

Fortress Europe claims 70 more migrant lives in mass drowning in the Mediterranean

Robert Stevens
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The European Union's (EU) murderous anti-immigration agenda claimed the lives of scores more people over the last week.

On Saturday, at least 70 migrants died in the Mediterranean Sea after their boat capsized off the coast of Libya. Only 32 survived on the small wooden vessel that was filled with at least 100 people who left Libya hoping to enter Europe. Those who survived said they were rescued not by any coastguard, but by a commercial ship which took them to the island of Lampedusa.

There is no end to the grotesque suffering faced by desperate migrants attempting the perilous journey across the Med.

In the early hours of April 1, the Italian coast guard recovered 19 bodies from a migrant boat adrift around 85 miles off Lampedusa. 58 people were rescued but five were reported to be in critical condition. A spokesperson for Doctors without Borders (MSF) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said they appeared to have died of hypothermia.

Survivors said that after their boat broke down, they were drifting for several days in severe weather. The boat left western Libya around March 30, containing migrants from African countries including Sudan, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Nigeria, Ghana, and Ethiopia.

Europe's governments have all but ceased monitoring and assisting small boats attempting the crossing. This task is largely being carried out by a few charities run by volunteers such as Sea-Watch. The organisation said a recent surge had seen at least 100 deaths in just the three days to April 1. Among these were another 19 victims of hypothermia, including a baby, that drowned when their inflatable boat capsized off western Turkey on April 1. According to *Deutsche Welle*, 21 were rescued.

Scores more would have perished in another incident had they not made it to an abandoned oil rig. Euronews reported Sunday, "A Sea-Watch rescue ship arrived in

Lampedusa Saturday carrying 44 migrants rescued from an abandoned oil rig in the Mediterranean. The rescue group said the migrants were on the oil rig, 'Didon in the waters between Tunisia and Libya after taking refuge to escape a storm.'" The migrants had been on the rig since Wednesday.

Vast numbers of deaths take place after boats leave Libya headed for Europe, as its ports operate as transit points for refugees fleeing Asia, the Middle East and Africa—leaving behind home countries devastated by imperialist war and grinding poverty. Those who manage to escape the shores of Libya represent a small minority. Fully 70 percent of the world's refugees never get further than a neighbouring state, with most contained in hellish conditions in slums and refugee camps throughout Africa and Asia.

Libya is nothing more than a massive dungeon for refugees, paid for by the European Union. In February, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released a harrowing report noting: "Across the country, migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees are forcibly rounded up, abducted, separated from their families, arbitrarily arrested and detained, and transferred without due process – often at gunpoint – to official, unofficial, or illegal detention facilities. There, they endure prolonged detention and are coerced through torture and inhumane treatment into paying for their release."

The most recent Mediterranean deaths are part of a gruesome toll, making 2026 the "deadliest start to a year" since 2014, when the UN's migration agency, the International Organization for Migration, began to record this data.

That assessment was made on February 23, by which point at least 606 people had already been reported dead or missing trying to reach Europe. The IOM updated the

death toll to 683 on April 5.

Such figures underestimate the actual death toll in the Med. Over the past year, there have been reports of hundreds more missing at sea that cannot yet be verified. In just two weeks in February, 23 human remains were washed up on southern Italian and Libyan coasts not associated with any reported sinking.

According to the IOM's Missing Migrants dataset, a staggering 34,570 refugees have lost their lives in the Mediterranean since 2014.

The rising toll of mass deaths is the inevitable result of the "Fortress Europe" policy enacted by the continent's major imperialist powers for more than a decade.

Anti-immigrant policies once associated with the far-right have been adopted by parties of the ruling class, whether nominally conservative or social democrat. Fascistic forces spewing xenophobia and scapegoating asylum seekers for all social ills—such as Italy's Mussolini-admiring Giorgia Meloni, Marine Le Pen in France, the Alternative for Germany, and Reform UK—are all now part of mainstream bourgeois politics.

On the mainland, governing parties are strengthening their borders with barbed wire, metal fencing, and military and drone surveillance. Concentration camps has been set up on every external border and within many member states, housing asylum seekers in the most inhumane conditions.

Last month, European Parliament deputies passed "safe countries of origin" legislation, paving the way for mass deportations. Other legislation laid the basis for "return hubs" in non-EU countries to which migrants and refugees can be deported. Europe's ruling elite are systematically tearing up every post-war legal commitment to human rights laws and conventions.

Politico reported last month that "Germany and the Netherlands want to have plans in place by the end of 2026 for so-called return hubs—facilities in third countries where rejected asylum seekers would be sent before deportation. Austria, Denmark and Greece are also involved in those talks." Charlie Weimers, the Swedish negotiator for the European Conservatives and Reformists group, declared, "There is a new consensus in Europe... The era of deportations has begun."

As they prepare this offensive, the European powers are colluding with what could lead to the greatest forced movement of refugees since the Second World War, as the US and its Israeli client state undertake the systematic destruction of Iran—a nation of 90 million people.

A report written just as the war on Iran got underway by

the EU's Agency for Asylum noted that "even partial destabilization could generate refugee movements of an unprecedented magnitude." Making clear the response that can be expected, Social Democrat Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen of Denmark and Italy's Meloni insisted in a joint letter, "We cannot afford to be taken by surprise as in the past. This means further strengthening our borders."

Europe's onslaught on immigrants and asylum seekers is one foul expression of a global process. Everywhere, impoverished migrants face closed borders and state-sanctioned demonisation designed to divert social anger over poverty, unemployment and cuts in vital social services away from the super-rich oligarchy despoiling the planet.

On February 26, the International Organization for Migration reported, "At least 7,667 people died or went missing on migration routes worldwide in 2025." This followed the nearly 9,200 deaths recorded in 2024, with the fall since then mostly due to the ending of all efforts to monitor and safeguard migrants.

On the Asia and the Eastern Route – from the Horn of Africa to and from Yemen and Gulf countries – "More than 3,000 deaths were recorded... making 2025 the deadliest year on record for migrants along this route for the third consecutive year" and including 1,540 Afghans.

Workers and youth must not allow this brutality against asylum seekers and migrants to continue. It is the spearhead of a right-wing assault—led by fascist and far-right forces—aimed at the destruction of the social position of the entire working class, and the bitter product of wars that threaten the destruction of humanity.

"Fortress Europe" must be torn down and replaced by the United Socialist States of Europe, with the defence of immigrants and asylum seekers a clarion call in this struggle. This is conceivable only as part of a unified struggle by the international working class to end the division of a global economy into antagonistic nation states based on the private ownership of the essential means of production, which the root cause of wars, economic exploitation and oppression and the destruction of democratic rights.



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