

## **The Untold Story behind the Saharan Tragedy: the Long Procession of Migrants Leading to Miserable Deaths in the Desert**

The gate of hell presented in Dante's *Divine Comedy* does not even allow anyone entering the gate to nourish a faint hope. It sounds like a stale story about a dungeon during the Middle Ages. Still, the brutal reality of what has happened in the Sahara Desert tells us that Dante's hell is a never-ending story for migrants and refugees crossing the Sahara toward Europe.

Regrettably, very few studies have been done on such utterly unimaginable human rights violations in the desert. On the other hand, many news sources over the last decade have mostly reported on the migrant tragic deaths during the Mediterranean crossings as a high-profile global issue. Ironically, a salient feature of the Sahara tragedy is that the deaths in the desert [outnumber](#) the migrants who died in the Mediterranean, at least double. The 2024 joint research report, conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), [highlights](#) the atrocities that were carried out on migrants and refugees undertaking risk by walking on the perilous overland routes to Europe. Unimaginable inhumane acts, including the dangers of sexual violence, organ harvesting, detention, robbery and physical torture, are taking place in the desert.

### **A Frightening Eyewitness Account by More Than 30,000 Migrant Voices**

During a 3-year record, the migrant survivors who were interviewed with the MMC pointed at Libya, the Sudan, and the Niger as the most threatening land routes for migrant crossings. In a desperate attempt to ensure the safety of the crossings against various threats mentioned earlier, many refugees and migrants grudgingly have asked [unreliable smugglers](#) for help to escape from this horrible reality. This has become an unspoken agreement between migrants and smugglers as a more secure source of migrant land routes. Ostensibly, it has been a reasonable choice because smugglers would provide cheaper tickets for crossing services despite a certain amount of risk. Essentially, however, the bottom line is that most [perpetrators](#) accountable for this inhumane treatment are police, army soldiers, officers and paramilitary groups.



Migrant detainees in Libya are exposed to human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of violent abuse, and [nearly 20,000 migrants](#) in 2017 rampant inhumane treatment were held in Libyan detain facilities.

Image courtesy: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL via WIRED

Another inescapable fact is that female migrants and children would confront with sexual exploitation and abuse on the migration route. The significant research findings in the 2021 UN Women Policy Brief back up this assertion, saying that the female interviewees protested with one accord that approximately [9 out of 10](#) females and girls had to sell sex stuck in a growing sex trade and extortion. To make matters worse, the recent pandemic has aggravated the vulnerability of migrant females in the corner of many types of “[Gender Based Violence \(GBV\)](#).”

### **What Is behind an Endless Flow of Crossings Coming down to Deaths?**

A balanced consideration of the primary causes of migrant crossings has been discussed in the context of continuing political instability in Africa. A chaotic period of intra-national conflicts in Africa in the recent past fueled the growth in refugee exodus, according to sociologist, [Jane Freedman](#). Apart from this visible insecurity, the risk of climate change and the noticeable signs of racist discrimination and a xenophobic environment also [provide](#) persuasive evidence of the ever-growing number of the crossings.

As a notable example, since 2023, Sudan has suffered from a strife-ridden domestic situation deteriorated by warlordism. It has created a mass exodus of refugees and migrants, amounting to [six million](#) people leaving the country. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), or another name for Doctors Without Borders, singled out [Libya](#) in conflict, where 3,041 migrant casualties were listed as missing or dead among 341,010 migrants taking the Mediterranean routes in 2023. To avert the flagrant violation of human rights, the African migrants have risked life and limb as their only exit strategy. The results of this mortal combat were dire, ending with being tortured, raped and killed during the Sahara crossings. A professor at Seattle University School of Law, Veronica Fynn Bruey, in the author's 2018 journal article, [acknowledges](#) the severity of the incredible number of Africans being displaced, corresponding to one migrant per second.



Migrants and refugees seeking economic opportunities are dying in the middle of the desert. Left and neglected on the border between [Tunisia](#) and Libya, these Africans are hovering between life and death. Image courtesy: [Mahmud Turkia](#)

Noticeably, most migrants have chosen the central Mediterranean route toward Italy and Malta. The total migrant population selecting this route in 2023 was increased by approximately 50 percent year-on-year. On the other hand, those reported dead or missing grew by more than 30 percent between 2022 and 2023, according to the recent [UNHCR](#)

[statistics](#) for the last two years. What is behind this big number is that unstable economic and political circumstances along with climate change have cast a cloud over the Sahel and the Sahara belt of Africa. Ultimately, these factors have pushed Africans pursuing a better life into endless rows of deadly migrant journeys.

### **Closer International Cooperation but All Sizzle and No Steak**

Blessedly, there has been a need for international cooperation on an unprecedented scale to resolve the presence of the African migrants navigating the treacherous crossings and ease the resulting mayhem across parts of Africa. Amid the growing voices of the international community for the most efficient solutions over a decade, [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW) made a strong appeal in 2015 for the EU's ambitious plan to seek multilateral collaboration and act responsibly in the indiscriminate destruction of human rights across the sub-Saharan regions. It highlighted the EU's responsibility for embracing and rescuing the migrant people.

Contrary to what the international community expected, things have worked out differently. The EU's proactive approach to the migrant crossings was mainly based on solidifying mutual alliance with neighboring African countries. [Libya](#) is a typical nation applied to this case, which has posed an obstruction to such international efforts. The national coastguard leading a search and rescue mission has committed vicious acts of violence and even trafficking while the EU has spent a vast outpouring of money resolving the conflict. In response to the unforeseen consequences of a blatant violation against humanity, the EU has [drawn fire](#) for the stopgap measure that failed to get to the root of the issue. By papering over the dearth of migrant-integrated policies, the EU headquarters have [remained silent](#) about migrants facing the shadow of death.

### **The Place of Discourse on Futurism**

A professor at the University of Milan, Monica Massari, places a high importance on the testimonies from migrant survivors whose harrowing experiences resonate with torture and inhumane treatment. Massari's research ultimately calls for [collective responsibility](#) shared by all of us in the context of the reinstatement of human dignity and rights. For displaced migrants groaning under atrocious acts, their journey for a better life has been nothing more than a mirage in the desert. However, we can at least provide a caring and humane oasis.