

Deaths at sea off the Italian coast: ECRE calls for safe channels for refugees to reach Europe

Brussels, 3 October 2013. ECRE expresses its deep sorrow for one of the worst tragedies at sea of the last years. So far at least 82 people have died and some 270 people are missing after a boat which departed from Libya sank just off the southern Italian island of Lampedusa. According to UNHCR, of the estimated 500 passengers on the boat, believed to be Eritreans, only 147 have been rescued so far.

ECRE welcomes the efforts undertaken by the Italian government in coordinating search and rescue operations. However, this tragedy once again highlights the need for Europe to equip itself with tools to avoid the loss of lives and provide refugees with an alternative to resorting to illegal means of entry through dangerous routes.

With legal channels of entering the EU for protection reasons almost non-existent, most refugees have no choice but to risk their lives in order to try to reach safety. This has to change. European governments have to take a real stand to prevent further loss of life. The EU and its Member States have a responsibility to facilitate access to protection in Europe for people fleeing war and persecution through resettlement, humanitarian visas and other means to facilitate entry to the EU in a legal and safe manner.

These tools should not undermine in any way the situation of those with protection needs who manage to reach Europe outside those procedures.

This is not an isolated tragedy in the Mediterranean. In 2011 alone, according to estimates by UNHCR, more than 1,500 asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants have died trying to reach the southern shores of the EU.

See also:

- Italian Council for Refugees (CIR), [CIR on the Lampedusa tragedy: take measures to avoid tragedies at sea](#) (in Italian).

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