

Deaths Soar as Migrants Attempt to Reach Europe by Sea



FILE - Migrants wait to be rescued by the Ocean Viking during a search and rescue operation in the Mediterranean Sea, July 5, 2021. (Flavio Gasperini/SOS Mediterranee/Handout via Reuters)

ROME - The International Organization for Migration said Wednesday that deaths among maritime migration routes to Europe have more than doubled in the first half of this year compared to the same period in 2020.

The organization said Wednesday that at least 1,146 people died attempting to reach Europe in the first six months of 2021. Most of those who died were attempting to cross the Mediterranean.

The total number of attempted crossings is also on the rise. More than 31,500 people were intercepted or rescued by North African authorities in the first half of 2021, compared to just over 23,000 in the same period last year.



FILE - Migrants queue to embark on a ferry to the mainland, in the Sicilian island of Lampedusa, Italy, June 23, 2021.

Many of the migrants departed from Tunisia, headed for Italy.

Italy's interior minister, Luciana Lamorgese, said on Italian national television that arrivals from Tunisia multiplied in July due to that country's deep economic crisis. Because they are economic migrants, she added, they cannot stay in Italy and will be repatriated, likely in early August.

Lamorgese added that areas have been identified where the migrants can be tested for COVID-19 and placed in quarantine, including on a large ship.

The IOM data shows that the migrant deaths occurred because of insufficient search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and on the Atlantic Route to the Canary Islands, even though interceptions off the North African coast have increased for the second consecutive year.

IOM Director General Antonio Vitorino called on countries to take urgent measures to prevent loss of life, such as increasing search and rescue efforts and ensuring access to safe and legal migration pathways.

The IOM also said over 15,300 people were returned to Libya in the first six months of 2021, almost three times higher than the same period last year. However, the organization said, migrants who are returned to Libya are subjected to arbitrary detention, extortion, disappearance, and torture.

Source:

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