

Twelve more migrants die off Greek coast

Our reporter
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Twelve undocumented migrants drowned early on Friday after their fibreglass boat sank off Greece. Four were children. They are believed to be Syrians fleeing the civil war.

The Greek merchant marine ministry, which recovered the bodies, said that the migrants' plastic boat was just 7-8 metres (23-26 feet) in length. The Greek authorities were told of the incident on Friday morning by some of the 15 survivors of the tragedy. They had swum to shore from the rocks to which the boat was tied.

Mayor Costas Aravanis of the island of Lefkada, in western Greece in the Ionian Sea, explained, "Some of the survivors managed to swim to the shore and call for help. They were not sure exactly how many people were on the boat so we still don't know if there are others still out there."

He did not know why the boat sank, as weather conditions were good.

"There have been cases in the past where smugglers tricked the immigrants and left them on Lefkada, claiming they had arrived in Italy," he said.

This is only the latest tragedy since the death of almost 400 asylum seekers, who drowned off the Italian island of Lampedusa. The major tragedy off Lampedusa on October 3 led to the loss of 366 lives of refugees trying to reach the southern Italian island.

Most refugees are middle class and professional people who have paid well over €1,000 to smugglers.

Greece is one of the main destinations for migrants and refugees trying to enter the European Union (EU) and is charged by the EU with policing its borders by the European border agency, Frontex. It does so with utmost brutality.

Until recently, Greece was the route for 90 percent of illegal migrants entering the EU, but this is dropping.

Greece partly sealed its land border with Turkey last year with the erection of a 10-kilometre fence in the

Evros region, forcing more refugees to take dangerous sea routes. According to *Kathemerini*, citing the United Nations, more than 32,000 migrants from Africa and the Middle East have arrived in Italy and Malta this year. More than 550 migrants died last month alone while trying to make the crossing.

A report released this month noted that Greek authorities have systematically rejected more than 2,000 refugees fleeing conflict, including many women and children, and ill treated many.

The German NGO PRO ASYL conducted interviews with 90 refugees. It stated that the vast majority of refugees prevented from entering Greece in the past year were Syrians like those that died yesterday, as well as those from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Palestine and Somalia.

As well as routine abuses by the Greek coast guard and border patrol officers, including arbitrary detention and confiscation of identity documents and mobile phones, refugees describe being thrown back into their boats "as if we were garbage" and left with "no engine, no fuel on the boat and no paddles."

People were pushed back from Greek to Turkish waters by masked officers carrying guns. One refugee said, "They beat one of us with a wire.... Most of us were beaten with punches and kicks."

The EU's response to the Lampedusa tragedy has been to demand tighter immigration controls. Greece regularly orders migrants released from detention in appalling conditions in de facto prison camps to leave Greece within 30 days.



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