



MEDITERRANEA

MEDREPORT
NOVEMBER 2023

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GREEK REPORT

In November Aegean Boat Report have registered 70 illegal pushback cases in the Aegean Sea, performed by the Hellenic coast guard, 2.064 people, children, women and men, have been denied their right to seek asylum, their human rights have been violated by the Greek government.

WEEK 29/10- 05/11

This week 88 boats carrying over 2.700 people have tried to reach the Greek islands, 26 boats made the trip and 866 people were officially registered on the Greek islands. We have registered 16 pushback cases in the Aegean Sea this week, involving 450 men, women and children. In 4 of these pushback cases Greek authorities used life rafts as a tool of illegal deportation, 113 people were left helplessly drifting in 7 life rafts on the Aegean Sea. Of the 42 boats that managed to cross over into Greek waters, Greek authorities stop and illegally pushback 16 of them, 61.9% made it through and arrived on the Greek islands, a total of 866 men, women and children arrived safely on the Greek islands this week. Of all boats that started out from Turkey towards the Greek Aegean islands this week, only 29.5% succeed.

WEEK 06/11- 12/11

This week 99 boats carrying over 2.722 people have tried to reach the Greek islands, 45 boats made the trip and 1.284 people were officially registered on the Greek islands. We have registered 25 pushback cases in the Aegean Sea this week, involving 754 men, women and children. In 5 of these pushback cases Greek authorities used life rafts as a tool of illegal deportation, 116 people were left helplessly drifting in 8 life rafts on the Aegean Sea. Of the 70 boats that managed to cross over

into Greek waters, Greek authorities stop and illegally pushback 25 of them, 64.3% made it through and arrived on the Greek islands, a total of 1.284 men, women and children arrived safely on the Greek islands this week. Of all boats that started out from Turkey towards the Greek Aegean islands this week, 45.5% succeed.

WEEK 13/11- 19/11

This week 72 boats carrying over 2.056 people have tried to reach the Greek islands, 38 boats made the trip and 1.173 people were officially registered on the Greek islands. We have registered 15 pushback cases in the Aegean Sea this week, involving 436 men, women and children. In 2 of these pushback cases Greek authorities used life rafts as a tool of illegal deportation, 35 people were left helplessly drifting in 2 life rafts on the Aegean Sea. Of the 53 boats that managed to cross over into Greek waters, Greek authorities stop and illegally pushback 15 of them, 71.7% made it through and arrived on the Greek islands and a total of 1.173 men, women and children arrived safely on the Greek islands this week. Of all boats that started out from Turkey towards the Greek Aegean islands this week, 52.8% succeed.

WEEK 20/11- 26/11

This week 69 boats carrying over 2.094 people have tried to reach the Greek islands, 33 boats made the trip and 952 people were officially registered on the Greek islands. We have registered 15 pushback cases in the Aegean Sea this week, involving 483 men, women and children. 117 people were left helplessly drifting in 5 life rafts on the Aegean Sea. Of the 48 boats that managed to cross over into Greek waters, Greek authorities stop and illegally pushback 15 of them, 68.8% made it through and arrived on the Greek islands, a total of 942 men, women and children arrived safely on the Greek islands this week. Of all boats that started out from Turkey towards the Greek Aegean islands this week, 47.8% succeed.

MED CARE FOR UKRAINE

**THE WAR'S
SECOND WINTER
HAS ARRIVED:
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SAVING HUMANS
IS WHERE WE
NEED TO BE.**

November brought snow to Ukraine for the second winter of war in the country invaded by Russia. Temperatures in Lviv fell below zero and the MedCare for Ukraine Project faced various difficulties. Fortunately, our medical teams were able to carry out their activities indoors in the city's 12 official and unofficial shelters for war refugees. However, despite the weather, thanks to our mobile medical clinic *Mediterranea Saving Humans* continued to provide basic medical assistance and medication to the city's poorest inhabitants, the homeless residing in Striskj Park, where the organization began operating several months ago.

Air raid alerts warning of Russian missile or drone attacks became less frequent, but still lasted a very long time. Sometimes our activists along with our medical teams were forced to shelter underground for up to four hours. Thanks to support from our ground crews in Barcelona, Taranto, and Turin, the humanitarian aid supply mission which departed Naples, arrived in Ukraine at the beginning of November. The ground crews of Emilia Romagna are coordinating the next supply mission which will leave from Bologna and is expected to arrive in Ukraine next January.

On the 1st of December, the Ukrainian government will enact a new law regulating importation of humanitarian aid into the country.



International organizations providing assistance to refugees, such as Mediterranean Saving Humans, fear that the new long and complicated bureaucratic process, together with several mandatory customs procedures, will negatively impact distribution of humanitarian aid. In addition to this new hurdle, thanks to empty coffers, the Ukrainian government is at the mercy of international foreign aid. Consequently, the government is unable to allocate sufficient funds to provide assistance to war refugees arriving from the eastern part of the country and requiring reception and healthcare in western regions such as Lviv.

The new legislation's effect on the MedCare for Ukraine Project's functionality will become evident in the coming weeks. For the moment, Mediterranean Saving Humans is where we need to be, side by side with the civilian population affected by the war.

BORDER STORIES

RUSSIA -

FINLAND:

A POLITICAL

FRONTIER

At the end of November, Finland closed the last operating checkpoint on its border with Russia due to the large influx of people driven by Russia towards Finnish entry points. Estonia now also seems to be ready to follow Finland's lead. However, there are still hundreds of people on the move who would like to apply for asylum yet remain on the other side of these countries' strategic and political maneuvers.

ON THE BACKS OF PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

At the end of November, the Finnish government closed the last crossing point on its eastern border at Raja-Jooseppi, located in the country's far north region, until mid-December for a period of at least two weeks. The decision to close this last crossing point followed the prior gradual reduction of the number of people allowed to enter Finland at other crossing points with neighboring Russia.

The grounds for this decision, Russia driving a large influx of people to Finland, would seem to be entirely political. Even the Finnish government's previous decision to close checkpoints followed what Prime Minister Petteri Orpo categorized as "an attack orchestrated by Russia." Crossing point closures are meant to stop the unusually high number of asylum seekers from entering the country. The Prime Minister's cabinet called this influx a "hybrid war attack" and stressed that there is no real emergency as the increase in number of people attempting to cross into Finland is the result of an "organized activity."



According to official reports, more than 900 people on the move have applied for asylum in Finland since last August. These asylum seekers are not Russian citizens, but there are people from Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Pakistan, Kenya, and Morocco, as well as other countries. This figure is unusually high when compared to the average of less than 100 requests recorded in the first six months of the year. Consequently, the Finnish government attributed the extraordinary increase to Russia as political retaliation following Finland's decision to join NATO in April 2023 which marked the end of the country's military neutrality. According to Prime Minister Orpo, Russia is purposefully exploiting people for strategic reasons by driving them to the border with Finland.

It seems Estonia is also about to follow Finland's lead and close its eastern border. Following a massive influx into the country, Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna has threatened to completely shut down entry points while he urged foreign citizens not to come to Estonia. Referring to the increase in number of irregular people on the move attempting to enter Estonia and Finland, the Prime Minister spoke of "a hybrid attack operation." Both Latvia and Lithuania are monitoring the situation and are preparing to completely shut their eastern border in case of national security threats.

According to the Finnish Institute for International Affairs analyst Charly Saloniuss-Pasternak, Russia is weaponizing migration and systematically driving migrants to the borders of its neighboring countries indicating a “clear intent” behind this activity.

Now that every crossing point between Finland and Russia has been shut down, people on the move are unable to apply for international protection unless they arrive at Finnish airports or sea ports. Even before the border crossing was closed, the Finnish Non-Discrimination Ombudsman warned that the remote location of the sole open crossing at Raja-Jooseppi potentially undermines people’s fundamental right to seek asylum.

Beyond these countries’ strategic and political actions, there are hundreds of people wanting to apply for asylum who are exposed to harsh and almost unbearable weather conditions with temperatures reaching -25 degrees. It has become increasingly dangerous to attempt to cross the border without authorization.

The UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, has joined others voicing concerns about the consequences of the Finnish government’s decision to close its borders. The UNHCR believes that the move may hinder the proper application of asylum protections as called for by international refugee law.

While recognizing each states’ right to control its own borders, border security does not justify breaching international human rights agreements and refugee law, including the 1951 Convention and European Law. The UNHCR, therefore, has urged Finland to undertake all efforts to ensure the safety and protection of asylum seekers. The UNHCR also contacted Russian authorities in order to understand the causes behind the increased migration flow out of the country. Finally, UNHCR urges both countries to cooperate in managing their borders in a responsible and protection sensitive manner towards those in need as this should be the focus of attention rather than using those in need as instruments of retaliation.

MSH MONTHLY REPORT ON MIGRATIONS



WORLD

LIBYA, November 10th: Refugees in Libya release videos showing young people, probably minors, being tortured by guards in Libyan detention centers. The recordings were recorded with the intent to extort ransom from the subjects' relatives. Despite the seriousness of the allegations and the evidence, international authorities have not taken any action.

LIBYA, November 29th: Libyan authorities forcibly return 248 people to Chad and Niger in collaboration with the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM). The official Libyan government hopes this will be a first step towards establishing future bilateral agreements with other countries in the region.

GREECE, November 2nd: Médecins Sans Frontières releases a report to the public condemning human rights violations committed by Greek authorities. Of note, numerous cases of illegal refoulements have been documented in the Aegean Sea. Neither the Greek government nor the European authorities have addressed the situation.

AUSTRIA, November 3rd: Austrian Interior Minister Karner and the UK government have entered into an agreement to work closely on a migration plan that would send asylum seekers to a third country while waiting for their application to be processed.

GERMANY, November 7th: German Chancellor Scholz and Germany's 16 state leaders reach an agreement on managing migration flows into the country. The accord calls for cuts in reception spending, increased border controls, and bilateral agreements with migrants' country of origin in order to ensure that more are repatriated.

SPAIN, November 10th: 81 people autonomously reach El Hierro, the smallest of the Canary Islands. One person traveling with the group died during the crossing.

FRANCE, November 13th: 201 people in distress attempting to sail across the English Channel are rescued by the French Coast Guard over the weekend.

SPAIN, November 15th: Sea-Watch 5, a new civilian sea rescue ship, sails from the port of Vinaros for its first search and rescue mission in the central Mediterranean.

UNITED KINGDOM, November 15th: The British Supreme Court declares the government's decision to forcibly transfer asylum seekers to Rwanda, as a safe third country, unlawful.

GREECE, November 16th: Mobile Info Team and Refugee Legal Support, both NGOs, report that vulnerable people and victims of torture have been subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment in Greek reception centers that are part of a "dysfunctional" asylum system.

FRANCE, November 23rd: A boat attempting to reach the UK capsizes in the English Channel. 58 passengers are rescued by French authorities. Another two passengers drown.

SPAIN, November 30th: Four people drown off the coast of Cadiz after being forced out of their boat by people believed to be traffickers. The other 23 passengers, however, survive the incident.

SEA

LAMPEDUSA, November 1st: A fishing boat carrying 420 people autonomously reaches Lampedusa.

CIVIL FLEET, November 3rd: Italian authorities instruct Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée) to rescue 75 people aboard a boat in distress in the Ionian Sea. The survivors disembark at the Port of Taranto.

CIVIL FLEET, November 4th: Geo Barents (Médecins Sans Frontières) rescues a boat in distress carrying 29 people fleeing Libya. The survivors disembark at the Port of Bari.

LAMPEDUSA, November 4th: A fishing boat carrying 400 people autonomously reaches Lampedusa. The boat is escorted to the dock by a Customs Corps patrol boat.

CIVIL FLEET, November 6th: 56 people are rescued by Aurora (Sea-Watch). The survivors disembark at Pozzallo, approximately 330 km from the site of rescue.

SYMI, November 6th: The Greek Coast Guard intercepts 29 people off the coast of the island of Symi. They are forcibly pushed back to Turkey.

CHIOS, November 8th: A group of 25 people aboard a boat in distress off the coast of Chios are forcibly pushed back to Turkey.

CIVIL FLEET, November 9th: 118 people in distress are rescued by Life Support (Emergency) in two separate operations. The survivors disembark at the port of Brindisi.

KOS, November 10th: The Greek Coast Guard pushes back a boat it intercepted off the coast of Kos carrying 30 people.

LIBYA, November 10th: The so-called Libyan Coast Guard intercepts a boat in distress off the coast of Zliten carrying 29 people and forcibly returns the survivors to Libya.

CIVIL FLEET, November 11th: Thanks to air support from Colibri 2 (Pilotes Volontaires), Geo Barents rescues 81 people. The survivors disembark at the port of Civitavecchia.

CIVIL FLEET, November 11th: Ocean Viking rescues 128 people in distress in three separate operations. The survivors disembark at the port of Ortona.

LAMPEDUSA, November 12th: A fishing boat carrying 220 people reaches Lampedusa autonomously.

LESBO, November 13rd: The Greek Coast Guard intercepts 23 people off the coast of Lesbos and illegally pushes them back to Turkey. Witnesses claim the Greek Coast Guard beat survivors and stole their personal items, including cell phones.

SEA

CIVIL FLEET, November 15th: Nadir (ResQShip) provides assistance to approximately 140 people aboard several boats in distress while waiting for Italian authorities to arrive. Later, the survivors disembark at Lampedusa.

AGATHONISI, November 17th: One person dies after a boat capsizes off the coast of Agathonisi in the eastern Aegean.

The Greek Coast Guard rescues the remaining 19 survivors.

CIVIL FLEET, November 17th: Geo Barents rescues 57 people aboard a boat in distress. After four and a half days of navigation from the central Mediterranean, the survivors disembark at Ravenna.

VRAVONA, November 17th: The Greek Coast Guard rescues 41 people aboard a boat in distress off the coast of Vravona. Three of the passengers are charged with trafficking and taken into custody.

CIVIL FLEET, November 20th: In adverse weather conditions, Nadir rescues 49 people aboard a boat in distress. The survivors disembark at Lampedusa.

CIVIL FLEET, November 20th: Life Support rescues 21 people aboard a boat in distress. The survivors disembark at Marina di Carrara.

TUNISIA, November 20th: The Tunisian Coast Guard intercepts 40 people and forcibly returns them to Tunisia. Some are forced to the desert bordering Algeria, while others manage to flee.

LAMPEDUSA, November 20th: A 2 year old girl is dead and 8 people are missing after a boat capsizes off the coast of Lampedusa. A nearby fishing boat rescues two of the remaining 43 survivors.

LAMPEDUSA, November 21st: 11 boats carrying approximately 800 people autonomously reach Lampedusa in 24 hours.

CIVIL FLEET, November 21st: Aurora assists 64 people in distress while waiting for the Italian Coast Guard to arrive. Aurora later rescues another 45 people aboard a second boat. All the survivors disembark at Lampedusa.

LESBOS, November 22nd: The Greek Coast Guard intercepts a group of 50 people and forces them to Turkey.

LAMPEDUSA, November 27th: Italian authorities rescue 573 people off the coast of Lampedusa in just 24 hours.

CIVIL FLEET, November 30th: Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity) rescues 200 people in 3 separate operations. The survivors disembark at Crotona. During the mission, the crew also witnesses an illegal pullback of a boat carrying about 35 people.

CIVIL FLEET, November 30th: Aurora rescues a boat in distress carrying 45 people. The survivors disembark at Lampedusa.

CIVIL FLEET, November 30th: Geo Barents rescues 44 people aboard two boats in distress. The survivors disembark at Taranto.

MESSINA, November 2nd: In a case related to a landing on the Sicilian coast in November 2022, Messina's Civil Court acquits 3 Bengali citizens of all charges related to aiding and abetting illegal immigration due to "lack of evidence."

TRAPANI, November 3rd: Mediterranea Saving Humans files an appeal with the Court of Trapani contesting the administrative detention its ship, Mare Jonio, received under the Piantadosi Decree for refusing to accept Italian authorities' designation of Libya as a port of safety for the 69 people the ship had rescued in Libya's SAR zone.

ROME, November 6th: Prime Minister Meloni and her Albanian counterpart, Edi Rama, sign a memorandum of understanding to manage migration flows. The agreement calls for two facilities to be built in Albania. Asylum seekers rescued at sea by Italian authorities are to be transferred to Albania and reside in the facilities while waiting for their applications to be processed.

CALTANISSETTA, November 14th: 17 people are arrested for attempting to block a bus leaving Pian Del Lago's CPR (Detention and Repatriation Center) as it transferred 15 people to the airport to be repatriated.

ROME, November 15th: The Italian Civil Aviation Authority threatens Sea-Watch claiming that assistance of vessels in distress at sea is exclusively the government's responsibility and that Sea-Watch's aircraft, Seabird's, monitoring activities are unlawful.

ORTONA, November 16th: The civil ship Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée) is fined 3,300 euros and receives a 20 day administrative detention in the port of Ortona for violating the Piantadosi Decree by rescuing 33 people in the central Mediterranean.

ROME, November 17th: Pope Francis meets with Pato and a delegation of activists from Refugees in Libya and Mediterranean Saving Humans. Last July, Pato's wife, Fati, and his daughter, Marie, both died of dehydration and starvation on the border between Tunisia and Libya.

VENTIMIGLIA, November 18th: The European Court of Human Rights orders Italy to compensate three Sudanese citizens who had been subjected to degrading and distressing treatment within the first tier of Italy's reception system.

TARANTO, November 29th: The European Court of Human Rights condemns Italy for illegally detaining unaccompanied minors at Taranto's hotspot where they were subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment in 2017.

ROME, November 30th: The Chamber of Deputies passes a decree allowing for more restrictive measures in the reception of unaccompanied minors, including detention in adult centers of minors as young as 16 years old for up to 5 months and for up to a period of 45 days in adult centers for those younger than 16.

VALSUSA, November 4th: Stranded near Claviere in a heavy snowstorm, nine people attempting to reach France through the Italian Alps are rescued by an Alpine Rescue Team.

TURIN, November 30th: Work is underway for the reopening of the CPR (Detention and Repatriation Center) in Corso Brunelleschi. The center was damaged during a revolt by detainees following a meeting with Minister of the Interior Piantadosi, Turin Mayor Lo Russo, Prefect of Turin Cafagna, and Chief of Police Pisani.

REPORT BORDERLINE EUROPE

NEWS FROM
CENTRAL
MEDITERRANEAN



ARRIVALS

In November, 8,520 people arrived in Italy through the central Mediterranean. There were 21% fewer arrivals in November compared to the previous October. Harsh weather and storms in the Mediterranean made crossing extremely dangerous for most of the month.

Three boats, each carrying over 500 passengers, reached the Italian coast this month. The first boat, carrying 531 people, was rescued by Italian authorities on November 4th. The two other boats both sailed from Libya: the one that arrived on November 20th had 576 people on board while the one that arrived on November 27th carried 573 people.

We also noted other arrivals carrying unusually high numbers of passengers: 220 people, 238 people, 338 people, 426 people. When boats are this overcrowded, there is a high probability that passengers will be forced to risk occupying the engine room below deck even though, in the past, people have died due to lack of oxygen.

Most of the arrivals (89%) were recorded on Lampedusa just as in previous months. However, 18 people did arrive in Malta this month. In the past, Malta has been repeatedly criticized for ignoring requests for assistance from boats in distress within its SAR zone in breach of its obligation under international law. According to the latest MSF report, Geo Barents (MSF) rescued a person claiming that Maltese authorities provided the boat in distress with just water, food, and fuel: “They told us, ‘You’re

50 km from Italy. We don’t have to help you. Continue on your own.’” This practice would explain why, according to our calculations, only 128 refugees reached Malta (as of November 1, 2023) through the central Mediterranean.

On November 14th in Malta’s SAR area, another boat carrying 18 people was in distress due to a failed engine. Sea-Watch’s civilian monitoring aircraft, Seabird, alerted a nearby merchant ship of the boat needing assistance. The ship’s captain contacted Malta authorities and had to wait a very long time for direct instructions. Rather than receiving the go ahead to rescue the boat, the captain was ordered to supply the migrants aboard the boat in distress with water and fuel so they could continue on to Lampedusa. Ultimately, the captain was even forbidden to rescue the passengers. In the end, the captain chose to take the boat to the nearest port of safety in Malta despite the orders he received from authorities. In doing so, the captain fulfilled his obligation under international law undeterred by the Maltese authorities’ efforts to prevent him from doing so.

Just as in previous months, however, rescue at sea by private vessels were an exception (less than 1%). A small percentage of refugees (9%) reached Italy autonomously, meaning that they entered Italian territorial waters, 12 nautical miles from the coast, without assistance. Italian authorities rescued most arrivals (54%), sometimes with support from Frontex. Although we have observed that Italy regularly complies with international

law and fulfills its obligation to coordinate sea rescue within its SAR zone, we also noted Italian authorities repeatedly attempted to evade requests for assistance throughout this month. For instance, on November 14th, MSF reported that Italian authorities requested that its rescue ship, Geo Barents, ignore a distress call from a boat carrying 40 people that was less than 30 km away. Based on our assessment, many groups of similar size reached Lampedusa the next day. We hope that these people were among them.

Furthermore, 986 (12%) people were rescued by civil fleet ships in November. Italian authorities repeatedly hinder rescue activities by withholding information. On November 17th, for instance, Geo Barents (MSF) reported a boat in distress which had already been located by Frontex. Rather than notifying Geo Barents, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard was alerted. When Geo Barents arrived at the rescue site in Malta's SAR zone, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard was already there. However, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard does not rescue people; it takes them back to Libya in violation of the right of asylum and the principle of non-refoulement. This cooperation between the EU agency and Libyan militias must be condemned. Once again, it is evident that protecting human lives is less important to the EU than protecting its borders.

The political strategy behind this practice is clear: keep civil sea rescue vessels out of the area as long as possible. By doing so, less people will be saved. Some crossings last many days and are so dangerous that they are potentially traumatizing. However, the Italian government does not care whether weakened survivors are brought ashore as soon as possible to receive medical and psychological support after they are rescued.

DEAD AND MISSING

Underscoring the deadly consequences of insufficient legal access routes, several dramatic maritime accidents took place in the central Mediterranean yet again this month. At least 14 have died and another 12 people are considered missing, according to our estimation. Due to the number of unreported cases, these numbers are most likely much higher.

On November 11th, a boat carrying 39 passengers from Eritrea and Sudan was rescued by the Italian Customs Corps and Frontex. According to a current reconstruction of the event, a 29-year-old Eritrean appears to have died during the rescue operation.

A similar tragedy occurred on November 21st. A boat carrying 47 migrants capsized during a rescue operation as the Italian Customs Corps officials transferred passengers from the boat onto the authority's vessel. A 26 year old woman from the Ivory Coast fell into the water during this phase of the operation and drowned.

Before this incident took place, an article by the Maldusa Project had already warned of the dangers of the transshipment phase of rescue operations. The article pointed out that certain types of sea vessels, especially those frequently used by the Coast Guard and Customs Corps, are unsuitable for rescue at sea especially when overcrowded iron boats are involved. Today, most people arrive on these exceptionally unstable iron boats whose sides are often so close to the surface of the water

that they easily take it in.

The Maldusa Project also emphasizes the importance of having a cultural mediator aboard rescue vessels so rescue crews can communicate with people in distress, reassure them, and explain the rescue process. At sea, panic breaking out can be extremely dangerous. Communication through a cultural mediator helps avoid panic from breaking out on boats during rescue operations. However, according to the Maldusa Project, neither cultural mediators nor medical personnel were present during the Customs Corps recent rescue operations. Quite possibly, more deaths could have been avoided if the rescue operation had been conducted differently.

Another dramatic accident at sea took place on November 20th off the coast of Lampedusa when a boat carrying 52 people capsized. Italian authorities and Frontex rescued 41 survivors. A fishing boat rescued another two men who were dreading water. 8 people are considered missing, including 2 children. A mother lost her one year old baby who died during the incident.

WAYS TO EUROPE

In November, points of departure for arrivals changed once again. We observed that at least 23% of arrivals departed from Tunisia (4,417 people), while at least 52% of arrivals (2,001 people) reached Italy from Libya. Compared to the previous month, departures from Tunisia increased 46%, while departures from Libya fell to 12%. However, there was a 52% decrease in the number of arrivals for whom it was not possible to determine departure points. Given the political instability in both Libya and Tunisia, it is difficult to clearly understand the reasons for these changes. While the data indicate authorities in both countries do occasionally respect agreements with the EU intended to prevent migrants from leaving and reaching countries in Europe, the numbers also indicate authorities turn a blind eye to migrants departing on a dangerous crossing to Italy. Protecting refugee rights is not a priority for authorities in either scenario. To them, refugees are merely political pawns.

For this reason, like many organizations, we have long felt neither Libya nor Tunisia are safe countries for migrants. This belief was yet again confirmed in November as a climate of racist violence continued to prevail in Tunisia. According to MSF's recent report, a person rescued by Geo Barents sharing their experience told them, "I was kicked out. All the owners threw out their African tenants. I lost everything. I was living in Tunis. One morning I got up and the landlord came.....He said to me, 'The president said that you Africans should go home. We cannot accommodate other Africans.'" Violence also intensified in other parts of Tunisia this month. In another instance,

migrants attacked members of the National Guard and set fire to police vehicles after Tunisian authorities destroyed several metal boats to be used for travel across the sea. Several people were arrested in connection with the incident. These are signs of growing tensions and feelings of frustration resulting from the intolerable migrant situation in Tunisia, especially that of sub-Saharan migrants.

Our network has also condemned the arbitrary criminalization of migrants in Tunisia. Just in November, approximately 80 Tunisians were arrested for arranging crossings and another 60 migrants from various sub-Saharan countries were arrested for being intermediaries or boat operators.

In Libya, the human rights situation of migrants also remains concerning. MSF medical evaluations of people rescued by Geo Barents give reason to consider the situation troubling: "The MSF team found that most of the violence-related injuries were inflicted by civilians, criminal groups, or state forces. Overall, 67% of the medical assessments reporting violence-related injuries were cases where the injuries resulted from violence in Libya."

It is within this context that the EU's cooperation with countries having well-documented histories of persistent human rights violations must be condemned. Even the EU's plans to address migration issues by pursuing and closely cooperating with other transit states having poor human rights records, such as Egypt and Tunisia, should be regarded with concern.

Lastly, as in previous months, a small number of refugees (150 people, 2% of arrivals) took the Ionian Sea route from Turkey.

PUSH-BACKS

There was a sharp increase in the number of refoulements to Tunisia this month. In fact, refoulements in November increased 303% compared to the previous month. Throughout the month, Tunisian authorities forcibly pushed back 3,593 people off the coast of Tunisia thus preventing them from reaching Italy. On November 22nd, we were informed that approximately 1,200 people were intercepted in over 30 separate operations. Moreover, at least 12 people were arrested by the Tunisian National Guard. 12 boats and 22 engines were also confiscated by authorities. Alarm Phone accounts of individuals being detained in these operations and later taken to the desert on the border with Algeria are especially concerning.

In a series of operations at sea, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard also prevented people from reaching Italy. We estimate that at least 1,627 people were intercepted, 8% less than the previous month.

Private merchant vessels are also obligated by international law to bring people to a port of safety once rescued. However, at the beginning of the month, yet another refoulement involving a private merchant vessel took place. The privately-owned oil tanker, Anwaar Libya, intercepted a boat carrying 28 people and handed them over to Libyan authorities who forcibly returned them to Tripoli.

CIVIL RESISTANCE

In light of these recent events, the civil resistance movement continues its struggle to prevent deaths at sea in the Mediterranean. The civilian fleet, with the support of two reconnaissance aircrafts, is making an especially important contribution in countering the EU's isolation policy.

There was also good news in November: Sea-Watch 5 set sail from Germany to begin its mission in the Mediterranean. Due to the Italian government's repeated efforts to obstruct civil rescue at sea by either detaining ships and imposing harsh fines or by making false accusations of aiding and abetting unauthorized entry into the country or by designating distant ports for disembarkation (see above), the support of another ship is exceedingly needed.

The Italian government repeatedly justifies its obstructive measures by accusing civil sea rescue organizations of not cooperating with authorities. These same organizations have long denied this allegation. A leaked Italian Coast Guard document now proves these allegations are completely unfounded. The document itself cites Alarm Phone and civil rescue ships as sources of information for the Coast Guard. Claiming that sea rescue support is the exclusive responsibility of the government, Italian authorities attempted to restrict civil reconnaissance aircraft activities by targeting Sea-Watch's aircraft, Sea-Bird, directly.

However, Italian authorities were not successful in grounding the aircraft and Sea-Bird is still flying over the Mediterranean.

After successfully rescuing a total of 128 people aboard three separate boats in distress in Libya's SAR area, Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée) was fined €3,300 and received another 20 day administrative detention. According to the so-called NGO decree, yet another measure intended to make civil sea rescue more difficult, a civil rescue ship must immediately report to the designated port after each individual rescue. Basically, Ocean Viking was forbidden from rescuing the passengers on more than one boat.

Welcome news arrived on November 22nd when charges were dropped against Open Arms (Proactive Open Arms) crew members, Anabel Montes and Marc Reig, due to lack of evidence. Catania's Court of Appeal upheld the decision that the pair would not stand trial for allegations of aiding and abetting unauthorized entry into the country in March 2018.

At present, it is feared that Germany may start criminalizing sea rescue in the same manner as Italy's government. A draft amendment to the Residency Act removing the "financial gain" requirement for the crime of trafficking ("trafficking of foreigners") could lead to future criminalization of German sea rescue organizations for their activities in the Mediterranean. Although the Ministry of the Interior has claimed that such criminalization would not occur, developments in the passage of the amendment to the law should continue to be monitored.

In closing, civil sea rescue organizations are openly resisting attempts to impede rescue activities in Italy. In fact, just at the beginning of the month Mediterranean Saving Humans filed an appeal challenging the 20 day detention in Trapani of its ship, Mare Jonio, following the rescue of 69 people on October 18th.

Sea-Eye filed a similar appeal in Vibo Valentia's Civil Court challenging a 3,000 euro fine and 20 day detention imposed on its ship, Sea-Eye 4, following the rescue of 69 people in October. The third detention this year, Italian authorities justify the penalties on the grounds that the crew did not follow the so-called Libyan Coast Guards' instructions during the October 27th rescue. Barbara Held, a Sea-Eye 4 crew member present at the time of the incident, described the situation created by so-called Libyan Coast Guard's "pursuit" of the raft in distress so highly dramatic that 4 people died as a result. When Sea-Eye 4 arrived at the location, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard was already on site and ordered Sea-Eye 4 to leave the area. According to Italian authorities, Sea-Eye 4 should have obeyed the instruction and abandoned the rescue operation. There are currently 3 cases brought by Sea-Eye pending before Italian courts.

We hope Italian courts will seize this opportunity to condemn the Italian governments' illegal policies and rule that they are unlawful.



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MEDREPORT
NOVEMBER 2023