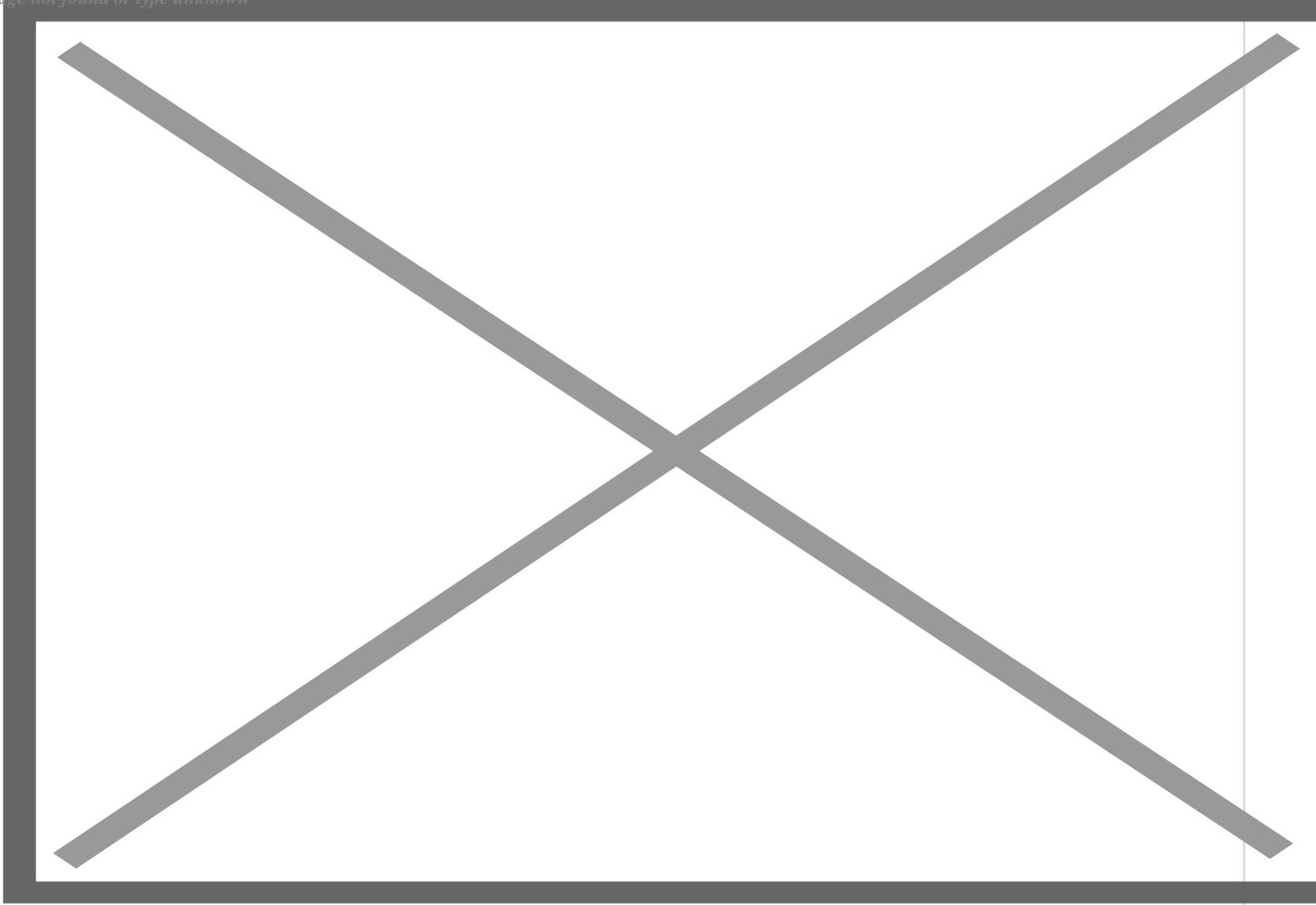


Concerns grow for thousands of child refugees in Canary Islands

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Children are fleeing Africa alone to make the dangerous journey across the Atlantic. (Photo: AFP)

Tenerife, December 11 (RHC)-- A refugee crisis is brewing in the Canary Islands, where tens of thousands of people fleeing northern and west Africa have arrived in recent months. More than 8,000 refugees and migrants arrived in the Spanish archipelago – situated off the coast of northwest Africa – in November alone, a record figure.

A larger number of people are using the Atlantic route, which is considered more dangerous, after several Mediterranean Sea routes were blocked, with more patrols deterring people to attempt crossings.

Canary Island officials have raised the alarm, particularly as more children are making the journey by boat. Since October, more than 2,000 such children have arrived.

Among them was 16-year-old Diawoiye, from Mali, who fled conflict and economic insecurity in his own country before disembarking on the island of Gran Canaria. He spent six days at sea making the journey. "In Mali, there's a war now ... my mother and father are over there, and now they are getting old and there's no money, so I left and came here," he told reporters.

More than 500 people have died at sea while following the Atlantic route, with most deaths in October and November, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Save the Children's Catalina Perazzo said more needed to be done to support the refugee children. "They are in overcrowded conditions after making this life-threatening sea crossing, and they will need psychological support because of what they have seen and gone through," she told reporters.

"For example, they have seen people dying on board and being thrown into the sea, they have suffered from a lack of food and some may have experienced violence and, of course, separation from their parents – all these factors can scar the children for life."

About 20,000 refugees and migrants have reached the Canary Islands so far this year, up from 2,557 in 2019.

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