

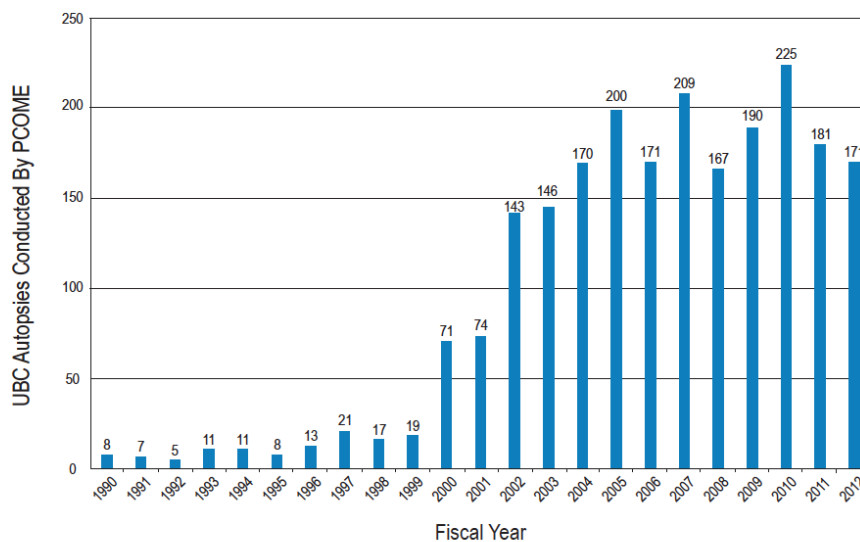
FACT SHEET

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.

Figure 1. PCOME Deaths Coded as UBCs
FY1990-2012 (N = 2,238)

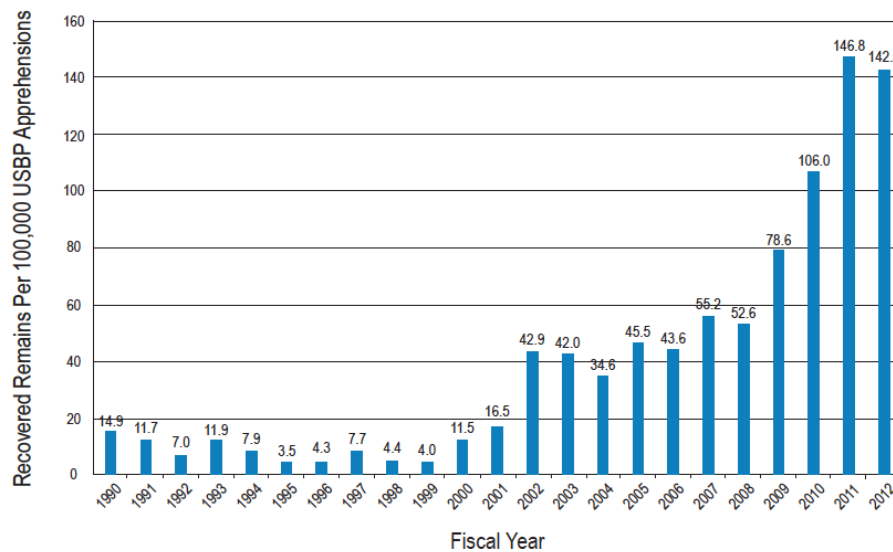


It has been more than a decade since this crisis began and today people are still attempting dangerous journeys through remote areas of the borderlands. Between 2001 and 2013, at least 2,202 migrants died attempting to cross into Arizona alone. U.S. Border Patrol has recorded 6,029 deaths of assumed migrants between 1998 and 2013^[1]. A majority of these individuals die from exposure to the elements. On average, less than 4% die from homicide^[2].

Estimates on the number of deaths are incomplete and only account for those bodies that have been found and recovered from the U.S. side of the border. 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 2012, Border Patrol reported finding the remains of 463 migrants, over 100 more than in 2011 and the highest number on record since 2005^[2]. While there was no statistically significant change in the number of recovered migrant remains in Arizona during 2012 and 2013, it is evident 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.

Figure 2. Approximate Death Rate in the Tucson Sector using PCOME Deaths Coded as UBCs, FY 1990 - 2012 (N = 2,238)



Recovered remains now number in the thousands and many 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 records for over 2,000 missing persons, reported by their families to be last seen crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. The cause for this high number of missing and unidentified relates to the decentralized nature of forensic data along the border today. There is currently no nationally uniform procedure to investigate the deaths of migrants, and practices vary from county to county. Many remains found in Texas have yet to have DNA samples taken, and there is currently no comprehensive DNA database to match the DNA of unidentified migrant remains with family members searching for missing loved ones.

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, and with access to forensic data about unidentified remains found along the entire border, 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, 2013) <http://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/U.S.%20Border%20Patrol%20Fiscal%20Year%20Statistics%20SWB%20Sector%20Deaths%20FY1998%20-%20FY2013.pdf>

²"A Continued Humanitarian Crisis at the Border: Undocumented Border Crosser Deaths Recorded by the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner, 1990-2012", (The Binational Migration Institute, June 2013) http://bmi.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/border_deaths_final_web.pdf