

At least 180 missing after four boats sink off Yemen and Djibouti

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Ethiopian migrants, stranded in war-torn Yemen, sit on the ground of a detention site pending repatriation to their home country, in Aden, Yemen.

REUTERS/Fawaz Salman

Sanaa, March 9 (RHC)-- Four boats carrying migrants from Africa have capsized in waters off Yemen and Djibouti, leaving at least two people dead and 186 missing, according to the United Nations migration agency.

A spokesperson for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said on Friday that two of the boats capsized off Yemen late on Thursday.

Tamim Eleian said two crew members were rescued, but 181 migrants and five Yemeni crew remain missing.

The IOM chief of mission in Yemen said the majority of those onboard were believed to be Ethiopian migrants and five were thought to be Yemeni crew members. At least 57, from both boats, were women. "We are working with authorities to see if we can find any survivors, but I'm afraid we may not have any," Abdusattor Esoev told the AFP news agency.

Two other boats capsized off the tiny African nation of Djibouti about the same time, Eleian said. Two bodies of migrants were recovered, and all others on board were rescued.

Despite a nearly decadelong civil war, Yemen remains a major route for migrants and refugees from East Africa and the Horn of Africa trying to reach Gulf countries for work. Hundreds of thousands of people attempt the crossing each year.

To reach Yemen, people are taken by smugglers on often dangerous, overcrowded boats across the Red Sea or Gulf of Aden. The numbers of people making it to Yemen reached 97,200 in 2023 – triple the number in 2021.

But last year, the number dropped to just under 61,000 amid increased patrols of the waters, according to an IOM report this month.

The IOM said 558 people died along the route in 2024. In January, 20 Ethiopians were killed when their boat capsized off Yemen.

Over the past decade, at least 2,082 people have disappeared along the route, including 693 known to have drowned, according to the IOM.

About 380,000 migrants are currently in Yemen.

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