

Four dead, 18 rescued after boat sinks off Greek island of Lesbos

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Athens, August 30 (RHC)-- Four asylum seekers have died and 18 others rescued after their boat capsized off the Greek island of Lesbos, according to Greek authorities. A patrol picked up 22 people in the Aegean Sea, but four of them were dead, the Hellenic Coast Guard said in a brief statement.

No details were officially given about the nationalities or the condition of those rescued. According to local media reports, the survivors included Yemenis, Palestinians and Somalis.

Greece has been one of the preferred entry points into Europe for many people from Africa and Asia, seeking refuge from conflict and poverty. According to the United Nations, more than 15,000 people have reached Greece by sea and land so far this year and authorities in Athens have been heavily criticised for their handling and management of asylum applications.

In June, a battered fishing trawler heading from Libya to Italy with an estimated 500-750 people on board sank in international waters off southwestern Greece.

Only 104 survivors were found and inquiries continue over the Greek government and coastguards' slow response towards rescuing drowning refugee boats along its coastline.

After nearly one million people entered Greece at the height of Europe's 2015 refugee crisis, the vast majority hoping to move north to wealthier European countries, Athens has implemented a tough border policy.

While the Greek government has attributed the migrant and refugee arrivals over the past few months to good summer weather and smugglers taking advantage of the situation, humanitarian groups and search-and-rescue watchdogs have said Athens's tough policy continues to amount to illegal pushbacks of potential asylum seekers at sea.

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