

# *Pope Francis Condemns Austria Refugee Deaths*

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Vatican City, August 31 (RHC)-- Pope Francis has called the “crime” that led to the recent death of 71 refugees in an abandoned truck in Austria an “offense to humanity.” The Pope made the remarks during an address on Sunday in the Vatican City.

“Unfortunately, in the past few days, many migrants have lost their lives in their terrible journeys,” the Pope said, calling for cooperation to effectively avoid “such crimes that are an offense to the whole of humanity.”

The remains of the refugees were found in the truck that had been abandoned at least one day earlier in the eastern Burgenland State, near the Austrian-Hungarian border, on August 27th. Austrian authorities say autopsies are currently being carried out on the victims, which include 59 men, eight women, and four children.

Although an investigation is still underway, authorities say suffocation most likely caused the deaths, as the truck did not have openings for ventilation. Many of the corpses were so decomposed when found that officials said they had most likely died two days earlier before entering Western Europe.

A Syrian travel document was found among the remains of the refugees, which has led authorities to believe the truck may have been carrying a group of Syrian migrants, escaping a four-year foreign-sponsored conflict in their country, which has left more than 240,000 people dead so far. However, officials say they cannot say whether all the victims were Syrians.

Police officials say the drivers who abandoned the truck are probably members of a Bulgarian-Hungarian human trafficking gang. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), almost 300,000 migrants have crossed the Mediterranean this year, with most of them fleeing conflicts in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

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