

PRESS RELEASE

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AMSTERDAM

LOOKING FURTHER

Embargo until Tuesday 12 May 2015, 10 AM CET

News Conference Tuesday 12 May at 10 AM CET, Nieuwspoor, The Hague, Netherlands: release of Deaths at the Borders: Database for the Southern EU external borders

European Migrant Death Observatory needed

On 12 May 2015, researchers of VU University Amsterdam release a border death database, based on official death records of migrants who died at the Southern European borders in the years 1990-2013. They suggest that European states continue to collect such data supervised by a new European Migrant Death Observatory which should be part of the Council of Europe. This European Migrant Death Observatory can achieve two aims:

1. Adapt European migration policies so less people die at the border

The European policy response to the large number of migrant deaths is characterized by tunnel vision. Over the past 25 years, the combat against irregular migration has intensified, and at the same time the number of people dying has increased. "These two developments may be related: the increasing number of deaths may be in part an unintended side-effect of European policies", says prof. Thomas Spijkerboer. The European Migrant Death Observatory can collect data on migrant deaths and evaluate the impacts of European policies, leading to evidence-based policy making.

2. Identify more people

Less than half of the dead migrants are identified. Identification of deceased migrants is difficult. Whether local authorities succeed in doing so depends on coincidence, the effort they make, and on the knowledge and skills they have. "Local authorities along the EU external borders are left to their own devices to deal with those who die during the crossing, without national or European assistance or supervision", says Tamara Last. Identification of deceased migrants is crucial for the dignity of the person concerned, and for surviving relatives. The database shows that the percentage of migrants who are identified differs drastically between different times and places. The European Migrant Death Observatory can develop effective procedures for identifying deceased migrants which would be of great help to local authorities along the borders.

The database contains individualized information on 3.188 people who died while attempting to reach southern EU countries from the Balkans, the Middle East, and North & West Africa, and whose bodies were found in or brought to Europe. It is unique because it includes – where known – date and place of death, cause of death, gender, age, country of origin, and whether or not the person was identified. Over the past year, 13 researchers visited 563 local civil registries in Spain, Italy, Greece, Malta and Gibraltar and collected information from death certificates. “This database underlines decades of indifference of European states. They had this information all the time, but failed to collect it”, says Thomas Spijkerboer.

NOTE TO EDITORS

News conference

Who Prof. dr. Thomas Spijkerboer
Tamara Last MSc
When Tuesday 12 May 2015
10 AM
Where Nieuwspoor
Lange Poten 10, 2511 CL Den Haag
The Hague

www.borderdeaths.org with

- Full database
- Visualization
- Documentary *Counting. The Human Costs of Border Control* (Pieter Boeles, 2014) about the research project
- Papers on (1) how was the data collected; (2) preliminary findings; (3) identification; (4) policy relevance

Spokespersons

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