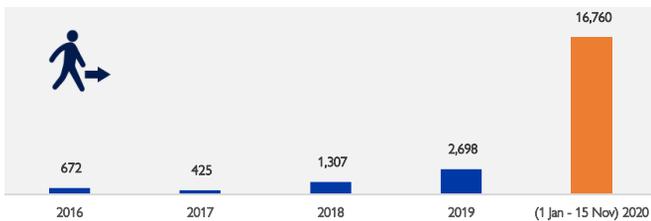


Fig.1- Number of irregular arrivals to the Canary Islands via the West African Maritime Route

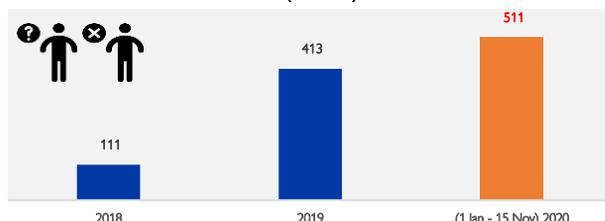


Fig.2- Number of recorded migrant deaths and disappearances on the West African Maritime Route

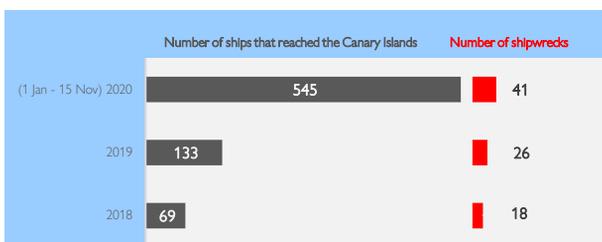


Fig.3- Number of ships that reached the Canary Islands and number of ships that failed to reach the Canary Islands<sup>(3)</sup>

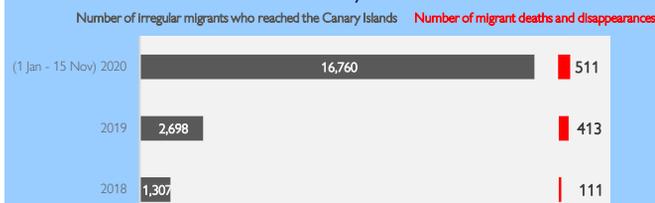


Fig.4- Number of Individuals who reached the Canary Islands irregularly and number of Individuals who died or disappeared on their way to the Canary Islands<sup>(3)</sup>

Multiple testimonies obtained from migrants speak of disappearances en route to the Canary Islands. Irregular boat crossings and incidents involving them are increasing along the West African coastline. Between January and November 2020, there were 41 shipwrecks along the Western African Maritime Route. The actual number of shipwrecks, many of which go unreported or are unaccounted for, may be higher. In 2020, shipwrecks and other fatal maritime accidents affecting migrants took place off the shores of Senegal (Mbour, St-Louis) Mauritania (Nouadhibou, Nouakchott), Morocco (Tan-Tan, Tarfaya, Plage Blanche de Guelmim), Western Sahara (Dakhla) and the Spanish islands of Gran Canaria (Arguineguin, Castillo del Romeral) and Lanzarote (Arrecife).

A study conducted by IOM Senegal in 2019<sup>(1)</sup> found that, whatever the risks and despite the very low success rate of attempted crossings, a large share of respondents in Senegal reported their intention to cross over to the Canary Islands. They see migration as a pathway to success, and the Western African Maritime Route as an attainable passage to their destination (the Canary Islands).



IOM and the French Red Cross provide urgent assistance to migrants rescued off the coast of Mauritania © IOM / Fatime Djamilia Harine

#### NOTE ON SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY:

Existing data on the deaths and disappearances of migrants in West and Central Africa is limited. Information about incidents involving the death or disappearance of migrants is sparse. Little information known about the **sex and age** of missing migrants, or about the **precise location of their death or disappearance**. In addition, there is no uniform or harmonized number of missing migrants, nor any information about the families of missing migrants with whom contact was lost during the migration journey. IOM's [Missing Migrants Project](#) is the only public and freely accessible database relating to the death or disappearance of migrants. In Africa, MMP data primarily comes from interviews with migrants conducted in the framework of the [Mixed Migration Centre's 4Mi initiative](#). Other data sources include **IOM data, government data, as well as information provided by NGOs and the media**. In 2020, 4Mi stopped collecting data on dead and missing migrants along migration routes.

**DISCLAIMER:** Data for the year 2020 covers the period up to 15 November 2020 (1 January – 15 November 2020).