

FRA Press Release  
Vienna / Rome, 13 May 2014

## Recent migrant tragedy, another reminder of urgent need for EU-wide action

**Many migrants drowned in the recent tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea. The frequency of such tragic events points to the urgent need for Member States and the European Union to work together to safeguard the lives and rights of migrants.**

*“Far too many migrants are dying as they escape persecution or simply seek a better life,”* said FRA Director Morten Kjaerum, during a two-day visit to Rome where FRA discussed cooperation with Italy as it prepares for its Presidency of the Council of the EU, beginning on 1 July. *“Recognising the efforts that have been made by the Italians, no one country can solve the issue alone. Europe needs to act together to find long-term comprehensive solutions that will address all aspects of migration from cause to effect”.*

The Italian coastguard, through the Mare Nostrum initiative, has already saved thousands of lives of those in peril on the seas surrounding the EU’s external borders. However, such short-term actions are insufficient to address fundamental rights emergencies as EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) pointed out in its report on [Fundamental rights at Europe’s southern sea borders](#). Unless structural solutions and actions adopted at EU level are fully implemented, more tragedies are likely to occur. This also means that the EU should review its legislation to combat human smuggling as outlined by FRA in its 2014 paper on [Criminalisation of migrants in an irregular situation and of persons engaging with them](#). This is an important aspect of the European Commission’s ‘Task Force Mediterranean’, which was set up following the deaths of almost 400 people off the Italian island of Lampedusa in October 2013.

In light of the Mediterranean Task Force recommendations, and FRA findings from its work on migration, the EU needs a more comprehensive approach leading to a joint commitment by all Mediterranean coastal and other interested States to address unsafe migration by sea. This would include:

- 1) tackling the reasons **why people flee**: the EU need to help improve the human rights situation in third countries;
- 2) enhancing **regional protection**: this will enable asylum seekers access fair and efficient processes in their region of origin without exposing them to perilous sea crossings. This also involves supporting those regions who receive refugees fleeing from trouble zones;
- 3) alleviating the pressure on **countries of first arrival**: resettlement needs significant improvements. For example, in 2012 the US received 50,000 refugees whereas 12 EU Member States only received 5,000;
- 4) **improving maritime safety**: unseaworthy boats should be prevented from taking to sea and all efforts made to uphold the global search and rescue regime, including the swift disembarkation of rescued people to safe places;
- 5) **assisting migrants in distress**: Private shipmasters must not be discouraged from providing humanitarian assistance. : Criminal rules to combat human smuggling must be implemented in a way to avoid that people providing such assistance are punished;
- 6) **creating legal ways to access Europe for people who need protection**: currently such people are too often dependent on smuggling networks to reach safety;
- 7) recognising the **added-value of migration**: many migrants enter the EU and help drive the EU economy. This needs to be acknowledged and supported by the appropriate migration channels;



- 8) providing full access to fair and efficient **asylum procedures**: Member States should make use of EU funds and operational support from the EU Asylum Support Office (EASO) to provide adequate and humane reception conditions for migrants, including support for vulnerable people;
- 9) boosting **operational support** for border operations carried out by the EU border agency, Frontex, which must be fundamental rights-compliant. Here FRA offers support by sharing its expertise as well as through fundamental rights training for border guards;
- 10) showing **EU solidarity**: All EU Member States should equally shoulder responsibility for migration.

FRA will support the Italian Presidency to help move the EU migration agenda forward. As part of this, FRA's flagship event this year, its Fundamental Rights Conference will focus on fundamental rights in the area of migration, integration and border management. The event will take place in Rome on 10-11 November.

Notes to editors:

- The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) is mandated to provide evidence-based advice to EU and national decision makers, thereby contributing to more informed and better targeted debates and policies on fundamental rights.

**For further information please contact: [media@fra.europa.eu](mailto:media@fra.europa.eu)**

Tel.: +43 1 580 30 642