

REGIONAL MEETING ON MIGRATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

-

Justice for the Missing

Date: 21 and 22 may 2026

Location: Rabat, Morocco

Participants: families, civil society actors, institutional representatives, academics, and media professionals

Focus: Establishing the truth, ensuring accountability, and building justice.

GLOBAL REPORT

Executive Summary:

The Regional Meeting on Migration in the Mediterranean, held in Rabat on 21 and 22 May 2026, provided a valuable space for dialogue, experience-sharing, and collective resistance. Organised by EuroMed Rights, the event brought together families of missing persons, civil society activists, lawyers, forensic experts, and journalists from across the Euro-Mediterranean region. The shared objective was to break the silence surrounding migration tragedies and to define clear strategies built around three fundamental pillars: truth, accountability, and justice. Over the course of the two days, participants highlighted the scale of the failures in addressing disappearances along migration routes: insufficient search and rescue operations, obstacles to the work of NGOs, difficulties in identifying bodies, lack of cooperation between States, and the absence of adequate mechanisms to support families of missing persons and guarantee their right to the truth.

Against a backdrop of increasing externalisation of European borders and the militarisation of migration routes, both at sea and on land, migrants are being pushed onto increasingly deadly pathways, in both the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert. Participants strongly denounced State inaction, the criminalisation of migrants and their defenders, and the invisibilisation of the specific forms of violence experienced by women and children. Beyond documenting these realities, the meeting was strongly action-oriented through four thematic workshops. These sessions laid the groundwork for concrete and operational recommendations:

Workshop 1 highlighted the need to professionalise and better structure cross-border investigative journalism, drawing on ethical charters (the Rome Charter and the Marseille Charter) and close collaboration with NGOs.

Workshop 2 highlighted the psychologically and administratively challenging journey faced by families of missing persons, stressing the need to centralise their knowledge and create mutual support networks.

Workshop 3 explored the various legal avenues for establishing State responsibility for migration-related disappearances, focusing on litigation before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), the International Criminal Court (ICC), the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and UN mechanisms. Discussions also examined ways to challenge border externalisation policies and bilateral agreements that contribute to systemic violations of the rights of migrants and their families.

Workshop 4 put forward seven urgent forensic recommendations, including the creation of a cross-border Ante-Mortem/Post-Mortem database, the establishment of a humanitarian visa, and the guarantee of dignified and traceable burials.

In conclusion, the Rabat meeting reaffirmed that migrant disappearances are not an inevitable tragedy but the direct consequence of security-driven political choices. To address this issue, participants called for a unified cross-border mobilisation that places human dignity and the rights of families at the centre of all future actions.

ملخص:

انعقد اللقاء الجهوي حول الهجرة في البحر الأبيض المتوسط في الرباط يومي 21 و 22 ماي 2026، بتنظيم من الشبكة الأوروبية ومتوسطة للحقوق، وجمع بين عائلات المفقودين ومنظمات حقوقية ومحامين وخبراء وجنائيين وصحفيين من مختلف دول الفضاء الأوروبي-متوسطي. وقد هدف اللقاء إلى كسر الصمت حول مآسي الهجرة، وتعزيز عمل جماعي يركز على ثلاث ركائز أساسية هي الحقيقة، والمساءلة، والعدالة، في ظل وضع إنساني وُصف بالخطير. وقد تناولت النقاشات الانتقادات الموجهة إلى سياسات عسكرية طرق الهجرة ومناولة تدبير الحدود الأوروبية، إضافة إلى تجريم المهاجرين والمدافعين عن حقوقهم. كما خلص اللقاء إلى توصيات عملية من خلال أربع ورشات عمل همت الصحافة الاستقصائية، ودعم عائلات المفقودين، والآليات القانونية الدولية، والبروتوكولات الطبية-القانونية. وفي الختام، دعا المشاركون إلى تعبئة عابرة للحدود تضع كرامة الإنسان ومسؤولية الدول في صلب أي تحرك مستقبلي.

OPENING SESSION

Khadija Ainani, Policy Advisor on Migration and Asylum and Member of the Executive Committee of EuroMed Rights, Moroccan Association for Human (AMDH):

In her opening remarks at this EuroMed Rights regional meeting dedicated to missing migrants in the Mediterranean, the speaker denounced a major political failure and a human tragedy concealed behind cold statistics.

Faced with the impossible grief endured by families, she rejected the idea that these disappearances are an unavoidable fate. Her intervention was structured around three inseparable imperatives: truth, accountability, and justice. Establishing the truth requires breaking the institutional silence, which she described as a form of cruel violence inflicted on relatives. It also means exposing the structural mechanisms that destroy the lives and trajectories of young people, women, and children.

The issue of accountability directly targets State impunity and purely security-driven political choices. The militarisation of borders and the externalisation of asylum do not prevent departures; instead, they prove deadly. Governments must therefore be held accountable for their criminal inaction and their failure to provide assistance at sea. Furthermore, the speaker called for an immediate end to the criminalisation of migrants and those who defend their rights.

The justice dimension calls for transcending borders to uphold the rule of law wherever it is being violated. Building such justice begins with granting official victim status to missing persons. It also requires the establishment of effective, immediate, and unconditional remedies for families. In this sense, the regional meeting emerged as a genuine act of collective solidarity and resistance. By bringing together researchers, legal experts, journalists, and activists, the event sought to build a common front in support of the fundamental rights of families to information, truth, search, and identification.

These conditions were presented as the only means of restoring the human dignity of the deceased. The ultimate goal remains to repair, as far as possible, the lives of relatives that have been profoundly shattered. The message concluded with a powerful call to transform indignation into concrete and collective action.

Opening Remarks by Lilia Rebai, Director of the Regional Programme and EuroMed Dialogue at EuroMed Rights:

The speaker recalled that behind the figures lie interrupted lives, shattered dreams, and, above all, families plunged into painful uncertainty, sometimes for years, without answers, without truth, and without the possibility of mourning. The latest data once again highlights the dramatic scale of this situation. Every year, thousands of people die or disappear along migration routes, both in the Mediterranean and in the Sahara.

Many of these deaths remain invisible, undocumented, without witnesses, without identification, and sometimes without any official record. These disappearances cannot be regarded as isolated accidents. They occur within a context marked by increasingly restrictive

migration policies, the externalisation of borders, the expansion of security measures, and the inadequacy of protection and accountability mechanisms.

It is essential to recall that the issue of missing migrants is not only a humanitarian concern; it is also a matter of human rights, dignity, truth, and justice. This Regional Meeting is therefore important in several respects, as it will make it possible to:

- Exchange our experiences;
- Strengthen ties between institutions, international organisations, civil society organisations, and families;
- Collectively reflect on ways to improve the search for missing persons, the identification of bodies, families' access to information, and cooperation between States.

The initiatives undertaken in recent years, particularly within the framework of the Rabat Process, the establishment of national focal points, and the strengthening of civil society mobilisation, demonstrate that progress is possible when stakeholders work together in a spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility. Lilia Rebai expressed her hope that the discussions held over these two days would rise to the human and political urgency of this issue and contribute to making tangible progress towards truth, accountability, and justice for missing migrants and their families.

DAY 1

PANEL 1: Field Perspectives

ON THE ROADS OF EXILE: REALITIES ON THE GROUND AND THE CHAIN OF DISAPPEARANCES

Speakers:

- Lucille Guenier, SOS Méditerranée
- Moctar Dan Yaye, Alarm Phone Sahara
- *Yousra Boughdadi, EuroMed Rights – Moderator*

Lucille Guenier, SOS Méditerranée:

Shipwrecks in the Mediterranean continue to occur even when authorities have been informed of boats adrift and people in distress. Search and rescue operations are often launched too late to prevent tragedy. Drawing on field experience, she cited the example of Frontex's surveillance drones, which once again demonstrates that the authorities are aware that people are dying at sea from hunger or thirst.

These failures in search and rescue and the policies of border externalisation have contributed to one of the deadliest starts to the year in a decade in the Central Mediterranean. The situation is extremely alarming. The tragic death toll for the beginning of 2026 has already exceeded 1,000 deaths at sea. As in the Sahara, there are countless invisible shipwrecks, meaning that the exact number of people who have lost their lives during these crossings remains unknown.

What is most concerning in the Central Mediterranean today is that crossings have decreased by 40%, while the number of deaths has increased by 150%. The year is expected to become even deadlier due to the growing obstacles faced by sea rescue organisations. These organisations compensate for the failures of States in fulfilling their search and rescue obligations, yet they are encountering increasing difficulties in continuing their operations in the Mediterranean.

Les ONG de recherche et de sauvetage en Méditerranée travaillent souvent à partir d'informations incomplètes et doivent, dans de nombreux cas, « naviguer à vue » dans un espace maritime immense. Malgré les importants moyens technologiques déployés par les États (drones, hélicoptères, systèmes de surveillance maritime), une grande partie des données n'est pas partagée avec les organisations de secours, ce qui entraîne des opérations de recherche longues, complexes et parfois infructueuses. Les équipes découvrent parfois uniquement des embarcations vides ou les traces d'un naufrage, sans jamais pouvoir établir le sort exact des passagers. Cette opacité est dénoncée comme la conséquence d'un système défaillant et de choix politiques qui contribuent à invisibiliser les morts et les disparitions en Méditerranée. Face à cette situation, les ONG ont développé leurs propres mécanismes de documentation, de veille et de témoignage, notamment grâce à des avions de surveillance civile et à la présence de journalistes embarqués lors des missions de secours.

Since Giorgia Meloni came to power in Italy, new measures such as the Piantadosi Decree-Law have significantly complicated humanitarian operations by requiring rescue vessels to disembark survivors in ports located far from the rescue areas. This has considerably reduced the time NGOs can spend in search and rescue zones and has increased operational costs.

At the same time, the externalisation of European borders to Libya and other countries has intensified violent interceptions targeting both migrants and NGOs. Coast guards financed and

equipped by the EU have even attacked humanitarian vessels in international waters, including those operated by SOS Méditerranée and Sea-Watch. Lucille Guenier therefore denounced the growing criminalisation of humanitarian action and a European policy that deliberately obstructs rescue efforts at sea.

Moctar Dan Yaye, Alarm Phone Sahara:

Alarm Phone Sahara emerged as an extension of the Alarm Phone network, which was created to report distress situations in the Mediterranean. From 2015 onwards, with the criminalisation of mobility in Niger, deaths in the desert multiplied while remaining largely invisible. The project therefore established an alert system for people in distress in the Sahara. Due to the limited telephone network coverage in the desert, the organisation developed a network of community alert focal points in villages located along migration routes between Agadez, Algeria, and Libya. Former actors involved in migrant transportation, who had been marginalised by the new legislation, were also integrated into this rescue mechanism. According to the United Nations, the number of deaths in the Sahara could be even higher than the number recorded in the Mediterranean.

The Sahara is another space of disappearance that is far less known and less visible than the Mediterranean. Across the Sahel-Saharan region, people are disappearing and dying, often out of sight. The situation is particularly dramatic, notably as a result of border externalisation policies and the increasing use of repressive measures against people on the move. Several speakers described this situation as a form of war against people in mobility. This "war" driven by the externalisation of European borders manifests itself through:

- The criminalisation of mobility;
- The persistence of disappearances in the desert;
- The transformation of migration routes in Niger since 2015, including the adoption of legislation targeting transporters and the reduction of departures in organised convoys;
- Mass deportations from Niger and to Niger from Algeria.

Yet this criminalisation has not stopped people from moving; rather, it has made mobility more difficult by forcing people onto more dangerous routes and, as a result, causing greater loss of life. In this context, human losses remain underestimated. Today, the Sahara is an open-air graveyard that swallows its victims.

Objective factors, such as climate and climate change, combined with factors produced by border externalisation policies, mean that migrants are abandoned in the desert. They are then forced to walk without any possibility of rescue or access to basic infrastructure. Alarm Phone Sahara's response, through the emergency phone number set up by our organisation, provides a lifeline for people in distress.

Moctar stressed that this strategy involves several actors: civil society, migrants themselves, and State authorities, within a context marked by numerous grey areas. According to him, Niger did not historically view human mobility as a political issue, but rather as a natural phenomenon of regional movement. Following the Valletta Summit in 2015, the European Union (EU)

turned Niger into a key hub for migration control in an effort to curb departures towards Europe. Yet the majority of movements across the Sahara end in Algeria or Libya, and less than 10% of migrants actually reach Europe. Despite this, restrictive legal frameworks, including the 2015 law, were introduced to criminalise these movements. This security cooperation between Europe and the Sahelian States has transformed migration routes into increasingly deadly spaces.

Humanitarian operations in the Nigerien desert face immense challenges due to the vastness of the territory and the lack of infrastructure. The Sahara is a huge and difficult environment to navigate, even for the State, which greatly complicates the work of civil society organisations. These material constraints are compounded by political obstacles: security-driven migration policies implemented under European influence make migrants more vulnerable rather than protecting them. Current policies prioritise the control and repression of mobility over the protection of human lives.

PANEL 2 : Testimonies

FAMILIES SPEAK: LIVING IN THE ABSENCE OF THE MISSING

Speakers :

- Batoul Karbijha, Association of the Families of Missing Asylum Seekers (AFOMAS), Syria
- Latifa Walhazi, Collective of Families of Missing Migrants in Tunisia, Tunisia
- Ramatoulaye Touré, Relative of a missing person, Guinea
- *Hassane Ammari, Support Association for the Migrants in a Vulnerable Situation (ASMV) – Moderator*

Latifa Walhazi, Collective of Families of Missing Migrants in Tunisia:

Latifa Walhazi shared the story of the disappearance of her brother, Ramzi. He disappeared at sea on 1 March 2011 while trying to reach Italy from Tunisia. This tragedy profoundly changed her life and that of her family. She explained that, within the collective, bereaved families have become like one family, united by the same pain and the same absences. Each meeting brings back the memory of the missing (Ramzi, Marwan, Mahdi, Mohamed) and reminds us that behind every name lies a broken story.

Her brother dreamed of leaving Tunisia to build a better life elsewhere. Since his disappearance, grief has transformed her mother, her father, and the entire family, who now live more in waiting and sorrow than in joy. Celebrations, weddings, and happy moments have lost their meaning. Even the sea has become unbearable to look at, as it now symbolises absence and uncertainty.

Latifa also spoke about the profound impact of this tragedy on her children, who are growing up in the shadow of this disappearance. From a very young age, they have felt this family suffering and understood that they too carry the memory of their missing uncle. Through her

testimony, she showed how the disappearance of a migrant affects not only one person, but durably destroys an entire family and emotional circle.

At the same time, Latifa Walhazi has become a key figure in the movement of families of missing migrants in Tunisia. She took over her mother's role within the association of families of the missing and continues to advocate for truth and justice. She recalled the history of this movement, as well as the internal and external challenges it faces. Latifa Walhazi also spoke about the many scams targeting families of missing migrants, particularly in Tunisia and Libya, where institutions provide few answers. Taking advantage of relatives' despair, some people present themselves as lawyers, fishermen, or witnesses able to provide information about the missing in exchange for money. She explained that she herself paid around €1,000 to a Tunisian fisherman who claimed to have found her brother's computer on a beach, hoping to obtain news. Her testimony shows how the absence of official information pushes families to cling to the slightest lead, at the risk of being exploited both financially and emotionally.

Batoul Karbijha, Association of the Families of Missing Asylum Seekers (Syria):

Batoul Karbijha explained that her commitment stems from the disappearance of her sister in 2014 during a crossing between Libya and Europe. She described the permanent suffering of families who live without answers, without a grave, and without the possibility of mourning. This uncertainty sustains a constant sense of hope, but also profound pain.

She denounced the absence of a clear legal status for missing migrants and the lack of State accountability, arguing that governments are more concerned with protecting borders than with searching for missing persons. She also criticised the fragmentation of institutions, which forces families to repeatedly recount their stories, causing further retraumatisation.

Finally, she highlighted the sense of exploitation felt by many families towards researchers and journalists who collect their testimonies without providing meaningful feedback or concrete support in return.

Ramatoulaye Touré, Relative of a missing person, Guinea:

Ramatoulaye Touré recounted the gradual departure of a close relative, her niece, who had decided to leave Guinea despite her family's attempts to dissuade her. Officially, she had left for Côte d'Ivoire to work, but in reality, she had already planned a broader migration journey. After maintaining occasional contact with her family, she gradually cut off communication while continuing to ask her relatives for money. Later, from Senegal, she sent all her personal belongings back to her family, an alarming sign that led them to believe she would probably continue her journey towards Europe. Having received no further news, it is highly likely that she disappeared in a shipwreck. Her testimony highlights the discreet strategies adopted by many migrants when leaving and the anguish experienced by families confronted with incomplete information and the sudden loss of contact.

PANEL 3 : Gender

GENDER, DISAPPEARANCES, AND THE CONTINUUM OF VIOLENCE

Speakers :

- Roberta Derosas, MeltingPot Europa
- Boye Coude, Women Widowed by Migration, Senegal
- Aida Kheireddine, FekTyari
- *Imane Bellamine, Journalist Enass Média – Moderator*

Aïda Kheireddine, Fek Tyari:

Complexity and intersectionality of migration

- Migration realities are not homogeneous; they vary according to administrative status, geographical origin (Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East) and refugee status.
- Migration dynamics are situated at the intersection of gender, social class, and legal status. The analysis focused here on sub-Saharan migrant women, based on field data and around twenty workshops conducted in 2022 with 150 women.

The continuum of violence: a systemic reality

- The violence experienced by women with an irregular migration status, particularly Black women, is not made up of isolated incidents but forms part of a systemic pattern.
- This continuum of violence manifests itself in everyday life in the street, at work, and in other public spaces-through sexual harassment, physical assaults, humiliation, and subtle yet persistent forms of intimidation and discrimination.
- A mechanism of impunity: the absence of a residence permit creates an obvious vulnerability. Perpetrators act knowing they are likely to enjoy near-total impunity, as many women are reluctant or unable to report abuses for fear of the consequences of their migration status.

Residence status as the central driver of invisibility and exclusion

- Administrative status entirely determines access to rights and legal remedies, raising a fundamental question: who is actually able to file a complaint?
- The institutional paradox (Morocco): Although Morocco has strengthened its legal framework including Law 103-13 on violence against women and introduced regularisation policies, while efforts have been made to ensure that undocumented migrants can report abuses at police stations without fear of arrest, the reality on the ground remains very different.
- The barrier of fear: In practice, many women are reluctant to go to the police because they fear being subjected to a "double procedure" both criminal proceedings and migration enforcement, including possible deportation. This fear keeps them invisible and effectively excludes them from protection mechanisms.

Roberta Derosas, Melting Pot Europa:

The dehumanisation and systemic subjugation of racialised women

- Findings of the investigation: The report, particularly *Women's State Trafficking*, highlights a process of extreme dehumanisation experienced by Black and other racialised migrant women along migration routes, especially between Tunisia and Libya.
- Mechanisms of violence: This continuum of violence is not the result of isolated abuses but of a genuine institutionalised "logistical chain." It is characterised by systematic rituals of humiliation, deliberate degrading practices, and institutionalised neglect, all aimed at achieving the complete physical and psychological subjugation of these women.

The central role of the European Union's border externalisation policies

- Roberta Derosas stressed that these forms of violence do not occur in isolation; they are directly linked to the political choices of the European Union, which has signed official agreements, including memoranda of understanding, with Tunisia and Libya.
- Through the externalisation of its borders, the EU finances, equips, and trains the national and coast guards of these third countries, while supporting the establishment of Search and Rescue (SAR) zones that have been diverted from their original humanitarian purpose to instead block, intercept, and detain people on the move.

The impact of the report: from geographical documentation to political action

- The successive investigations have produced robust empirical evidence, including precise geographical coordinates and compelling testimonies documenting both secret and official sites where migrants are detained.
- The publication of this work helped bring the issue before the European Parliament, leading to formal calls for inspections of detention centres in Tunisia. The speaker stressed that the necessary tools for action already exist: ending this complicity and ensuring independent inspections of these sites now depends solely on the political will of the authorities.

Codou Boye, Women Widowed by Migration, Senegal:

Behind the statistics on migration from Senegal lies an invisible continuum of violence experienced by the mothers, wives, and widows left behind on the shores of M'bour. For these women, the disappearance of husbands and relatives at sea marks the beginning of a painful ordeal, characterised by extreme economic hardship and the burden of an impossible mourning process, often compounded by social stigma. Their daily lives are shaped by the relentless

search for bodies or any trace of their loved ones along the beaches, a constant and exhausting quest that takes a severe toll on their mental health and that of their orphaned children. Without official death certificates, deprived of a clear legal status and adequate resources, these widows bear the full weight of institutional neglect and the violence of prolonged uncertainty. Making their struggle in M'bour visible means documenting the traumatic memory of Senegal's coastline while affirming their right to dignity, truth, and justice in the face of migration policies that leave families trapped in endless waiting and uncertainty.

PANEL 4 : Media
WHO NARRATES DISAPPEARANCES?
MEDIA, INVISIBILISATION, AND THE HIERARCHY OF
LIVES

Speakers :

- Malek Khadhraoui, Editor-in-Chief, Inkyfada
- Maïa Courtois, Independent Investigative Journalist
- Charles Autheman, Independent Migration Consultant
- *Éléonore Plé, journalist- Moderator*

Charles Autheman, Independent Consultant on Migration and the Media:

Over the past ten years, Charles Autheman has organised and led training workshops for journalists, trade unionists, and communication professionals in around twenty countries, mainly across the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. From 2012 to 2014, he coordinated a European project promoting balanced and high-quality reporting on migration in eight countries: Mali, Senegal, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, France, and Spain. A specialist in media coverage of migration and forced labour, he regularly teaches in journalism schools, helping future journalists develop a deeper understanding of migration issues and a critical perspective on media practices.

During the panel, Charles Autheman delivered a critical assessment of media coverage of migration. He argued that the photograph of Aylan Kurdi triggered a wave of global emotion that was quickly followed by collective amnesia, even though children have continued to die on migration routes ever since. In his view, the structural problem lies in a reactive form of journalism that only responds to shocking images, whereas what is needed is a more proactive approach. He also emphasised the dehumanising nature of dominant media narratives: migrants are rarely identified by name or face and are instead reduced to official death tolls that often underestimate the true scale of the tragedy. As he put it: *"These are not just numbers. This is about building relationships with families; these are human stories."*

He also highlighted the Marseille Charter, launched in April 2025, as an important ethical framework for journalists. The Charter calls on media professionals to avoid rendering migrants invisible and to seek information directly from the people most affected by migration policies.

Maïa Courtois, Independent Investigative Journalist:

Specialising in border issues, Maïa Courtois conducts long-term investigations into the consequences of French and European migration policies, from the opacity of immigration detention centres to places of solidarity. Her work has been published by *Mediapart*, *Reporterre*, *InfoMigrants*, and *La Revue Dessinée*.

During the panel, she presented the findings of a three-year investigation carried out with a team of journalists to document deaths during Channel crossings at the Franco-British border. The investigation was built around individual stories and conducted in close collaboration with the families of those who had disappeared. This work led to the publication of the article "*The Missing of the Channel: When Their Families Fight Against Oblivion*" in March 2024.

She also covered the November 2025 trial of ten individuals accused of organising the deadly Channel crossing of 12 August 2023, during which at least seven people lost their lives. Throughout her intervention, she argued that mainstream media coverage systematically renders missing migrants invisible by denying them names and faces. Her own investigative approach seeks to counter this by placing individuals and their families at the centre of the narrative.

Malek Khadhraoui, Co-founder and Editor-in-Chief of Inkyfada:

Malek Khadhraoui is the co-founder of *Inkyfada*, a Tunisian investigative and data journalism outlet established in 2014 in the aftermath of the Tunisian revolution. The media organisation positions itself as a counterbalance to power, committed to exposing all forms of discrimination and defending economic and social rights, individual freedoms, and the rights of minorities, including through extensive reporting on borders and migration.

During the panel, he presented *Inkyfada*'s major investigations into migration, including a collaborative investigation conducted with *Lighthouse Reports*, *The Washington Post*, *Der Spiegel*, *Le Monde*, *ENASS Media*, *IRPI Media*, *Tagesschau*, *PorCausa*, and *El País*. This investigation documented the forced expulsions of migrants to remote desert areas along the Algerian and Libyan borders from the summer of 2023 onwards, combining field reporting, multiple testimonies, and visual evidence.

He also highlighted the rise of racism in Tunisia and its direct consequences for the work of human rights defenders and journalists reporting on migration. According to him, this increasingly hostile environment makes the work of *Inkyfada* both more necessary and more dangerous.

DAY 2

The second day of the regional meeting began with a recap of the discussions held on the first day. The session then opened with the screening of a teaser for the documentary *Senza Nome* (*Nameless*), directed by Filippo Casini. The documentary was introduced by Tareke Brhane, President of the *Comitato 3 Ottobre* in Italy and producer of the film, who presented the project and its objectives.

PANEL 5 : Identification
**IDENTIFYING BODIES, RESTORING NAMES:
FORENSIC ISSUES AND THE RIGHT TO TRUTH**

Speakers:

- Elias Muiy Numbi, Association of Congolese Doctors in Morocco
- Ahlam Chemlali, University of Oxford & Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)
- Paolo Boccagni, Researcher, University of Trento
- *Silvia Di Meo, MemMed - Moderator*

This panel brought together three speakers around a central question: how to restore identity and dignity to nameless bodies whose disappearance has taken both away. The discussion combined forensic expertise, academic perspectives, and testimonies from families, in a room where several relatives of missing persons were present and acknowledged from the outset.

Dr. Elias Muiy Numbi, Resident in Forensic Medicine at Tangier University Hospital and member of the Association of Congolese Doctors in Morocco:

While outlining the role of forensic medicine, Dr. Elias Muiy Numbi immediately placed the human dimension at the centre of his intervention. Behind every body received, he reminded the audience, is a family member, a missing person whose relatives are waiting for answers.

Based in Tangier since 2023, he has examined a large number of bodies recovered from forests, roadsides, and the sea. Working in cooperation with the Royal Gendarmerie and the National Police's forensic laboratory, his role is to move beyond the immediate emotional impact and apply a rigorous forensic protocol based on the principles and constraints of forensic medicine, while always giving the benefit of the doubt. He stressed that the same protocol is applied to every case and highlighted that collective burials have now been abandoned, as they are considered incompatible with the dignity owed to the deceased. He concluded by calling for stronger collaboration between forensic practitioners, civil society organisations, researchers, and families, emphasising that the department where he works remains open to such cooperation.

Ahlam Chemlali, University of Oxford, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC):

Researcher Ahlam Chemlali presented insights from her fieldwork in Zarzis, where she worked closely with fishermen who are often the first to recover bodies washed ashore. She emphasised that, despite recent progress, the challenge of identifying the dead remains far from resolved and that forensic practice continues to face significant structural obstacles. She observed that the various actors involved in this issue, including families, forensic professionals, and civil society organisations, approach it from different perspectives and with different motivations.

At the same time, she expressed her deep admiration for the commitment and perseverance shown by families in their search for truth. Finally, she highlighted a profound inequality that extends beyond death itself: an inequality experienced both in life and in death. In doing so, she echoed the frustration expressed by Dr. Elias Muyi Numbi regarding the unequal treatment afforded to deceased migrants and their families.

Paolo Boccagni, University of Trento, Italy:

Academic Paolo Boccagni offered a broader structural perspective on the phenomenon of disappearances. In his view, disappearance is a product of racialisation and precarity: it stems from structural inequalities that make the risk of death an expected outcome for certain populations rather than an isolated accident.

He described disappearance as a rupture between the body and the name, while defining forensic medicine as the reverse process, an effort to reconnect the body with the person through a genuine act of remembrance and recognition.

He also emphasised the deeply personal and painful nature of this experience for families, who are often compelled to make their private grief public in order to obtain answers. He concluded his intervention by calling for the restoration of victims' dignity to serve as the common objective of all efforts related to the search for, identification of, and justice for missing migrants.

Discussion with participants

- The discussion was marked by several interventions from relatives of missing migrants, giving the panel a particularly powerful and emotional dimension. The mother of a missing man named Oussama shared her personal experience, stressing that DNA should never be considered a taboo subject. She made an urgent appeal for every possible effort to be made to help families identify their loved ones, even if only a single strand of hair remained for forensic analysis. She also emphasised that her story is shared by many other families facing the same deadlock and enduring the same suffering caused by the disappearance of a loved one.
- Serge reflected on his experience of investigating the disappearance of a young man, raising the issue of exhuming bodies as a possible means of establishing the truth. The mother of a missing migrant from Mauritania also gave a moving testimony, sharing that, over time, the intensity of her pain had gradually changed. Her words created a deeply emotional moment in the room, bringing several of the mothers present to tears.
- Ms Batoul, the mother of a missing person, called on participants to move beyond simply documenting the problem. In her view, bodies have already been recovered; what is needed now is action rather than continued discussions about the "challenges".
- Hassane Ammari, from the Association for the Assistance of Vulnerable Migrants (ASMV), reflected on the work carried out in close cooperation with the affected communities. He explained that identification procedures differ depending on whether bodies are recovered at sea or on land. He also noted that, through this collaborative work with migrant communities of different nationalities, 75 bodies had been successfully identified.

- Le débat s'est élargi en fin de séance à la dimension transnationale de la question : l'accès aux visas a été évoqué comme un obstacle concret pour les familles, de même que la nécessité de penser un mécanisme judiciaire à la hauteur d'un drame qui, de l'avis général, a déjà trop duré. Une intervention a enfin souligné l'absence du Sahara dans les discussions, le qualifiant de véritable « mer des morts », et appelant à établir un lien explicite entre cette zone et la question plus large des disparitions forcées.

PANEL 6 : States
ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPUNITY:
STATES, EXTERNALISATION, AND DISAPPEARANCES

Speakers:

- Moutar Amina Abdou, Permanent Secretariat of the Migration Consultation Framework, Niger
- Romain Lanneau, Statewatch
- *Nabil Ferdaoussi, University of Cape Town - Moderator*

This second panel shifted the focus from forensic practice to the political and institutional frameworks that shape migration routes and the blind spots surrounding migrant disappearances. Through two complementary perspectives, the discussion contrasted the views of a public institution involved in migration governance in Niger with those of an organisation critically monitoring European migration policies.

Moutar Amina Abdou, Permanent Secretariat of the Migration Consultation Framework, Niger:

The speaker presented the programmes developed by her department to promote a more "human-centred" approach to border management, placing this work within Niger's institutional framework for coordinating migration policies. The Migration Consultation Framework, attached to the Office of the Minister of the Interior of Niger, works closely with the European Union (EU) Delegation in Niger and serves as a coordination and monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the operational partnerships established between the two parties, particularly in the areas of border management and the fight against migrant smuggling.

She explained that migration has become an increasingly prominent political issue since 2024. Nigerien authorities have taken public positions on the matter and intensified institutional dialogue, while international actors such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have assumed a leading role in the humanitarian response.

This development has taken place during a period of profound transformation in Niger's migration policy. Following the military coup of July 2023, the country's new authorities repealed Law No. 2015-36 in November of the same year. For eight years, this legislation had criminalised migrant smuggling in Niger. The European Union immediately expressed regret over its repeal, citing concerns that it could lead to increased migration flows and greater risks along desert migration routes. It is within this evolving context, marked by tensions between a security-driven approach inherited from cooperation with the European Union and a renewed assertion of national sovereignty, that Moctar Amina Abdou situated the consultation and coordination work carried out by her institution.

Romain Lanneau, Statewatch:

Romain Lanneau offered a critical analysis of the criminalisation embedded in contemporary migration policies. He argued that the figure of the "smuggler" has increasingly been instrumentalised as a tool for migration control, noting that migrants themselves are frequently treated by judicial systems as smugglers and consequently subjected to severe criminal penalties. He also questioned the usefulness of analysing migration policies solely through their financial dimension, arguing that the EU–Morocco funding relationship alone provides only a limited understanding of the broader dynamics at play.

His intervention drew on Statewatch's extensive documentation and monitoring work. Since 2024, Statewatch, in partnership with *migration-control.info*, has published the bi-monthly bulletin *Outsourcing Borders: Monitoring EU Externalisation Policy*. The publication analyses and compiles key documents produced and discussed within the European Union Council's working groups on border returns, the financing of border externalisation, and visa sanctions. He also referred to a Statewatch report examining the role of Frontex in West Africa, which shows how the EU's border externalisation strategy has expanded across the Sahel under the guise of partnership and development cooperation. The report highlights the absence of effective accountability mechanisms, democratic oversight, and enforceable human rights safeguards. According to this analysis, cooperation between Frontex and West African States reflects a clear imbalance of power, in which European Union funding and diplomatic pressure are used as leverage to advance migration control policies that primarily serve European political interests.

PANEL 7 : Criminalisation
CRIMINALISATION OF SOLIDARITY:
RESCUING, ALERTING, AND TESTIFYING UNDER
PRESSURE

Speakers:

- Romdhane Ben Amor, Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) - *Online*
- Serena Colagrande, Doctors Without Borders
- Kirsty Macdonald Mellor, Human Rights Expert
- *Khadija Ainani, Policy Advisor on Migration and Asylum and Member of the Executive Committee of EuroMed Rights, Moroccan Association for Human (AMDH) - Moderator*

This panel examined the mechanisms through which assistance to migrants, raising the alarm, and bearing witness are gradually being turned into acts that may lead to criminal prosecution. It brought together three complementary perspectives: that of a Tunisian organisation defending economic and social rights and directly facing repression; that of an international humanitarian organisation operating on the ground; and that of a human rights expert.

Romdhane Ben Amor, Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES):

Romdhane Ben Amor described the criminalisation of migrants and human rights defenders as an increasingly pervasive, complex, and insidious phenomenon. In practice, it takes the form of restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian assistance and relies on a legal framework that is increasingly used against those showing solidarity with migrants. His intervention reflected the direct experience of FTDES, one of the organisations most exposed to this repression. Since May 2024, nearly eight civil society activists who expressed solidarity with migrants or worked on migration-related issues have been imprisoned in Tunisia, most often on charges of financial mismanagement or money laundering. According to civil society organisations, these prosecutions are widely perceived as instruments of intimidation. The most emblematic case remains that of Tunisie Terre d'Asile. Several of the organisation's leaders have been held in pre-trial detention since their arrest in May 2024 and were tried alongside elected municipal officials from Sousse for having simply authorised the use of a municipal building for humanitarian purposes. FTDES places its advocacy within a broader, long-term struggle. The organisation calls for the repeal of the 2004 law that criminalises assistance to migrants, arguing that it violates international legal obligations. It also advocates for the recognition of migrants' rights, stronger protection against discrimination, and an end to the prosecution of human rights defenders.

FTDES itself has not escaped this repression. The organisation was summoned for an investigation into its funding, and its activities were subsequently suspended by the Tunisian authorities for one month at the end of October 2025. FTDES denounced the measure as "arbitrary and unjust", while reaffirming its commitment to defending social justice and human rights.

Serena Colagrande and Kirsty Macdonald Mellor:

The interventions by Serena Colagrande and Kirsty Macdonald Mellor broadened the discussion beyond the Tunisian context by highlighting the increasing pressure placed on humanitarian and solidarity actors. They addressed both the operational challenges faced by

humanitarian organisations working on the ground and the growing use of European and national legal frameworks to restrict acts of solidarity. Together, their contributions placed the situation documented by Romdhane Ben Amor within a broader trend of shrinking civic space around migration issues, where humanitarian assistance, advocacy, and the defence of migrants' rights are increasingly subject to legal, political, and administrative constraints.

Three key themes emerged from these three panels on the second day:

- **The need to systematically document legal proceedings against migrant rights defenders** in order to expose the often disproportionate nature of the charges and prosecutions brought against them.
- **The urgent need to reform national legal frameworks**, such as Tunisia's 2004 law, which criminalise humanitarian assistance by treating acts of solidarity as criminal offences.
- **The importance of strengthening international solidarity** among civil society organisations, humanitarian actors, and human rights experts to counter the growing isolation faced by targeted defenders in Tunisia and elsewhere.

COLLECTIVE WORKSHOPS - RECOMMENDATIONS

The meeting concluded with four collective workshops aimed at developing practical and operational recommendations around the four main themes explored during the two-day event:

- **THEME 1:** The role of the media and communication in reporting on disappearances at sea.
- **THEME 2:** Supporting the families of missing migrants in overcoming administrative barriers.
- **THEME 3:** Legal action, strategic litigation, and access to justice.
- **THEME 4:** The identification of bodies and ways to overcome the obstacles to identification.

WORKSHOP 1: Investigating and Documenting Migrant Disappearances

Moderators: Valentina Camu and Malek Khadhraoui

1. Structuring and Networking

Strengthening journalists' training: A specific gap was identified in Morocco, where migration journalism remains largely unspecialised. Participants called for enhanced training within journalism schools, newsrooms, and civil society organisations, drawing on ethical and professional frameworks such as the **Rome Charter** and the **Marseille Charter**.

Building a network of journalists: Participants recommended establishing a structured network of journalists to improve responsiveness on the ground, strengthen local reporting, and foster regular cooperation with NGOs.

Developing information-sharing networks and communication channels: Closer collaboration between journalists and NGOs was identified as essential, including through existing initiatives such as **Alarm Phone**, to facilitate the exchange of information and improve early warning and documentation.

Establishing structured information-sharing mechanisms: Participants stressed the need for organised information-sharing between NGOs and journalists, enabling civil society organisations to act as trusted intermediaries and help increase the visibility of journalists' work.

Promoting cross-border collaboration: Participants highlighted the importance of strengthening regional and thematic cooperation among journalists to support transnational investigations and improve reporting on migrant disappearances across borders.

2. Sustainability and Resources

Building on existing initiatives: Participants stressed the importance of sustaining and strengthening existing projects rather than creating short-lived initiatives. They called for an end to the recurring cycle of promising projects being abruptly discontinued due to a lack of funding, a dynamic that generates frustration and undermines long-term impact.

Securing sustainable funding: Discussions highlighted the need to identify long-term funding opportunities while ensuring that sensitive information, sources, and investigative work remain protected and independent.

Strengthening collaboration with NGOs: Participants recommended closer cooperation with civil society organisations from the earliest stages of investigations, allowing resources, expertise, and logistical capacities to be pooled before the production and dissemination of journalistic content.

3. Semantic, Technical, and Ethical Challenges

The power of words and the strength of images: Facing the difficulties of accurately defining situations.

Technological tools and AI: A "ChatGPT for migration"? Caution is required (given the sensitivity of the topic), but there is potential for its use as an enhanced search engine.

Production and dissemination of work: Collecting retrospective testimonies and lessons learned from professionals. Exploring formats for sharing and keeping content alive (podcasts, social media).

Identified deliverables: Development of a glossary and reference guides.

Mapping: Geolocation of ongoing investigations.

Focal points: Clear identification of focal points.

ATELIER 2 : Disparitions : parcours des familles et obstacles administratifs

Moderator: Arthur Kalonda

1. Analysis of Policies and International Agreements

EU agreements: Structural analysis aimed at identifying the types of technologies deployed and highlighting the direct links between European funding and the abuses or violations observed.

Systemic approach: Absolute need to apply a systemic approach, not only a structural one. The aim is to directly target broader structures and policies, particularly those of the EU and countries such as Italy, rather than focusing only on individuals or simple sub-committees/ministries.

2. Centralisation and Mobilisation of Knowledge

Families' knowledge: Centralise and recognise the knowledge accumulated by the families of missing persons.

Training: Actively train lawyers, legal experts, and students to support families in their legal and administrative procedures.

3. Collective Mobilisation and Experience Sharing

Family networks: Establish a unified network of families to share lived experiences and better navigate complex administrative and legal procedures, drawing on individual cases and experiences, particularly those from Libya.

WORKSHOP 3: Strategic Litigation and Access to Justice

Moderators: Emma Cabrol et Ragheb Zouaoui

1. Recourse to International Bodies and Mechanisms

European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR): Identify how the Court can be engaged. The ECtHR may provide the most effective avenue, given the binding obligations it imposes on States, particularly their positive obligations to protect human rights.

Committee Against Torture: Mobilise this Committee, alongside other relevant international treaty bodies, while acknowledging the practical reality that, in some cases, their decisions do not produce immediate changes on the ground.

Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances: Analyse lessons learned and concrete case studies, including experiences from Tunisia.

International Criminal Court (ICC): Establish and document a precise list of individuals who bear direct responsibility for the violations committed.

African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights: Activate this regional mechanism for cases arising in the African context.

Treaty law and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs): International treaties and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) can be challenged through judicial proceedings or through advocacy before the European Parliament.

International Court of Justice (ICJ): Highlight the unlawful nature of certain practices ("Not legal!") and bring these cases before the ICJ in order to establish State responsibility.

2. Operational Strategy and Field Action

Case selection: Carefully identify and prioritise strategic cases for litigation, taking into account the potential political repercussions associated with legal action.

Family-centred approach: Ensure the direct involvement of families throughout the process, recognising them as essential partners. Systematically document the legal and administrative obstacles they encounter in their search for truth and justice.

Documenting financial flows: Undertake targeted investigations to document and trace the financial flows supporting migration policies and practices that contribute to human rights violations.

Coordination and admissibility: Strengthen coordination among legal experts, civil society organisations, and families to reinforce the quality, credibility, and admissibility of legal cases.

Realism and resources: Provide the financial and human resources necessary to sustain strategic litigation while maintaining realistic expectations regarding achievable outcomes.

WORKSHOP 4 : Body Identification, Practices and Challenges

Moderators: Mahamoudou Dicko et Dr. Elias Muyi Numbi

Establish a centralised cross-border AM/PM database: Enable the effective matching of **Ante-Mortem (AM)** data provided by families with **Post-Mortem (PM)** data collected from recovered bodies in order to identify missing migrants.

Promote the training of forensic pathologists and mobilise funding: Allocate dedicated financial resources for the acquisition of specialised equipment and materials required for the identification of missing persons.

Create a EuroMed Rights focal point: Establish a dedicated focal point to centralise and facilitate the sharing of critical information on missing persons across both shores of the Mediterranean, in line with recommendations issued by the Council of Europe.

Ensure comprehensive support for families: Guarantee multidimensional assistance to the families of missing persons, including administrative, legal, and psychological support.

Facilitate families' travel to countries where disappearances occurred: Develop practical mechanisms to overcome border-related obstacles, including the creation of a dedicated humanitarian visa.

Ensure dignified burial for unidentified bodies: Guarantee that unidentified deceased persons are buried with dignity, supported by a strict and reliable system for recording and tracing burial sites.

Develop an information and awareness framework: Raise awareness and provide accessible information on complex procedures and the overall functioning of the forensic process for the management and identification of unidentified bodies.

