

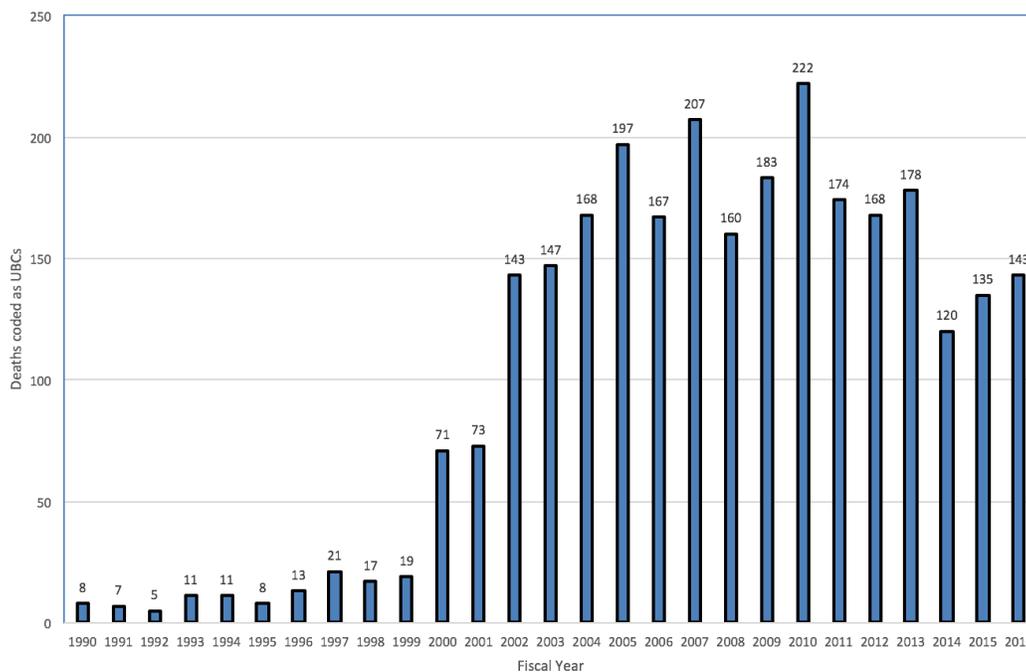
FACT SHEET

Migration is as old as humanity itself. High rates of migrant death are not. Today we face a human rights crisis, as each year hundreds of migrants die along the U.S.-Mexico border.

This crisis began in the mid-1990s following new U.S. border security policies—Operation Hold the Line, Operation Gatekeeper and the 1994 Border Patrol Strategic Plan—that increased enforcement at many traditional and safe entry points along the border. These policies effectively pushed migration routes into remote desert areas. Citing the theory of *prevention through deterrence*, the U.S. government assumed that migrants would be discouraged by the prospect of a harsh and hazardous desert. As former Immigration and Naturalization Service Commissioner Doris Meissner told the Arizona Republic in 2000, “We did believe that geography would be an ally to us...it was our sense that the number of people crossing the border through Arizona would go down to a trickle, once people realized what it’s like.”

The result was a crisis of death and disappearance on the border.

Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner Deaths Coded as UBCs, FY 1990-2016
(N = 2,776)



It has been more than a decade since this crisis began and today people are still attempting dangerous journeys through remote areas of the borderlands. Between 1990 and 2016, at least 2,776 migrants died attempting to cross into Arizona. U.S. Border Patrol has recorded 6,915 migrant deaths along the border between fiscal year 1998 and fiscal year 2016^[1]. A majority of these individuals die from exposure to the elements. Estimates on the number of deaths are incomplete and only account for those individuals that have been found and recovered from the U.S. side of the border. Due to the remote and isolated nature of migration routes, many of those individuals whose remains have been recovered were found by chance.



Most likely there are many thousands who have never been found. From the data that is known, we know that such deaths are on the rise. In fiscal year 2016, Border Patrol reported the deaths of 322 migrants, nearly 100 more than in 2015 ^[1]. Between October 1, 2016 and July 18, 2017, the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner in Arizona had examined the remains of 129 individuals presumed to be migrants.

The data suggests that migrant deaths are on the rise in Texas. In Border Patrol's Rio Grande Sector of Texas, migrant deaths more than doubled from 2011 to 2012. Deaths of migrants are increasing at a time when apprehensions—and thus most likely the total number of migrants—are dropping. This means that the migrant passage is only getting deadlier.

Recovered remains now number in the thousands and thousands are still unidentified. Despite world-renowned practices in examining the dead, the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner, in Tucson, Arizona, has records of more than 900 unidentified remains believed to be migrants. This is just one of many offices along the border that face this crisis. Colibrí's database contains over 2,300 active missing persons cases reported by families searching for loved ones last seen crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.

Colibrí's work is on the frontline of creating a sustainable, centralized, and responsive system for identifying and repatriating remains found along the U.S.-Mexico border. With the most complete list of missing migrants nationwide, access to forensic data about unidentified remains found along the entire border, and a DNA Program sampling relatives of the missing to help identify those high numbers of unidentified remains, Colibrí is in the unique position to assist both families and forensic experts in their work to find the living and name the dead.

¹"Southwest Border Deaths By Fiscal Year Oct. 1st through Sept. 30th", (United States Border Patrol, Southwest Border Sectors, 2016) <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2016-Oct/BP%20Southwest%20Border%20Sector%20Deaths%20FY1998%20-%20FY2016.pdf>

