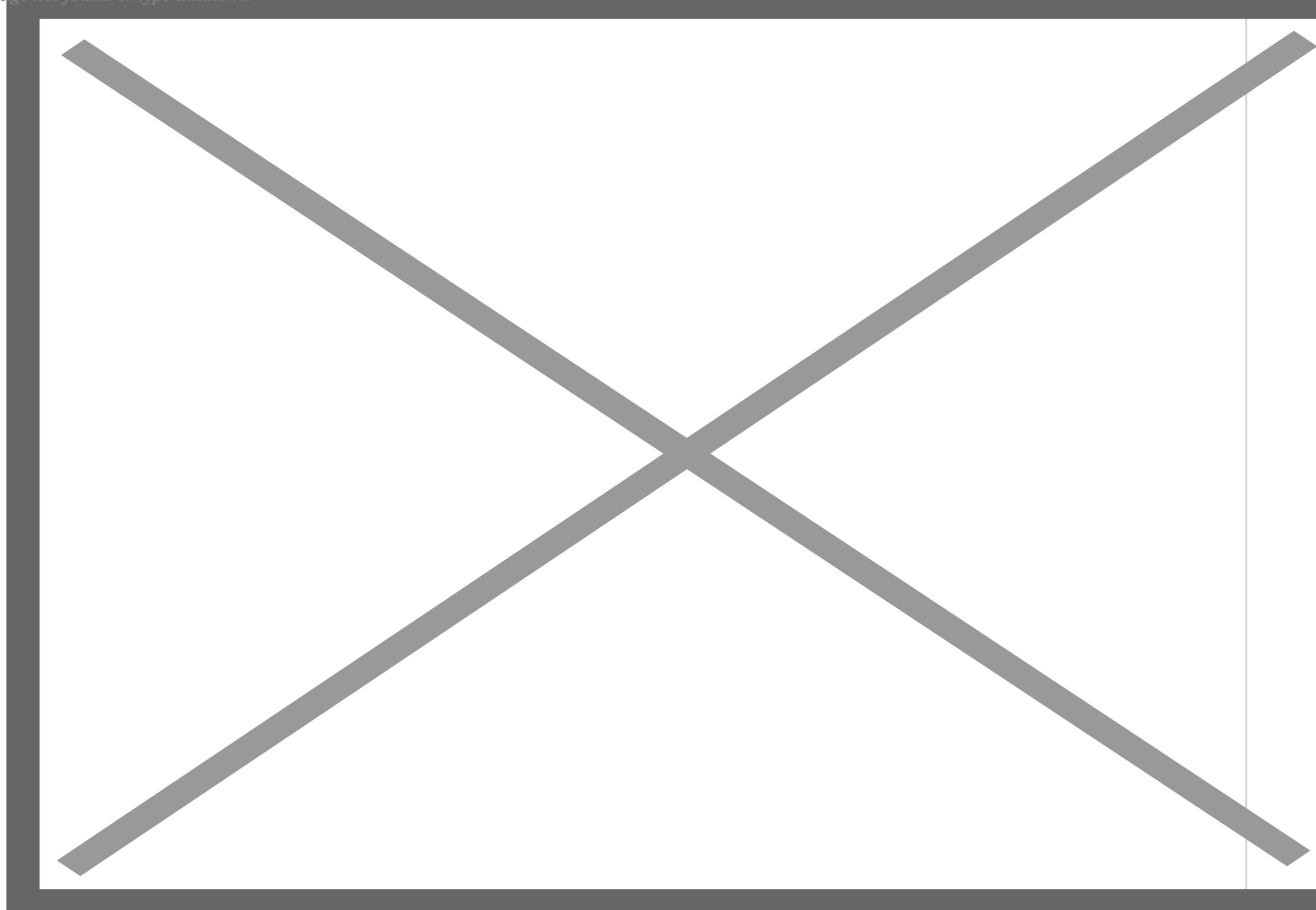


Italy rescues nearly 600 migrants off Calabria, finds one dead

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Italy's coastguard patrol boat approaches a refugee and migrant boat in distress [Screenshot via Reuters]

Rome, February 22 (RHC)-- Italy's coastguard has rescued nearly 600 people packed into overcrowded fishing boats in bad weather off the coast of Calabria, finding one person dead.

The 573 refugees and migrants were found overnight on board "two overloaded fishing boats and left at the mercy of waves with unfavourable weather conditions that were expected to worsen significantly", the

coastguard service said in a statement on Tuesday.

A large ship and three patrol boats aided in the rescue, which took place about 110km (70 miles) off Cape Spartivento at the southern tip of Calabria, it said. Among those recovered was a body of a person who “had already been dead for a few days”, according to witnesses cited by the coastguard.

A patrol boat rushed another person in need of immediate medical care to the Calabrian port of Roccella Ionica. The group included 59 minors, most of whom were unaccompanied by family members. The ship was on its way to the Sicilian port of Augusta where the refugees and migrants will be disembarked, the coastguard said. Winter weather has not been a deterrent for people crossing the Mediterranean this year despite freezing temperatures and rough seas.

So far this year, about 10,570 refugees and migrants have reached Europe by sea, and more than 1,400 others have attempted crossings by land or air, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). About 229 have died or gone missing in their attempt to reach the continent.

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