Irregular migration is becoming increasingly complex, elaborate and mosaic, making it harder to monitor and identify. A better understanding of irregular migration routes, journeys undertaken by migrants and migrant profiles is imperative to adopt measures to protect migrants and to respond effectively and appropriately to irregular migration. Collecting quality and reliable data, is key to gaining a better understanding of irregular migration and thereby making informed decisions and policies. (1)

This document highlights the resumption of migration from the coasts of West Africa to Spain’s Canary Islands since 2018. While this route was active in the past, notably in 2006, a growing number of migrants have been taking this route. With a very low success rate, few manage to reach the Canary Islands compared to all departures along the Atlantic coasts of Senegal, Mauritania and Morocco.

Between January and mid-November 2020, 17,337 individuals reached the Canary Islands irregularly after crossing by boat from the coasts of West Africa (Western Africa - Atlantic route). This represents a 1.019 per cent increase in arrivals when compared to the same period in 2019. (3)

Data on the Western Africa - Atlantic route remains scarce and incomplete. No coherent or harmonized approach to data collection currently exists. Existing data on arrivals as well as intercepted boats is collected by the Spanish authorities and DTM. Very little data exists on the actual number of departures and attempts from the West African coasts, while shipwrecks often go unreported.

Multiple testimonies obtained from migrants speak of disappearances en route to the Canary Islands. Irregular boat crossings and incidents involving them are increasing along the West African coastline. Between January and mid-November 2020, there were 40 shipwrecks along the Western Africa - Atlantic route. The actual number of shipwrecks, many of which go unreported or are unaccounted for, may be higher. In 2020, shipwrecks and other fatal maritime accidents affecting migrants took place off the shores of Senegal (Ybour, St-Louis) Mauritania (Nouadhibou, Nouakchott), Morocco (Tan-Tan, Tarfaya, Plage Blanche de Guelmim), Western Sahara (Dakhla) and the Spanish islands of Gran Canaria (Arguineguín, Castillo del Romeral) and Lanzarote (Arrecife).

NOTE ON SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY:
Existing data on the deaths and disappearances of migrants in West and Central Africa is limited. Information about incidents involving the death or disappearance of migrants is sparse. Little information known about the sex and age of missing migrants, or about the precise location of their death or disappearance. In addition, there is no uniform or harmonized number of missing migrants, nor any information about the families of missing migrants with whom contact was lost during the migration journey. IOM’s Missing Migrants Project is the only public and freely accessible database relating to the death or disappearance of migrants. In Africa, DMM data primarily comes from interviews with migrants conducted in the framework of the Mixed Migration Centre’s 4M initiative. Other data sources include IOM data, government data, as well as information provided by NGOs and the media. In 2020, 4M stopped collecting data on dead and missing migrants along migration routes.

DISCLAIMER: Data for the year 2020 covers the period up to 15 November 2020 (1 January – 15 November 2020).