

Dozens of migrants dead after boat capsizes off Djibouti

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The incident comes after at least four people were found dead on a migrant boat off the Canary Island of El Hierro on Sunday [File: Guglielmo Mangiapane/Reuters]

Madrid, April 12 (RHC)-- At least 34 migrants drowned on Monday after their boat capsized off the coast of Djibouti, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said, the second such accident in just over a month.

Survivors reported that the boat capsized in rough seas at around 4:00 am (0100 GMT) after leaving Yemen with around 60 passengers on board, an IOM official in Djibouti told AFP, asking not to be named.

“The migrants were being transported by people smugglers,” Mohammed Abdiker, the IOM’s regional director for East Africa and the Horn of Africa, added on Twitter.

“Apprehending and prosecuting people traffickers and smugglers who exploit the vulnerabilities of migrants must become a priority. Too many lives needlessly lost.” There were “many children” among the bodies found, the first official said, adding that survivors were receiving treatment from the IOM and local authorities.

The boat capsized in seas north of the Djibouti port town of Obock, a major transit point for thousands of African migrants in the region trying to reach the Gulf.

It follows a similar accident on March 4 when 20 people drowned after smugglers threw dozens of migrants overboard during a journey between Djibouti and Yemen across the Gulf of Aden. At least 200 migrants were packed aboard that vessel when it left Djibouti. But about 30 minutes into the voyage the smugglers panicked about the weight on board, and threw 80 people into the sea before turning back towards land.

Two similar incidents in October claimed the lives of at least 50 migrants. Every year thousands of migrants make perilous boat journeys from the Horn of Africa to war-torn Yemen, many with the aim of travelling overland to Gulf nations in search of work.

It is believed thousands of migrants are stranded in Yemen, where a years-long conflict has claimed tens of thousands of lives and displaced millions in what the UN calls the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

The strait which separates Djibouti from Yemen is unusual in that it sees migrants and refugees passing in both directions – boatloads of Yemenis fleeing to Africa to escape war, while others head in the opposite direction carrying African migrants to the Arabian Peninsula in search of better opportunities.

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