

# ITALY

## Over 100,000 refugees and migrants have reached Italy by sea in 2014 – Many moved forward to other European countries

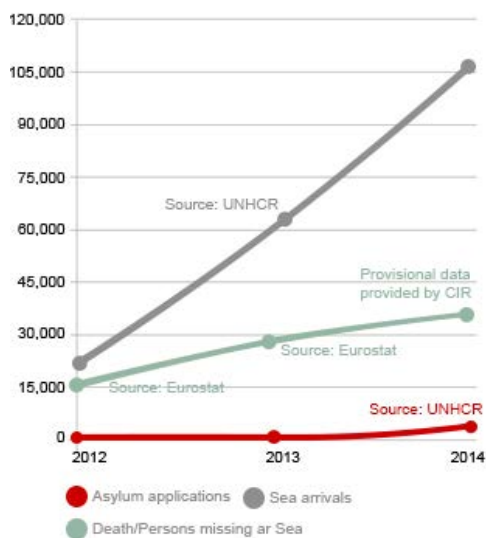
106,000 people<sup>1</sup> are estimated to have arrived in Italy by boat so far this year, with the total continuing to increase by thousands each week. About half of those arriving are Eritreans and Syrians, with many others from Somalia, Mali and Gambia. The majority departed from North Africa, **mainly from Libya**. However, about **36,000** asylum applications were filed from January to August 2014, a strikingly low number given the number of persons who have arrived. These figures show that many of the people arrived have not applied for asylum, in fact, refused to provide fingerprints in order not to be identified and then returned to Italy under the Dublin Regulation. “Many refugees, particularly from Syria and Eritrea, wish to reach other EU destinations, such as Germany, The Netherlands or Sweden where they can count on the support of friends or relatives, more job opportunities and more protective welfare systems”, noted Christopher Hein, Director of the Italian Council for Refugees.



Many of those arriving are **families and children**. In the first seven months of the year, 17,700 children, arrived in Italy. Approximately 9,700 of these were unaccompanied children or young persons separated from their families, mostly from Eritrea.

The arrival of thousands of people by sea to a circumscribed geographic area, in an extremely short period, presents Italy with a considerable humanitarian and operational challenge. To respond to the increased arrivals of migrants and refugees, Italy has expanded the number of reception places for asylum seekers and set up temporary structures. As a result, currently 60,000 asylum seekers are currently housed in Italy. Nevertheless, the standards of Italian reception facilities vary across the country and the structures are stretched to their limit. Reception centres in southern Italy are hosting 55% of the asylum seekers, with those in Sicily accommodating more than 25%.

The deficiencies in the Italian reception system, though, affects people who have already been granted a protection status more than those who have newly arrived. Refugees who cannot access the system find themselves without any support and many try to reach other EU countries in search of better living conditions and integration prospects.



### Operation 'Mare Nostrum'

The Operation 'Mare Nostrum' was launched by the Italian authorities in the Channel of Sicily in the aftermath of the tragic shipwreck of 3 October 2013 near the Lampedusa coast, in an attempt to prevent deaths at sea. As of the end of August, the operation had rescued more than 100,000 people<sup>1</sup>. Despite the efforts, however, **almost 2,000 people have died** or missed at sea this year. The Italian Council for Refugees has cautiously welcomed the recent news that 'Mare Nostrum' would be supplanted by "Frontex Plus".

"We agree that rescue at sea in the channel of Sicily should be considered a European responsibility and the Italian efforts under the 'Mare Nostrum' operation should be supported by other Member States and the European Commission. For the moment, the 'Frontex plus' plan does not appear to go into this direction as its predominant aim is strengthening border control and surveillance" stressed CIR's Director, Christopher Hein.

1. Figures provided by the Military Italian navy on 27 August 2014

### Contacts

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