

# EU gives Italy \$40M to help migrants after boat sinking

## Recovery operations continue after a smuggler's boat sank Oct. 3, killing at least 297 people

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Italy will receive an additional 30 million euros (about \$40 million Cdn) in EU funds to help receive and settle refugees after the sinking of a migrant boat off the Sicilian island of Lampedusa killed at least 297 people, European Commission head Jose Manuel Barroso announced Wednesday.

The European Union has long taken a back seat regarding border security and asylum policies, leaving the problem mainly to its member states. But the sinking of a smuggler's boat carrying 500 migrants Oct. 3 has prompted European officials to call for more co-operation within the EU to avert further tragedies of that scale. That will include more assistance to the countries most affected by the influx of refugees from Africa, namely Italy, Greece and Spain.

Barroso announced migration would be on the agenda of an upcoming European leaders summit and would have a priority place in the 2014 EU agenda with Italy and Greece spearheading the process.

"The EU cannot accept that thousands of people die at its borders," Barroso told reporters after touring Lampedusa's migrant holding centre. "The challenges that Lampedusa and Italy are facing are European challenges."

Amsa, 16, a migrant from Somalia, leaves Lampedusa on a ferry Monday. He is one of thousands of people who land on the tiny Sicilian island each year seeking a better life in the European Union. (Luca Bruno/Associated Press)

Barroso also pledged to work towards implementing an EU-wide asylum policy and to beef up the EU's Frontex border patrol agency to prevent similar tragedies.

He visited Lampedusa with Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta, who announced the victims of the disaster would receive a state funeral.

Recovery operations are continuing to locate the [victims of the Oct. 3 sinking of a smuggler's boat](#) with an estimated 500 people on board. Only 155 survived.

Some islanders shouted "Shame! Shame" as Barroso and Letta arrived and then protested outside city hall where they met with Lampedusa's mayor. As riot police held them back, protesters held signs saying "Lampedusans' rights adrift."

People living on Lampedusa have long complained they have been forgotten by Italy and the EU, left to cope alone with the thousands of migrants who come ashore each year from Africa and the Middle East. Italy has demanded the EU do more to patrol the Mediterranean and help countries on the front lines receiving the migrants.

Barroso acknowledged that Italy and other southern Mediterranean countries like Greece bear the brunt of the arrivals, but noted that northern European countries like Germany, France, Britain, Sweden and Belgium actually receive the bulk of asylum-seekers for permanent settlement. Those countries took 72 per cent of the 330,000 asylum applications in the EU in 2012.

Italy receives a fraction of such applications – 16,000 in 2012 – and Barroso said Italy and Austria should share more of the burden. Nevertheless, he announced 30 million euros in extra EU funds to help Italy improve the standards at its immigrant holding centres to better care for new arrivals.

The Lampedusa centre, for example, routinely houses far more than the 850 people for which it has capacity. This week, recent arrivals slept outside in the rain because there was no space for them inside.

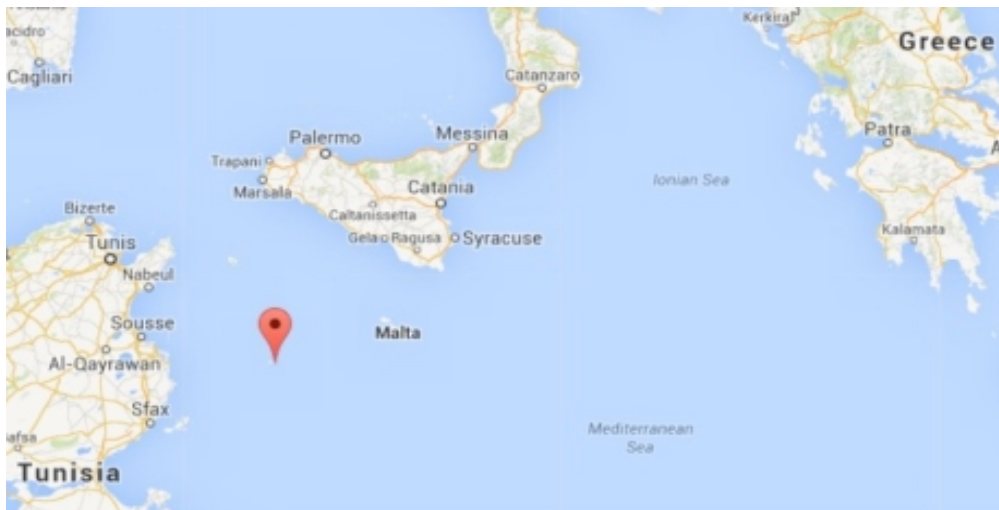
The sinking of a migrant-filled smuggler's boat off the coast of Lampedusa has created momentum for a comprehensive EU immigration policy to cope with the tens of thousands of people fleeing Africa and the Middle East. (Luca Bruno/Associated Press)

Barroso visited the centre and also the airport hangar where the coffins of the dead have been laid out. "That image of hundreds of coffins will never get out of my mind," he said.

On Tuesday, EU interior ministers agreed in principle to explore ways of strengthening the patrol capabilities of the Frontex border protection agency to try to prevent similar tragedies.

EU Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom, who also visited Lampedusa Wednesday, proposed expanding Frontex's search and rescue operations to range across the Mediterranean Sea "from Spain to Cyprus," she said. No details have been worked out, including who will pay for the increased patrols.

Lampedusa is 113 kilometres off Tunisia and closer to Africa than the Italian mainland. It has been at the centre of wave after wave of illegal immigration and is the destination of choice for smugglers leaving from Libya and Tunisia.



The island of Lampedusa, Italy, about 113 km off the coast of Tunisia. (Google Maps)

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