



MEDREPORT
SEPTEMBER 2023

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WHAT DO THE NUMBERS TELL US

19,091 people who were forced to flee across the Mediterranean managed to reach Italy in September. 1,602 unaccompanied minors were among the arrivals.

During a press conference held in Rome, Nicola Dell’Arciprete, UNICEF Country Coordinator for the National Response to Migrants and Refugees in Italy, noted that approximately 127,000 people had crossed the central Mediterranean and arrived in Italy since the beginning of this year. Most of the minors who arrived were between the ages of 15 and 17 and were originally from West Africa and sub-Saharan countries. However, a significant number were also from Tunisia and other North African countries.

NATIONALITIES DECLARED AT THE TIME OF LANDING (UPDATED TO SEPTEMBER 30, 2023)



* The figure could include immigrants for whom they still are identification activities are in progress.

** The data refer to the landing events detected before 8:00 am of the reference day.

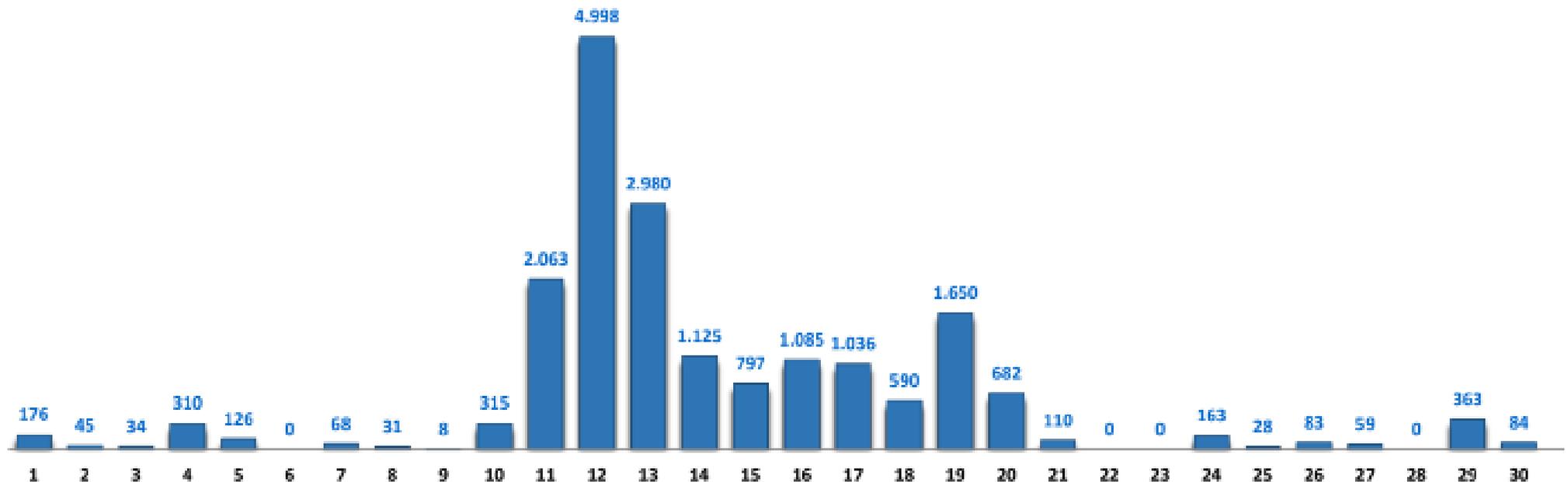
Source: Department of Public Security of the Ministry of the Interior of the Italian Republic.

The data are subject to subsequent consolidation

Due to the rise in the number of arrivals, the number of victims of incidents at sea also rose. With an estimated 990 deaths at sea, including 289 minors, the number of victims tripled.

The Mediterranean Sea has become a sorrowful grave for children and their futures. The tragic deaths of children seeking asylum and safety in Europe are the result of political choices that have been made and of a migratory system that is in crisis.

European-level action is required to support children and families seeking asylum and security. Additionally, a significant increase in international aid for countries facing multiple crises is necessary to avert further suffering.



These data are processed on the basis of information provided by the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior of the Italian Republic. The data refer to the landing events detected by 8.00 on the reference day.



CHRONICLE OF SEPTEMBER OF THE FACTS IN MEDITERRANEAN

DAY 4

In the central Mediterranean, GeoBarents' crew rescues 31 people fleeing Libya. A third of the survivors are children and half of the children are unaccompanied. Bari is assigned by Italian authorities as the port of disembarkation.

At the same time, the crew aboard the sailboat, Nadir, assists a boat near Lampedusa carrying 46 people, including 3 women, one of whom is pregnant. In the evening, the same crew assists another 2 boats in distress carrying about 100 passengers. Due to poor weather conditions, one of the boats sinks during rescue operations carried out by Italian authorities. Fortunately, all the passengers are saved.

Louise Michel's crew rescues a boat in distress carrying 24 people, including a child.

DAY 5

Louise Michel's crew rescues a boat in distress carrying 44 people.

DAY 10

The crew aboard the civil ship, Ocean Viking, rescues 68 people fleeing Zuara, Libya aboard a wooden boat in distress.

DAY 16

The crew aboard the civil ship, GeoBarents, rescues over 330 people from 8 separate vessels in distress.

DAY 17

In the central Mediterranean, the crew aboard the civil ship, LifeSupport (Emergency), rescues a boat fleeing Syria and Libya. There are 28 people on board, including a pregnant woman and 9 minors. Four days of navigation from the site of rescue, Italian authorities assign Ravenna as the port of disembarkation.

DAY 19

With the help of Pilotes Volontaires' aircraft, Colibri, the crew aboard the civil ship, Aurora, is able to foil the so-called Libyan Coast Guard's attempt to intercept and forcibly return survivors. After rescuing 40 survivors, Sea-Watch's crew witnesses the death of four people. Italian authorities assign Pozzallo as a port of safety.

DAY 28

The crew aboard the civil ship, GeoBarents, rescues a wooden vessel in distress in Libya's SAR area carrying 61 people, including 5 unaccompanied minors. Italian authorities assign Civitavecchia as the port of disembarkation.



ON BOARD!

THE MEDITERRANEA FESTIVAL

“For us, hope is the point of departure. It must not and will never be a destination. Onwards, Mare Jonio! Onwards, Mediterranea! Onwards, On Board!” With this declaration, Laura Marmorale, Mediterranea Saving Humans President, officially inaugurated the second edition of On Board! The Mediterranea Festival.

Accompanying her on stage were: Cardinal Zuppi, Don Mattia Ferrari, Mare Jonio’s marine chaplain, and Luca Casarini, one of the organization’s founders.

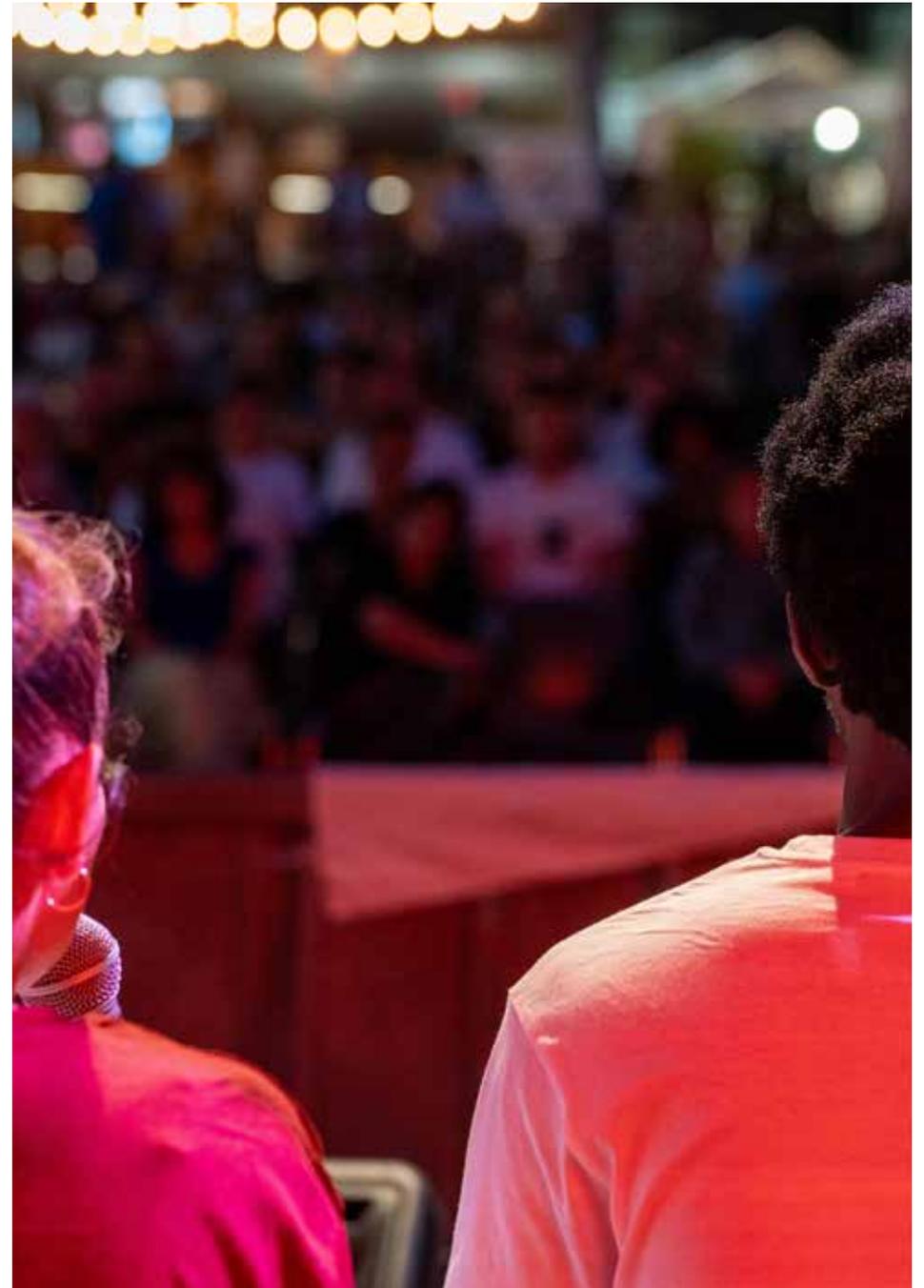
The Italy-Libya Memorandum

The Festival's first day began with a heartfelt discussion panel entitled, "You Cannot Die of Hope." The trio of Zuppi, Ferrari, and Casarini led this important and in-depth conversation about the humanitarian tragedy we are witnessing in the Mediterranean while focusing on the importance of rescue at sea and the need for both civil and political responses to the situation.

The theme of the necessity of an urgent and decisive institutional response was also a focus in the discussion that followed entitled, "From Parliament to the Sea: Meeting with Parliamentarians and Guarantors Regarding Civil Aid in the Mediterranean." Several representatives of the Italian political sphere participated, including parliamentarians such as: Paolo Ciani, Beatrice Covassi, Rachele Scarpa, Matteo Orfini, and Toni Ricciardi. While attempting to clarify what approaches the Italian State has implemented in the past and what approaches it could take in the future, the Memorandum with Libya became the focus of the discussion. In light of the recent agreement with Tunisia, it is in fact becoming clear that the Memorandum has set a dangerous precedent and the results should be regarded as a warning.

Of course, the Memorandum with Libya was the central topic of many discussions due to the political approach to dealing with rescue at sea has become increasingly aggressive and obstructive.

Signed in 2017, the Memorandum of Understanding on Migration provides an economic plan with substantial funding from Italy to support Libyan authorities, in particular, the Coast Guard. The Me-





morandum provides: money, equipment, and whatever else is necessary to forcibly return people trying to escape from the horror in Libya, on land or by sea. During the Festival, Mediterranea examined the nature of the institutional relationship between the Italian and Libyan governments. Several panels discussed the dramatic and practical implications of these institutional relationships, especially the most recent and most painful maneuver by the Italian government: the blockade of the ship, Mare Jonio, just days before the Festival began.

Among the many events, the presentation, “The Libyan Mafia: Relations with European Authorities and Crimes Against Humanity,” paid particular attention to the humanitarian consequences of the aforementioned agreement with Libya. Don Mattia Ferrari appeared on this panel together with several journalists: Nello Scavo (L’Avvenire), Anna Candido (Repubblica), Marco Damilano (Il Cavallo e la Torre), with Annalisa Girardi (Fanpage) acting as moderator.

The Externalization of European Borders

The extent of the new European political-institutional system’s cruelty became especially evident during two panel discussions held at the Festival: “Libya and Tunisia: The Two Guardians of Fortress Europe” and “They help us at home? Migrants and African Activists Talk about European Colonialism.”

Both panels examined the main element of the European Union’s strategy meant to hinder the flow of migration: the outsourcing of European borders, usually to third-party countries of departure, which, then, employ various measures to achieve the objective.

These discussion panels featured stories and personal experiences from those who have lived the reality of the migration experience. David Yambio, an advocate from Refugees in Libya, was a central figure of the meeting. Founded in 2021 in Tripoli, Refugees in Libya is a movement dedicated to collecting and sharing stories, photos, and videos of the atrocities that are still taking place in Libya. Recalling one of the many video documents he shared at the discussion meeting with the purpose of informing the public of what is happening in Libya, Yambio said, “The trauma and unspeakable violence that we migrants have suffered are inscribed into our bodies, onto our skin, and are witnessed by all the people who rescue migrants at sea and who are the first to have the opportunity to learn of the torture that we suffered.”

Another central figure at the meeting was Hela Kanakane, a Tunisian Alarm-Phone activist. Founded in 2014, Alarm-Phone’s aim is to facilitate the rescue of refugees at sea. When he spoke, Kanakane confirmed to us that, “For migrants trying to escape from Tunisia, the only way out is the sea. But, the violence the Tunisian Coast Guard is capable of knows no limits. The constantly increasing numbers of capsized boats are not caused by bad weather, but by an escalation in violence by Tunisian authorities.” Kanakane attested to the inhumane methods used by Tunisian and Italian patrol boats to stop boats from leaving, including: blocking boats at the border, relentlessly pursuing boats, and the, unfortunately, now widespread practice of causing already fragile vessels to capsize by creating waves around them.

Participants on the “Do they help us at home?” panel included: Mohamed Dihani (Amnesty International), Ahmed Arafa (No Name Kitchen), Ibrahima Lo, and David Yambio (Refugees in Li-

bya). Together they attempted to answer the question appearing in the session’s title. After discussing the invasion and neo-colonial looting of Africa by Europe, which is still in progress, the panel participants reached a shared conclusion that the answer to the question is a definite and sadly obvious, “No, they do not help us at home.”

Migration and the Climate Crisis

During several panels, the migration phenomenon was discussed in relation to the climate crisis. The conclusion reached during the discussions was that the migration phenomenon is an inevitable consequence of the climate crisis. There was an important exchange between Mediterranean and Fridays For Future activists, during the “Alliances Not To Be Extinguished: Climate Crisis and Migration” discussion panel. The conversation centered around the current superficial journalistic narrative in Italy which too often forgets to focus on people, their lives, and the violation of their rights. However, the “Journalism and Migration: How To Change The Narrative” panel focused specifically on the need to change both how journalism approaches the migration phenomenon and how it uses language to discuss the issue.

Med Care for Ukraine

“What is the first thing you do when you get up in the morning? Do you drink coffee? I go online and I read the names of the people who lost their lives during the night.” (Kristina Senchenko, Insight NGO)

The Festival was not only an opportunity to provide information about and raise awareness regarding the migration phenomenon at sea. It was also an opportunity to talk about Mediterranea's commitment to land missions. It's been over a year since Russia invaded Ukraine. Mediterranea is still present there with its Med Care for Ukraine Project which was created immediately after the conflict began. The discussion, "Mediterranea in Ukraine: Contexts of War and Civil Rescue Practices," featured panelists: Mediterranea Saving Humans President Laura Marmorale, Larissa Kotsovska, cultural mediator for the project in Ukraine, together with Krystina Senchenko and Mariana Pryima, coordinators from Insight, an NGO that has been actively working alongside the Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ community for over 10 years.

The Med Care for Ukraine Project's medical assistance and supply missions attest to the organization's commitment to its core foundational values: supporting civilian populations who are too often subjected to geopolitical logistics and forced to endure conflicts alien to them. Starting out as an organization dedicated to rescue at sea, and continuing to be the only rescue ship in the Mediterranean flying the Italian flag, Mediterranea has made solidarity a matter of principle: adhering to a solidarity to people, to their stories, and to humanity; thus, rejecting a solidarity based on skin color or maritime issues. Civil rescue does not operate according to a hierarchical ranking of rescue priorities nor does it discriminate on the basis of border or population.

A Moment of Coming Together

Alongside the events to raise awareness and provide information about the reality of migration, the Mediterranea Festival also offered a joyous opportunity for activists, members, and volunteers to come together in Rome to dialogue and share ideas. The "Land Crew Square- Living Mediterranea: The Role of Land Crews in their Territories and within the Organization" workshop was an especially informative and constructive meeting involving ground crew members. In fact, every member of Mediterranea's crew receives training in the shared ideal of solidarity, the humanity that transcends political boundaries between States, and the common struggle to recognize the rights of those who are most vulnerable, as well as how to create a network, how to create areas of social integration, and how to create a safe place where no one ever feels excluded.

Evening performances were essential in creating opportunities for our activists to come together. We are thankful to all the outstanding artists from the music scene in Rome who performed, including Giorgio Poi and Laila al Abash, and to Italy's Modena City Ramblers. We are also thankful for the exceptional standup comedy performances of C'è Fica and Massimiliano Loizzi.

Dedicated to Michela Murgia, to Fati & Marie Dosso, and to Yosef Testfamariam Kedane

Lasting four days, the Festival's discussion panels, meetings, and evening performances took place on the main stage and in several other venues. Mediterranea chose to dedicate festival events to those who, in a variety of manners and contexts, represent the precious values the organization holds dear.



Mediterranea enthusiastically dedicated the main stage to Michela Murgia, a writer and activist who championed anti-racist and queer Transfeminist causes.

One of the interior conference rooms was dedicated to Fati Dosso and her daughter, Marie, both Ivorians, whose lifeless bodies were discovered in the desert between Tunisia and Libya.

The another conference room was dedicated to the memory of Yo-sef Testfamariam Kedane, a young man from Eritrea who hoped to cross the Mediterranean, but instead met his death in a detention camp in Zentan. He was forcibly returned to Libya following a joint operation involving Italian authorities and Libya's Asso Ventinove.

Hope is the Point of Departure

Hope was the Festival's point of departure and its source of inspiration. Whatsmore, hope is what, back in 2018, motivated a group of activists scattered throughout Italy to crowdfund in order to buy a ship which would be named Mare Jonio. Driven by the desire and enthusiasm for a better tomorrow, in solidarity and with humanity, Mediterranea's activists face the waters of the Mediterranean with determination.

Too many names and too many stories are now preserved by these same waters. And this, we shall never forget.

LAMPEDUSA

BEYOND THE “COMMON PLACE”

On September 12th, over 100 boats carrying approximately 5,000 people fleeing Libya and Tunisia arrived in Lampedusa. In the midst of the chaos, Mama Traoré, a 5 month old girl, died. As the landings continued in the days that followed, the island’s hotspot collapsed. Exceeding the hotspot’s maximum capacity 20 times over, more than 7,500 people were held there.

It was under these circumstances that a team of Mediterranea activists arrived in the area. After authorities were forced to open the hotspot’s gates due to overcrowding, our team gave support to Lampedusa’s reception community and other organizations on the ground actively working with migrants. Specifically, our tasks included preparing and distributing meals, providing legal information, monitoring the hotspot, and looking out for landings.

Even though this situation dominated the news around the world for many days, we have decided to report on it by using the most significant places on the island as starting points and by describing the dynamics that weave across them. We made this choice intending to counter the current trend of presenting what is happening in Lampedusa with a stereotypical narrative. Our report begins at Favalaro Pier and Commerciale Pier, the two famous piers in Lampedusa that serve as the settings for arrivals and departures. We continue to the public squares which are at the center of island life and, then, to the hotspot which is the core of the internment system. Finally, we conclude at Cala Madonna beach which is more than just an elite tourist destination.

The piers

Lampedusa's Favalaro Pier and Commerciale Pier are located at the mouth of a scenic bay. Two silent witnesses to complicated stories and profound contradictions, the two piers are the main points from which arrivals and departures flow to and from the island, respectively.

After landing at the airport and setting foot on the island, we headed to the piers for the first time.

The contradictions were obvious as soon as we arrived at the piers. The contrast between the migration phenomenon and the tourist industry were striking. At Favalaro Pier, on our left, tiny tourist boats were impeccably anchored and flaunted the perfect care received down to their smallest details. These boats were ready to welcome tourists searching for a coastal paradise. However, this idyllic image was quickly spoiled by the sight of boats not merely in disrepair, but falling apart. All piled on top of each other, these were the boats migrants used to arrive here in this period. As soon as any migrants arrived on the island, they were brought to Favalaro Pier. Before being transferred later to the hotspot in Contrada Imbriacola, they would have received first aid and any other needed assistance at this pier.

Punta Guitigia beach, located to the right of the piers, was replete with umbrellas and comfortable sunbeds, a true oasis of relaxation. Tourists spent their days here enjoying the crystal clear water and golden sand. Directly in the waters before this heavenly site, Customs Corps and Coast Guard patrol boats, and autonomous boats loaded with migrants, made their way into the port.

There was yet another remarkable layer of complexity overlying this scene which was already abundant in contradictions. At the piers' entrance, an eloquent inscription proclaimed, "Protecting People, Not Borders," thus declaring Lampedusa's residents' commitment to the principles of solidarity and reception. Turning to the west, our gaze fell upon Laika's mural. Depicting a touching embrace between a migrant woman and a woman from Lampedusa, the painting seemed to be an enduring statement of intent meant to remind us of the local population's humanity and openness.

In this period, Favalaro Pier was one of the most significant places on the island and it was an essential reference point that gave us an opportunity to understand how the situation here evolved.

On days when the number of landings reached record numbers, the Pier never rested. The Customs Corps' and Coastal authorities' patrol boats ceaselessly disembarked hundreds of migrants a day. Concurrently, an unstoppable flow of autonomous boats made its way into the port. And while boats and tourist ships entered and left the harbor, the tourist industry continued to carry on with almost complete indifference to the intricate scenes of humanity that unfolded beneath its eyes.

Most of the wharf was occupied by disembarked migrants. The Red Cross and other associations providing medical and humanitarian aid administered the initial assistance these migrants would receive. The reception and transfer of people arriving on the island was coordinated by the Red Cross, together with law enforcement. However, in a time with such a massive surge in arrivals, it became evident that managing the reception of a great number of people was a complex undertaking.

The present reception system's inability to handle the situation became undeniable as migrants remained trapped on the pier for hours. The lack of planning and the shortage of resources was glaringly obvious.

Exploiting the physical conditions of the people who just arrived for the sake of journalism was one the most chilling and painful scenes we ever witnessed. We saw a Red Cross team member display migrants' bodies as they laid on stretchers to the media as if those people were the trophies of a media hunt.

There were news-hungry journalists climbing over the pier wall in their quest for information, asking the usual questions: "How many are there? How many landings today? Where are they from? Are there women and children?" However, not all journalists were cynical or only interested in scoops, even though that's what first impressions appeared to confirm. During the long wait for patrol boats, we managed to create real human connections with some journalists, sharing moments of vulnerability and sincere emotion.

Challenged by a massive workload and experiencing a range of intense emotions, there were journalists who confessed their discomfort to us. One journalist told us, "It is difficult to witness these scenes every day. With time I become more and more sensitive, and I become overwhelmed." We got the impression that people were on edge and that they could buckle under the weight of the tremendous emotional burden they had to bear.

The relationship between law enforcement and Red Cross members was detached and cold. Maintaining a strict separation between the public and the migrants who just arrived was their common objective. The pier was made into a militarized zone and

was rendered inaccessible to anyone who was not a journalist or did not belong to the reception staff. However, even journalists were held at somewhat of a distance which seemed like a strategy meant to preserve the reputation of the island and ensure that tourists went undisturbed.

All told, Favalaro Pier was like the stage production of a complex play where contradictions, struggles, and humanity were interwoven into a narrative that was difficult to recount and even more difficult to fully comprehend. As De Genova has pointed out, it is a place that challenges every attempt at simplification and calls for deeper reflection on what happens at its docks and beyond.

However, it seems difficult to break free from the prevailing narrative that characterizes this place as a just "landing spot." The golden mylar blankets meant to comfort the newly disembarked migrants and the discarded life jackets encountered while walking along the quayside of the pier, even in quiet moments, have become tangible symbols of the process of frontier building.

During our stay on the island, we visited Commerciale Pier less frequently. Mostly ferries connecting Lampedusa to the mainland dock at this pier. Even here, the contrast between migration and the tourism industry was clear.

Migrants were seated on the ground under the Red Cross tents, waiting to be called to board a ferry transferring them to Porto Empedocle. Parading before them, tourists with their travel bags passed by as their island holidays drew to a close and it was time to return home. The situation here seemed to be less tense than the one we experienced at Favalaro Pier which was still visible from the opposite shore and where, it seemed, arrivals never

stopped coming. Here, on Commerciale Pier, Red Cross members were prepared to provide migrants with bottles of water and a bag with food before boarding the ferry. Law enforcement was also present and seemed less suspicious of us than the officers on the other pier. Although we felt watched by peering eyes, we took advantage of the opportunity to exchange a few words with the people who were seated on the ground. This scene, a combination of moments of sincerity and compassion, seemed to be an inherent part of the interactions between law enforcement and journalists with children and migrants, but in a patronizing manner. Here, too, we witnessed the “performance” of the frontier of which we, too, were part.

The piers are like a theater where a dramatic play is performed. The main actors include migrants seeking refuge, journalists hunting for news stories, humanitarian workers and law enforcement agencies managing reception and transfers, coastal rescue authorities, the residents of Lampedusa offering hospitality and solidarity, and tourists enjoying their holidays and observing what is taking place before them with astonishment. The choreography that takes place in this context represents a pulsing microcosm of contradictions and complexity. It is a situation that cannot be defined in simple terms.

The public squares

The center of community life in Lampedusa takes place within its petite 50 x 50 meter town square, situated between the town hall square and the church square and positioned between the center of secular power and that of religious power.

Our first impression of Lampedusa’s public squares was power-

ful and compelling. On Thursday, September 14th, a torchlight procession in memory of Traore Mama, the 5-month-old girl who died during the previous day’s landing was held. The column of people moved along Via Roma to the port, passing through the outside tables of the cafes where people looked at us stunned as if they felt guilty for vacationing here in Lampedusa. Fr. Carmelo delivered a heartfelt homily, quoting Pope Francis’ “the globalization of indifference” speech. Everyone there who was listening was moved. Even the journalists, an inevitable presence in the squares of Lampedusa, listened strangely silent.

Don Carmelo Rizzo is Lampedusa’s parish priest. And, as in many small communities, he is a respected figure. It was for this reason that his change of heart was hurtful to us. Initially, he offered access to the rectory to a group of people in solidarity, made up of people from Lampedusa and various organizations like ours who were present on the island. He offered to allow us to use the showers and organize meal distribution for migrants who were not allowed the right to bathe and were malnourished while at the hotspot. Later, Don Carmelo rescinded his offer. Upon arriving at the rectory on Saturday evening, we found the doors locked. Don Carmelo told us he was pressured by the Commissioner to not give us access to the rectory or the warehouse where food and clothing donated by many people, in a great show of support, was already stored. Lampedusa is also an island of contradictions; it is a place where one thing is said and the opposite is done.

Returning to the torchlight procession, Town Hall Square was half empty because all the residents participated in the march. Banners and old white bed sheets with handwritten texts declared: “Regular Modes of Entry Immediately!” “No More Deaths at Sea!

Stop!” “EU and Rome Absent!” The message was unified and the demands were clear. For these reasons, Ursula Von Der Leyen and Giorgia Meloni did not enter the citizen’s political space during their visit to the island. They had no answers, only empty propaganda. Accordingly, they did not go to any public squares. They locked themselves in a ‘golden cage’ at the airport where they held a press conference that was not intended for Lampedusa. Rather, the press conference was propaganda created from the skin of people.

The Church Square was also the site of an immediate and spontaneous expression of solidarity by Lampedusa’s residents, by the organizations present on the island, and by some tourists. There was the baker who brought focaccia, the greengrocer who brought some fruits and vegetables, and Mancino’s gastronomy kitchen which opened its doors to prepare up to 1,500 meals for lunch and dinner several days in a row. So much more was shared in that square: football matches after meals, conversations with residents, stories migrants told us about their families, and music emanating from a portable stereo that brought people together to dance for a happy instance with no thought about the future.

Authorities found this situation unacceptable because we managed to effectively compensate for their shortcomings with little notice. However, above all else, despite thousands of obstacles, we were able to show a different reception model was possible for Lampedusa, a model not based on segregating new arrivals in the hotspot. Authorities, conversely, reacted by increasing transfers from Lampedusa, decreasing the number of people incarcerated in the hotspot, and locking the doors to the center. Goodness knows Giorgia Meloni couldn’t have been allowed to see an

island of solidarity coming together to face difficulties when she arrived on Sunday.

Recently, the Town Hall Square became, above all else, Lampedusa’s political arena where local politics fused with and became contaminated by national politics.

We were able to experience direct democracy on Lampedusa, such as at the citizen’s assembly on Wednesday, September 20th. This event could have not been possible anywhere else in Italy. In this regard, we were perhaps the best able to understand what was happening in Lampedusa. In fact, although peripheral to all the topics discussed at the assembly, migration was not its focus. Health, culture, employment, and much more were discussed. All these topics shared common themes: the local residents’ feelings of having been abandoned by government institutions which exploit what is happening in Lampedusa for propaganda on a national stage for political reasons and the sentiment that the government never really wanted to help find solutions for the island’s problems. For the daughter of a victim of Italy’s broken public healthcare system, for the retired university professor, for the fireman, for the physiotherapist, and for the small merchant, Lampedusa’s problem is the State, not migrants.

The public square is not only a democratic space, it is also the site of manipulation. For example, Giuseppe Conte’s comments, at the previously mentioned assembly, were not directed to the people of Lampedusa, but they were meant for his electorate, his allies, the opposition, and to sway public opinion. Another example of the manipulative function of the public square was obvious on Friday, September 15th when spontaneous protests meant to give the local population an opportunity to express the anger and

outrage felt about the government's poor management of the first line of reception. The reality of the mood in the square was very different from how it was portrayed by Deputy Mayor Attilio Lucia. Appearing with an Italian flag armband, Lucia who is very close to Matteo Salvini of the League Party, garnered most of the national and international press' attention.

Lampedusa's public squares are a small-scale depiction of Italian politics: ambiguous, contentious, ubiquitous and often forgetting its mandate is to govern and represent the people. Possibly, when there is a return to actually governing for the common good, Lampedusa's problems might be solved or, at least, there might be a good faith effort.

Hotspot

Contrada Imbriacola's hotspot represents the Lampedusa of migration, the Lampedusa that authorities want to hide from residents, tourists, and the world. This is the Lampedusa of seclusion and segregation.

As Meloni and Von der Leyen arrived on Lampedusa, the detention of migrants inside the hotspot commenced. Only tourists and law enforcement were visible along the official route once they landed. In contrast, in the days previous to their arrival, migrants and residents of the island could be seen sharing spaces and dancing together on the main road.

The way the two politicians' visit was managed was typical. Around midmorning, about 30 journalists were waiting in front of the hotspot's front gate. Under strict surveillance and barred from leaving, the migrants inside were behind a barricade, deep in the back of the center. Occasionally, they would start to protest,

but very little could be heard outside.

Meloni and Von der Leyen quickly entered the center and stopped about 20 yards from the gates to talk to representatives of the Red Cross and law enforcement. They left in more of a hurry than they were in when they arrived. Their visit lasted a total of 7 minutes. They had no contact with the people locked up in the hotspot. For them, migrants are a number, not human beings. The hotspot is simply an issue to be exploited for their inhumane propaganda. So meeting any of the people detained inside didn't matter to them.

Migrants, men, women, children, they were all locked up together in the hotspot in order to hide them and make them invisible, yet again. While in Lampedusa, we went to the hotspot to monitor the situation daily because the information we received from inside the hotspot was limited and often contradictory.

Situated in a ravine just a few hundred meters outside town, only one access road leads to the hotspot. The lettering on the vehicles traveling down this long and narrow road was the only way we could distinguish Red Cross and law enforcement cars and vans from each other.

Preventing entry or exit, law enforcement guarded the gate at the end of the road. The walls attached to the gates are 3 meters tall. At certain points of the structure, there is a double wall wrapped in barbed wire ensuring escape from the center would be impossible. Seeing anything beyond the point of entry was difficult. Consequently, it was difficult to understand what was happening inside the hotspot or to figure out how the center was organized within. Only by hearing the sound of voices emanating to the road

outside was it possible to surmise the number of people being detained inside the hotspot. Everything seemed designed to make the people inside invisible, as if they were purposefully prevented from seeing outside and us from seeing in. There were 4 military personnel posted around the hotspot. Equipped with riflescopes, they worked in pairs. They kept an eye on the situation, prevented people from leaving and monitored whether someone outside approached.

Attempting to talk with someone inside was almost impossible. As soon as someone got within 15 yards of the fence, the police and soldiers immediately ordered us to leave. The only way to circle around the hotspot was by staying at a distance and from that distance, photos and videos could document the means of control and repression that were put in place.

One side of the center was patrolled less than the others. Thanks to Lassaad who speaks Arabic, we were able to communicate at a distance with a Syrian boy who was inside. "It's as if we were in a jail," he told us. Hearing this hurt us. We understood the privilege of being European citizens. A few days later, as we were trying to get closer to the center, a police officer confirmed what the boy told us. After a heated exchange with the officer, he gave us a harsh warning that we had to leave. "You can't stay here," he said. "It's forbidden. It's like we were in military barracks!"

Lampedusa's hotspot incites fear and clearly represents the purpose of European and Italian migration policies: render people invisible and dehumanize them. At the farthest border of Fortress Europe, Lampedusa is an impregnable fortress which, for 3 days, imploded.

Cala Madonna

Lampedusa is a steep and rugged boulder emerging out of the sea which, of course, has dreamy inlets like the images on tshirts we've seen with "Lampedusa 2023" written over them, like the ones a group of tourists waiting at a gate at Malpensa Airport were wearing. That this island is a famous tourist destination is not a surprise. The impression it leaves after a visit is remarkable. Tourism seems to be the only social activity to have any significant influence on the island, especially if main streets and beaches are the focus. Everything about the island seems to be picture perfect for Instagram stories or travel brochures. Or so you might think.

As a matter of fact, even the small luxurious bays, although inaccessible to almost everyone during the day, transform at night. When it is dark, the Coast Guard and the Customs Corps have trouble spotting and intercepting autonomous arrivals, who, when they manage to reach the coast, land on private beaches such as Cala Madonna.

We visited Cala Madonna at night. After encountering a group of young Palestinians on the street, we all simultaneously thought the same thing, "If they are outside the hotspot, then they just arrived." That they seemed to be a little lost and a bit excited seemed to confirm what we were thinking. We had no time to chat, ask them about their trip, or give them any information about the hotspot system. The police arrived immediately to restore order: migrants must be sequestered so tourists can continue to enjoy the island.

Realizing that we would have no opportunity to interact with them, we decided to head for the presumed landing spot. This

is how we discovered Cala Madonna. Although it was night time, we could see that this was one of the most beautiful and cared for places on the island. The water here was clear and the sand fine. A small wooden boat swung and bobbed on the sea. Many boats like this one could be seen at the docks. A few air cushions that had been used as lifesavers and water bottles with Arabic, possibly Libyan, writing on them were scattered on the ground.

We weren't the only ones to witness this scene. There were two middle-aged residents of Lampedusa there, too. They sized us up as soon as we got there. They talked to each other continuously, not because they were upset by what they were seeing. Rather, as they told us themselves, they'd been experiencing the same thing night after night: the sighting, the landing, the call to the police, the conversation with the neighbors about the conditions of the boats.

Even though the landings had become routine, the people coming by sea were still frightening. One of them told us when he had gone fishing with his younger son, he made him go back home after he spotted a boat out at sea. "It is better that my son does not see certain things," he said. For the first time, we understood the difficulty of seeing the situation holistically, beyond one's own emotional reaction.

On many occasions, the residents of Lampedusa proved that they are aware that the migration issue is nothing more than a phenomenon that shines a light on the island's structural problems which are deeply rooted in its relationship with the State. It is obvious that residents on the island feel alone and abandoned to manage such a delicate situation on their own. Consequently, it is difficult to analyze what is happening objectively and without fear.

Conclusion

Having experienced the island, it is very clear that Lampedusa is not (only) what is presented in the mainstream narrative. There is so much more. In fact, Lampedusa is not only migration or (so-called) emergencies. For the residents of Lampedusa, migration is a normal, daily, and inevitable fact that has affected the island's coasts and will presumably continue to do so for a long time to come. Lampedusa, however, is also many other things: it is tourism and it is the absence of basic services; it is beautiful and it is contradictory. From this perspective, a great vacuum is felt as the State and politics discuss Lampedusa, spouting simple slogans and sickening propaganda, without knowledge of the island. For migrants, Lampedusa is the destination of their journey. It is the first strip of civil Europe's territory that they reach, where they believe they will be finally safe. So often, however, that is not the case because, above all else, Fortress Europe segregates and violates the rights of those who do not have the privilege of being European citizens. Consequently, Lampedusa also marks the beginning of another journey or, perhaps, it is the second part of the one journey towards a better life. This part of the journey is different from the previous part. As Fortress Europe closes in on itself, as it raises its walls making them increasingly more insurmountable than before, and as it builds even more walls around itself and within itself, both physical and invisible walls, this part of the journey becomes more and more complicated. More than anything, Lampedusa is a transit point. In a world of borders and more borders, this small island has become the symbol and cornerstone of an unjust and unequal system, just like Ventimiglia, Idomeni, the Evros River, Bihać, and so many others. It is up to us, with the weapons of solidarity, to struggle together to win over this injustice and inequality.

MED CARE FOR UKRAINE

In Ukraine, Russians destroy 300 tons of humanitarian aid.
New supplies from Mediterranean arrive.

In September, the Med Care for Ukraine Project completed its first year. This marks an important achievement for Mediterranean Saving Humans as its activities expanded abroad to Ukraine for a sustained period of time since the foundation of the organization in 2018. We also completed our 34th medical health care mission in the same month. A group of 2,000 war refugees living in official refugee camps and informal shelters in the city of Lviv received basic health care through our mobile medical clinic. And, our 11th humanitarian aid mission, organized by Brescia's ground crew with the support of activists from ground crews throughout Italy, set off for its destination at the end of the month.

However, during this time, the Ukrainian government decided to close the informal refugee camp at the Lviv National Polytechnic. The university, which continued its activities throughout this period, resumed using the gymnasiums where for over a year, since March 2022, hundreds and hundreds of war refugees were housed. Since March 2023, these guests at the Polytechnic were part of Mediterranean Saving Humans' Med Care for Ukraine Project which allowed for continuity in health and medical care and for a periodic distribution of humanitarian aid supplies.

Some of the Polytechnic's informal camp's guests were transferred to a refugee camp in Lviv's Sykhiv district where the Med Care for Ukraine Project operates. The rest of the guests were transferred to a new governmental refugee camp that was recently opened.

The Med Care for Ukraine Project also started operating in the Hnizdovskoho Street student residence which hosts both students and refugees from the eastern regions of Ukraine under Russian occupation. Medical teams have already started working here and the first humanitarian aid guaranteed by Mediterranea Saving Humans will soon arrive with the 11th supply mission.

Russian attacks on the city of Lviv also left their mark during September. A warehouse storing humanitarian aid was destroyed by the Russian army on September 18th in the month's most serious missile attack. Approximately 300 tonnes of aid meant for the civilian population went up in flames. This attack, directed at civilians who desperately need humanitarian aid, can in no way be considered an attack on a military target.

Another attack on Lviv occurred on September 24th. Drones hit the city, killing a 61-year-old man.



BORDER STORIES

THE SILENT BORDER BETWEEN ITALY AND FRANCE

The Italian-French border is one of the European Union's, and the continent's, most crucial crossing points. Migratory routes have traveled across it for many years. Signed by both France and Italy, movement between the two countries is regulated by the Schengen Treaty. Consequently, France is unable to opt out of the treaty and, as of 2015, France has restored internal border controls claiming that migratory pressure coming from Italy constitutes a “threat” for its country. However, strict controls along the border have formally been enforced “for security reasons” for several years, despite the Schengen Code providing for a maximum of 24 months for such measures.

Recently, in mid-September 2023, this border returned to the spotlight after France decided to further invest in the fortification of the Ventimiglia-Menton state border by sending 120 Border Guards to monitor the area and identify irregular migrants attempting to cross the border.

Many of the tactics implemented to control the border are remarkably similar to counterterrorism measures. Moreover, in fact, members of Mission Vigipirate, created to protect France from terrorism, have also been deployed to the border along with the Police National and the Gendarmerie.

There have been numerous complaints from NGOs and civil society groups that work in the area monitoring activity on the border. For instance, Rainbow4Africa reported serious overcrowding at Oulx's migrant center in Val di Susa where dozens of people are forced to sleep on the ground. There have been reports of people being forcibly pushed back to Italy by French Gendarmerie drones. Associations, such as Doctors of the World, have condemned the alarming humanitarian crisis along the Italian-French border for years. Other NGOs, such as Diakité, have pointed out that these controls solely increase discrimination, because, very often, only African migrants are targeted. In a video recorded by the newspaper, Il Sole 24 Ore, a dozen soldiers armed with rifles, dressed in camouflage uniforms and wearing bulletproof vests were shown exiting two large off-road military vehicles at the Menton-Garavan railway station. The video recorded the soldiers heading toward the platform where a train from Ventimiglia was to arrive. After the soldiers checked the passengers as they got off the train, a dozen migrants were loaded onto a van.

All the migrants were returned to Ventimiglia, even though at least one of the migrants possessed a birth certificate confirming he was a minor.

Even data released by the Prefecture in Nice, cited in Doctors Without Borders' latest report, documented 13,395 cases of refoulement or detention on the border between Italy and France from January 1, 2023 to June 15, 2023, an increase of 30% compared to 2022. This means there are every day 80 reported cases of people being forcibly returned to Italian territory.

Given the alarming increase in the number of children being pushed back, the situation is even more worrisome as minors require greater protections.

Given the numerous deportations of migrants that occur are not only in violation of national but, also European and international legislation, all these cases are instances of serious human rights violations involving people on the move.

In fact, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has delivered numerous judgments condemning France for its inhumane and degrading treatment of migrants, including unaccompanied minors. Moreover, a recent European Court of Justice decision made the point of stressing that member states do not have the right to reject irregular migrants and that member states must respect the European "Return Directive," even if border controls are active.

The decision highlighted that the reintroduction of border controls is not a measure to be applied systematically nor is it to be implemented for a protracted period of time. Rather, the reintroduction of border controls is an extraordinary and exceptional measure to be enacted for short time periods. This decision, therefore, appears to confirm, as many NGOs have claimed, that France cannot systematically reject migrants, even if those migrants are irregular, and even after monitoring systems and internal border controls have been reintroduced.

MSH MONTHLY REPORT ON MIGRATIONS



WORLD



TUNISIA, September 1st: Four Tunisian fishermen are arrested on charges of piracy. Money and a boat engine are found in the home of one of the suspects following a search. Allegedly these items had been stolen from migrants en route to Italy.

LIBYA, September 6th: Doctors Without Borders announces the end of medical and healthcare activities inside Tripoli's detention centers due to the inhumane conditions in the camps and the impossibility of accessing the facilities. The organization will continue to provide assistance in other locations in Libya.

LIBYA, September 10th: Storm Daniel causes two dams to break, flooding the city of Derna and resulting in thousands of victims. An even greater number of people, however, both among the local and migrant population, have lost everything.

LIBYA, September 11th: Tripoli's Interior Minister, Imad Trabelsi, announces the installation of a video surveillance system along the border with Tunisia. This decision is in line with the policy of militarization and strict externalization of borders that the European Union is promoting and supporting in the central Mediterranean region.

TUNISIA, September 14th: Local authorities ban a delegation from the European Parliament from visiting Tunisia. The purpose of the mission was to assess Tunisian institutions and meet with civil society, opposition representatives, and trade unions.

TUNISIA, September 18th: Tunisia pushes thousands of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to move to main departure points for Italy. Saied's government is promoting a change in security policy by encouraging departures to Italy, thus violating migrants' rights and putting their lives at risk.

TUNISIA, September 28th: A sub-Saharan migrant loses a leg to an anti-personnel mine near Kasserin, near the Algerian border. Even though it is littered with mines, this area has become an access point for many migrants entering Tunisia.

GREECE, September 6th: After being stranded for 4 days at Drosia, in the River Evros region, a group of 11 people are forcibly pushed back by Turkish authorities even though some in the group have serious health issues that need attention.

WORLD



EUROPEAN UNION, September 14th: Following the soaring number of landings in Lampedusa, French and German governments decide to boost control of their borders and accuse Italy of not respecting the Dublin Treaty which requires that migrants be welcomed by the country of first arrival.

EUROPEAN UNION, September 21st: The European Court of Justice rules against the French government's unlawful closing of borders with Italy. According to the Court, "reintroducing internal EU borders must remain an exceptional measure."

FRANCE, September 23rd: During the Mediterranean Meetings in Marseilles, Pope Francis declares that "those who risk life at sea do not invade, they seek acceptance, seek life" and that "the migration phenomenon is not a temporary emergency, but a reality of our times."

GERMANY, September 22nd: The German Ministry announces that it will financially support monitoring and rescue operations of civil rescue organizations at sea in the central Mediterranean, including SOS Humanity and Sea-Eye. The Italian government has protested and has unjustly accused these organizations of acting as a "pull factor" for departures from North Africa.

EUROPEAN UNION, September 28th: No agreement has been reached in the European Union on the Pact for Asylum and Migrants. Of note, Italy and Germany have clashed on some issues, such as: the declaration of a state of emergency, processing applications for minors and families, and the role of civil rescue organizations at sea.

SWEDEN, September 28th: Considered an alternative Nobel Prize, the Right Livelihood Prize has been awarded to SOS Méditerranée "for its rescue operations on the deadliest migration route in the world."

SEA

SYMI, September 1st: The Greek Coast Guard rescues 50 people aboard a dinghy in distress off the coast of Rhodes. The survivors later disembark on the island of Symi.

LESBOS, September 1st: The Greek Coast Guard rescues 27 people aboard a boat in distress off the coast of Lesbos. The survivors later disembark on the island.

CIVIL FLEET, September 4th: Nadir (ResQShip) aids 100 people aboard two boats in distress before the Italian Coast Guard rescues them.

CIVIL FLEET, September 4th: Geo Barents (Doctors Without Borders) rescues 31 people and brings them to the port of Bari to disembark as directed by Italian authorities.

CIVIL FLEET, September 4th-5th: Louise Michel rescues 68 people in two rescue operations and takes them to the port of Trapani to disembark.

LESBOS, September 5th: The Greek Coast Guard rescues 33 people aboard a dinghy in distress off the coast of Lesbos and brings them to the island to disembark.

BENGHAZI, September 6th: While Maltese authorities ignore their distress calls, 16 people aboard a boat about 270 km from Malta are illegally forced back to Libya.

DIDIM, September 9th: 17 people aboard a boat in distress off the coast of Farmakonisi are illegally forced to the Turkish port of Didim by the Greek Coast Guard.

CIVIL FLEET, September 10th: Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée) rescues 68 people and takes them to the port of Ancona to disembark.

CIVIL FLEET, September 10th: Sea Punk I (Sea Punks) carries out its first operation rescuing 44 people with Nadir's support. Another 40 people traveling aboard the boat have been reported missing.

CIVIL FLEET, September 12th: Nadir assists 76 people aboard two boats. The first boat is escorted to Lampedusa; the second is rescued by Italy's Customs Corps.

LAMPEDUSA, September 13th: Approximately 120 boats carrying over 7,000 people arrive within 24 hours. A child accidentally dies during landing operations.

LESBOS, September 13th: The Greek Coast Guard rescues 18 people off the coast of Lesbos. The survivors are brought to the island to disembark.

CIVIL FLEET, September 14th: Aurora (Sea-Watch) rescues 84 people aboard two boats. 12 are taken to Lampedusa by the Italian Coast Guard, while the rest are brought by Aurora to Catania to disembark.

SEA

CIVIL FLEET, September 14th: ResQ assists two boats in distress. 96 survivors are brought aboard and disembark at Trapani. One person dies before the crew is able to help.

CIVIL FLEET, September 19th: Aurora rescues 40 people in collaboration with the aircraft, Colibri (Pilotes Volontaires). However, a second boat is illegally forcibly pushed back by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

LESBOS, September 20th: 35 people aboard two boats off Lesbos are rescued by the Greek Coast Guard and disembark on the island.

KOS, September 20th: A boat carrying about 15 people off Kos is illegally forced to Turkey by the Greek Coast Guard.

CIVIL FLEET, September 21st: Louise Michel rescues 35 people. They disembark at the port of Pozzallo.

KALAMATA, September 22nd: 82 people off Zakynthos are rescued by the Greek Coast Guard. They disembark at the port of Kalamata.

CIVIL FLEET, September 22nd: Life Support (Emergency) rescues 28 people. Authorities assign a distant port for disembarkation, Ravenna, which is over 4 days of navigation from the point of rescue.

LESBO, September 24th: Intercepted off the coast of Lesbos, approximately 40 people are illegally pushed back by the Greek Coast Guard.

SYMI, September 25th: 29 people aboard a boat in distress are rescued by the Greek Coast Guard off the coast of Symi. The survivors disembark on the island.

CIVIL FLEET, September 28th: Geo Barents rescues 61 people aboard a boat in distress. The survivors disembark at the port of Civitavecchia.

CIVIL FLEET, September 29th: Seabird (Sea-Watch) and Louise Michel witness the so-called Libyan Coast Guard illegally forcibly returning approximately 50 people.

CIVIL FLEET, September 29th-30th: Nadir assists 41 people until the Italian Coast Guard arrives. Nadir, then, rescues another 22 people. All survivors disembark at Lampedusa.

CIVIL FLEET, September 30th: Open Arms rescues 178 people in three operations. Italian authorities assign Genoa as the port of disembarkation which is 4 days of navigation from the point of rescue. All survivors disembark there.

TRAPANI, September 12th: Trapani's Captain of the Port concludes its inspection of *Mediterranea Saving Humans'* civil rescue ship, *Mare Jonio*, without endorsing the ship's rescue certification. All sea rescue equipment has been ordered off the ship. The Captain of the Port has threatened legal action in case of non-compliance with the order.

LAMPEDUSA, September 12th-13th: The island's hotspot has become overcrowded due to numerous landings prompting authorities to order the gates of the hotspot open, thus allowing the people who were locked up to move around the city freely.

FIANO ROMANO, September 15th: A bus transferring migrants from Porto Empedocle to Piedmont is involved in a crash. The drivers of both vehicles have died. 35 people onboard the bus have been injured.

LAMPEDUSA, September 17th: Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen visit Lampedusa as they revive a 10-point plan to tackle the so-called 'migration emergency.'

REGGIO CALABRIA, September 20th: Reggio Calabria's Court of Appeals has postponed issuing a decision in Mimmo Lucano's case to October 11th. The former mayor of Riace was previously convicted of criminal conspiracy and "exploitation of the refugee reception system" in a lower court.

ROME, September 22nd: The Italian government issues a decree forcing asylum seekers to pay 4,938 Euro while awaiting the review and determination of their application in order to avoid being detained in the country's CPRs during that time.

PORTO EMPEDOCLE, September 22nd: A police officer is injured at Porto Empedocle's pre-identification zone as some people attempt to flee the area. Transfer to the rest of Italy commences in the pre-identification zone. Overcrowding here is overwhelming at this time.

POZZALLO, September 24th: The first center for the rapid repatriation of people from so-called safe countries has opened in Pozzallo. People waiting for the decision regarding their asylum application will be detained here.

ROME, September 27th: The Italian government drafts a decree stripping unaccompanied minors of certain previously guaranteed protective rights upon arrival in Italy, including the presumption of minority and the right to be housed separately from adults in designated structures.

BASSO CANAVESE, September 20th: The Italian government has chosen the Vauda Nature Reserve as the next CPR (administrative detention facility) headquarters in Piedmont rather than use the previous center in Corso Brunelleschi which was closed last spring. Despite ongoing renovation of the old building, it will not meet the Meloni government's new guidelines once completed.

TURIN, September 30th: On orders from the Interior Ministry, the reception center in Via Traces will be closed. Living in deplorable conditions, up to 500 people have been accommodated there in recent weeks, even though it has a maximum capacity of only 180. Those who are currently residing there will be transferred to CAS (Center for Extraordinary Reception) outside the region.

REPORT BORDERLINE EUROPE

NEWS FROM
CENTRAL
MEDITERRANEAN



ARRIVALS

borderline-europe documented 19,251 arrivals in Italy in September, approximately 3,000 fewer arrivals than in August. The Italian Interior Ministry reports 19,143 arrivals for the same month.

Due to inclement weather at the beginning of the month, very few people crossed the Mediterranean. However, new records were set mid-month. On September 10th, Storm Daniel hit Libya causing severe flooding in the eastern part of the country which resulted in thousands of injuries and deaths.

Once the storm subsided on September 11th, 51 boats from Tunisia and Libya carrying 1,993 migrants arrived on Lampedusa in the span of 24 hours. The following day, 110 boats carrying 5,112 migrants arrived on the island. Most of the boats reached the island autonomously. Many of the people detained at the hotspot following their arrival fled the center by climbing over its fence. The hotspot did not have the capacity to accommodate, with dignity, all the people who had arrived nor could it provide them with proper assistance. The Italian authorities' inability to provide adequate support led many local residents to unite and coordinate the distribution of food for those who arrived.

Due to strong winds, there was an 8 day pause in arrivals which resumed on September 29th after the winds died down.

DEAD AND MISSING

borderline-europe recorded 66 deaths and missing in September.

On September 11th, Nadir's crew (Resqship) came across people in distress who reported seeing, on their way from Sfax, a capsized boat whose passengers were in the water screaming. Nadir informed all the appropriate authorities; however, help did not arrive. The rescue ship, SeaPunk, searched for survivors but, unfortunately found none. 40 people are now considered missing.

On September 13th, a five month old child died tragically on Lampedusa. A boat carrying 45 people, including the child and her mother, capsized near Lampedusa's port before the Coast Guard could rescue the people onboard. The child's mother, who is also a minor, was taken to the island's polyclinic after she and the other survivors were rescued by the Italian Coast Guard. Another infant died shortly after birth on a boat leaving Sfax (Tunisia) en route to Lampedusa.

WAYS TO EUROPE

The controversial Memorandum of Understanding, signed between the EU and Tunisia on July 16th, has not had the effect the EU and the Italian government desired. According to an analysis by the ISPI Research Institute's Matteo Villa, when looking at the Ministry of the Interior's data, arrivals from Tunisia increased significantly after the agreement. For example, in September, the boats arriving on Lampedusa were mostly from Tunisia. Moreover, for years, the Tunisian Coast Guard intercepted about 50% of migrants trying to leave the country. But, in recent months, and especially after the memorandum was signed, there has been a decrease in Tunisian Coast Guard's activities. This may be part of the Tunisian president's strategy to increase pressure on the EU by causing an increase in Mediterranean Sea crossings.

On September 30th, a fire broke out in the hold of the ferry, "Cossyra," as it made its way from Lampedusa to Porto Empedocle. Fortunately, no one was hurt. A unit of Carabinieri was on board as was Red Cross personnel. Also traveling on the ferry were 83 migrants who had to be transferred from Lampedusa's hotspot to the hotspot on Porto Empedocle (Sicily). Once again, the connection with the island has proven fragile. There is only one ferry that operates on Lampedusa, limiting residents' mobility and any eventual transfers of refugees.

PUSH-BACKS

In September, borderline-europe documented 1,187 forced returns to Libya and 50 to Tunisia.

On September 2nd, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard intercepted a boat carrying 45 people of different nationalities fleeing the coast of Al-Khums and forcibly returned them to Libya. On the same day, 16 people in distress, 270 kilometers off the coast of Malta, contacted Alarm Phone. Authorities did not respond to Alarm Phone's alert. Eventually, Alarm Phone lost contact with the people who called. Relatives later reported that the group was forcibly brought to Benghazi.

On September 29th, Sea-Watch's aircraft, Seabird, witnessed the so-called Libyan Coast Guard brutally attacking a group of people traveling on a dinghy. The so-called Libyan Coast Guard rammed into the dinghy with the new CP300 patrol boats gifted to Libya by the Italian government earlier this year. This attack caused the dinghy to sink. Some of the passengers were taken by force onto a Libyan ship. Of the approximately 50 people who fell into the water, the rescue ship, Louise Michel, found no survivors when it arrived at the site of the attack.

CIVIL RESISTANCE

In September, [borderline-europe](#) reported 1,089 people saved at sea by rescue ships. A total of 9 different ships were at sea during this period. Italian authorities illegally detained 3 maritime rescue ships within a 48 hour period in August: [SeaEye4](#) (Sea-Eye) and [Aurora](#) (Sea-Watch) were released after 20 days, while [Open Arms](#) (Proactiva Open Arms) was released on September 27th. However, Italian authorities ordered [Mediterranea](#) to remove all equipment and gear from its ship, [Mare Jonio](#), prior to its release. Under Article 650 of the Italian Criminal Code, non-compliance of the order would carry a penalty of up to 3 months in prison and monetary fines. The only civil rescue ship flying the Italian flag, [Mare Jonio](#) received the order following a thorough inspection of the ship by Italian Maritime authorities. All required navigation documents were renewed during the long and exhaustive inspection which lasted from August 22nd to September 6th. In yet another instance in which the Italian government has attempted to hinder and block rescue operations in the Mediterranean, Italian authorities still refused to certify [Mare Jonio](#) as a “rescue ship” after the inspection was concluded.

On September 12th, [Nadir](#) (RESQSHIP) assisted 5 boats in distress carrying 231 people.

On September 16th, following 20 continuous hours of rescue efforts, [Geo Barents](#) (MSF) rescued 11 boats in distress and assisted the Italian Coast Guard in rescuing another 4 boats. A total of 471 people, including 205 children, were rescued and taken to Brindisi in Puglia. By assigning distant ports to disembark survivors, the Italian government continues to make NGOs' work more challenging than it already is. For example, [Ocean Viking](#) (SOS Méditerranée) was assigned to go to Ancona in the Marche region, [LifeSupport](#) (Emergency) was assigned an even farther port in Ravenna in the region of Emilia-Romagna, [Geo Barents](#) had to sail to Civitavecchia in the region of Lazio, and [Open Arms](#) (Proactiva Open Arms) was forced to travel as far as Carrara in Tuscany.

Moreover, the issue of rescue at sea has also caused tension between Italy and Germany. The Italian government has criticized Germany for providing financial aid to NGO rescue vessels. However, the German Bundestag had already approved this assistance in 2022. The ships, [Sea-Eye 4](#) (Sea Eye) and [Humanity 1](#) (SOS Humanity), will receive this aid as well as Italy's [Sant'Egidio](#) community, a religious institution that has organized humanitarian corridors for refugees on several occasions in the past.



MEDREPORT
SEPTEMBER 2023

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