

Illegal sea-borne attempts to reach Italy up 107 percent in 2008

Written by reporter

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Some 25,000 would-be immigrants attempted to reach Italy illegally by sea in January-September 2008 marking a 107 per cent increase compared to the previous year, according to a senior official of the European Union's border security agency Frontex.

Frontex deputy executive director Gil Arias Fernandez, speaking in Rome on Thursday, also singled out what he said was lack of co-operation by Libya in attempts by the EU to curb illegal immigration across the Mediterranean Sea.

In contrast, Arias Fernandez praised efforts by authorities in Senegal and Mauritania to prevent would-be immigrants from leaving their territories to reach the EU from the Spanish-administered Canary Islands.

"While irregular immigration by sea to the Canary Islands in 2007 decreased by 65 per cent and in 2008 by another 10 per cent, in Italy from January to September it has increased by 107 per cent," the Frontex official was quoted as saying by the ANSA news agency.

In 2008, the majority of those who attempted the crossing from North Africa to Italy come from Nigeria and Eritrea.

The number of would-be immigrants from these two nations increased 10 fold from June to September - when weather conditions are relatively good - compared to the previous three months, Arias Fernandez said.

According Frontex, 75 per cent of people attempting to reach the EU illegally during January/September 2008 did so through Italy, Spain and Greece.