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On one day alone earlier this month, 457 people were rescued from the sea in 12 separate cases off the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Kalymnos and Kos, according to the coastguard.

The method the people traffickers use has changed. At first, boats would attempt the perilous crossing from Libya to Malta, Sicily or Lampedusa. Now, they take them across land to Turkey and make a short trip by boat.

None of the organisations *ST* spoke to, including Noonsite, the Ocean Cruising Club and the Cruising Association, had come across any reports from their members of dinghies being stolen or boats boarded.

But one charter company we queried said it was a “real worry” that a yacht might be used to smuggle people across the border.

And one cruiser told of friends who had been chased by a refugee boat between Italy and Corfu. Their Mayday calls went unanswered. Another yachtie said that they had been advised by the Hellenic coastguard to call in any sightings of immigrants in the water or in difficulty on a boat on VHF channel 12 with co-ordinates. The advice in Turkey is to report sightings to the coastguard on VHF 16.

The European Council has agreed to set up a military operation to try to break the business model of the people smugglers and traffickers. Called EUNAVFOR Mediterranean, and based on a similar operation to disrupt Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden, it is likely to be focusing on Libya, and it is not yet known how this will improve the situation in Greece.

Cruisers in the area, meanwhile, are quick to point out that these refugees are desperate people, who are giving up everything they have and risking their lives to seek refuge in Europe.

One boat gave out sun cream and hats to people burning under the hot sun while they waited to be processed in Lesbos.

The cruiser said: “The suntan cream guy said he didn’t mind losing his bag overboard in a dangerous dinghy ride to Lesbos. ‘I have life.’”

Med migrant crisis deepens

The number of migrants arriving in Europe via the Mediterranean has passed 103,000 in the first five months of the year. According to statistics from various international bodies, nearly 50,000 refugees, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, have landed in Greece alone, compared to about 34,000 for the whole of 2014. Nearly half of the 600 migrants who reach Greece each day land on Lesbos, just 5nM from the Turkish mainland.

People smugglers – who charge up to £4,700 per person – pile migrants high in any kind of boat they can, from ferries to rubber dinghies.

Each arrival in Greece has to be identified, screened and registered, but the sheer numbers are putting the authorities and resources under pressure. There are up to 2,500 people waiting in temporary accommodation on Lesbos to be registered before they can make their way to the mainland.

The situation there is pretty desperate. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Adrian Edwards said that in May, 7,200 migrants arrived on the 30-mile-wide island. The original island population is about 90,000.

One cruiser said: “Arriving at Lesbos in the port of Mytilini was weird. We were yelled at by

a uniformed guy on the quay, summoned to come alongside, and it was the customs official who was overwhelmed by too much work.

“He had us and about 100 Syrians to process. They had been towed from Izmir in two large rubber dinghies, too fast, and were soaked and many had lost their baggage overboard. The quay was festooned with their drying clothes and shoes and they were mostly huddled in little groups looking exhausted... All the bays on the eastern coast of Lesbos had versions of the same story; we found wrecked dinghies, abandoned lifejackets, garments, and shoes on every quay.”

Other sailors have said they have seen refugees in Agathonisi, Leros and Simi, and Kos has featured heavily in news reports.

● **ABOVE**
An Afghan refugee tries to pull his belongings from the water after arriving by boat on Lesbos

● **BELOW**
Principal migration routes in the Med

