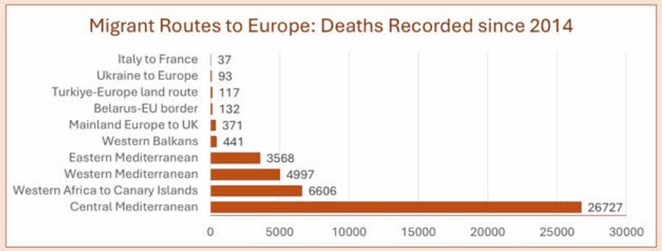
GUIDANCE FOR BEST AND ETHICAL PRACTICE: MIGRANT DISASTER VICTIM IDENTIFICATION

MDVI Migrant Disaster Victim Identification

Funded by the European Union

Understand the Crisis



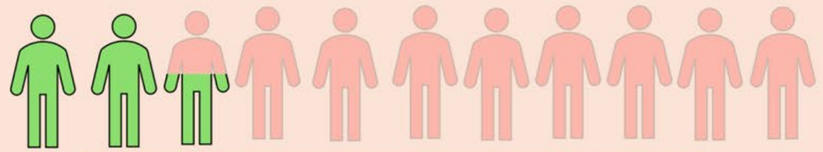
Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM) Missing Migrants Project



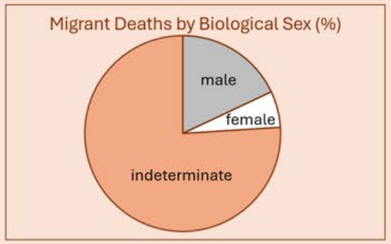
At least 40,000 migrants have died trying to reach Europe by land and sea routes

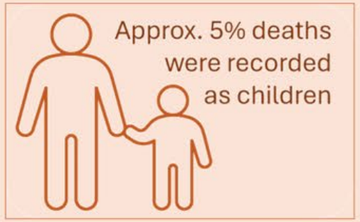
These figures are likely to be significantly under-estimated as many bodies are never recovered

Appreciate the Challenge



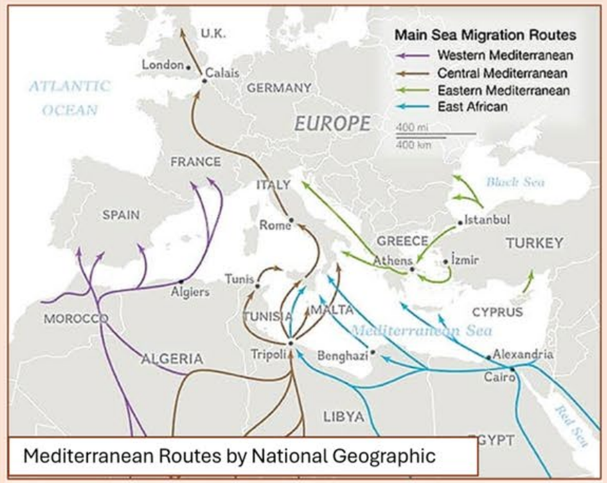
Less than a third of migrant disaster victims are ever formally identified





Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM) Missing Migrants Project

Consider any Complications



Mediterranean Routes by National Geographic

Migrant routes to Europe are complicated and multiple, and often involve criminal gangs, smugglers and traffickers

Many migrants originate from countries in crisis e.g. Afghanistan, Myanmar, Iran and Syria

Authorised communication between country of origin and Europe may be limited or difficult

Families of the missing may not trust government authorities

Migrants may cross multiple borders before perishing

Multiple deaths across time on a land route constitute an on-going disaster event

Know the Identification Community



Coastguards, police, mortuary staff, medico-legal or judicial authorities, DVI experts, academics, university depts, international organisations, NGOs, charities, support groups, families, communities and volunteers

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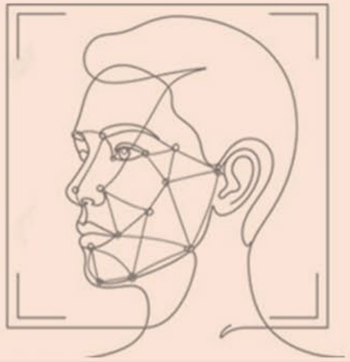
Follow DVI Processes



DNA, dental or fingerprints are legally accepted identifiers

2D and/or 3D images of faces, personal items and body modifications (e.g., tattoos, scars) should be recorded

Smiling ante-mortem face images can be useful for dental comparison



Legally accessed smart phones carried by migrants can provide social media, GPS and image data

Data should be stored securely following international data protection law

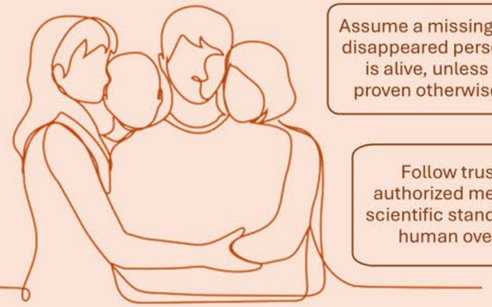
Disaster survivors can provide important information relating to migrant disaster victims and/or origin

Mitigate Misidentification

Misidentification affects two families; those of the deceased and those of the wrongful identity

Visual recognition by family/friends is flawed due to post-mortem changes or emotional pressures

All information should be recorded individually and accurately in official documents, and identifying data/samples should be preserved



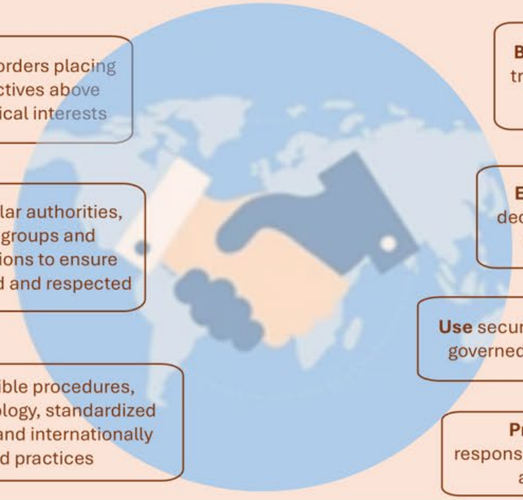
Assume a missing or disappeared person is alive, unless proven otherwise

If an examination, sample or comparison cannot be completed, records should explain

Follow trust-worthy and legally authorized methods with established scientific standards and protocols with human oversight of digital tools



Cooperate Transnationally



Cooperate across borders placing humanitarian objectives above institutional or political interests

Coordinate with consular authorities, community support groups and international organizations to ensure families remain informed and respected

Apply compatible procedures, common terminology, standardized documentation and internationally recognized practices

Build relationships based on transparency, mutual respect and professional integrity

Exchange missing persons or deceased migrant data only when necessary for identification

Use secure, proportionate and ethically governed procedures for data sharing

Promote collective responsibility among authorities and practitioners

Establish Monitoring Mechanisms



Following every MDVI operation, conduct ethical review identifying good practices, challenges and lessons learned

Periodically evaluate whether cooperation complies with agreed ethical principles

Designate liaison officers responsible for operational coordination and promotion of ethical cooperation

Promote regular joint training, simulations and exchanges to strengthen ethical decision-making alongside operational interoperability



Develop a simple checklist for participating practitioners to complete during multinational operations

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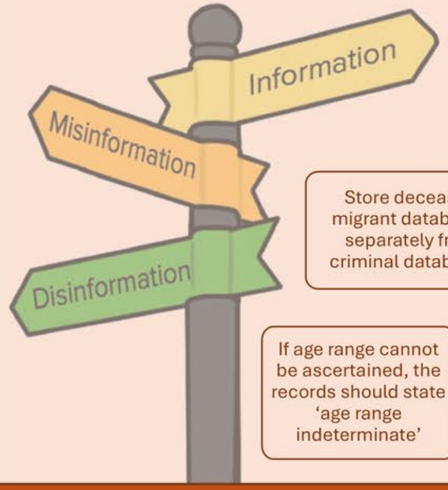
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Avoid Misinformation



Do not assume there is a health risk to the public - people who die in migrant disasters generally do not pose an epidemic risk

Do not assume migrant disaster victims are uncooperative or criminal

Promote ethical communication with the press and public

Store deceased migrant databases separately from criminal databases

If age range cannot be ascertained, the records should state 'age range indeterminate'

Avoid reinforcing existing gaps in accountability for migrant disasters



Avoid Harm to the Deceased



International privacy laws typically do not include deceased, but dignity of dead and data protection must be considered

Regardless of how or why a person goes missing, the deceased have the right to be identified and must be treated with dignity



Identification can be obstructed by poor search-and-rescue, improper handling, lack of resources, and inaccessible procedures



All information collected from each deceased person must be recorded accurately in official documents

Sharing or publishing data obtained from deceased can cause harm and reduce trust from families or communities

Avoid cremation before positive identification and record burial sites

Avoid Harm to Families/Communities



Families and communities have the right to know what happened to missing persons

Avoid putting other migrants at risk of harm when sharing data

Follow data protection and international privacy standards for data collection and sharing

Act in ways that support the needs of families

Do not share data from families or communities without their informed consent

Store missing migrant databases separately from criminal databases

Involve families and migrant communities in meaningful and inclusive ways



Families should receive clear information about identification process and its limitations

Protect Support Groups, Volunteers & Practitioners





- Cooperation with support groups should be transparent and accountable, including data collection, storage and use
- Prioritise safety of migrant support groups during data collection
- Data collection and sharing should follow data protection and international privacy standards wherever possible: the rights of living and dignity of dead require strong safeguards
- Provide emotional and physical support systems for MDVI practitioners
- Organisational culture should support collective care to help prevent occupational trauma and sustain ethical practice

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