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Hundreds of Migrants Feared Dead Off Libyan Coast

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Italy's coast guard says hundreds of migrants who tried to cross the Mediterranean are feared to have lost their lives in the perilous journey across the sea off the coast of Libya.

The coast guard said Wednesday that the migrants are feared to have drowned after their overcrowded fishing boat capsized off the Libyan coast. The fishing boat reportedly sent a distress call after running into difficulty some 15 nautical miles off Libya. The boat overturned when the migrants on it rushed to one side after they saw the first rescue vessel.

The Italian coast guard said some 100 migrants have been saved and the rescue operation is still under way.

Nawal Soufi, who is based in Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean, and often contacted by migrants in distress, said she had received a distress call earlier in the day about a boat in trouble with some 600 people on board.

Nearly half of the people who have crossed the Mediterranean so far this year have landed in Italy and the other half in Greece. Most of the refugees who risk their lives to reach Europe are fleeing conflict zones in the Middle East and Africa.