



SUMMARY OF ANNUAL REPORT 2023



INFORMATION FUSION CENTRE
INDIAN OCEAN REGION (IFC-IOR)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023, the Centre monitored, recorded and analysed a total of 3,955 incidents across the wider Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and adjacent seas. These incidents are classified into five major categories: piracy and armed robbery; contraband smuggling; Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing; irregular human migration and maritime incidents. Additionally, the report addresses incidents related to maritime security threats (hybrid), cyber security, marine environmental pollution and climate change and security. Geographically, the incidents in all major categories were grouped under four regions: South Asia, West Asia, East Africa and South East Asia. Additionally, piracy and armed robbery incidents in the Gulf of Guinea were also recorded.

The report presents collated data and trend analysis utilising both textual descriptions and graphical representations to provide concise informational highlights of significant events throughout the year. Additionally, it offers a comparative analysis of the incidents with the preceding year. However, it is important to note that the presence or absence of incidents in a particular region should not necessarily be construed as a benchmark for comparing the state of security and safety across regions or countries. The absence of incidents may depict either an actual incident-free region or a region with inadequate monitoring mechanisms to report such incidents. The Centre's monitoring, recording and analysis is concentrated on reported incidents within the maritime domain, encompassing ports, coastal areas, riverways, littoral zones and open seas. While inland incidents are excluded from the scope, the Centre implicitly acknowledges that illicit activities often transcend geographical boundaries, frequently traversing diverse domains. excluded from the scope, the Centre implicitly acknowledges that illicit activities often transcend geographical boundaries, frequently traversing diverse domains.

PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY

In 2023, the Centre recorded 194 incidents of piracy and armed robbery, a notable increase of 20% compared to 161 in 2022. These incidents are categorised into subtypes such as hijack, kidnap, illegal boarding, attack, sea robbery, sea theft, attempted incidents and suspicious approach. The monthly average incidents rose from 13 in 2022 to about 16 in 2023. Despite the surge in incidents, a positive trend emerged as 78% of reported incidents involved no violence. However, isolated instances of violence resulted in severe injuries and one fatality.

While piracy and armed robbery remained suppressed in most regions, South East Asia saw a surge, accounting for 103 incidents. East Africa experienced a significant increase, notably in hijacking of dhows off the coast of Somalia and petty thefts off Mauritius. The types of incidents varied, with sea theft being the most reported (43% of total incidents) and bulk carriers, tankers and pleasure crafts being the most targeted vessels. Most incidents occurred at night (83%), within 12 nm of the coast (85%) and involved small groups of perpetrators.

The incidents monitored in the last quarter of 2023 may indicate the resurgence of piracy and armed robbery, especially in Gulf of Aden. The ongoing conflicts and recent developments in the Red Sea area, removal of High-Risk Area (HRA) wef 01 Jan 23 coupled with depleting fishing stocks due to increased IUU fishing activities are likely to pose challenges in Gulf of Aden.

CONTRABAND SMUGGLING

Contraband smuggling, particularly narcotics, continues to rise in the IOR, posing multifaceted threats to the well-being and health of the affected nations. The Centre recorded an 18% upswing in incidents, totaling 958 seizures. Narcotics accounted for 31% of incidents, while domestic products and

fuel smuggling each represented 17% of recorded instances. Major drug seizures in the IOR included large shipments of Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) such as methamphetamine, cannabinoids and opioids such as heroin.

East Africa experienced a notable 70% surge in reported incidents, with drugs leading the list. Conversely, West Asia saw an overall 35% decrease, but witnessed a rise in weapon smuggling. South Asia faced a substantial 59% increase, particularly in incidents involving drugs, domestic products and natural resources. South East Asia recorded a 16% rise, with fuel smuggling being predominant. The trends highlight the need for region-specific interventions, acknowledging the varying dynamics and challenges each region encounters. International collaboration and information sharing remain crucial to address the transnational nature of these illicit activities, particularly given the evolving methodologies observed in contraband smuggling. The report delves into the intricate methods employed by traffickers in smuggling narcotics and contraband across borders. The analysis also underscores the modus operandi, encompassing tactics like rip-on/rip-off, concealment in ship structures, strategic maritime corridor selection and concerns about potential use of unmanned vessels. As smuggling methods evolve, law enforcement agencies must adapt and collaborate effectively to counter these dynamic challenges, protecting the region's security and well-being.

ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED AND UNREGULATED FISHING

IUU fishing is a global menace, jeopardizing marine ecosystems, economic stability and the livelihoods of millions. In 2023, the Centre monitored 800 reported IUU fishing incidents, witnessing a significant 33% surge from 603 incidents in 2022. As it is challenging to categorise incidents distinctly as 'illegal', 'unreported' or 'unregulated' fishing, the reported incidents have been categorised as 'Local IUU' and 'Poaching' to avoid inaccurate representation of data. Local IUU involves violations by a state's own vessels within its jurisdiction, while poaching refers to foreign vessels acting in violation of another state's laws in an area under that state's jurisdiction. Local IUU fishing and poaching accounted for 60% and 40% of reported IUU incidents respectively. Both categories witnessed a notable increase compared to 2022, with local IUU fishing registering a 24% rise and poaching incidents increasing by 48%.

The regional distribution of these incidents highlighted South East Asia as the most affected region, constituting 65% of all recorded IUU incidents, primarily occurring off the waters of Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand. South Asia followed with 21% of reported incidents, witnessing a significant surge compared to the previous year. West Asia saw a decrease in overall IUU fishing incidents compared to the previous year, mainly off Oman, while East Africa observed a significant uptick, notably off Mauritius, with an increase in both local IUU fishing and poaching incidents.

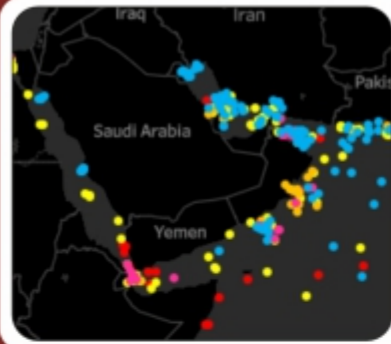
Despite varied regional dynamics, the overall trend suggests a pressing need for continued international cooperation and strengthened enforcement measures to combat IUU fishing effectively and protect marine ecosystems. Legal gaps and the presence of extra-regional fishing fleets contribute significantly to IUU fishing. Implementation of robust regulatory measures, data compilation and international collaboration are pivotal to safeguard marine resources and ensure sustainable fisheries management.

IRREGULAR HUMAN MIGRATION

Despite a nominal decrease in recorded IHM incidents from 300 in 2022 to 243 in 2023, the scale and impact remain significant. IHM incidents in the IOR accounted for 66 migrant fatalities and 114 individuals reported missing in 2023.

IHM is driven by the persistent quest for a better life and security. Migrants undertake high risk transits on overcrowded and often unseaworthy small boats. 14,183 migrants were rescued and 551 smugglers/ traffickers were apprehended during 2023.

East Africa faced the persistent challenge of IHM, notably off the coast of Mayotte, where socio-economic factors contribute to migration attempts. South East Asia and South Asia recorded a decrease in incidents. West Asia experienced an increase in IHM incidents, with Oman accounting for the highest number. The report delves into the methodologies employed for IHM, including the use of social media platforms, usage on converted fishing vessels and stowaways onboard merchant vessels.



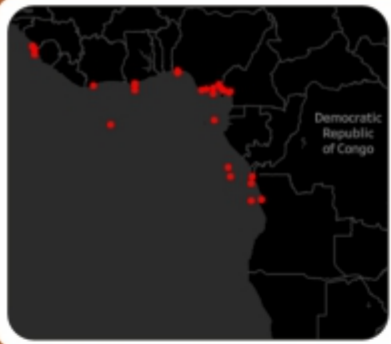
West Asia

- » 307 maritime security and safety incidents monitored, a 16% decrease compared to 2022 (364 incidents).
- » Significant increase recorded in hybrid maritime security threats incidents (43 incidents compared to 11 in 2022). Irregular human migration incidents saw a 32 % rise compared to the previous year.
- » Contraband smuggling, IUU fishing and piracy and armed robbery witnessed a decrease of 36%, 32% and 31%, respectively, compared to last year.
- » There was an upsurge of conflict-related incidents involving aerial attacks on ships using drones/missiles in the Red Sea and Western Indian Ocean in the last two months of 2023



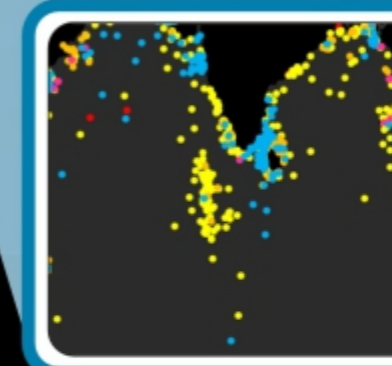
South East Asia

- » 2,310 maritime security and safety incidents monitored, an 32% increase compared to 2022 (1,760 incidents).
- » Maritime incidents, IUU fishing, piracy and armed robbery and contraband smuggling witnessed an increase of 45%, 34%, 20% and 16% respectively compared to 2022. Marine environment pollution saw a significant increase - 21 incidents compared to 08 in 2022.
- » Irregular human migration witnessed a 10% decrease compared to 2022. However, coercing of migrants to consume drugs/ crystal meth (shabu) to endure hardship on overcrowded boats (reported in a few incidents) is a development of concern.



Gulf of Guinea

- » 33 incidents of piracy and armed robbery monitored, similar to incidents in 2022 (34 incidents).
- » The perpetrators were armed in nearly 60% of the incidents.
- » Majority (64%) of the incidents were reported within territorial waters. However, one incident was reported even beyond 200 nm.
- » The region continues to witness higher degree of violence associated with piracy and armed robbery. In the incidents, one fisherman lost his life and two crew members sustained severe injuries.



South Asia

- » 896 maritime security and safety incidents monitored, a 15% increase compared to 2022 (780 incidents).
- » Contraband smuggling and IUU fishing incidents recorded 60% and 35% upsurge compared to 2022.
- » Irregular human migration and piracy and armed robbery witnessed a decrease of 71% and 23% respectively compared to 2022.



East Africa

- » 486 maritime security and safety incidents monitored, a 34% increase compared to 2022 (362 incidents).
- » Significant increase recorded in piracy and armed robbery (37 incidents compared to 12 in 2022). Contraband smuggling, IUU fishing and maritime incidents saw a rise of 70%, 65% and 27% respectively, compared to the previous year.
- » Irregular human migration witnessed a 7% decrease compared to 2022.
- » The incidents monitored in the last quarter of 2023 may indicate the resurgence of piracy and armed robbery, especially off Somalia.



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MARITIME INCIDENTS

The Centre recorded 1,760 maritime incidents, reflecting a 26% increase from the 1,395 incidents in 2022. The incidents are divided into three categories: incidents affecting vessels, incidents affecting individuals and incidents with legal connotations. Vessel-related incidents, constituting 60% of recorded cases were primarily caused by mechanical failures. Noteworthy is the concentration of 'Vessel Detained' incidents in Malaysian waters, emphasizing the need for adherence to regulations. The report indicates an upward trend in various incidents, except for capsizing and cargo mishap, suggesting improved coordination and prompt responses from regional authorities. Efforts of regional law enforcement agencies led to 18,410 lives being rescued, marking a significant 56% increase from the previous year. However, 528 seafarers lost their lives and 736 individuals were reported missing during 2023.

South East Asia accounted for 61% of the total maritime incidents, particularly off the coasts of Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam. The month-wise breakdown highlights an average of 147 incidents per month in 2023, with peaks during cyclones and adverse weather conditions.

Significant maritime incidents in 2023 included capsizing of LU PENG YUAN YU 028 and the fires onboard LADY MARY JOY 3 and SAGAR NANDINI-2. These incidents exemplify the challenges faced at sea, emphasizing the need for robust safety measures, adherence to regulations and coordinated search and rescue efforts. The analysis underscores the importance of regional collaboration and information sharing among maritime stakeholders to enhance maritime safety.

MARITIME SECURITY THREATS (HYBRID)

The escalating challenges posed by hybrid maritime security threats in 2023 are characterised by a combination of overt and covert military and non-military means. Notably, the Red Sea and Western Indian Ocean witnessed a disturbing surge in conflict-related incidents, specifically aerial attacks involving drones and missiles, presenting a significant threat to maritime security.

In 2023, the Centre monitored a substantial increase in incidents, totaling 43, compared to 12 in the previous year. These incidents included drone attacks, missile attacks, vessel seizures, threats over radio and attempted boardings. The

majority of these incidents occurred between the ports of Hodeida and Mocha in the Red Sea, attributed to spillover effects of global conflicts and regional geopolitical tensions. The consequences of these attacks were profound, with shipping companies rerouting vessels away from critical chokepoints, such as the Suez Canal and Bab-El-Mandeb, leading to increased transit times, war risk premiums and disruptions in global trade.

UAVs or drones played a prominent role in the surge of attacks, with 23 incidents recorded in 2023, a stark increase from the three incidents in 2022. Additionally, 10 missile or projectile attacks were reported, often preceded by UAVs flying overhead, potentially providing targeting data. While no casualties were reported, damages to the targeted vessels were significant, emphasizing the evolving threat landscape in the maritime domain.

The Centre monitored one incident of vessel seizure/ detention in Nov 23, involving the Bahamas-flagged vehicle carrier MV Galaxy Leader. Perpetrators, using a helicopter, boarded the vessel west of Hodeida. Several instances of attempted boardings, threats over radio and suspicious approaches were thwarted by the presence of international forces. These incidents underscore the continuous and collaborative vigilance and response efforts required to mitigate hybrid maritime security threats.

MARINE ENVIRONMENT POLLUTION

Marine pollution remains a significant threat, jeopardizing ecological systems and marine life while rendering coastlines unusable due to pollutants. In 2023, the Centre observed a notable increase in incidents, monitoring 32 cases, including 14 oil spills and diverse forms of pollution. South East Asia accounted for the majority, with 18 incidents.

Two significant incidents underscore the environmental impact of such events. The grounding of the Gabon-flagged tanker MV Aashi in Indonesia led to a spread of asphalt across an expanse stretching 70 km, threatening conservation areas and impacting the local fishing community¹. The sinking of the MT Princess Empress off Philippines resulted in a 120 km long oil slick, causing a loss exceeding USD 5 million in addition to environmental damage².

In response to rising pollution concerns, 2023 saw the implementation of notable IMO regulations, including the Energy Efficiency Existing Ship Index (EEXI), Carbon Intensity Indicator (CII), amendments to the Control of Harmful Anti-Fouling Systems on Ships (AFS Convention) and the adoption of the 2023 IMO Strategy on Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions. The adoption of the agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea further reinforces the collective effort required to address environmental challenges in the maritime domain.

CYBER SECURITY THREATS

The maritime industry is currently navigating a significant technological shift, accompanied by a growing concern for maritime cyber threats capable of disrupting operations. The vulnerability of port management systems to cyber attacks poses substantial risks to maritime safety and security. With the interconnected nature of maritime infrastructure, threats can originate from diverse sources, potentially causing supply chain disruptions, economic losses and data breaches. Notably, cyber attacks are evolving in sophistication, with only a fraction being detected and many incidents may go unreported.

Cyber security incidents in 2023 recorded a surge, with 11 recorded attacks on shipping companies and port infrastructure. Ransomware attacks emerge as the primary technique employed by cybercriminals, impacting insurance companies, shipping fleets and port systems. Several incidents, such as the cyber attack on DNV, ransomware attack on Royal Dirkzwager and the attack on the port of Nagoya, Japan, underscore the potential for significant financial loss and operational disruption for the maritime sector.

¹Press Release Marsec - 17 April 2023 (English).

Available at: https://oceanjusticeinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Press_Release_Marsec_17_April_2023_en.pdf (Accessed on 15 Dec 23)

²DOJ indicts ship owners, maritime officers over Mindoro oil spill.

Available at: DOJ indicts ship owners, maritime officers over Mindoro oil spill | Philippine News Agency (pna.gov.ph) (Accessed on 15 Dec 23)

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SECURITY

Climate change has far-reaching implications for the world's oceans and seas. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, ocean acidification and alterations in sea temperature and circulation patterns pose challenges to the maritime domain. Key areas of concern include the rise in sea levels, heightened severity and frequency of natural disasters, conflicts over fisheries, climate-induced migration and threats to freshwater supply.

Climate security represents the impact of climate change on both traditional and non-traditional security threats. The effects associated with climate change are expected to intensify pre-existing issues and conflicts while simultaneously giving rise to new challenges. In the long term, this phenomenon poses a risk not only to stability of national and regional political landscapes but also to human survival. In the short term, climate change disrupts natural systems, leading to adverse effects on human systems and potentially contributing to the occurrence of maritime crimes. Further, the escalation of certain maritime crimes, such as illegal fishing, may act as a catalyst for the emergence of others, such as piracy.



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