

# *Italian Coast Guard Says 6,500 Refugees Rescued Off Libyan Coast*

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Rome, August 30 (RHC)-- The Italian coastguard says that about 6,500 refugees have been rescued in the Mediterranean Sea off the Libyan coast while on a perilous voyage to Europe.

"The command center coordinated 40 rescue operations" on Monday, saving 6,500 refugees, the coastguard said on Twitter on the same day. "We've been particularly busy today," a spokesman for the Italian coastguard said.

Vessels from Italy's navy, humanitarian organizations as well as the European Union (EU)'s border agency Frontex also took part in the rescue operations. Doctors Without Borders (MSF), which also participated in the operations, said infants, including a five-day-old baby, were among those rescued.

The number of the people rescued on Monday is one of the largest in the recent past, when countless individuals have been embarking on dangerous journeys to reach Europe in the hope of a better life.

The Monday rescue operation came a day after more than 1,100 refugees were picked in the same area. The coasts of Libya have turned to a launch-pad for people seeking to reach Europe. The unsafe rubber

boats that carry hundreds of refugees often capsize off Libya, especially near its western coast.

Human traffickers have taken advantage of the chaos gripping Libya since the 2011 to boost their lucrative business. According to the UN refugee agency, some 204,000 refugees crossed the Mediterranean to Europe in the first half of 2016.

The number of the refugees who died at sea while trying to reach Europe since the beginning of this year has increased by some 50 percent compared to the same period in 2015, standing at over 3,000.

Europe is facing an unprecedented influx of refugees, most of whom are fleeing conflict-ridden zones in Africa and the Middle East, particularly Syria. The conflicts they are fleeing are usually instigated by the very same European and non-European countries they seek to finally settle in.

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