
THOUSANDS OF AFRICAN MIGRANTS SAVED OFF ITALIAN COAST

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Italy's coastguard has rescued almost 5,000 migrants crossing the Mediterranean. More than 10,000 migrants have been rescued and brought to Italy in the last two days.

Around 4,555 migrants were saved by the Italian coastguard on Tuesday, in a dramatic day that saw more than 30 rescue operations off the Libyan coast.

Twenty-eight people died, the Italian coast guard said, 22 of which were found on an overloaded wooden vessel.

Aris Messinis, an AFP photographer travelling on a ship chartered by Spanish migrant rescue NGO Proactiva Open Arms, said that it appeared most of the dead had suffocated.

A doctor from the NGO Proactiva Open Arms watches refugees on a rubber dinghy.

"It was a wooden vessel and there were about 1,000 people on three levels. I counted 22 bodies and there are still others in the hold," he said.

It is the second consecutive day of frantic, large-scale rescue missions in the Mediterranean.

On Monday, about 6,000 migrants packed in rickety boats were rescued off the coast of Libya. Nine people died, including a pregnant woman.

The Italian and Irish navies, private merchant ships, tug boats, the European Union border agency Frontex and several nongovernmental organizations are involved in the rescue operations.

Migrant smugglers are taking advantage of the calmer autumn period before winter begins to push more migrant boats out to sea to make the dangerous crossing to Italy.

Overall, around 3,100 have died since the beginning of this year while attempting the crossing.

The migrants rescued this week add to the 132,000 people who have already landed in the south of Italy or been rescued at sea.

Conflict, poverty and fear of prosecution have uprooted thousands of people from Libya, Nigeria, Sudan, Eritrea and a number of other African states.

Italy: Sea of tragedies

European law stipulates that migrants entering the European Union must stay in the country where they first enter the bloc. Therefore, while the majority of the migrants strive to get to northern Europe, most are forced to seek asylum or the right to remain in Italy.

Italy is increasingly struggling to deal with the growing numbers. Reception centers, where Italian and EU officials work to identify new arrivals and take fingerprints, are reported to be strained to bursting point.

dm/cw (AFP, Reuters)

Kaynak/Source: