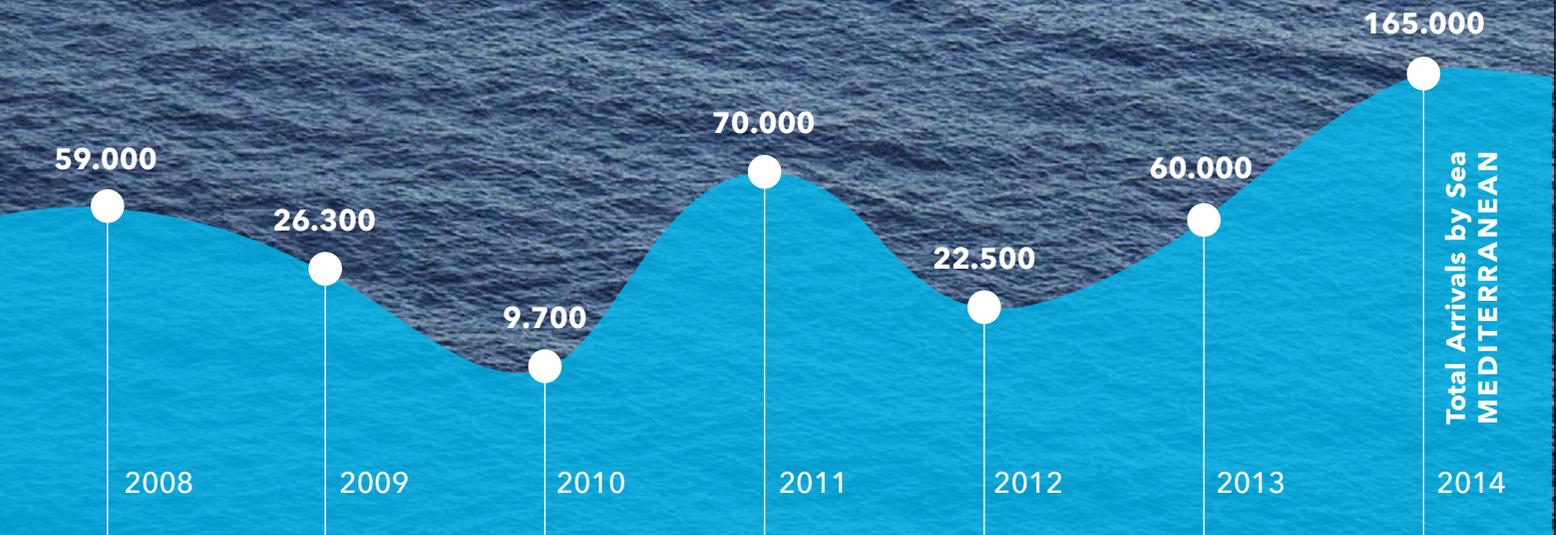


SO CLOSE

YET SO FAR FROM SAFETY



REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS RISKING THEIR LIVES AT SEA TO REACH EUROPE

Almost one year has passed since the terrible tragedies off the coast of Lampedusa where two boats capsized causing the death of more than 600 refugees and migrants. The events unfolding in Syria, Iraq, Central African Republic, South Sudan and elsewhere, are reminders that the need for international protection of refugees is as urgent as ever. With few opportunities to enter Europe by regular means, thousands of people threatened by persecution and serious human rights violations in their home countries are taking to dangerous sea routes.

The tragedies in October near Lampedusa and the ever increasing death toll in the Mediterranean Sea are a wake up call for joint European action, based on solidarity, burden-sharing and protection to those fleeing persecution and violence.

Like many other days that 3 October, Letebrhane was dreaming about Europe. She had fled Eritrea, passed through the desert and took an overcrowded dinghy to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Off the coast of Italy's Lampedusa, at the doorsteps of Europe, the boat capsized and her journey turned into a nightmare, causing the death of 366 people. Among them, was her best friend.

Lete was rescued by three fishermen. "After the shipwreck, I was taken away by helicopter and brought to the hospital. I knew my friend was dead but I didn't have the chance to see bodies and coffins and could not believe it". She is still clinging to this false hope, of seeing her again somewhere.

Eleven months after the shipwreck, Lete says she is doing fine, has requested asylum in Norway and found a good and safe place to live. She has started classes at a language school. The possibility to return to Lampedusa for the commemoration scared her. Images she had tried to forget suddenly came back. But after talking with other survivors, Lete overcame her fears and realized how important it was for her to be there. "I thank God," she said, "because to me 3 October was like coming back to the light".

One year later, she will finally meet the people who have rescued her, and thank them for giving her life back. "We were in touch on Facebook, but they didn't speak any English. I could only tell them: Grazie, grazie, grazie!"

Letebrhane from Eritrea, survivor of the tragedy of the 3 October.

LAMPEDUSA

3 OCTOBER 2013



© UNHCR / A. D'Amato

One year later more people are arriving and DYING AT EUROPE'S DOORSTEPS...

So far in **2014**, over **165,000** refugees and migrants arrived by sea in the Mediterranean, compared to 60,000 in 2013.

Italy has received over **140,000 arrivals in 2014**, at the astonishing pace of 15,650 arrivals per month or **516 arrivals each day**, most of them rescued at sea by Italy under its Navy operation Mare Nostrum.

UNHCR estimates that over **3,000 people have died** or are missing at sea so far in 2014, including more than **2,800 since the beginning of June**, in comparison to just over 600 in 2013.

Almost half of the people arriving in 2014 are from **Syria** and **Eritrea**.

The number of Eritreans and Syrians arriving by sea so far this year in Italy alone has increased by almost 400% and 600%, compared to the same period in 2013.

Among them, increasing numbers of women, children and the elderly embark on these journeys, enlarging the already large portion of vulnerable people aboard unsafe boats.

So far in 2014, **over 18,000 children** have arrived to Malta and Italy by sea, including at least **10,000 unaccompanied**.

SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR FROM SAFETY

URGENT AND COLLECTIVE ACTION NEEDED TO SAVE LIVES

The dramatic situation at Europe's sea borders demands urgent and concerted action, with the overall objective of saving lives. One year later, more needs to be done, as a matter of urgency efforts should focus on:

1. STRENGTHEN RESCUE AT SEA

Ensure that the long-established tradition of rescue at sea is upheld, maintaining strong capacity for search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean including with support of the European Union (EU) and Member States.

2. INCREASE LEGAL ALTERNATIVES TO DANGEROUS JOURNEYS

Europe needs to increase legal alternatives to such dangerous crossings. This could include increasing resettlement quotas and access to humanitarian visas targeting populations in need who are resorting to unsafe sea routes while seeking safety. States can also facilitate family reunification, as many of those arriving by sea are seeking to reunite with family in Europe, and use private sponsorship schemes. In addition, States can use programmes such as student or employment visas.

3. PROVIDE ACCESS TO ASYLUM AND SOLUTIONS FOR THOSE IN NEED OF PROTECTION

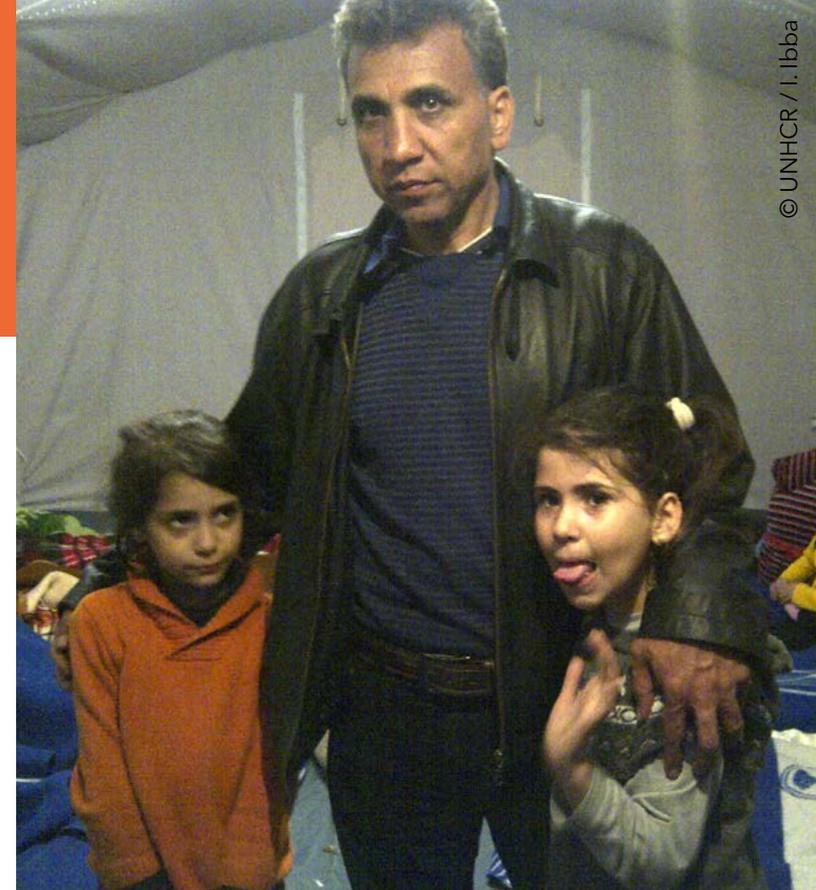
Many of those arriving have fled their homes due to conflict and violence and are in need of protection. States should provide them with adequate reception conditions and swift access to asylum procedures. Additional initial reception facilities and assistance in processing as well as identifying durable solutions could potentially be established with EU support.

“Europe's response needs to be a truly collective effort, one that offers safer ways to find protection while maintaining a strong capacity to rescue people at sea. If it fails, many more lives will be lost at Europe's doorstep.”

António Guterres,
UN High Commissioner
for Refugees

“To be able to make any real headway on the issue of sea crossings, credible alternatives must be offered. We urge countries to look at all options.”

Vincent Cochetel,
Director Bureau for
Europe, UNHCR



Mahmoud fled Syria with his two daughters, Rose and Jasmine, after losing his wife in a bombing in Yarmouk: “I had just lost one of the most important people in my life and could not risk the lives of the other two, my daughters.” Mahmoud and his daughters arrived to Italy late at night in April 2014. They disembarked from the “San Giusto,” an Italian Navy vessel that had just rescued them at sea. The boat they had boarded in Tripoli was ill equipped for crossing the sea and they had to spend several days at sea packed into the boat with 200 other people. Their journey from Syria to Italy lasted four months during which they crossed five borders passing through Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. In Tunisia, stranded for over three months, they suffered from hunger and thirst.

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WHERE ARE PEOPLE COMING FROM?

25% Eritrea 28,557

People who crossed the Mediterranean in 2014 came from more than 40 countries around the world on three different continents. In the last two years almost half of the arrivals in the Mediterranean were people coming from Syria and Eritrea. In addition, people from Somalia and Iraq are also arriving by sea in Italy in search of safety.

21% Syria 23,945

From January to August 2014, more than 28,000 Eritreans, including almost 3,000 unaccompanied children, arrived in Italy alone by sea, while an additional 3,600 persons came from Somalia. In the same period almost 24,000 Syrians arrived to Italy. The rest of the nationalities include people from sub-Saharan countries and an increase number of Palestinians fleeing Syria and most recently from Gaza.

18% Other 17,228

13% Other sub-Saharan 14,374

7% Mali 7,971

5% Nigeria 5,861

5% Gambia 5,158

3% Somalia 3,646

3% Egypt 3,026

FORCED DISPLACEMENT AT THE CENTRE OF SEA ARRIVALS

A large number among those arriving and rescued at sea are refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing from war, violence and persecution. The link between the rise in forced displacement to over 51 million people and the increased number of people attempting to find safety in Europe is undeniable. In addition, the deterioration of the situation in countries where refugees were residing is contributing to force more people to move onwards. Many refugees and asylum-seekers find themselves without legal and safe alternatives and often rely on smugglers, making themselves even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, sometimes detained for long periods of time.

THE DEPARTURE POINT: FORCING MORE PEOPLE TO FLEE

Most of the people arriving in Europe are departing from Libya. In 2013, out of 43,000 arrivals in Italy, more than 27,000 departed from Libya. This trend is likely to increase in 2014. The deterioration of the situation in Libya is also forcing more people to take the risk of traveling in unsafe vessels in the hands of criminal organizations.

A young Syrian girl who has travelled with her school bag sleeps on her father's arm. Together, they escaped upheaval at home and have journeyed hundreds of miles.

© UNHCR / A. D'Amato



SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR FROM SAFETY

Was there anything else to lose? Amid, a Syrian family man. Amid is a Syrian refugee who was rescued with his family. The moment he decided to leave was also the moment in which he realized there was nothing else to lose. Successive stages of his journey to Libya simply reinforced his beliefs: that this was the only choice left to take.

ON BOARD UNSAFE BOATS IN THE HANDS OF SMUGGLERS

This sudden and progressive surge of Mediterranean Sea crossings has resulted in a deterioration of the already precarious conditions of the journey. It also represents a mass phenomenon of smuggling, in which refugees and migrants find themselves in a vulnerable position, abused by the use of force or threats; deception; and for the sole purpose of exploiting them to the utmost possible.

According to rescued refugees and migrants, every single life vest costs extra and most of the time they never get one. Before departure, one can often spend several days or weeks detained by smugglers, without information and in constant fear of being tricked and abused. When it comes to the sea crossings, they end up in unseaworthy and overcrowded boats, packed in a few meters of space, with no food and water. The least fortunate do not have enough air to breathe. The length of the journey varies from 1 to 4 days, though it can take even longer, depending on the weather, sea and boat conditions. In several incidents, people have been stranded on boats for more than 2 weeks before being rescued.

UPHOLDING THE TRADITION OF RESCUE AT SEA: SAVING LIVES OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS AT SEA

With growing numbers of people undertaking the perilous Mediterranean Sea crossing, UNHCR reiterates the fundamental importance of search and rescue operations at sea. It is critical to have in place effective search and rescue operations, which are safe and incur minimum risks for those being rescued.

UNHCR has welcomed the Italian Navy operation, Mare Nostrum, which has rescued tens of thousands of refugees and migrants since it began in October 2013 in the aftermath of two major tragedies. Its stated goal is to prevent further tragedies at sea and apprehend traffickers and smugglers. From October 2013 to date, Mare Nostrum contributed to the rescue of more than 140,000 people, which translates into an average of 2,900 people rescued each week.

However, over 3,000 people have died or are missing at sea so far in 2014. The few survivors of the recent shipwreck off the coast of Malta, where 300 to 500 people lost their lives, spent days in the water watching helplessly as family members and friends perished.

UNHCR urges the EU and Member States to strengthen rescue at sea efforts, based on solidarity and joint support. A collective response needs to maintain a strong capacity to rescue people at sea.

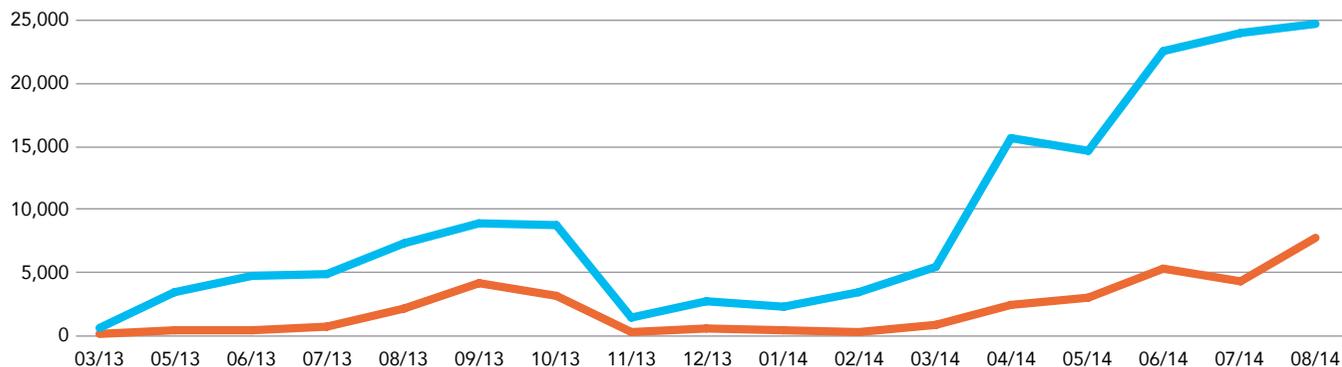


A TALE OF HOPE AND STRENGTH

Amiir, from Somalia, arrived to Italy by sea in May 2014 after a long journey that took him through Ethiopia, Sudan and Libya. Amiir was rescued by an Italian vessel, part of the Mare Nostrum operation. Three years earlier when he left Somalia, Amiir had nothing left but a pair of shoes. With his family in a refugee camp in Kenya, he decided to undertake the dangerous journey across the desert alone. He met his future wife at the border with Ethiopia, though she was promised for marriage to a guerrilla leader. They fled together and in Libya they had their first daughter, but political turmoil in the country forced them to undertake the perilous sea crossing to Italy. By the time they reached Italian soil, Amiir's daughter was just 2 months old, ten days of which she spent in a tiny, overcrowded boat.

SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR FROM SAFETY

Sea Arrivals to Italy: **Syrians** and **all arrivals**, March 2013- August 2014



TAKING TO BOATS: SYRIAN REFUGEES' EXODUS BY SEA

An increasing number of people fleeing the Syrian conflict are seeking safety in countries beyond the immediate region that has come under enormous strain from the increasing number of refugees fleeing the conflict. As of August 2014, some 3 million Syrian refugees have been registered in Syria's neighbouring countries. UNHCR has long been calling for increased support to the life saving regional humanitarian response plan which remains largely underfunded, and increased solidarity with these host countries and host communities. Against this background, many are embarking on long and dangerous journeys to reach safety in Europe. The number of Syrians taking to boats in the Mediterranean, mostly departing from Libya, Egypt, and Turkey, has also continued to increase.

At the end of 2011, a few months after the outburst of violence in Syria, an estimate 320 Syrians arrived by sea to Italy. Although still relatively low, Syrian arrivals peaked at 580 at

the end of 2012. At the end of 2013, Syrian arrivals to Italy numbered 11,307, making them the largest group of arrivals, a jump from 20th place just two years earlier and an increase of 1,800% with respect to the same period a year earlier. This trend continued in 2014, as of the end of August, 23,945 Syrians arrived in Italy, representing nearly a seven-fold increase over the same period last year.

Many Syrians arriving by sea in the Mediterranean are coming with entire families, including small children and elderly parents and grandparents. Family groups represent a significant part of Syrian movements towards Europe. So far this year 6,900 Syrian children have arrived to the coast of Italy up from 3,600 in 2013. Children, in particular small children, are more at risk of perishing at sea if their boat capsizes because they may not know how to swim, and, if traveling alone, may not have someone looking out for them. We have witnessed countless children disembarking from the boats that have rescued them, some in their parents' arms, many hiding trauma suffered during the trip, all of them shouldering a burden of fear and insecurity at far too early an age.



© UNHCR / I. Ibba

TWELVE DAYS STRANDED AT SEA

Naar, from Syria to Italy, via Egypt.

Naar and his father departed from Alexandria, Egypt on a small boat made of iron. They ran out of food and water on the fourth day of the crossing, and in order to not die of thirst they forced themselves to drink the water used to clean the engine, which they filtered through their own clothes. More than 130 children were trapped on the boat, with sea conditions deteriorating by the day. Their journey lasted almost two weeks. "The Italian Navy saved our lives," said Husaam, "I can never be thankful enough. At a certain point we were about to drown, then a moment later, we were aboard an Italian vessel, safe from the storm. You can not even imagine how much we appreciate what the Italian population is doing for us."

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