



SAVING LIVES AT SEA

HAVING AN EYE FOR AN INVISIBLE TRAGEDY

HSP@SEA

Life saving humanitarian aid operation
at the Central Mediterranean

BY SOS MEDITERRANEE & IFRC



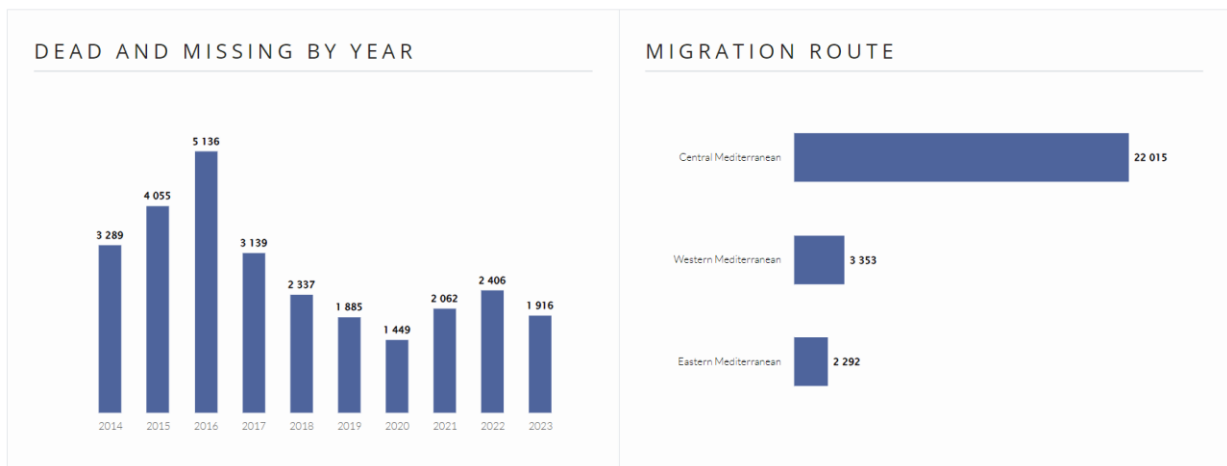
THE WORLD'S DEADLIEST MIGRATORY ROUTE

Since 2014, the Central Mediterranean has become the world's deadliest migratory route. Over 27,600 lives have been lost since then. The actual number of fatalities is likely to be much higher, because many people disappear without any record.

We, as the world's largest humanitarian network, cannot turn a blind eye. This is a humanitarian imperative to which we have an obligation to respond. These deaths at sea are avoidable, and we will do what is in our power to prevent more people from perishing.

We cannot turn a blind eye

That is why at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), we are doing everything we can to save lives with the HSP@SEA. No-one should have to drown searching for safety.



Source: <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean> - July 2023



What is the HSP@SEA?

The HSP@SEA is a so-called Humanitarian Service Point on board the search and rescue ship the Ocean Viking. Together with our partner SOS MEDITERRANEE, we save lives of migrants in distress at the Mediterranean Sea.

Many people risk their lives trying to cross the sea in order to reach Europe. Packed with way too many people on board unsafe vessels without any safety precautions, many never reach the shore. The Ocean Viking monitors the waters and rescues those in distress.

On board the Ocean Viking, our partner SOS MED focuses on the search and rescue (SAR) operation, while IFRC supports the people that have been rescued. We provide survivors with food, water, medical assistance, and psychosocial support.



“THE FIRST THING WE SAY IS: ‘YOU ARE SAFE’”

Hear from Sara Mancinelli, IFRC’s operations manager for the Ocean Viking



When people step foot on board the Ocean Viking, their lives have been hanging by a thread. Sara Mancinelli is at the heart of the operation and gives a peak into the life on board the rescue ship.

“I don’t think anyone can forget their first rescue on board the Ocean Viking. Actually saving people’s lives, that is something that you don’t forget easily.

When spotting a boat in distress, you know what this means for the people on board. Sometimes they have been drifting at sea for days, without food, drinking water and life jackets. Most boats are overcrowded, and people have to hold on for their lives. They know that if they fall into the water, that will most probably be the end. And that every year, thousands of people drown during the same journey.

When the Ocean Viking picks people up in such circumstances, there is immense relief. Most people cry when they come on board the ship, or they kiss the floor and fall into our arms. Other people just get very, very quiet, knowing what they have just escaped. The first thing we always tell people is: ‘You are safe.’

The first friendly face in a long time

Most survivors that come on board the Ocean Viking, have gone through a difficult time. Not only in their days at sea, but also before that. Some have experienced hardship in their country of origin, especially if they come from conflict-afflicted areas.

And they have gone through a dangerous journey to reach the shores of the Mediterranean. After a while on board, people start telling us about their journey. These are stories about human trafficking, blackmail, sexual violence, torture and sometimes even slavery. A lot of people tell us: ‘You are the first friendly face that I have seen in a long time.’

Being there for people

During their time on board, we do as much as possible to support people. First, we give them dry clothes and food and water. And we provide medical assistance, as many people got hurt during their journey or haven’t had access to medical care in months.

We make people as comfortable as possible. There is a shelter exclusively dedicated to women and children, and one for men. And there is room to relax, talk, pray and heal.

And of course, we provide psychosocial support. We see that this is much needed, for adults and

children. Some minors travel without their parents, some travel with family members that are extremely traumatized. We comfort them as much as possible by playing games and providing colors and toys.

Long journey ahead

During their time on board, most survivors start to realize that their journey is not over. When they arrive to Europe, new challenges lie ahead. We try to prepare survivors for this. We provide information about what to expect when they come to shore, and where to find help. If people have specific needs, for example if they need protection or medical care, we refer them to experts and authorities on land for a follow-up.

For migrants that get rescued at sea, their time at the Ocean Viking is only a small part of a long and difficult journey. But it is a journey in which people are often not seen as human beings, treated as a problem, a number, or even as a criminal. So for just these few days, we are doing everything we can to make sure people feel safe, heard, and seen. Because in the end, we are all human.”

“In the end, we are all human”

OUR SUPPORT

IFRC has been on board the Ocean Viking since September 2021. Since then, over 4300 people have been rescued from drowning. We have assisted them with food, water and dry clothes. And our teams have provided survivors with much needed psychosocial support and medical aid.

OCEAN VIKING OPERATIONS

September 2021 - August 2023

Number of
resues done

81

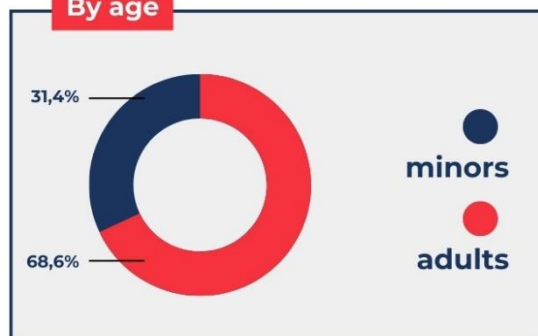
People
rescued

4333

By gender



By age





“Our boat capsized. Nine people died in front of us”

A Syrian family shares the journey that led them on board the Ocean Viking

Bassem, Hana* and their 4-year-old daughter were rescued by the Ocean Viking. They fled Syria to escape from violence and hunger and give their daughter a future.

“My family and I left Syria because of the war. I cannot go back there. Otherwise, I would be enrolled to fight in the military. We couldn’t guarantee the safety for our child nor her education. So, we decided to leave. We have spent more than a year in Libya. It’s our 5th time trying to escape Libya by the sea. The Libyan coastguards caught us four times and returned us back to Libya.

One time, in May 2022, our boat capsized. We spent five minutes under the boat, without lifejackets. Nine people died in front of us. I can still smell the fuel in the water. We got caught by Libyan coastguards and brought back to Libya. My 4-year-old girl still wakes up at night, frightened, remembering this event. We try to help her to forget.

Kidnapped for money

Before you rescued us, we departed from Sabratha on a fiberglass boat, with no lifejackets. Even food was not given. We had nothing else to do in the beginning, we got kidnapped from Benghazi to Tripoli, in Beni Walid. They wanted money in exchange for our freedom. If we didn’t pay, they would have killed us, and sold a kidney or body parts. We eventually escaped and came to Tripoli.

**“We no longer want
to think about
violence or hunger”**

When you are at sea, the water is all around you and then memories start coming back. You can’t imagine the feeling it is. When we saw your ship, we couldn’t believe it: was this real?

Our dream is to find education for our daughter. We want her to grow up safe and to give her a good life. We no longer want to think about violence or hunger.”

*The names of the survivors were modified to protect their identity.

WE CAN'T DO IT ALONE

We need your support

Stronger together

IFRC is here to support survivors at the Mediterranean Sea. But we can't do it alone.

Since 2021, 18 Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies supported this operation. We are grateful for all the support we received.

At the same time, we want to continue the operation after 2024. That's why there is a strong need for continued support.

Only with support, we can save lives and respond to the unrelenting humanitarian imperative in the Central Mediterranean.

This is how you can support the HSP@SEA:

- **Financial contributions** As you might understand, a rescue operation at a large ship costs a lot of money. Your donations are much appreciated.
- **Advocacy** People should not have to risk their lives to find safety. IFRC continues to advocate for safe pathways for migration. With the support of National Societies, we can increase our impact on decision makers.
- **Staff** The expertise of Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies on board The Ocean Viking is invaluable. We are grateful for personnel to carry out operations on board.

OUR SUPPORT ON THE OCEAN VIKING



MEDICAL CARE, FIRST AID

A lot of people get injured during their journey. Or haven't been able to see a doctor for months. Only in 2022, we gave more than 2.500 medical consultations.



BASIC NEEDS

Once people arrive on board, we stand ready with dry clothes, blankets, water and food. In 2022 we distributed over 46.000 (halal) meals. During Ramadan, we deliver food before sunrise.



PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

We provide psychosocial support and make people as comfortable as possible. We ensure people can practice their religion, providing room to pray, distributing veils and offering exclusive shelter for women and children.



INFORMATION AND REFERRALS

The journey is not over once the survivors set foot on shore. We refer people with special needs (for example medical needs or the need for protection) to authorities or experts that can help.



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IFRC, August 2023

Photography: *SOS Mediterranee*: p 1,3) Jeremie Lusseau p 2) Flavio Gasperini p 6) Camille Martin Juan
IFRC: p 4,5,7) Annalisa Ausilio
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