

Migrant deaths along US-Mexico border remain high despite drop in crossings – UN agency

6 February 2018 – The number of migrants losing their lives attempting to cross the United States-Mexico border in 2017 remained high in spite of substantial decrease in the number of arrests along the frontier, the United Nations migration agency reported on Tuesday.

In a [news release](#), the UN International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) said that US Border Patrol figures show 341,084 migrants were apprehended on the country's southwestern border in 2017 as against 611,689 in 2016 – a drop of about 44 per cent.

However, 2017 recorded 412 migrant deaths, compared to 398 the preceding year.

“The increase in deaths is especially concerning, as the available data indicate that far fewer migrants entered the US via its border with Mexico in the last year,” said Frank Laczko, Director of IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre.

According to the UN agency, prolonged exposure to the extreme environments in the border region, where temperatures often top 104 degree Fahrenheit (40 degree Celsius), combined with the difficulty of bringing assistance those in need in remote areas have repeatedly been cited as leading causes of death.

Texas, where 191 migrant deaths were recorded in the last year, is a particular area of concern and the 2017 total represents a 26 per cent increase over the 151 fatalities recorded in the state in 2016, added IOM in the news release.

At the same time, though data on migrant fatalities on the US-Mexico border are more accessible than in many other regions of the world, they remain incomplete and the number of deaths reported by the US Border Patrol, includes only those which agents deal with directly.

“This means that federally reported figures could seriously underestimate the real number of deaths,” said Julia Black, data collection coordinator for IOM's Missing Migrants Project.

IOM also reported that the “vast majority” of migrant border deaths recorded by the Project occur on the US side of the border – though one reason for this may be that coroners, medical examiners, and sheriffs in US border counties are more likely to regularly report data on migrant deaths to the agency's staff.

Reports of deaths south of the border often surface locally from radio stations and small newspapers, or from social media, the UN agency added,

noting that the information on fatalities could come weeks, even months after they occur.

Since the start of the [Missing Migrants Project](#), IOM has recorded 1,468 deaths on the US-Mexico border, including 14 deaths in January 2018.