

Dozens of stranded Syrian refugees rescued off Albanian coast



Sixteen hospitalised as a total of 55 boat passengers are brought back to land

Tirana, January 10 (RHC)-- Dozens of Syrian refugees have been brought back to land by Albanian authorities after being stranded for hours in rough waters in the Adriatic Sea as they attempted to reach Italy.

The 55 Syrians, including children, were trapped by bad weather for more than three hours on Saturday in an inflatable boat at the Vjosa River delta, some 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of Albania's capital, Tirana.

“The rescue operation and evacuation of the people on board took place in very bad conditions in the midst of a storm and high waves at sea,” the police said in a statement. Sixteen of the boat passengers, including three children, were hospitalised afterwards, while the others are expected to be brought to a migrant center. No one was believed to be missing.

Police could not find the traffickers. The refugees had allegedly paid up to 2,000 euros (\$2,450) each for the transport towards Italy.

Albania, a NATO member since 2009 and hoping to launch European Union membership negotiations soon, cooperates with the European border agency Frontex to control its southern borders with neighbouring Greece, from where most of the refugees and migrants arrive.

It has become a key transit country for many people from Asia, Africa and the Middle East who are trying to reach Western Europe. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, the number of intercepted people passing through Albania more than tripled in 2020 compared with the previous year, police data shows.

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