



18 September 2014 – Migration to Europe by people fleeing conflict, poverty or oppression has greatly increased in 2014. The great danger these migrants face was yet again highlighted as a group of 500 migrants heading to the E.U from Egypt were deliberately shipwrecked and left to drown.

Staff from the [International Organization for Migration](#) is currently in Crete investigating the incident. Speaking to survivors, the IOM has learned that a group of traffickers turned violent when the 500 migrants they were escorting to Europe refused to switch to an unseaworthy boat. This report point to a growing death toll off Europe's shores which this year already approaches 3,000. That's nearly four times the figure from 2013, which IOM's Missing Migrants Project [estimated](#) to be 700 deaths

During their journey from Egypt, survivors [told the IOM](#) they had switched boats three times, and refused a fourth switch demanded by the traffickers, because they felt the smaller vessel was unsafe. After trying threats, the traffickers used sticks to try to cow their passengers. Witnesses then say the smugglers rammed the larger boat, forcing people into the water, then

watched as it sank instantly drowning the 300 people below decks, and leaving more to struggle in the water.

Some passengers managed to stay afloat for three days, but a storm swept in drowning many. Ultimately nine people survived the ordeal, though one perished later and another remains in critical condition. In total 500 passengers were aboard the vessel, and the IOM believes that of those up to 100 children drowned at sea.

The circumstances that drive migrants to search for shelter abroad, often force them to accept help from unscrupulous traffickers. They prey on vulnerable people and often demand exorbitant funds for the journey. Some survivors shared that they each paid US \$2,000 in advance to ensure transport after calling a “travel” office in Gaza.

The survivors, including two Palestinians, an Egyptian and a Syrian, have identified their traffickers as Palestinian and Egyptian nationals. As the IOM continues to investigate this event, survivors in Crete have already provided authorities, and the Greek Coastguard, information on the criminal gangs.

In the face of rising incidents involving migrants falling victim to smugglers and traffickers a stronger policy is necessary, and following the disaster in the Mediterranean in August the IOM’s Director General William Lacy Ambassador Swing [stated](#) , “If the basic human rights of these people are to be protected, the international community must act together to crack down on these brutal smuggling networks and provide alternatives for these desperate people.”

UNRIC's related links:

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UNRIC's article on [risks of migration](#)

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Migrant deaths multiply

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