

Irregular migration by sea

Irregular migration by sea is not a solely Mediterranean phenomenon; it is also frequent in the Caribbean, where mixed migration – including trafficking and smuggling – among the multitude of island nations and particularly to the United States is an increasing phenomenon; in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, in the direction of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Australia; and in the Red Sea, where it used to be mainly Somalis and Ethiopians going to Yemen, and now is also Yemenis going in the opposite direction. In all of these cases migration at sea tends to involve unseaworthy and overloaded craft, and with refugees and asylum seekers using the same routes, and the same craft, as other migrants.

All of these factors lead to this phenomenon involving a range of different actors with different interests, each viewing it through a different lens. They include state structures like immigration and border protection agencies, private-sector actors such as fishing vessels and commercial shipping, international and humanitarian organisations, regional bodies like Frontex, civil society organisations, and criminal syndicates. At the core are the networks of different kinds of migrants and their families, and communities in countries both of destination and origin.

Complicating rescue at sea is the fact that states must legally implement a process of distinguishing between those who are refugees and those who are not. Rescue must anyway lead to safe disembarkation for all of them, together with appropriate support for refugees and asylum seekers, trafficked persons and unaccompanied or separated children.

See:

- UNHCR's Global Initiative on Protection at Sea www.refworld.org/docid/53abd14d4.html
- UNHCR (2011) Djibouti Summary Conclusions on distress and rescue at sea, tools for incidents involving asylum seekers and refugees www.refworld.org/docid/4ede0d392.html
- International Maritime Organization (2004) Guidelines on the Treatment of Persons Rescued at Sea www.refworld.org/docid/432acb464.html

Articles related to protection at sea previously published in FMR

The challenge of mixed migration by sea [2014]

Judith Kumin

Much more needs to be done to respond to irregular maritime migration in a way which protects fundamental rights and respects human dignity but the political will for this appears to be lacking.

www.fmreview.org/crisis/kumin

Aspects of crisis migration in Algeria [2014]

Mohamed Saïb Musette

Movements of migrants are only partially covered by international instruments and while the Algerian authorities certainly have opportunities to protect this stream of people, no agreements (bilateral or multilateral) are in force to do so.

www.fmreview.org/crisis/musette

Protection challenges of mobility [2014]

Melissa Phillips and Kathrine Starup

It is easy to say that people fleeing Syria should stay in camps or satellite cities but people move on for a variety of reasons, and programmes and services must adapt to assist them.

www.fmreview.org/syria/phillips-starup

From commitment to practice: the EU response [2012]

Madeline Garlick and Joanne van Selm

Events in North Africa in 2011 transformed the pattern of boat arrivals in Europe. The EU's response indicates that more is needed to translate a commitment to solidarity from limited aid and statements of principle into practical reality.

www.fmreview.org/north-africa/garlick-vanselm.html

www.fmreview.org/destination-europe

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'Identity unknown': migrant deaths at sea [2011]

Stefanie Grant

Political unrest in North Africa has led to a resurgence in irregular migration to Europe and an increase in migrant deaths at sea, yet there is still no framework for identifying those who die or recording their numbers.

www.fmreview.org/technology/grant.html

Satellite phones help rescue of refugees [2011]

Virginia Signorini

The first phone call came at 04.30 in the morning one day in 2006. They were in trouble out at sea in the Mediterranean and were calling for help.

www.fmreview.org/technology/signorini.html

