

[UNHCR welcomes deal to end latest migrant stand-off in Mediterranean Sea](#)

UN Refugee Agency chief [Filippo Grandi](#), on Thursday gave a cautious welcome to the decision by several EU countries to take in some 450 migrants who have been stranded at sea for days, warning that a “ship-by-ship” arrangement was not sustainable.

The development comes after the Governments of France, Germany, Italy, Malta, Spain and Portugal ended a disembarkation stand-off involving the migrants – who had set out from the Libya coast – by agreeing to take them in and process any asylum claims.

High Commissioner Grandi’s comments follow the rescue of the migrants near the Italian coast. They were reportedly picked up by two ships; one was operated by EU border agency Frontex, the other by Italian police.

In a statement, the [UNHCR](#) chief noted that at an EU Summit in June, some Member States had agreed to a more collaborative and well-managed approach to dealing with people rescued at sea.

He also underlined that while States “have obligations to save lives” under international law, those rescued at sea did not have “the unfettered right” to choose their final destination.

“We hope that these arrangements will now be quickly and effectively implemented,” he said. “As well as ending an ordeal for these individuals, this sets a positive example of how...countries can uphold sea rescue and manage borders while simultaneously meeting international asylum obligations.”

Noting that solutions are needed that go beyond “piecemeal or ship-by-ship arrangements”, Grandi warned that “lives will be at risk with each new attempted boat journey”.

He cautioned that EU arrangements for managing the rescue, disembarkation and follow-up processing of migrants are far from adequate.

Too little was being done to address the desperation that drives people to flee by sea in dangerous boats, Mr. Grandi insisted, just as these migrants had done.

Since the beginning of the year, 50,872 migrants and refugees have entered Europe by crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

This compares to 109,746 at the same point last year, and 241,859 by the middle of 2016, according to [IOM](#), the UN Migration Agency.

Although slightly fewer people now risk their lives travelling from North

Africa to Italy than to Spain, it remains the region's deadliest sea route, with 1,104 deaths to date this year.

This is almost four times the number of drownings as the Spanish route has registered since 1 January, despite having almost similar arrival totals, at around 18,000.