

# *Number of Refugees Landing in Italy Increases*

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Rome, February 5 (RHC)-- The number of refugees landing in Italy increased by almost ten times in January compared to the previous year, an Italian official says. Speaking in the Parliament on Tuesday, Italy's Deputy Interior Minister Filippo Bubbico said a total of 2,156 migrants reached the country in January 2014, compared to 217 recorded in the same month last year.

Bubbico also noted that some 42,925 migrants came to the Southern European country by sea in 2013, representing a rise of 325 percent on 2012. The official also stated that while a large number of refugees had set off from Libya, Egypt and Turkey, Syria was the main country of origin cited in the migrants' declarations.

Italy serves as a major European gateway for migrants in search of a better life. According to figures by immigration charities, during the past two decades, an estimated 17,000 to 20,000 migrants have died at sea trying to reach Europe as a result of traveling on overcrowded fishing vessels or rubber boats.

Last October, shipwrecks claimed the lives of more than 500 people near the shore of the Italian island of Lampedusa, located halfway between Sicily and Tunisia. After last year's disaster, the Italian government launched a major operation called "Mare Nostrum" mobilizing warships, amphibious vessels and aircrafts to prevent further tragedies

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