



13 February 2015 - The UN refugee agency on Thursday called on the European Union (EU) to urgently change its approach to dealing with irregular crossings of the Mediterranean Sea and make saving lives the topmost priority.

Following the deaths of some 300 people who set off from the Libyan coast in four

dinghies on Saturday, [UNHCR](#) said that the current rescue mission Operation Triton was a wholly inadequate response to the rising number of people undertaking dangerous sea journeys.

"These are people who are fleeing war and persecution and in need of protection" said Sophie Magennis, Head of Office at [UNHCR](#) Dublin, in an interview with RTE News. "We're hoping

that the EU Institutions and EU Members States will reflect on this and put in place a proper search and rescue operation."

In October 2013 Italy established the Mare Nostrum operation after about 400 migrants drowned in two separate incidents, but the program was replaced by the EU's considerably cheaper Triton operation last November which does not have a warrant to search international waters in search of migrants.

Over 200,000 people, including both migrants and refugees reportedly crossed the Mediterranean in 2014, of which at least 3,419 were confirmed to have lost their lives at sea, making it the world's most dangerous sea crossing. Without a dramatic reassessment of EU policy in relation to Mediterranean search and rescue and asylum procedures this trend is expected to continue in 2015.