

Faithful listen to Pope Francis' Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, Sunday, Nov. 28, 2021.(AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

by The Associated Press

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Pope Francis on Sunday expressed pain and sorrow at the deaths and suffering of migrants crossing the English Channel, at the border between Poland and Belarus and in the Mediterranean Sea.

The pope asked the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square for the traditional Sunday blessing to pray "for migrants and their suffering." Those present included members of an association of migrants with whom he met a day earlier at the Vatican, and who held an enormous banner comprised of flags from countries around the world.

"How many migrants, let's think about this, how many migrants are exposed to very serious dangers also in recent days? How many lose their lives at our borders?'' the pontiff said.

"I feel pain at the news of the situation in which many find themselves. Of those who died in the English Channel, of those at the border of Belarus, many of whom are children. Those who drown in the Mediterranean. How much sorrow, thinking of them."

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The deaths of 27 migrants in the English Channel have shocked both Britain and France. Still, shipwrecks of that scale are not uncommon further south in the Mediterranean Sea as migrants flee poverty, natural disasters and authoritarian regimes for a better life in Europe. UN officials estimate that as many as 1,600 people have died or are missing in the Mediterranean this year alone, their bodies usually not found and their deaths related only by survivors.

Overnight Sunday, the Italian Coast Guard rescued 244 migrants off the coast of Calabria, the toe of the Italian boot, in difficult sea conditions. Those rescued included 41 minors, among them an infant born Saturday on the packed wooden fishing boat.

The pontiff also remembered migrants who are sent from Europe back to northern Africa, "where they are captured by traffickers and enslaved. They sell the women and torture the men."

Francis expressed closeness to the migrants, and called on civil and military institutions to find solutions to help those who undertake dangerous journeys "that

respect the humanity of these people.”