



NEPTUNE
P2P GROUP

SPOTLIGHT REPORT

FEBRUARY 2025



A HUMAN TIDE

GLOBAL MIGRATION IN THE MARITIME DOMAIN



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Introduction

It has been 15 months since we first reported on the situation facing thousands of people affected by the global issue of human migration in the maritime domain. This update looks at the latest maritime migration trends and the driving forces behind these movements. We cover the challenges faced by migrants, host nations, and those who may be impacted by migration events, such as humanitarian organisations and the shipping industry. Every year, thousands of people embark on perilous sea journeys in search of safety, better economic opportunities, or family reunification. The root causes are generally armed conflict, poverty, climate change, and human rights violations. Key migration corridors include the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, the Atlantic Ocean from West Africa, the English Channel, and the Caribbean Sea. Addressing this issue requires a coordinated and blended international approach that tackles the root causes as well as effective border management, legal migration pathways, and humanitarian protection to mitigate risks and reduce the need for unsafe sea crossings as well as the international criminal gangs that organise them.



Fig 1. Human Migration is a Global Problem

What has changed?

In our previous report from December 2023, we focussed on the legal obligations and ethical considerations facing commercial ships that are required to assist human migration events under the International Conventions for Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Regulations. We also discussed how the maritime industry needs to address the increasing frequency of encounters with migrant boats by equipping ships with comprehensive procedures to deal with a potential influx of a large number of desperate travellers. According to estimates from the International Chamber of Shipping, over 1,000 commercial ships have participated in rescuing more than 65,000 migrants in the Mediterranean Sea since January 2014, representing a significant portion of the total migrant population crossing the region during that time. In this report, we have identified the current global transit routes, the numbers of migrant crossings in those areas, the impact being felt by those nations receiving migrants and the efforts to dissuade them from making a crossing in the first place. In short, there appears to be no end to this crisis, the number of migrant crossings has increased in nearly every region, and sadly, the number of fatalities occurring during those crossings has increased proportionately. Ship operators continue to face the risk that they may be called upon to assist in a rescue mission and deal with the potential threats to the ships and crew during such an event. There is no immediate end in sight to maritime migration, as the root causes including conflict, poverty, climate change, political instability, human rights violations and economic disparity, remain deeply entrenched across many regions.

Where are the world's maritime migration hotspots?

The Mediterranean Sea continues to be a critical but perilous route for migrants seeking entry into Europe. In 2024, over 2,000 individuals were reported dead or missing while attempting these crossings, with many departing from the coasts of Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya toward Italy and Spain. Recent incidents underscore this ongoing humanitarian crisis, in January 2025, more than 20 migrants went missing after a boat sank near Lampedusa, highlighting the persistent dangers faced on such journeys. Additionally, Libyan authorities have discovered multiple mass graves containing the bodies of migrants, some bearing gunshot wounds, reflecting the severe risks faced by those transiting through the region.

In the Aegean Sea, Greece experienced a notable increase in migrant arrivals during 2024, with 57,309 individuals entering by sea or via the land border with Turkey, up from 43,166 in 2023. In response to the escalating situation, Greek and Turkish coast guards have initiated cooperative efforts to combat illegal migrant smuggling. A meeting held in November 2024 on Greece's Chios island marked the first such collaboration in five years, with plans for continued joint operations. Despite these measures, the Aegean Sea continues to pose significant risks for migrants, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive and

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humane solutions to address the root causes of migration and ensure the safety of those seeking refuge.

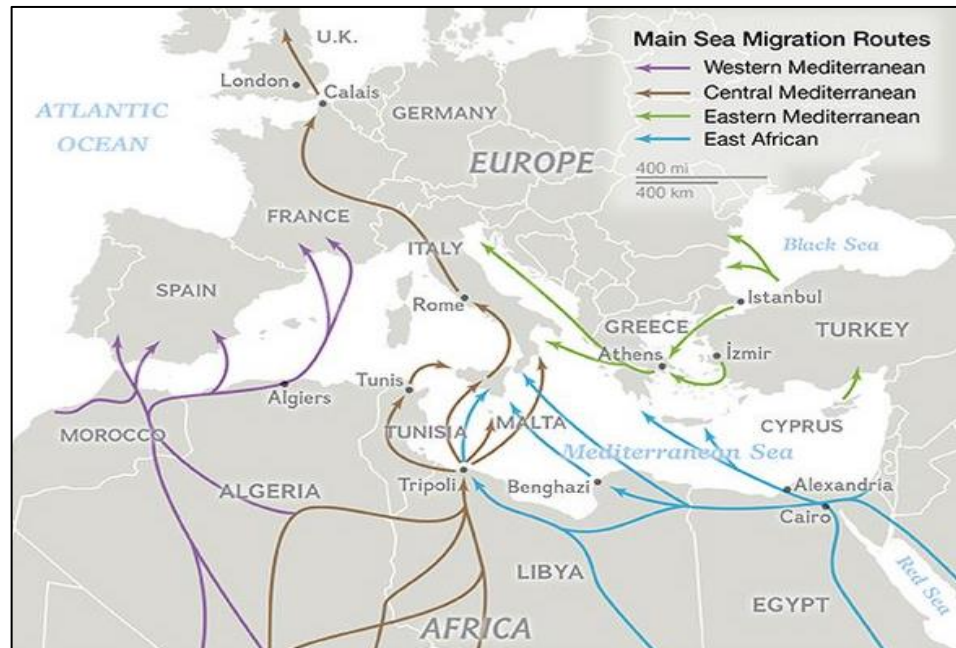


Fig 2. Mediterranean Sea Transit Routes (UN IOM)

West Africa. Migration routes from West Africa across the Atlantic Ocean to the Canary Islands have seen significant activity over the past 12 months. In 2024, a record number of migrants reached the Canaries, with 46,524 arrivals, marking a 16% increase from the previous year. This surge contributed to a total of 63,427 migrants entering Spain through various routes. The Atlantic migration route remains exceptionally dangerous due to the length of the journey and the often inadequate vessels used. In 2024, over 10,000 migrants died attempting to cross from countries such as Morocco, Senegal and Mauritania. Recent incidents include the feared drowning of up to 50 people, primarily from Pakistan, after their boat capsized off the coast of Mauritania in January 2025.

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The influx of migrants has placed significant pressure on rescue operations and local resources in the Canary Islands. El Hierro, the southernmost island, has seen nearly twice as many migrant arrivals as its resident population, with approximately 19,400 migrants arriving by mid-November 2024. This surge has overwhelmed local facilities and exhausted rescue personnel.



Fig 3. West African Transit Routes (UN IOM)

In 2024, a total of 36,816 individuals were detected crossing the Channel in small boats, marking a 25% increase on 2023. Over 1700 people have made the journey in the first two months of 2025.

Northern Europe. Human migration across the English Channel has become a significant humanitarian and political issue, with thousands of migrants attempting to cross predominately from France to the UK each year in small, often unseaworthy boats. In 2024, a total of 36,816 individuals were detected crossing the Channel in small boats, marking a 25% increase on 2023, sadly 77 people also died attempting the crossing. Over 1700 people have made the journey in the first two months of 2025. The UK and France have intensified efforts to deter crossings through increased border patrols, surveillance technology, and bilateral agreements, yet numbers remain high. Despite deterrence measures, smuggling networks continue to exploit migrants, and tragic incidents, including fatalities at sea, persist. The UK's Illegal Migration Act 2023 expanded agreements with France with an aim to reduce crossings, but critics argue that without safe and legal alternatives, or wider deterrents, migrants will continue to risk their lives. The crisis underscores the need for a coordinated, long-term strategy that balances border security, humanitarian obligations, and international cooperation to address the root causes.

The Caribbean Sea. Escalating gang violence, poverty, and political instability are the fundamental causes of migration in the Caribbean region. Since gang violence began in Haiti, over 1 million Haitians have been displaced, many of them have undertaken dangerous sea crossings in search of security in neighbouring countries. The Caribbean has also witnessed migration from Cuba, where the ongoing economic crisis has resulted in a substantial population decline due to emigration. Countries such as the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Venezuela, and Guyana also experience emigration, though to a lesser extent. Migrants from these nations often seek better economic opportunities abroad, with the US, Puerto Rico, and the Bahamas being the primary destinations. In response to the surge in maritime migration, several Caribbean nations have intensified border security and deportation efforts. The U.S. Coast Guard has increased its presence throughout the Caribbean to deter and prevent maritime mass migration from Haiti and Cuba.

The primary maritime migration routes from the Caribbean to the United States are the Florida Straits, the Windward Passage, and the Mona Passage between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.



Fig 4. Haitian Migrants arrive off the Coast of Florida

Southeast Asia. Maritime migration from Myanmar and Bangladesh has seen a significant increase, particularly among the Rohingya refugee population. In 2024, over 7,800 Rohingya refugees embarked on sea journeys, marking an 80% rise compared to 2023. Tragically, 656 individuals were reported dead or missing during these voyages, the highest number since 2014. This region, comprising 11 countries with a population of approximately 669 million, has a long history of significant population movements. As of mid-2024 an estimated 30 million Asians resided outside their countries of origin. Transnational smuggling networks have emerged to facilitate journeys across the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal as migrants attempt to reach destinations such as Malaysia and Indonesia, often leading to severe exploitation and human rights abuses.

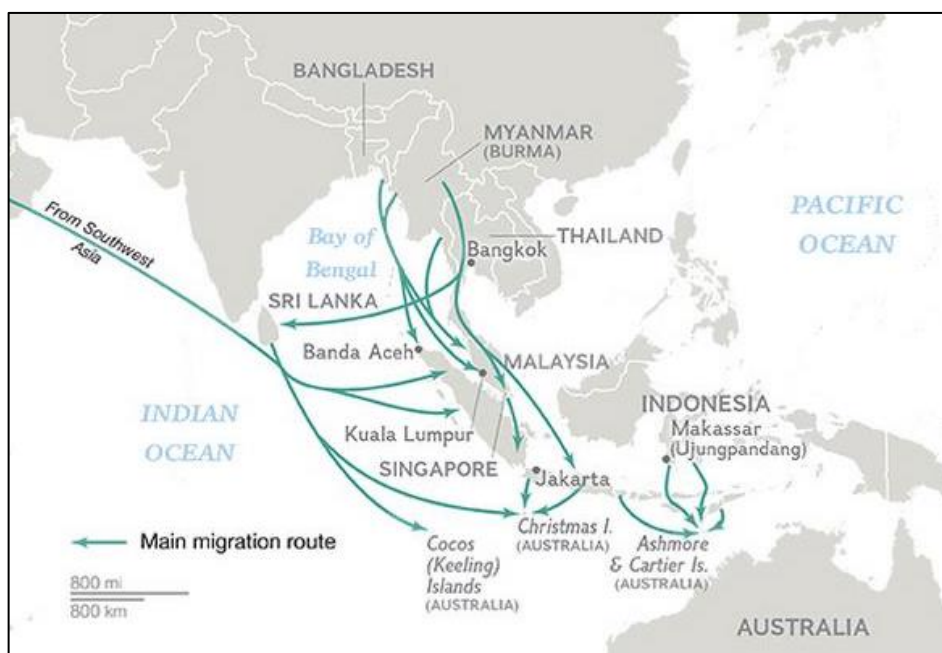


Fig 5. Southeast Asia Migration Routes (UN IOM)

Why do migrants put their lives in danger by taking these perilous journeys?

Maritime human migration is driven by a number of complex factors that compel individuals to undertake perilous sea journeys in search of safety, stability, and better opportunities. The root cause of human migration may vary slightly from region to region but fundamentally, the main issues can be grouped together using the following categories;

Conflict and Persecution. Armed conflicts, political instability, and persecution based on ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or political beliefs force individuals to flee their home countries. For instance, ongoing violence in parts of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Middle East has led to significant displacement, with many seeking refuge across the sea.

Economic Hardship. Severe poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic opportunities drive people to migrate in search of better livelihoods. Economic inequalities between nations creates a strong incentive for individuals to risk dangerous maritime routes to reach more prosperous countries that also provide generous welfare support.

Environmental Factors. Natural disasters, climate change, and environmental degradation are making some regions almost uninhabitable, prompting inhabitants to seek safer environments. Rising sea levels, severe droughts, and other climate-related events have increasingly contributed to migration flows.

Social and Demographic Pressures. Factors such as overpopulation, lack of access to education, and inadequate healthcare services can lead to migration. Social inequalities and demographic pressures, including a youthful population with limited prospects, often push individuals to seek better conditions elsewhere.



Fig 6. Rohingya Refugees arrive in Aceh Indonesia

Summary

Maritime migration is a global problem and addressing the issue requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. In addition to addressing the root causes, establishing safe and accessible processes for legal migration can deter individuals from resorting to dangerous sea journeys. Collaborative efforts among nations can lead to more effective border management, shared intelligence, and coordinated responses to the migration crises including tackling the international criminal gangs that help provide the enabling logistics to, and in some instances encourage, migration. Providing aid and supporting development projects in origin countries can address some of the causes of migration, such as poverty and instability. Targeting and dismantling human smuggling operations that facilitate maritime crossings, can reduce the exploitation of migrants. While nations work together to address the causes of migration, we must improve search and rescue operations and establish fair and efficient asylum processes that negate the reason to attempt these perilous journeys in the first place. Recognising the role of ship crews in these situations is important. Properly prepared and trained ship crews can serve as essential first responders, capable of providing immediate assistance to migrants in distress. Equipping crews with the knowledge of humanitarian principles, cultural sensitivity, and necessary protocols ensures that their interactions with migrants are respectful and supportive.

Neptune P2P Group comment:

At Neptune P2P Group we recognise the pressing need for a comprehensive approach to the maritime migrant crisis. The commercial shipping industry can contribute by ensuring that ships and crews are prepared and have procedures in place to mitigate the risks to their personnel when called upon to help those in distress. Our experts are able to provide the latest intelligence updates and advice and guidance prior to transiting migrant routes. We can assist in training your crews to react in the eventuality that your vessel is obligated to respond to a SOLAS incident, using best management practices to navigate these complex situations with a focus on safety, efficiency, and humanitarian considerations. [View our Migrant Assistance Course Overview Video](#) and our online [Migrant Assistance at Sea Training Course](#) which equips seafarers to respond effectively and humanely to migrant distress situations.

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