



# DEATH IN FLIGHT

## Exploring Migration-Related Fatalities in Greece

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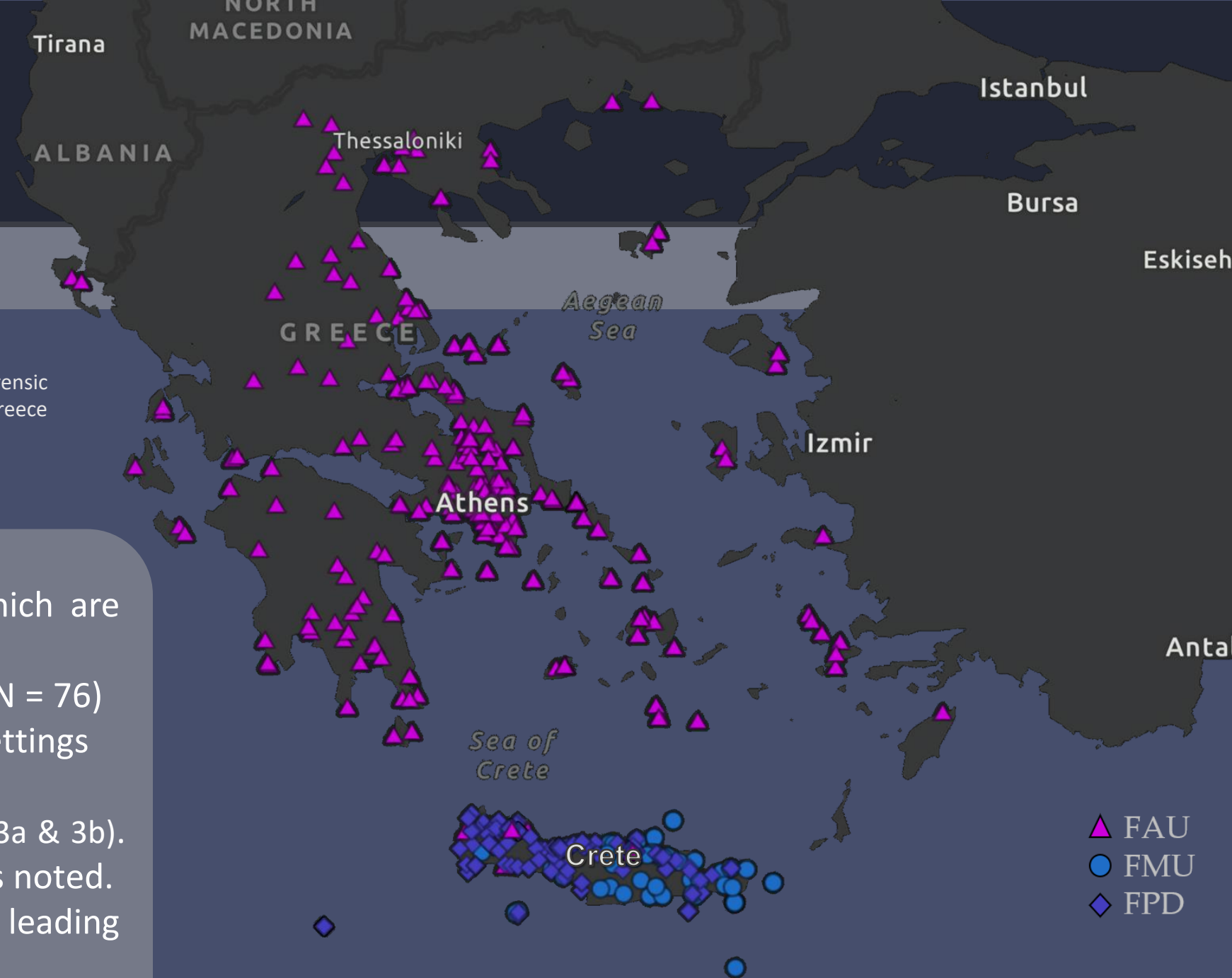


Figure 1. Geographical distribution of recovery locations for all cases.

### Background

- Greece is a country located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa and is being the recipient of multiple migration influxes annually.
- Numerous fatalities are being recorded across sea and land borders; with many more flying under the radar thus obscuring the true scale of this humanitarian crisis.
- All recovered remains are being subjected to postmortem examinations conducted within various jurisdictions.
- To date, no national centralized database for identified and unidentified migrants exists.

### Data Collection

Casefiles of originally unknown remains were collected from three National Medicolegal Departments for the years 1988-2022:

- Forensic Anthropology Unit (FAU)**, Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens
- Forensic Medicine Unit (FMU)**, School of Medicine, University of Crete
- Forensic Pathology Division of Crete (FPD)**, Ministry of Justice, Transparency & Human Rights

- Information on biological profile, identification status & methods, country of origin, postmortem interval & location of recovery were recorded when available.
- Confirmed or presumed associations with mass casualty events were explored.
- Geolocational mapping of the recovery & depositional locations was attempted for all cases.

### Results

- A total of **N = 590** cases were collected from all three Departments (Figure 1).
- Confirmed migration fatalities** accounted for **9.6%** (N = 57) of the dataset; all of which are related to documented migrant shipwrecks.
- A cohort of **presumed migration-related fatalities** was identified, accounting for **12.8%** (N = 76) of the cases. Those pertain to still unidentified remains, usually recovered from marine settings in various stages of decomposition (Figure 2).
- Both confirmed and presumed migration fatalities display similar demographics (Figure 3a & 3b). For both cohorts, a prevalence of young adult males and an absence of older individuals is noted.
- Within the confirmed migrant cohort, identification rate was **56.1%**; with DNA being the leading method in **81.2%** of positively identified cases (Figure 3c).
- Countries of origin included Syria, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Turkey & Iran.
- Depositional locations were difficult to track through paper trails while cemetery surveys were initiated.

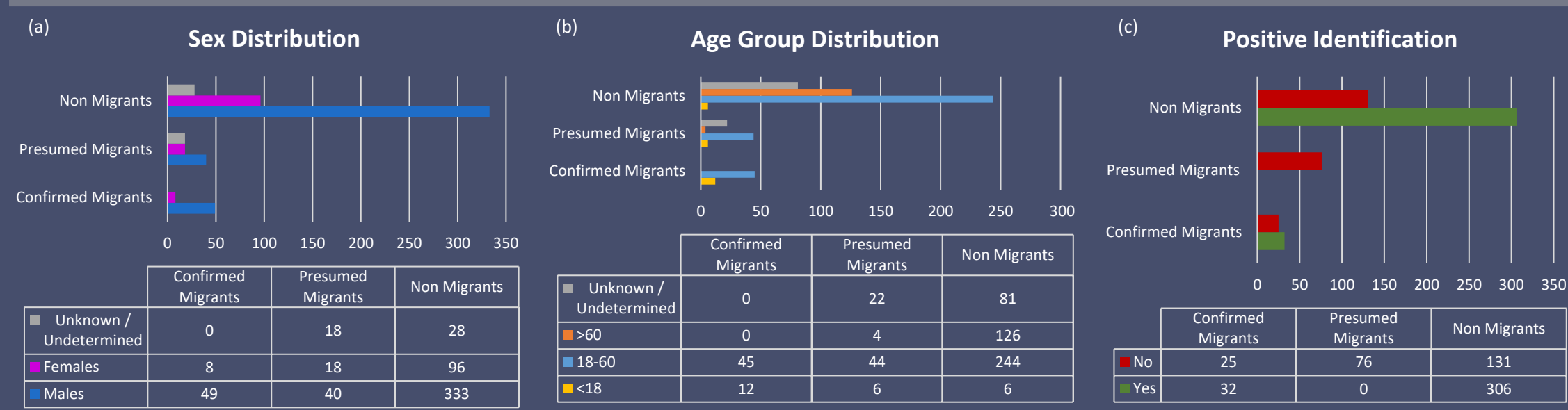


Figure 3. Distribution of cases according to sex (a) and age (b) for the cohorts of confirmed migration fatalities, presumed migration fatalities & migration unrelated fatalities. (c) Identification rates for the same cohorts.

### Discussion

- Despite the constant news of fatalities along migration routes at the Mediterranean region, the number of recovered bodies appears to underestimate the full scale of the phenomenon.
- Assumptions on the migration status of singular bodies can be made based on recovery settings, personal items & estimated biological profile. Dissemination of casework among different jurisdictions is hindering identification attempts in the absence of a centralized database.
- Depositional location data are poorly recorded, warranting further work on that front.

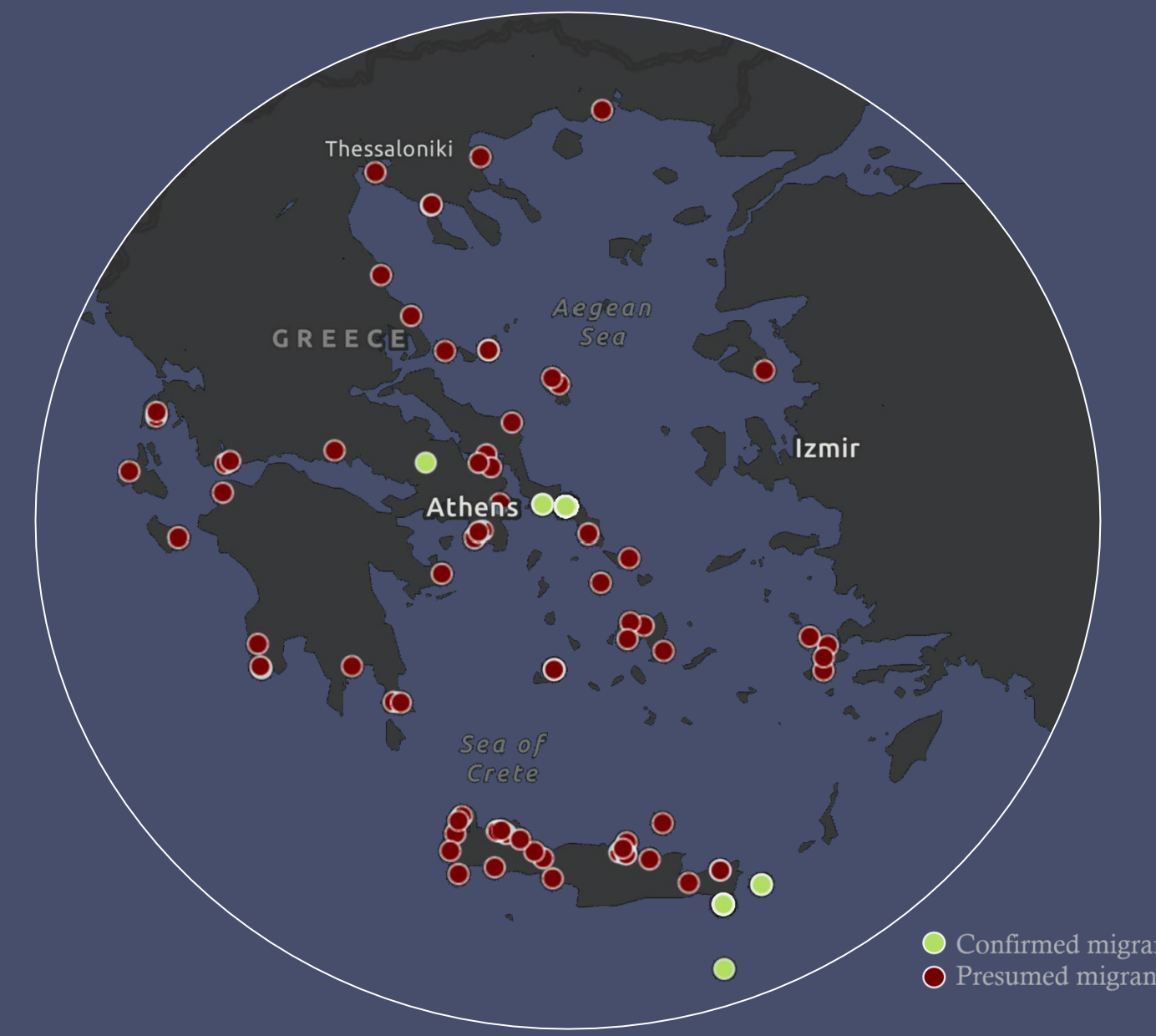


Figure 2. Geographical distribution of confirmed and presumed migration fatalities.

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