

Nearly 70 drown after boat capsizes en route to Spain

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Migrants on an inflatable dinghy attempt to cross the English Channel to reach Britain, on the beach of the Slack dunes in Wimereux, France, September 4, 2024

People on an inflatable dinghy attempt to cross the English Channel to reach Europe [File: Benoit Tessier /Reuters]

Madrid, December 28 (RHC)-- At least 69 people, including 25 Malians, died after a boat heading from West Africa to Spain's Canary Islands capsized off Morocco, Malian authorities have said.

The makeshift boat was carrying about 80 people when it capsized on December 19; only 11 people survived, the Ministry of Malians Abroad said in a statement on Thursday, after collecting information to reconstruct the incident. A crisis unit has been set up to monitor the situation, it added.

Several of the Malian victims are from the Kayes region in the west of the country, according to Doulaye Keita, adviser to the ministry, in a statement to The Associated Press news agency on Friday.

"Among the 25 Malians dead, there are 8 Malians from my commune," Mamadou Siby, the mayor of the commune of Marena in the Kayes region, told AP. "These dead young men left my commune seven months ago to work in the construction industry in Mauritania. Unfortunately, they were in contact with their friends in Europe and America, who encouraged them to come to these countries, and in most cases, they took the perilous journey without even informing their families back home."

The Atlantic migration route from the coast of West Africa to Spain's Canary Islands, typically used by African migrants trying to reach mainland Spain, has seen a surge this year, with 41,425 arrivals in January-November already exceeding last year's record 39,910.

Years of conflict in the Sahel region that includes Mali, unemployment, and the effect of climate change on farming communities are among the reasons why people attempt the crossing.

The Atlantic route, which includes departure points in Senegal, The Gambia, Mauritania and Morocco, is the world's deadliest, according to migrant aid group Walking Borders.

More than 10,000 people died while trying to reach Spain by sea this year, a report released by Walking Borders revealed on Thursday, the highest number since it began keeping a tally in 2007.

The route departing from Mauritania, which has been particularly well used this year by migrants leaving the Sahel region, was the deadliest, accounting for 6,829 deaths.

Walking Borders blamed a lack of action or arbitrary rescues and the criminalisation of migrants for the surge in deaths at sea, accusing governments of "the prioritisation of immigration control over the right to life".

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