

More refugees and migrants feared lost in Mediterranean; UN urges safer resettlement options

12 January 2018 – Amid reports that some 160 people are feared lost during desperate attempts to cross the Mediterranean this week alone, the United Nations refugee agency on Friday called for more action to save lives by offering more resettlement places and safe alternatives for people on the move.

“[We] have been advocating for a comprehensive approach to address movements of migrants and refugees who embark on perilous journeys across the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean,” William Spindler, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told the press at the regular news briefing in Geneva.

The approach, he outlined, should include building and strengthening protection capacity and livelihood support in countries of first asylum; providing more regular and safe ways for refugees to find safety through legal pathways; and addressing the root causes and drivers of refugee displacement.

In two separate incidents Monday and one Tuesday in the Mediterranean, about 160 people – including women and children – were reported dead or missing.

Less than five per cent resettlement places over 2018-19

In September last year, the UN refugee agency had appealed urgently for 40,000 resettlement places for refugees in 15 priority countries of asylum and transit along the Central Mediterranean route.

In all, 277,000 refugees are estimated to be in need of resettlement in these countries.

However, against these projected needs, UNHCR has to date received approximately 13,000 offers of resettlement places in 2018 and 2019.

“Most of these are part of regular established global resettlement programmes and only a few represent additional places,” added Mr. Spindler.

On its part, UNHCR has evacuated hundreds of vulnerable refugees since November, the vast majority children and women, from Libya to Niger.

“For unaccompanied children, a solution in the best interest of each child will be identified, while adults go through UNHCR regular processing with a view to identifying solutions for them, including resettlement,” said the UNHCR spokesperson.