

At least 61 asylum seekers drown after shipwreck off Libya

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A group of migrants rescued by crew members of a ship operated by Doctors Without Borders off the coast of Libya [File: Darrin Zammit Lupi/Reuters]

Tripoli, December 18 (RHC)-- At least 61 refugees and asylum seekers, including women and children, have drowned following a “tragic” shipwreck off Libya, the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

says. The organisation's Libya office early on Sunday quoted survivors as saying the boat was carrying about 86 people.

A "large number of migrants" are believed to have died because of high waves, which swamped their vessel after it left from Zuwara, on Libya's northwest coast, the IOM's Libya office said in a statement.

Libya and Tunisia are principal departure points for refugees and asylum seekers risking dangerous sea voyages in hopes of reaching Europe, via Italy. In the latest incident, most of the victims – who included women and children – were from Nigeria, Gambia and other African countries, the IOM office said, adding that nearly 25 people were rescued and transferred to a Libyan detention centre.

An IOM team "provided medical support" and the survivors are all in good condition, the organisation said. Flavio Di Giacomo, an IOM spokesperson, wrote on X, formerly Twitter, that more than 2,250 people died this year on the central Mediterranean migrant route, a "dramatic figure which demonstrates that unfortunately not enough is being done to save lives at sea".

On June 14 this year, the Adriana, a fishing boat loaded with 750 people en route from Libya to Italy, went down in international waters off southwest Greece.

According to survivors, the ship was carrying mainly Syrians, Pakistanis and Egyptians. Only 104 survived and 82 bodies were recovered.

More than 153,000 refugees and asylum seekers arrived in Italy this year from Tunisia and Libya, according to the United Nations refugee agency.

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