



Pressure has been put on Frontex to safeguard migrants' human rights after a recent tragedy.

The tragedy, when 350 mainly Eritrean asylum seekers were killed off the Italian island of Lampedusa last month has focused Europe's attention on the area of the Mediterranean separating southern Italy and Malta from North Africa.

The European Ombudsman, [Emily O'Reilly](#), has called on [Frontex](#), the European Union agency for external border security, to establish a mechanism for dealing with complaints about fundamental right infringements arising from its work. Frontex co-ordinates the co-operation between EU Member States in the field of border security as well as illegal immigration.

The Ombudsman conducted an investigation, including a public consultation, about how Frontex complies with human rights standards. Frontex complied with most of the Ombudsman's recommendations, but refused to set up a complaints mechanism. Accordingly, the Ombudsman submitted a Special Report on this issue to the European Parliament, asking for its support in persuading Frontex to review its approach.

Emily O'Reilly stated: "Against the backdrop of the Lampedusa tragedy and other recent humanitarian catastrophes at EU borders, it is vital that Frontex deals directly with complaints from immigrants and other affected persons. I do not accept Frontex's view that human rights infringements are exclusively the responsibility of the Member States concerned."

The number of migrants attempting the so-called Central Mediterranean route has doubled in the last year, to over 30,000 by the end of September. The majority of boats now depart from Libya, a country where smugglers operate with relative ease thanks to porous borders and the lack of an effective police force or army under the transitional government.

Syrians fleeing the war in their country make up a significant portion of the current migrant influx, accounting for 7,500 of the 26,100 who arrived in Sicily from Libya by the end of September, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

Until last year, the majority of migrants and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa region - which encompasses Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti - headed either for the Gulf States by way of Yemen or to Israel by way of Sudan and Egypt.

This year, both of these routes were virtually cut off. Saudi Arabia has resumed construction of a 1,800km fence along its border with [Yemen](#) and deported thousands of undocumented migrant workers. And at the beginning of 2013, [Israel](#) completed its own fence along the border with Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, shortly after a law allowing it to detain so-called "infiltrators" for up to three years came into effect.

"It's like squeezing a balloon," according to UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards "The problem pops up somewhere else, and that's exactly why we've been arguing strongly that you can only really work to reduce the toll in lives if you approach it holistically. If you approach it from a deterrent point of view, you're playing into the hands of human traffickers."

The Ombudsman's Special Report is available [here](#) .

*Source:* [European Ombudsman](#), *IRIN News Service*