

NORTHWEST AFRICAN (ATLANTIC) ROUTE: KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Sea smuggling routes to Spain shift in response to changes in border control practices.** The numbers of people smuggled along the Northwest African (Atlantic) Route have increased significantly since 2020, as border patrolling on the Western Mediterranean Route from northern Morocco to mainland Spain was reinforced and the numbers of people using that route decreased.
- 2. People were smuggled to the Canary Islands in overcrowded rubber boats for the first time during late 2021,** departing from the closest departure points in southern Morocco and the north of the Disputed Territories of Western Sahara, to ensure the shortest and relatively safest route.
3. Nevertheless, throughout 2020-2021, to avoid interception, people were smuggled by sea from Senegal, The Gambia, and Mauritania. **Boats headed south, navigating outside of search and rescue zones and cell phone networks, and risking getting caught in strong currents towards the Caribbean Sea.**
- 4. Smuggling along the Northwest African (Route) is deadly for at least one in twenty people travelling.** The true number of people who die or go missing is likely to be higher, as many deaths go unrecorded due to limited capacities to retrieve, identify and trace the bodies of people who lose their lives off the Northwest African coast, off the Canary Islands, in international waters and in the Caribbean.
- 5. Counter-smuggling investigations and prosecutions on the Canary Islands focus on boat drivers, who navigate the boat in return for a free or discounted passage, and are rarely members of transnational criminal organizations.** The drivers are often in a position of vulnerability and may be victims of trafficking for forced criminal activities.
- 6. Most investigations and prosecutions do not target the crime groups on the Northwest African coast that organize smuggling of migrants along this route and profit from the crime.**
- 7. No data is available on the numbers of girls, boys, and women arriving on the Canary Islands since 2020.** The information required to ensure that responses are age- and gender-sensitive is therefore not accessible.

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