

## Migration is a wake-up call for society. Let us prepare, not panic.



On International Day of the Migrant (18 December), Director General William Lacy Swing of the International Organization for Migration released the following essay:

A report arriving on my desk twice weekly tells a tragic story. It details the number of migrants who have died. They die when the vessels smugglers cram them into sink, they die of exhaustion crossing deserts, or much worse they die when those holding them captive - in places like Libya - take everything they and their families can give only to murder and bury the migrants in mass graves.

Sometimes they die far from their families. Sometimes their families are with them, or close behind. We have had 65 years of getting to know about migrants at the International Organization for Migration. And we know that, wherever migrants die during dangerous journeys, many could have avoided their fate had they had information about the risks ahead or opportunities for a better life closer to home.

Extreme poverty, climate change, broken and corrupt economies put millions of men, women and children at risk and on the move. Add to that the eight full-scale conflicts happening in various parts of the world which displace people inside and outside their own countries' borders.

IOM, the United Nations Migration Agency, today calculates that one in every seven people on our planet is a migrant—someone living, working and starting a family somewhere other than his or her habitual place of residence.

And, even though so many are just trying to live, too many are dying.



The report I receive twice weekly is produced by IOM's Missing Migrants Project, which attempts to identify every dead, missing or "disappeared" migrant IOM's staff has been able to track in the 165 countries where IOM operates. In 2016, for the third straight year, the Missing Migrants tally will top 5,000 fatalities.

Think about that: every day for the past three years, just over a dozen migrants have died, on average, or one man, woman or child every two hours.

As of today, over 7,000 people already have lost their lives along all these routes in 2016. And these are only the fatalities that we know about. Many more deaths go unrecorded by any official government or humanitarian aid agency.

We need to take a hard look at this shocking death toll and the cold shoulder which the world increasingly turns towards them. This is happening today, to families, many of whom are now following paths identical to the ones our own parents and grandparents took, decades ago.

There is no longer any point in expressing sorrow, or horror, or guilty feelings. We must recognize migration is the mega-trend of our time. It's a mega-trend which has pushed migration into the public's consciousness and at the top of every government's agenda.

Images of migrants on the move in great numbers, or being rescued at sea which are driving our politics to the extremes do not tell the whole story. Think of the rising death tolls as early warnings of what has yet to come as demographic, political, social pressures, often leading to conflict – drive people to migrate in every greater numbers.

Despite appearances and media spin, migration doesn't have to be chaotic or seem like an invasion. It is not a looming disease, set to contaminate our culture.

The upheaval we see all around in our politics should serve as a wake-up call to prepare rather than panic. We need to mold the future rather than ignore it. We should do this by embracing the inevitability of migration, changing the perceptions of migrants among our publics and better integrating migrants in our societies

There is a real demographic revolution going on today and it's up to us to manage it for the benefit of all. Most migrants simply want an opportunity and would welcome even a temporary one—say, a short-term student or agricultural work visa — to improve the lives of their families back home.

With the right support, those that stay will contribute to whatever society they settle in, whether it is economically or culturally. It is important that partnerships are built between migrants, host communities and governments to nurture the benefits of their presence in the country.

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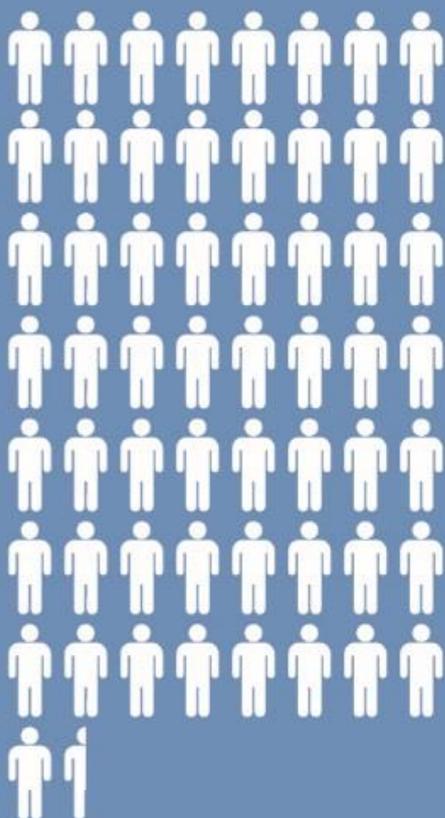
Internet: [www.iomvienna.at](http://www.iomvienna.at)

On December 18th, International Migrants Day let us recognize, that we have enough opportunity for all - we need only to share it.

## GLOBAL MIGRANT DEATHS MISSING MIGRANTS PROJECT

2015

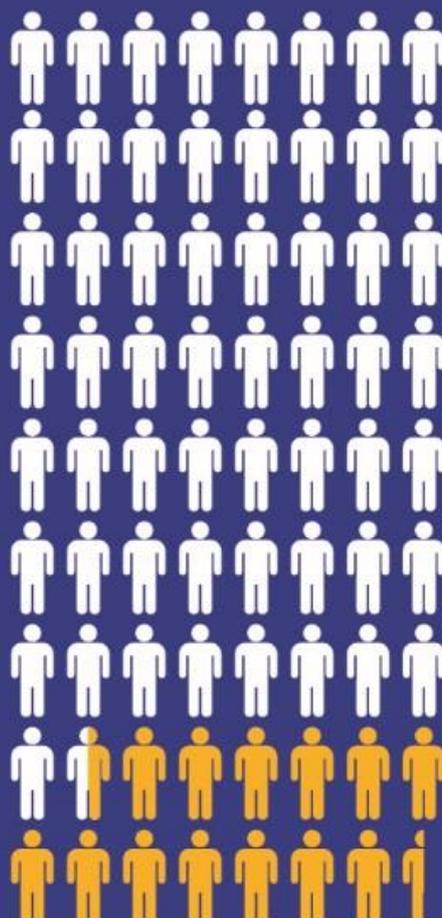
5,740



 = 100  
victims

2016\*

7,189



\*as 15.12.16