**Frontex detects mother boat smuggling people**

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Last week, Frontex aircraft detected a suspicious fishing trawler towing a smaller boat. The boat was empty, but something caught the attention of the agency’s experts. Frontex kept observing the boat for several hours, and all of a sudden people started to emerge from below the deck. A people smuggler jumped on the smaller boat encouraging a group of migrants to follow him.   
   
When all 81 migrants boarded the smaller boat, the mother ship was detached and started sailing south while the small boat started going towards the Italian island of Lampedusa. This was a clear example of a “mother boat” used by criminals to carry a large group of migrants across the sea towards their destination before unloading them onto a smaller boat.   
   
A Frontex plane and drone kept observing the fishing trawler and the boat with migrants over several hours, alerting Italian and Maltese authorities, as well as EUNAVFOR Med. The Italian National Coordination Centre initiated a complex operation that involved Italian Guardia di Finanza and Guardia Costiera. They caught up with the bigger vessel and arrested the suspected people smugglers. The Italian authorities arrested seven suspected smugglers and seized the fishing trawler.  
  
Most of the migrants came from Bangladesh, Morocco and Libya. Most of them were not wearing life vests when they were left in the middle of the sea by the people smugglers.  
  
The Italian authorities are investigating the case.