

## WHAT ARE “INVISIBLE SHIPWRECKS”?

“Invisible shipwrecks” are boats that disappear at sea, without survivors or distress alerts.

**They are common on irregular migration routes.**

## **WHY ARE THEY 'INVISIBLE'?**

Most ships today are in constant contact with land-based personnel. All ships over a certain size carry an automatic identification system (AIS) transponder. Smaller vessels are equipped with radios and beacons.

**Most migrant boats carry no AIS, beacons, or reliable communications.**

**If they capsize, no alert may ever be raised. All evidence of the attempted journey may be swallowed by the sea.**

## **WHY ARE THERE SO MANY?**

Many journeys are made in

**overcrowded and unseaworthy boats.**

Weather, currents, and night departures can overwhelm them quickly.

## MISSING BOATS, MISSING PEOPLE

**Some vessels never reach land and are never sighted.**

Families may wait months or years without knowing what happened to their loved one.

Phone calls that never come are sometimes the only evidence of the shipwreck that we have.

## DATA GAPS HIDE THE SCALE

Deaths without witnesses are rarely recorded.

Official statistics record rescues and attempted rescues, but almost never try to assess these invisible shipwrecks. Such deaths are inherently challenging to “confirm” or “verify”.

Initiatives like the International Organization for Migration’s Missing Migrants Project try to estimate these deaths, but even they recognize their numbers as conservative.

## **WHY UNDERCOUNTING MATTERS**

Undercounting hides risk, delays prevention, and weakens SAR planning.

**It makes the humanitarian crisis at sea appear far smaller than it truly is.**

Better data helps save lives and improve coordination.

**FHAS** Foundation  
for Humanitarian  
Action at Sea

**The Foundation for Humanitarian Action at Sea  
is working to strengthen our understanding of  
maritime migration and support  
practical solutions.**

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