



**MEDREPORT**  
**AUGUST 2023**

# INDEX

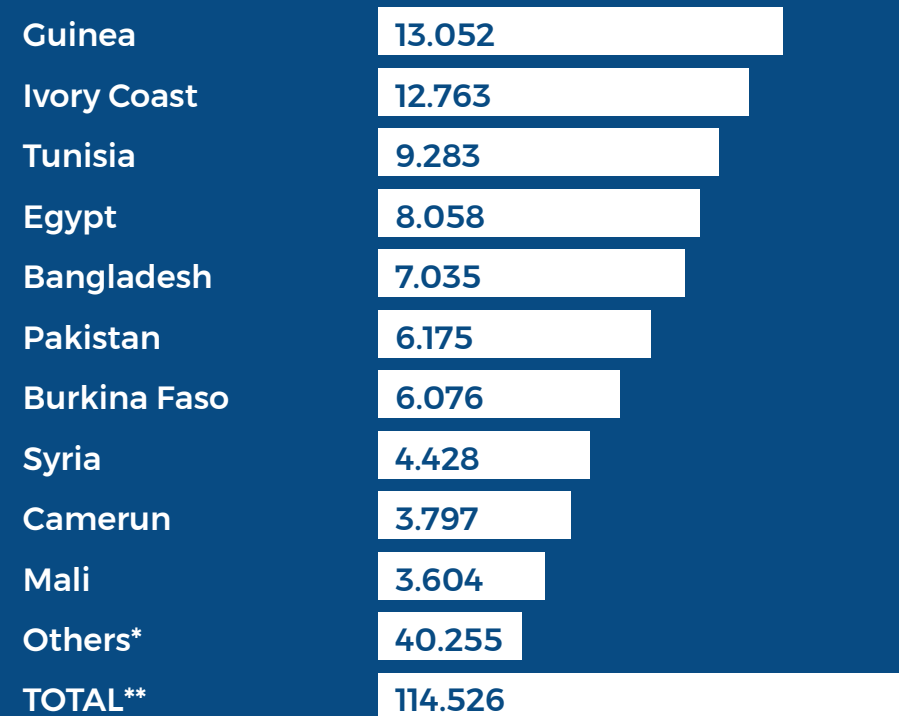
<b>What the numbers tell us</b>	<b>3</b>
Data for the months of August	
<b>From Sea to Prison:</b>	<b>5</b>
The Report on the Criminalization of So-Called Smugglers	
<b>Med Care for Ukraine</b>	<b>8</b>
News from the project	
<b>MSH Monthly report on migrations</b>	<b>10</b>
World and Europe	
<b>Borderline Europe Report</b>	<b>18</b>
News from Central Mediterranean	

# WHAT DO THE NUMBERS TELL US

In August, the number of people forced to flee across the Mediterranean and who managed to arrive in Italy totaled 25,652, including 1,231 unaccompanied minors.

These weeks have strained local resources and placed increased responsibilities on administrators who have yet again decried their inability to provide adequate housing or implement a suitable integration process. There have been an unprecedented number of landings on the island of Lampedusa. Existing facilities and temporary reception centers are extremely overcrowded. Many of the boats that arrived departed from Sfax, Tunisia.

## NATIONALITIES DECLARED AT THE TIME OF LANDING (UPDATED TO AUGUST 31, 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

New measures were presented at the first Council of Ministers that took place at the end of August after summer break. Of note, the process of returning illegal immigrants is to be accelerated. According to Matteo Biffoni, ANCI (National Association of Italian Municipalities) Delegate for Immigration, the reception of migrants in Italian cities is on the verge of collapse.

Even Porto Empedocle, which has become the second most common landing place for those arriving by sea, immediately after Lampedusa, has found itself managing a significant influx of people in recent weeks.

After Porto Empedocle was designated by the government as a hotspot for the region of Sicily, citizens and merchants protested. Consequently, the protests led to a large-scale transfer of migrants to other Italian regions, thus clearing out the hotspot. In fact, this is an example of how the current policy approach to managing migration works: gradually empty out reception structures which had initially become massively overcrowded, thus lightening the burden.



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.

# FROM SEA TO PRISON:

## THE REPORT ON THE CRIMINALIZATION OF SO-CALLED SMUGGLERS

Italy, the EU, and the UN have consistently argued that the arrest of so-called “smugglers” would be a way of fighting human trafficking and preventing deaths at sea. However, Arci Porco Rosso’s and Alarm Phone’s report, produced in collaboration with Borderline Sicilia and borderline-europe, demonstrates that the criminalization of so-called “smugglers” has actually contributed to some of the worst maritime disasters in recent history.

“**From the Sea to Prison**” is the result of these associations’ desire to shed light on the phenomenon of the Italian government’s criminalization of so-called “smugglers.” Its primary aim is to condemn the policy of closing borders, which essentially eliminates any possibility of reaching Europe through safe routes, especially for those from the southern regions of the world.

The report acknowledges that the application of criminal law is useful for the enforcement of these closure policies and it adopts a radically critical position against the criminalization of border crossing as it is embodied in the figure of the “smuggler.” The criminalization of people crossing borders detracts attention from the racist violence perpetrated against them by Europe.

However, the problem does not lie in the people crossing borders. The problem lies in the border control system itself which forces hundreds of individuals to undertake dangerous, often fatal, journeys every day.

The abolition of this system, rather than the criminalization of those who face its challenges, is the only appropriate response to the current situation.

### **Global Issue, Local Problem**

The criminal prosecution of so-called “smugglers” in Italy must be interpreted within the wider context of the criminalization of migration to Europe. In the specific case of “smugglers,” this is a manner of punishing the mere act of steering a boat carrying migrants who enter Europe without a visa.

It is important to remember that criminal proceedings against boat crews take place not only in Italy but also in Greece, Spain, the Canary Islands, and the United Kingdom. The tragic cases that emerged from this investigation therefore, represent only a part of an international phenomenon.

Even so, these events must be analyzed within an Italian context. Italy is a country in which acts of solidarity towards migrants are targeted by prosecutors. The criminal proceedings brought against the crews of civilian search and rescue missions (Iuventa and Mediterranea) and the conviction of Riace’s mayor are examples of this.

### **Criminalizing Migration**

Arci Porco Rosso and Alarm Phone’s report, produced in collaboration with Borderline Sicilia and borderline-europe, analyzes and condemns the criminalization of migration as it is embodied in the figure of the “smuggler.”

Italy has spent decades prosecuting individuals for simply steering boats carrying migrants to its shores by applying penal codes, conducting undercover police operations, and enacting anti-mafia emergency powers in order to strengthen the European border regime. For the report, many individuals involved in these cases were interviewed: boat pilots, former prisoners, lawyers, researchers, activists, judges, members of the police force and the Coast Guard, and dozens of court sentences were examined to establish the nature of Italy’s criminalization of migration.

Convictions for “smuggling” carry sentences ranging from 2 to 20 years and sometimes even longer sentences are given. Of the nearly 1,000 cases that were examined, it was discovered that 20 individuals are serving prison sentences of more than 10 years and 7 others received life sentences.

### The Report examines:

- official data on arrests and imprisonment of boat pilots;
- almost 1,000 cases which appeared in Italian media in the last ten years;
- the manner Italian law has been continually amended over the past 25 years in order to criminalize and prosecute boat pilots;
- the different types of boat pilots punished by law, including those who were coerced and subjected to violence;
- how all maritime routes to Italy have been criminalized: from Egypt and Tunisia to Algeria, from Libya to Greece and Albania;
- how inaccurate photographs and unreliable witnesses are used to identify boat pilots at sea;
- court cases that failed to protect defendants' rights and led to convictions based on inconsistent evidence and limiting individuals' access to a defense;
- ways the Italian prison system fails to protect the rights of foreign prisoners, such as denying boat pilots the possibility of house arrest;
- social and economic consequences for boat pilots after their release from prison, even in cases when acquitted.

### The report shows:

- the criminalization of migrant boat pilots in Italy has increased steadily over the past 25 years, especially since 2015;
- the criminalization of smugglers does not prevent deaths at sea, but, it does contribute to shipwrecks and maritime disasters;
- the consequences of being arrested as a boat pilot have a profound impact on people's lives, even when the charges are dropped;
- the rights of people convicted of smuggling are neglected: contact with families is often non-existent, translation services are rare in the Italian prison system, and access to an adequate defense is not guaranteed.

# MED CARE FOR UKRAINE

## ON AUGUST 11TH THE PROJECT OFFICIALLY TURNED ONE YEAR OLD

August was a very important month for the MedCare For Ukraine Project.

To begin with, the project officially turned 1 year old on August 11th. Mediterranea is proud to be able to say it has been present in Ukrainian territory for 320 days out of 365.

To date, there have been 32 medical missions during which doctors and nurses have offered basic medical care to over 2,000 patients. Furthermore, in August MedCare completed its 1,000th healthcare visit

The two main news items for the month of August concern the places affected by the MedCare Project. Firstly, the refugee center set up inside the gymnasiums at the Polytechnic University in Skystriivi Park has been closed. The refugees living there have been moved to other reception centers in Lviv Oblast.

Secondly, MedCare began working in a new location. MedCare activities are now taking place in one of Lviv's high schools' dormitory buildings housing students and refugees. The third and fifth floor are dedicated to about 50 refugees who are mostly seniors and children.



Mediterranea is the only association providing medical assistance to the guests in the dormitory. However, other international organizations have undertaken renovation of the building, as it is dilapidated and run down.

Refugees will be allowed to remain inside the Student Centre until the end of the state of emergency in Ukraine.

Unfortunately, in September, something happened that fills us with dismay and sadness. On September 11, Emma-Beatriu Ascaso Igual and Anthony “Tonko” Ihnat, ‘Road to Relief Ukraine’ activists, lost their lives in a Russian artillery attack while traveling in a car west of Bakhmut.



# **MSH MONTHLY REPORT ON MIGRATIONS**



# WORLD



**TUNISIA, August 8th:** Tunisian authorities carry out a large-scale refoulement. About 500 migrants, including several pregnant women and minors, are forced to the border with Algeria. There are reports of violence and separation of households during the maneuver.

**TUNISIA-LIBYA, August 10th:** Tunisia and Libya announce an agreement on migration flows along the border has taken effect. The agreement provides for bilateral management of migrants. According to reports provided by humanitarian associations present in the area, about 300 people were registered along the border. Of these, only 76 men, 42 women, and 8 minors entered Tunisia. The rest of the migrants are in Libyan territory.

**TUNISIA-LIBYA, August 11th:** The bodies of 27 migrants are found along the border between Tunisia and Libya. The conditions along the border are extreme and local authorities are accused of carrying out mass push-backs in the desert. According to data collected by the IOM, migrants attempting to cross the border do not receive any assistance from either Libyan or Tunisian border guards who, in turn, deny these allegations.

**TUNISIA, August 11th:** Former Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki launches an appeal through his social media to demand an investigation into the shipwreck off Sfax. According to the survivors, the Tunisian Coast Guard deliberately sank the boat carrying a group of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean.

**LIBYA, August 16th:** United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres shares a new report which contains evidence of widespread illicit trafficking and violence against migrants in Libya involving the same Libyan militias that control the country's political and military infrastructure. The document also includes dramatic witness accounts of slavery-like conditions and forced labor which involve victims that include even minors.

**LIBYA, August 17th:** 146 people are wounded and another 55 are killed during clashes between rival militias, Brigade 444 and al-Radaa, in Tripoli. Following the capture of Brigade 444's chief by al-Radaa, violence between the two militias breaks out. Such an occurrence demonstrates that Libya lacks the necessary institutions to keep the peace and that both civilians and migrants face danger on a daily basis.

# WORLD



**CAPE VERDE, August 17th:** A boat in distress carrying about 130 migrants who departed from Fasse Boye in Senegal is reported to authorities in Spain, Mauritania, Morocco, and Senegal. However, assistance arrives much later on the 14th of August after a Spanish fishing ship reaches the vessel. 38 survivors and the bodies of 7 deceased are found on board.

**SAUDI ARABIA, August 21st:** Human Rights Watch releases a report that describes the violence carried out by Saudi border guards along the border with Yemen. Saudi guards reportedly opened fire at close range on groups of migrants coming from the Horn of Africa. Armed patrols are becoming more frequent and violent.

**MOROCCO, August 29th:** A boat sailing from Akhfenir with 60 people on board sinks in the Atlantic leaving 6 dead.

**GREECE, August 2nd:** A group of migrants found themselves in dangerous circumstances near Lagyna along the Evros River. Despite the European Court of Human Rights' ruling, the group was separated, experienced extraordinary violence, and was forcibly pushed back to Turkey.

**MEDITERRANEAN, August 15th:** 379 researchers and civil society members sign an appeal calling for an end to the European Union's and Tunisia's inhumane migration policies. The document has also been published in Arabic and calls for an end to all violence and discrimination against migrants.

**BULGARIA, August 15th:** Alarm Phone reports there is a person in dire need of rescue in Bulgaria near Sredez. Local authorities reach the person in distress and provide assistance and transportation to a hospital.

**GREECE, August 22nd:** Greek police near Soufli force a group of approximately 9 people back to Turkey. Even though Alarm Phone has evidence of what occurred, Greek authorities deny the push-back took place.

**EUROPEAN UNION, August 28th:** 56 NGOs ask the Italian government to end the blockade that has prevented the ships Aurora, Open Arms, and Sea-Eye 4 from continuing with rescue activities at sea. Any attempt to obstruct Civil Fleet activities results in more deaths at sea and shipwrecks.

**EUROPEAN UNION, August 30th:** While on a visit to Tunis, the European People's Party leader, Manfred Weber, invites President Saied to deliver concrete results on the EU-Tunisia Memorandum. The agreement provides economic aid for the country provided that measures are taken to contain migratory flows from Africa. However, the true consequences of the agreement are daily rejection and suffering for migrants.

# SEA

**CATANIA, August 1st:** The Italian Coast Guard rescues 24 people and they disembark at the port of Catania.

**LIBYA, August 1st:** 170 people fleeing Sirte are intercepted and deported to Libya by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

**LAMPEDUSA, August 1st:** A boat carrying about 20 people capsizes off the coast of Lampedusa. The survivors are rescued and brought to the island.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 3rd:** In 6 separate operations coordinated by the Italian Coast Guard, Open Arms rescues 264 people. They are brought to Civitavecchia to disembark.

**LAMPEDUSA, August 4th:** 587 people aboard 20 boats arrive in Lampedusa after being rescued the previous night by Italian authorities.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 4th:** The sailboat, Astral (Open Arms), rescues 136 people in 3 separate operations.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 4th:** South of Lampedusa, Nadir (ResQShip) rescues 150 people aboard 4 boats.

**OINOUSSES, August 6th:** The Greek Coast Guard rescues 22 people. They disembark in Greece after having been previously rejected in Turkey.

**LAMPEDUSA, August 6th:** 57 people are rescued by the Coast Guard and brought to Lampedusa following two shipwrecks off the coast of the island which resulted in two fatalities and 28 still missing.

**KERKENNAH ISLANDS, August 7th:** 44 people are reported missing and 23 are dead after a migrant boat sinks off the coast of Kerkennah Island.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 8th:** Geo Barents (Doctors Without Borders) rescues 47 people in the Maltese SAR area. They disembark at the port of La Spezia.

**FALKONERA ISLAND, August 8th:** The Greek Coast Guard rescues 50 people off the island of Falkonera.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 8th-9th:** Astral assists 105 people on board 4 boats until the arrival of the Italian Coast Guard. They later disembark at Lampedusa.

**LAMPEDUSA, August 9th:** A boat fleeing Tunisia sinks off the coast of Lampedusa killing 41 people. There are 3 survivors. A Frontex aircraft had spotted the boat the day before the accident.

**LANZAROTE, August 9th-10th:** Approximately 385 people from North West Africa traveling on 7 separate boats land in Lanzarote, in the Canary Islands.

# SEA

**CIVIL FLEET, August 9th:** Acting on a report from a Frontex aircraft, Louise Michel rescues 20 people south of Lampedusa.

**LAMPEDUSA, August 10th-11th:** More than 3,000 people land in Lampedusa in 48 hours.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 10th:** Mare\*Go assists 176 people aboard 4 separate boats. They are escorted to Lampedusa while waiting for the Coast Guard to intervene.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 11th:** Nadir assists 95 people on board 2 boats until Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée) arrives and takes them on board.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 11th:** Astral rescues 60 people aboard 4 boats in an operation coordinated by the Italian Coast Guard.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 11th:** Ocean Viking rescues 623 people in 11 operations. 369 disembark at Porto Empedocle. The remaining survivors disembark at Civitavecchia.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 11th:** Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity) rescues 106 people. They disembark at Ancona which is 1,400 km from the rescue site.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 12th:** After fleeing Libya, 76 people are rescued in the Maltese SAR area by Life Support (Emergency). Naples is assigned as a designated port of safety.

**SFAX, August 14th:** 23 people are rescued and returned to Tunisia by the Coast Guard after a boat fleeing the country capsized. 7 people are still missing, while 11 have died.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 14th:** Nadir assists 125 people aboard 4 boats while waiting for the Coast Guard to arrive. The survivors are later taken to Lampedusa.

**RHODES, August 14th:** The Greek Coast Guard rescues 22 people off the coast of Rhodes. Two of the survivors are later arrested and accused of being smugglers.

**FARMAKONISI, August 14th:** The Greek Coast Guard rescues a group of approximately 23 people off the coast of Farmakonisi Island.

**SAMOS, August 14th:** The Greek Coast Guard pushes about 30 people back to Turkey.

**LIBYA, August 16th:** The so-called Libyan Coast Guard captures and returns approximately 30 people to Libya. The merchant ship, Maridive, is actively involved in the operation.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 17th:** Despite threats from the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, Geo Barents rescues 55 people following an alert by Seabird (Sea-Watch) and brings them to Bari to disembark.

# SEA

**LESBOS, August 17th:** The Greek Coast Guard rescues 13 people and brings them to the island of Lesbos to disembark.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 17th:** Open Arms rescues 196 people in 3 separate operations thanks to the support of Aurora (Sea-Watch).

**SAMOS, August 18th:** The Greek Coast Guard captures approximately 45 people off the Samos coast and forces them back to Turkey.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 19th:** Sea-Eye 4 (Sea-Eye) rescues 114 people in three operations.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 23rd:** Open Arms rescues 195 people in 3 separate operations and takes them to Carrara as instructed by Italian authorities.

**AGATHONISI, August 22nd:** The Greek Coast Guard rescues approximately 23 people off the coast of Agathonisi and takes them to a reception center.

**Rho Island, August 22nd:** The Greek Coast Guard rescues a group of about 15 people off the coast of Rho Island.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 23rd:** Humanity 1 rescues 60 people fleeing Libya.

**LESBOS, August 23rd:** The Turkish Coast Guard takes around 26 people back to the mainland after they were forced back into Turkish territorial waters.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 24th:** Geo Barents rescues 168 people south of Lampedusa and takes them to Brindisi to disembark.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 25th:** Ocean Viking rescues 438 people south of Lampedusa. Genoa is assigned as their port of disembarkation.

**LIBYA, August 25th:** The so-called Libyan Coast Guard captures and departs 40 people to Libya. The merchant ship, Vos Triton, did not intervene before the Libyan patrol boat's arrival.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 26th:** Louise Michel rescues 25 people despite threats from a Libyan patrol boat. The operation is possible thanks to Seabird's support.

**LAMPEDUSA, August 26th-27th:** In less than 36 hours, a record number of 2,345 people land in Lampedusa.

**LAMPIONE ISLAND, August 28th:** 40 people are rescued near the island of Lampione, 20 km from Lampedusa.

**MALTA, August 28th:** The merchant ship, Nikkei Sirius, rescues approximately 39 people fleeing Libya. They are later transferred to Malta.

**LESBOS, August 29th:** After two boats sink off the coast of Lesbos, killing 5 people, the Greek Coast Guard rescues the remaining 18 survivors.

# ITALY

**ROME, August 2nd:** 250 prominent figures from the academic world sign an appeal to the University Chancellor of La Sapienza in Rome requesting that the honorary doctorate in Roman law awarded to Tunisian President Kais Saied be revoked.

**LAMPEDUSA, August 3rd:** Conditions on Lampedusa have drastically deteriorated due to the difficulty in obtaining fuel for boats. Italian authorities have requested that civil rescue organizations operate at sea in emergency situations.

**VENTIMIGLIA, August 4th:** Directives enacted by Ventimiglia's municipal authorities have made the humanitarian circumstances of migrants along the border with France much worse. Voluntary guards have set up patrols in places that could potentially serve as shelter. Police activity has also increased.

**POZZALLO, August 16th:** A CPR (administrative detention facility) will be set up in Pozzallo in order to accelerate the expulsions of migrants who are denied international protection. This is possible thanks to the so-called Cutro Decree which allows the Italian government to expedite repatriations and deportations to countries deemed "safe."

**LAMPEDUSA, August 21st:** Sea-Watch's ship, Aurora, is placed under administrative detention by Italian authorities. The NGO's alleged violations are disputed by the NGO and by the Civil Fleet who describe the charges as false and unfounded.

**CARRARA, August 23rd:** Open Arms has been sanctioned with 20-day detention and a fine of 10,000 euros which are both based on a provision in the so-called "Meloni Decree" which limits Civil Fleet vessels to a single sea rescue operation at a time. Open Arms has pointed out that multiple responses to distress calls had been coordinated by the Italian Coast Guard itself.

**TRAPANI, August 25th:** Italian authorities subject Mare Ionio to inspection following the completion of maintenance work on the ship and after upgrading the rescue equipment on board. The alleged irregularities are in direct contrast with the necessary requirements that must be met in order to obtain a certificate of suitability for SAR activities as issued by RINA, the Italian Naval Registry. This predicament is a direct result of the government's efforts to prevent civilian SAR vessels flying the Italian flag from operating in the Mediterranean.



# ITALY

**MODICA, August 25th:** A new, 84 bed CPR (administrative detention facility) will be constructed in Modica. According to the Cutro Decree, the structure is intended to expedite processing and increase the number of repatriations and deportations to countries Italy deems “safe.” Local sources also point out that the structure will be situated in an industrial area and will be completely isolated from the rest of the city.

**CALTANISSETTA, August 30th:** Groups of migrants protest in front of Caltanissetta’s courthouse, demanding improvements in sanitary conditions at Pian del Lago’s CPR (administrative detention facility). Reports state that the facility lacks clothing, food, and healthcare. Moreover, no legal assistance has been provided to the migrants nor has any so-called pocket money been given to the people residing in the facility.

**FRENCH-ITALIAN BORDER, August 9th:** A lifeless body is found on the Alpine border between Italy and France along the path connecting Monginevro to Briançon.

**TURIN, August 30th:** The xenophobic, group identity association, “La Barriera,” posts signs saying, “Go home, we cannot help you” in English, French, and Arabic on the walls of the first reception center in Turin located in via Traves.

# REPORT BORDERLINE EUROPE

## NEWS FROM CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN



## ARRIVALS

In August, *borderline-europe* reported 22,780 arrivals in Italy. Even though the month of July usually has the highest number of arrivals for the year, the number of August's arrivals exceeds July's by more than 600. Even the Italian Interior Ministry speaks of well over 25,000 arrivals, no less. On August 15th, the estimate of 100,000 arrivals for the year was surpassed. On that day, Interior Minister Piantedosi announced the drafting of a new security decree which, if enacted, will exacerbate the refugee situation as much as previously issued decrees and legislation.

At present, public discussion focuses on arrivals from Tunisia. European efforts to prevent migration to Tunisia and President Saied's racist campaign against migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa have led to a significant increase in arrivals from Tunisia in recent times. Concurrently, arrivals from Libya have also increased compared to the same period of the previous year.

# DEAD AND MISSING

borderline-europe reports 320 deaths and people missing in August. Since the beginning of the year, more than 2,000 people have died or have been reported missing in the central Mediterranean. This is a significant increase compared to the same period last year and accounts for only documented cases. These numbers are most likely much higher due to cases going unreported.

Even in the early days of the month, the number of shipwrecks and capsized boats on the route between Tunisia and Lampedusa significantly increased. In an attempt to get to safety before giving birth, boats often carry pregnant women trying to escape the spiral of violence. Miscarriages of advanced stage pregnancies often occur after accidents at sea. On August 3rd, after being rescued by Italian authorities, a young Nigerian woman was taken by helicopter to a hospital where she had a stillbirth. Two other people died during the ship's crossing.

On August 7th, only two people were rescued from a shipwreck in Tunisian waters. Along with the survivors, 11 bodies were recovered. However, another 44 passengers are considered missing.

On August 12th, a boat that had sailed from Zuwara, Libya capsized in Tunisian waters. The 32 survivors who were rescued were taken to Tunisia. The remaining 18 passengers drowned.

# WAYS TO EUROPE

That many crimes against refugees and the mass deaths have persisted for many years is a confirmation that the Mediterranean has become a lawless place. However, in recent weeks sensational news reports of alleged pirates plundering refugees traveling at sea made headlines. Several Tunisian fishermen were arrested on these charges and are currently in custody. The defendants deny the accusations and claim to work as fishermen at sea. It remains to be seen whether the allegations are true or whether these accusations are part of another hateful criminalization strategy similar to the systematic arrests of smugglers. However, these accusations are without a doubt a political ploy meant to divert attention from the responsibilities the EU and European decision-makers have towards people on the run.

# PUSH-BACKS

In August, [borderline-europe](#) reported 2,319 people were forcibly brought to Libya and 1,146 were forcibly brought to Tunisia.

Even though refoulements are mostly carried out by Libyan militias and by the Tunisian Navy, in August a merchant ship, PGE Tornado, was also involved. After taking on board 24 survivors, including 9 children, who were stranded in the Maltese SAR area, European authorities ordered PGE Tornado to take the refugees to a port in Libya even though Libya is not considered a place of safety. These people, many of whom urgently need medical assistance, are now being held in Misrata, Libya. In Libyan detention camps, however, people are denied care, they are subjected to arbitrary violence (see also [here](#)), and are threatened with deportation to war torn areas such as Syria or Egypt.

This month, the ship, Tarek Ben Zayed, also attracted special attention. Since June of this year, this ship, used by Libyan militias in Benghazi under the command of General Haftar, has been repeatedly seen taking part in especially violent operations against refugees.

On August 18th, on its way from Lebanon to Italy, a boat carrying 110 refugees, including 40 children, made a distress call to Alarm Phone and reported that it was being chased and fired at by a boat flying the Libyan flag in the Maltese search and rescue area near the Greek island of Crete.

One person had already been shot and one of the engines had broken down after being hit. European authorities were informed of the urgency of the situation and the people on board reported they saw a Frontex drone. However, the Maltese authorities felt no responsibility to intervene and the Greek authorities launched an unsuccessful search operation the next day, which was too late. The relatives of the people on board then informed Alarm Phone that the passengers had probably been taken to Libya and detained in Benghazi.

In spite of this event, in August, Italy delivered three more patrol boats to Libyan militias in order to make the work of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard even more effective in intercepting boats from Libya headed to Italy or, as in the case described above, from other locations.

# CIVIL RESISTANCE

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's efforts have resulted in a reduction in the number of NGO rescues to almost half of what they were in the same period last year. Despite these efforts, the number of arrivals has simultaneously tripled. A scientific study conducted by the University of Potsdam, published on August 3rd of this year, once again refutes the claim that the presence of civilian rescue ships potentially acts as an incentive causing more people to undertake the journey towards Europe.

At the beginning of August, it became, once again, obvious that without the civilian network, the number of people dead and missing would be much higher. On the island of Lampedusa, the Coast Guard had to limit its activities due to lack of fuel. Even though the restrictive Piantedosi decree on NGOs prohibits consecutive rescue missions, the Italian government briefly abandoned its antagonistic stance as the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Rome coordinated countless back-to-back rescue missions together with civil rescue ships. On August 11th, Ocean Viking carried out the largest rescue operation to date and took onboard 623 survivors.

However, just a few days after Ocean Viking's rescue operation, Italian authorities issued three detention orders in less than 48 hours to three civilian sea rescue vessels based on the decree.

Open Arms, Sea-Eye 4, and the speedboat, Aurora, will not be allowed to leave their current ports for 20 days, plus a fine. Even though Italian authorities had ordered the previous rescue operations, the administrative detention has been justified by the execution of consecutive rescue operations. The case of Sea-Watch's Aurora is particularly egregious. Not only did the ship run out of drinking water, but it failed to reach the assigned port, Trapani, because it did not have enough fuel on-board. After several requests for a closer port, Sea-Watch was ordered to bring the people aboard to Tunisia. According to Human Rights Watch, Tunisia cannot be considered a port of safety. Thus, the ship's crew refused to take the people onboard back to the place they had just escaped. Entry to Lampedusa's port was allowed after further negotiation. The ship was, then, detained upon its arrival.

Restricting civil organizations and inadequate support on Lampedusa are political calculations aimed at not only at reducing the number of arrivals, but they are also intended to cause more deaths and make crossings more dangerous. Clearly, the continuous increase in arrivals demonstrates that refugee civilian resistance against the European border regime continues to grow despite the repression of solidarity.



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