In this special issue of BOb News we focus on the difficulties and challenges of counting and accounting for border deaths from a number of perspectives. These deaths are often not recorded or accounted for by national governments and recording often falls to non-governmental organisations as our news stories in this edition will show. The evidence available overwhelmingly indicates that recording and accounting for these deaths can promote humanitarian responses to irregular migrants traveling across borders and prevent ill treatment and fatalities during and at the end of their migration journey.

**Maurice Stierl** from *Watch the Med* (WTM) writes on WTM’s Alarm Phone interventions at the border zone between North Africa and Europe in an effort to save lives at sea for those attempting to reach Europe.

**Stefanie Grant**, Visiting Senior Fellow, Centre for Human Rights at the London School of Economics has written on border deaths from a global perspective arguing that while states have generally treated migrant deaths as an exception to their normal reporting and accounting obligations, a number of new initiatives are working to identify and count these deaths.

**Reem Abu-Hayyeh** from the *Institute of Race Relations* (IRR) provides insight into a recent IRR report recording 160 border deaths in Europe after arrival in ‘Unwanted, Unnoticed: An audit of 160 immigration related deaths in Europe’.

BOb’s Managing-Director **Rebecca Powell** reflects on the importance of the *Australian Border Deaths Database* in recording deaths over the last four years and provides an update on BOb’s ‘Count Border Deaths’ campaign that is raising awareness and applying pressure on the Australian government to count and account for deaths in immigration custody in Australia.
Did you know? Border deaths facts

More than 1,800 people lost their lives at sea in the first few months of 2015 alone when seeking to reach Europe. Within merely one week in April, at least 1,200 migrants drowned in the Central Mediterranean Sea.

Women are more likely to die crossing borders at the harsh physical frontiers of nation-states rather than at increasingly policed ‘internal border’ sites. The reasons why women are dying, based on the extant literature, include gendered social practices within families, and within countries of origin and transit, as well as the practices of smuggling markets.

The Border Crossing Observatory has recorded 1,970 deaths in the Australian Border Deaths Database since January 2000-present. 77 of these deaths have occurred in immigration custody.

The Coaliccion de Derechos Humanos has recorded the recovered human remains of 2,771 persons at the US-Mexican border from 2000-2014.

The Watch the Med Alarm Phone: Saving lives at sea

Maurice Stierl, Watch the Med

More than 1,800 people lost their lives at sea in the first few months of 2015 alone when seeking to reach Europe. Within merely one week in April, at least 1,200 migrants drowned in the Central Mediterranean Sea. These deaths, while disturbing, come as no surprise. For many months, human rights groups and activist campaigners, including Watch The Med, (WTM) have repeatedly urged the European Union and its member states to (re-)activate large-scale search and rescue operations at sea and to open legal and safe possibilities of entry.

In 2014, Watch The Med Alarm Phone decided to intervene more directly in a borderzone that seemed reserved for sovereign state practitioners. Responding to maritime violence and abandonment, we created the Alarm Phone, a hotline for people in distress. Read more from WTM’s Maurice Stierl here on the implementation and success of the WTM Alarm Phone.
Deaths at sea: From numbers to names
Stefani Grant, Visiting Senior Fellow, Centre for Human Rights at the London School of Economics

Migrant deaths at international borders are a global and growing phenomenon, but governments have long treated them as an exception to normal practice in emergencies and accidents. Policy has not been evidence-based, the dead have not counted or identified, and families have been excluded. This is beginning to change. Stefanie Grant sheds light on responses to border deaths spanning from Europe, South East Asia, North Africa and the Middle East to the US-Mexico border.

Read more from Stefanie Grant [here].

Unwanted, Unnoticed: an audit of 160 asylum and immigration-related deaths in Europe
Reem Abu-Hayyed, Institute of Race Relations

On 29 January 2012, Mohammad Rahsepar, an Iranian torture survivor, hanged himself from the window of his room in the Würzburg asylum camp in Bavaria, Germany. Doctors had diagnosed physical and mental strain from the torture that he had suffered in Iran, and recommended that he be allowed to move in with his sister in Cologne, or be hospitalised. Neither was permitted. When he was found dead, residents of the camp stated that Rahsepar had ‘ended his struggle to find a way to be able to live with dignity in a human society’.

It is cases like these that we document in Unwanted, Unnoticed: an audit of 160 asylum and immigration-related deaths in Europe. The report is in no way exhaustive – in many countries no records are kept, or published, on migrant deaths, even deaths in reception or detention centres. But the deaths that we are able to report on, using information and data collected from local and national news coverage and from anti-racist and migrant support communities, are indicative of the different forms of violence that follow migrants across borders into European states. Read more [here].
Four years ago the Border Crossing Observatory launched the Australian Border Deaths Database recording all known Australian border deaths from January 2000-present. To date, 1,970 deaths have been recorded including deaths in onshore and offshore immigration detention centres, deaths at sea en route to Australia, deaths on return to country of origin following deportation and deaths during pursuit by Australian immigration compliance officers.

The Australian Government still does not publicly record and publish records of Australian border deaths which gives ongoing importance to the Australia Border Deaths Database. The Database was established as part of the research for Globalization and Borders: Death at the Global Frontier (Weber and Pickering, Palgrave, 2011) in order to fill this gap.

Read more here about the Australia Border Deaths Database including how these border deaths are counted and how the Database has been used internationally and nationally as a record of Australian border deaths.

Update: Count border deaths campaign

The Border Crossing Observatory launched the ‘Count border deaths’ campaign in 2012 in an effort to raise awareness and apply pressure on the Australian Government to count and account for deaths in Australian immigration custody. A central feature of this campaign was to lobby the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) to include these deaths in their annual National Deaths In Custody Program (NDICP) reporting. Has the AIC now included a record of these border deaths within its NDICP annual reporting? Read here for an update on this campaign.

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