



PH CREDITS: PILOTES VOLONTAIRES



MEDREPORT
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MISSION MEDITERRANEA MIGRANTES

182 PEOPLE RESCUED
IN 24 HOURS



After the first operation, in collaboration with the Italian Coast Guard, two more rescues were carried out between Saturday and Sunday by the ship MARE JONIO, assisted by the Catholic Foundation's sailing boat.

FIRST RESCUE

given by Tiziano Schiena (Alliance with Refugees in Libya) who reviewed the four years of work on the European side of the Mediterranean, made possible by the inspiring acts of resistance of more than 5000 people in front of the Tripoli offices, both before and after the violent evictions put in place by the Libyan militias.

THE FIRST ROUND TABLE

As soon as the MARE JONIO passed the island of Lampedusa on Saturday afternoon, 24 August, flanked by the sailing boat MIGRANTES, it received numerous reports of boats in distress fleeing from Libya and Tunisia.

In particular, thanks to overflights by the civilian Colibri observation plane of Pilotes Volontaires, the ship by MEDITERRANEA Saving Humans was able to locate and intercept a wooden boat about to sink with 67 people on board, including 16 women and 15 small children. Our rescue team reached the boat in distress in the corridor between Tunisia and Lampedusa, about 25 nautical miles from the pelagic island, and immediately started distributing life jackets, stabilizing and securing the vessel.

A few minutes after the communication from the MARE JONIO, a Coast Guard SAR patrol boat, the CP311, arrived on the scene and rescued the people in distress and took them to Lampedusa.

SECOND RESCUE OPERATION

MARE JONIO, together with the support vessel MIGRANTES, was thus able to continue its southward patrol of the central Mediterranean, checking the numerous alerts received from Alarm Phone and civil aircraft, as well as the positions of vessels in distress reported by radio by Tunisian and Sicilian fishermen.

On Saturday night, MARE JONIO had to carry out its second rescue operation after it had difficulty locating, in the dark, a dinghy overloaded with people, drifting with its tubes already deflated and in imminent danger of being shipwrecked in international waters more than 30 miles south of Lampedusa. 50 people were evacuated to the MARE JONIO, including 2 women and up to 43 unaccompanied minors, mostly Ethiopian nationals but also from Sudan. The dinghy had left Abu Kammash four days earlier and the long stay at sea had weakened the people, many of whom were suffering from severe dehydration.

Shortly after the rescue operation on board MEDITERRANEA's ship had been completed - at around 2.40am - the Coast Guard patrol boat CP327 intervened and transferred the shipwrecked people from the MARE JONIO to enable them to disembark quickly in Lampedusa.





THE THIRD OPERATION

At this point, the MARE JONIO and the support vessel resumed their southward voyage towards the last known positions of 2 vessels in distress reported by the distress call: at around 6.10 am, with the first light of dawn on Sunday 25th, the bridge of the ship spotted a fiberglass vessel dangerously heeled over and in danger of sinking, almost 40 miles south of Lampedusa. On board were 65 people, including 5 unaccompanied minors of Syrian, Pakistani and Bengali nationality, who were rescued by the MEDITERRANEA Rescue Team in the third operation of this Mission 18. Once safely on board the MARE JONIO and receiving first aid from our medical team, it was noted that most of them showed signs of the violence they had suffered during their stay in Libya.

Mission 18: together where you need to be

It is also important to underline that, although all 3 rescue operations took place in the SAR area under Maltese jurisdiction, the Maltese authorities, who had been informed, were never available and never offered their assistance in these cases.

MARE JONIO has therefore always coordinated with its own flagship Maritime Rescue Centre, the IT MRCC in Rome.

**STORIES OF BORDERS
REJECTIONS AND
DEPORTATIONS OF
SYRIAN REFUGEES**



Human Rights Watch has sued the Cypriot authorities for carrying out forced repatriations against some Syrian refugees in Lebanon. For years now, not only Lebanese authorities but also Cypriot authorities have been carrying out repatriations and deportations of people on the move to prevent them from reaching European shores, ignoring international law and fundamental human rights.

Lebanon, Cyprus (and Syria) cooperate to prevent Syrian refugees from reaching Europe

In early September, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released the report “I Can’t Go Home, Stay Here, or Leave,” a 90-page document that shows how Syrian refugees attempting to flee Lebanon are intercepted by the Lebanese army and forcibly returned to Syria. The report is structured through 16 interviews with Syrian refugees between August 2021 and September 2023. Some of them reported having paid traffickers even more than €5,000 for the crossing, which then ended in refoulement. The interviews were supported and corroborated by pictures, videos and tracking data. In addition, seven NGOs working specifically with Syrian refugees, a Lebanese lawyer, and the Lebanese offices of two UN organizations and two humanitarian agencies were involved.

Lebanese and Syrian authorities are working together to prevent Syrian refugees from reaching Europe by deporting them back to Syria, a country torn apart by a terrible conflict for more than a decade now. The European Union has directly funded refoulement activities by the Lebanese authorities: a €16.7 million grant towards various Lebanese security authorities was paid by the EU and its member states from 2020 to 2023, precisely for the implementation of border management projects.

More recently, in May, the EU included in its €1 billion support package to Lebanon, on the one hand, funds to support Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and on the other hand, some €200 million that will instead fund infrastructure, equipment and training of security forces and military to strengthen border controls.

In addition, as part of EU-funded efforts to control migration, Cypriot authorities also repatriated Syrian people to Lebanon, where they were subsequently deported by Lebanese security agencies. Cyprus, a member state of the European Union, has become an increasingly common destination on the route between the country and Lebanon.

The first rejections documented by HRW date back to 2020, when the association had reported how more than 200 people were summarily turned away or deported.

By expelling hundreds of asylum seekers without actually allowing them access to asylum procedures, Cypriot authorities also forced them to return to their home country, handing them over to Syrian soldiers or even unidentified gunmen inside Syria. Some people testified that Cypriot police officers used violence against them, using Tasers and batons.

Irregular crossings leaving Lebanon have increased in recent years: in 2021, UNHCR recorded 38 attempts involving 1,570 people, while, in July 2024, there were 61 attempts to reach Cyprus, involving 2,541 people, most of them Syrians. According to UNHCR's 2024 data, Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the world, with nearly 800,000 Syrians registered. However, Syrians are not considered to be displaced or refugees, as the country is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The explosion in the port of Beirut, followed by the Covid-19 pandemic, has severely worsened conditions in the country and, consequently, those of the migrant people living there. Nadia Hardman, HRW researcher for the Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, told of the arbitrary arrests and detentions that Syrian people face in the country, in an environment that has become increasingly xenophobic over the years.

Hardman said that what is being witnessed is a "situation where people are being held in a no-man's land between Lebanon and Syria and a collusion between Lebanese and Cypriot authorities and smuggling networks to send Syrian refugees back." According to the association then, the summary expulsion of Syrian returnees and those expelled from Cyprus would be a serious violation of the principle of non-refoulement, that principle which prohibits refoulement to third countries where people are at risk of torture, inhuman treatment or possible harm in general. On top of this,

Cyprus violates the prohibition against indirect refoulement - called chain or secondary refoulement - since the expulsion of Syrian people to Lebanon puts them at risk of further refoulement to Syria. We are thus witnessing a double, and very serious, violation of international rights and disrespect for the human rights of migrant people.

THE POLISH-BELARUSIAN BORDER

DOUBLE STANDARDS,
VIOLENCE,
MARGINALIZATION



The Polish-Belarusian border is attracting attention because of the new arrivals, mainly from the Middle East and North Africa. Here, instead of welcoming policies (which have facilitated the reception and integration of about two million refugees on the same border), there is an increasing use of illegal and violent refoulement and, as of June 2024, the reintroduction of an “exclusion zone”.

Double standards in reception policy and treatment of migrants at the Polish-Belarusian border

The Polish-Ukrainian border has become a symbol of solidarity and hospitality for refugees fleeing the conflict in their country. As the war continued, Poland adopted an exceptionally liberal policy to facilitate the reception and integration of about two million Ukrainian refugees. This approach included the possibility of seeking employment without the need for a work visa, facilitated access to health services and public education, and the active support of numerous associations and local communities, which made daily efforts to include and integrate the refugees present on Polish territory. The close historical and cultural ties between the two countries, as well as the common experience of oppression by foreign powers, also strengthen Poland’s solidarity in welcoming and integrating refugees.

This contrasts with the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border, where the dynamics are quite different. This region has attracted attention because of the new arrivals, mainly from the Middle

East and North Africa. Here, instead of a policy of welcoming, there is an increasing use of illegal and violent refoulement and the reintroduction in early June 2024 of an ‘exclusion zone’ that is officially on Polish territory. This zone ranges from 200 metres to two kilometres in the wooded areas of Bialowieza and was established in response to an incident in which a border guard was shot dead by a migrant.

The introduction of this exclusion zone is justified not only by the death of the soldier, but also in the context of the so-called “fight against the instrumentalisation of migration” carried out by Belarus and the Russian Federation. It is defined as a set of actions by “states or other actors” to facilitate irregular migratory movements to another country in an attempt to destabilise it. It was first heard of in 2021, when higher than usual numbers of migrants arrived from the Russian border and alarmed the Nordic and Baltic countries, which had adopted illegal refoulement practices, justifying them precisely as a response to instrumentalisation. Russia and Belarus have always returned the accusations to sender, saying that the West was simply supporting a campaign of slander and defamation against the Federation and Minsk.

The reintroduction of the exclusion zone makes access to the area impossible for aid workers and activists, who face increasing criminalisation of solidarity. Many of them risk imprisonment for trying to help migrants stranded for weeks in the no-go zone, with one government determined to use them as pawns in a political game and the other even more determined to keep them out of its borders. The border area is mainly covered by forests and with very little chances to find food, water or blankets. According to Grupa Granica, a well-known group supporting the refugees on the

Polish-Belarusian border, the police previously arrested four volunteers for helping a family of seven in the forest and later charged them with aiding and abetting illegal immigration, a crime punishable by up to eight years in prison.

More recently, tensions have been heightened by the authorisation for Polish border guards to open fire on migrants trying to cross the border. The law was passed with 401 favorable votes and 17 against. This new law allows the use of firearms as an extreme measure of 'self-defense' from migrants attempting to cross border barriers, a decision that has provoked a wave of criticism from various human rights groups. Indeed, such a measure could have tragic consequences, endangering the lives and safety of migrants, who often include families with children. The possibility of using firearms poses a serious threat to the fundamental rights of migrants and contradicts the principles of international protection enshrined in the Conventions. Access to the area becomes not only difficult but also dangerous for anyone who is not a border guard. The right to provide humanitarian assistance and to inform people of their rights should be guaranteed in all circumstances and without discrimination.

Past experience shows how crucial humanitarian assistance at the border is in the run-up to winter; Human Rights Watch reports that the practice of completely closing the border has already resulted in the deaths of 55 migrants in the past, including children. If you are not caught in the exclusion zone, treatment on arrival at the border is nothing short of inhumane, with many documented cases of beatings, dog bites and detention in extremely harsh conditions.

The Polish border police have been accused of using brutal methods to deter attempts to cross the border, including summary and violent illegal push-backs, with no opportunity for migrants to apply for asylum.

Recently, a consortium of NGOs working at the border signed a joint letter to the new Polish government, pointing out that the practices of refoulement violate the principle of non-refoulement, given that the state to which they are being refused entry is Belarus.

The situation at the Polish-Belarusian border clearly shows a double standard in reception policies and treatment of different groups of migrants.

While refugees enjoy a robust reception and hospitality system, migrants from regions such as the Middle East and North Africa through Belarus face increasing obstacles and brutal illegal rejections. This highlights serious gaps in respect for human rights and the coherence of reception policies. Addressing these problems requires urgent action to ensure that everyone who reaches the Polish border is treated with dignity, humanity and respect, regardless of their national or ethnic origin.

MSH MONTHLY REPORT ON MIGRATIONS



WORLD

Western Sahara, Aug. 5

A boat carrying 59 people was intercepted by the Moroccan navy off Dakhla in the Atlantic while trying to reach the Canary Islands.

Western Sahara, Aug. 13

2 people died in a shipwreck off Dakhla while trying to reach Europe. 73 people on the boat that set sail from Mauritania survived.

Libya-Tunisia, Aug. 24

The International Organization for Migration reports that since the beginning of 2024, 434 people have died and 611 are missing in the Central Mediterranean route. 14,138 were intercepted and deported to Libya by the so-called Libyan coast guard.

Tunisia, Aug. 30

Alarm Phone Sahara reports that Tunisian authorities have deported 42 people to the desert area on the border with Algeria, leaving them without food, water, medical care or shelter.

United Kingdom, Aug. 3

Following fake news spread on the web, there were violent xenophobic and racist demonstrations led by various far-right movements in some major British cities, causing riots and injuries.

Albania, Aug. 6

Due to delays in the work, the opening of Italian detention centers on Albanian soil provided for in the agreements between the two countries was delayed. Meanwhile, UNHCR has agreed with the Italian government to play a role in monitoring and protecting human rights within the centers.

Serbia-Bosnia, Aug. 23

10 people died while trying to cross the border between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina along the Drina River. While 18 people on the boat managed to reach Bosnian territory.

Spain, Aug. 27

Spanish Prime Minister Sanchez visited Mauritania, Gambia and Senegal to sign protocols with the governments of these three countries to ensure safe migration channels and thus avoid dangerous sea crossings.

Greece, Aug. 29

21 people were attacked and pushed back into Turkey by Greek police while they were near Didymoticho at the Greek-Turkish border along the Evros River.

Germany, Aug. 30

Germany deported and repatriated 28 Afghan citizens on a flight from Leipzig. This is the first deportation from Germany since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021.

SEA

Civil Fleet, Aug. 1 The Louise Michel rescued 43 people in distress in two operations responding to Alarm Phone calls and landed them in Pozzallo.

Rhodes, Aug. 1 The Greek Coast Guard intercepted a boat in distress with about 30 people on board off Rhodes and pushed back into Turkish waters.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 1 Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity) rescued 60 people on an endangered boat that had set sail from Tripoli and disembarked them in Civitavecchia, a port assigned by authorities despite being nearly 1,000 km from the rescue site.

Libya, Aug. 4 106 people on a boat in distress were intercepted and deported to Libya by the so-called Libyan coast guard.

Simy, Aug. 4 25 people who arrived independently on the island of Simy were rescued by Greek authorities.

Sicily, Aug. 5 A boat carrying 17 people in distress was rescued by the Italian Coast Guard southeast of Sicily.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 7 Nadir (ResQShip) stabilized a boat carrying 45 people in distress until the Guardia di Finanza arrived and rescued them.

Kalamata, Aug. 8 A cruise ship rescued 77 people on a boat in distress and, in agreement with Greek authorities, disembarked them in Kalamata.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 8 Thanks to Alarm Phone reporting, Louise Michel rescued 85 people on a boat in distress at sea for 4-5 days and landed them in Pozzallo.

Catania, Aug. 8 166 people were rescued by the Italian Coast Guard in 3 operations and disembarked in Catania.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 9 Life Support (Emergency) carried out two rescue operations, rescuing 67 people and landing them in the port of Ortona.

Libya, Aug. 9 About 65 people on a boat on the verge of shipwreck were intercepted and deported to Libya by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

CRETE, Aug. 9 52 people in distress were rescued by the Greek Coast Guard and disembarked on the island while their boat was off Crete.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 11 Humanity 1 rescued 273 people on 4 boats in distress and landed them in the distant port of Genoa, assigned by Italian authorities.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 9-12 Astral (Open Arms) rescued 110 people on 5 boats in distress. During operations, a lifeless body was also found.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 12 Thanks to an Alarm Phone warning, Nadir stabilized a boat in distress with 51 people on board. 14 of these were rescued and disembarked in Lampedusa by Nadir itself, and the others by the Italian Coast Guard.

Tripoli, Aug. 13 An endangered boat with 220 people on board was intercepted and deported to Tripoli by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

Aegean, Aug. 13 22 people on an endangered vessel were intercepted and deported to Turkey by the Greek Coast Guard.

Pozzallo, Aug. 14 The Italian Coast Guard rescued a boat in distress with about 46 people on board and disembarked them in the port of Pozzallo.

Tobruk, Aug. 15 About 125 people in distress on a boat that set sail from Libya were intercepted and deported to Tobruk by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 15 Thanks to Alarm Phone reporting and air support from Colibri (Pilotes Volontaries), Geo Barents (MSF) rescued 57 people in distress and landed them in the port of Livorno.

Kalolimnos, Aug. 15 19 people who landed independently on the island of Kalolimnos were turned back to Turkey by the Greek Coast Guard.

Aegean, Aug. 15 149 people in distress were intercepted and turned back to Turkey by the Greek Coast Guard.

Inousses, Aug. 17 A boat with 31 people on board arrived independently on the island of Inousses and the people were then rescued by Greek authorities, who transferred them to Chios.

Lesvos, Aug. 20 The Greek Coast Guard rescued about 100 people in distress off the island of Lesvos and landed them in Mytilene.

Kos, Aug. 20 A person fell into the water while on a boat that sailed from Turkey. After several hours of searching, she was rescued by the Greek Coast Guard.

Rhodes, Aug. 21-22 Greek authorities on the island of Rhodes prevented 9 people from two separate landings from seeking asylum in Greece.

Crete, Aug. 22 3 merchant ships in the stretch of sea between Libya and Greece rescued 55 people on a boat in distress and landed them in Crete.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 23 Geo Barents carried out 5 rescue operations, drawing 191 people to safety with assistance from Trotamar III (Compass Collective) and Colibri and landed them at the assigned port of disembarkation in Salerno.

El Hierro, Aug. 23 In just a few hours 358 people arrived in El Hierro, Canary Islands, traveling along the Atlantic Route to Europe.

Samothraki, Aug. 23 20 people who arrived independently on the island of Samothraki were rescued by Greek authorities and transferred to Alexandropoli.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 24-25 Thanks to reports from Alarm Phone and Colibri, Mare Jonio (Mediterranea Saving Humans) rescued 3 boats carrying 182 people in distress. 117 of these were transferred to two Italian Coast Guard patrol boats, while the other 65 were disembarked in Pozzallo.

Libya, Aug. 26 around 117 people on a boat that set sail from Lebanon were intercepted and deported to Libya by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 26-27 Life Support rescued 259 people in distress in five operations. 88 were transferred to an Italian Coast Guard patrol boat and disembarked in Lampedusa, while the remainder were disembarked in Ravenna, an assigned port 4 days' sailing away.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 26-27 Nadir carried out 2 rescue operations, bringing 62 people to safety through reports from Seabird (Sea-Watch) and Colibri aircraft and landed them in Lampedusa.

Libya, Aug. 27 20 people aboard an endangered boat were intercepted and deported to Libya by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

Samos, Aug. 28 An endangered vessel with about 30 people on board was intercepted and deported to Turkey by the Greek Coast Guard.

Lampedusa, Aug. 28 About 70 people on an endangered boat were rescued by the Italian Coast Guard and disembarked in Lampedusa.

Limnos, Aug. 30 About 24 people who arrived independently on the island of Limnos were rescued by Greek authorities and transferred to Mytilene.

Agathonisi, Aug. 30 About 20 people who arrived independently on the island of Agathonisi were arrested by Greek authorities and transferred to Samos.

Cartagena, Aug. 30 After 5 days at sea, an endangered boat set sail from Algeria wrecked off Cartagena. 2 people died, while 10 others were rescued.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 31 Sea-Watch 5 rescued 289 people in 4 operations and landed them in Civitavecchia, an assigned port nearly 1,000 km away from the rescue site.

Civil Fleet, Aug. 31 Nadir assisted 14 people on an endangered boat that set sail from Tunisia until the Italian Coast Guard arrived. The same night, Nadir also rescued 31 people in distress and landed them in Lampedusa.

ITALY

Power, Aug. 5

Oussama Darkaoui, a 19-year-old boy detained in the CPR in Palazzo San Gervasio (Potenza), was killed by police officers' beatings and subsequent lack of medical care. After the killing, a revolt of the detainees immediately broke out in the facility.

Palermo, Aug. 23

Palermo's court validated the detention of a Tunisian citizen in the Porto Empedocle reception center. The charge against the man is that he tried to evade border controls by diving from the boat he was traveling on, a few hundred meters from Lampedusa and attempting to sneak off the island.

Salerno, Aug. 26

For the third time, Geo Barents (MSF) was placed under administrative detention, this time for 60 days in the port of Salerno, for violating the so-called Piantedosi Decree.

REPORT BORDERLINE EUROPE

NEWS FROM
CENTRAL
MEDITERRANEAN



ARRIVALS

According to [borderline-europe](#) data, 8,709 people reached Italy by sea in August 2024. Most refugees (75 percent) arrived in Sicily, mainly in Lampedusa. Some arrivals have also been registered in Calabria via the Ionian route (6%) with Turkey as the starting point. In addition, some boats reached Sardinia (2%) via the Algerian route. According to our counts, Italian authorities rescued just around 39 percent of the people who arrived, while the civil sea rescue vessels operations accounted for about 23 percent. Frontex was involved in about 2 percent of the rescues in August, according to [borderline-europe](#) data. 5% of refugees independently reached Italian coastal waters (12 nautical miles from the coast) without being intercepted or rescued. For 31% of arrivals, no information about the rescue was available.

According to official data from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, 8,137 people arrived in Italy in August. Deviations from our numbers are due to inaccurate or missing information on rescues. Sometimes it is not possible to accurately reconstruct or separate rescues among the various sources. This can also lead to double counting, as is obviously the case this month. Unfortunately, it is not possible for us to know what information pertains to this double counting.

ROUTES TO EUROPE

The press has not been shy about celebrating the “successes” of the Meloni government this month. One figure in particular has been repeatedly flaunted: Meloni claims to have reduced irregular arrivals in the Mediterranean by 64 percent. The government proudly claims to have finally brought the situation under “control.” Frontex points out that the drop is largely due to EU measures to conclude agreements with Tunisia and Libya that disrupt “the activities of human traffickers.” This propagandistic emphasis on “fighting human traffickers” comes up again and again as a justification for the Italian government’s anti-migratory policy. In this month’s reports we want to look at what is really behind this simplification: Is the drop in arrivals actually due to the fight against human trafficking? How sustainable is such a policy? And how do the government’s attempts to control the routes affect people on the run?

To get a better idea of what this drop in arrivals really means, we use an analysis by Matteo Villa (researcher at the Italian Institute for International Policy Studies). He first noticed that restrictions on civil fleet vessels in the Mediterranean have no impact on migrant arrivals. For example, in 2023, 13,750 people were rescued by organizations operating civil rescue at sea, compared to 13,150 in the last 12 months, which has no correlation with the total number of people who arrived in Italy during the same periods: in 2023 there were about 155,000 and in the last 12 months about 80,000 so-called irregular arrivals.

All of the government's attempts to criminalize, denounce and label the ships of civilian sea rescue organizations as "criminals" are therefore not only unfounded, but also show that it is very easy to spread incitement and blame, even though there is no data to back up these claims.

According to Villa, part of the decrease of irregular arrivals in Italy can be explained by a shift in migration routes. Spain and Greece, for example, have seen a significant increase in arrivals. The largest increase was in the Canary Islands (154 percent), Europe's southernmost border. This is a way to avoid the dangerous flight through the Sahara and other countries such as Tunisia and Libya, traveling from Gambia, Senegal and Mauritania. This development is worrying because the boats face much longer and more dangerous journeys to reach the Canary Islands. Many people die of thirst or drown during the journey. If their boats do not reach the easternmost islands of El Hierro and La Palma, all that awaits them is the open Atlantic and certain death. Just recently, at least 25 people died in a shipwreck off the coast of Mauritania and several dozen remain missing. The boat carrying about 300 people capsized after seven days at sea. An estimated one-quarter of people trying to reach the Canary Islands across the Atlantic die.

However, according to Villa, arrivals to Europe have decreased overall, even taking into account the shift in routes. In his view, there are two reasons for this. First, the decrease by about 20 percent of Tunisians leaving their country. And then, a large reduction in the number of refugee people departing from Libya. This is due, for example, to rejections by the so-called Libyan and Tunisian coast guards (discussed in the next section). Howe-

ver, most of the decreases (70 percent) are due to people from sub-Saharan Africa who have already been prevented from continuing their journey across the Mediterranean to Tunisia.

Migrant people from sub-Saharan Africa are exposed to extreme danger from police forces and extortion by human traffickers. They then live in informal camps where they have no access to medical care, water or food. They are also at constant risk of being attacked by local gangs or found by the police. The police consciously push refugees back to the desert, abandoning them to their fate: most die of thirst. Cases like these are not new. A UNHCR report shows that between 2020 and 2023, deaths of migrant people in the Sahara were at least double with respect to those in the Mediterranean.

Despite the brutal repression of migrant people, Italy classifies Tunisia as a "safe country of origin." Tunisia is also one of Italy's most important cooperation partners. Since 2011, the European Union has invested more than €500 million to improve the Tunisian police force. With the 2023 "Memorandum of Understanding," Tunisia received funding from the EU to "specifically address the challenges arising from increased irregular migration in Tunisia and the EU." In this way, the EU directly supports the authoritarian Tunisian government of Kais Saied, which persecutes migrants, activists and anyone who opposes its policies. These practices are completely incompatible with the fundamental human rights that the EU claims to value so highly. While the EU continues to claim that it wants to stop the "activities of human traffickers" with memoranda, it is instead motivating the Tunisian government's deportation of refugees. By its illegal and inhumane behavior, the Tunisian government in turn benefits

from its agreements with the EU.

But on top of making a point about how inhumane this isolationist policy is, all this turns out to be ineffective: in fact, trends can be influenced this way in the short term, but in the long term all this is useless. It is precisely when the supranational dimension of migration becomes too complex that the call for “simple solutions” such as sovereignty and control becomes futile. Erik Marquardt, a member of the European Parliament, makes this clear: “We have been arguing for years that irregular migration will be stopped. But it will not be stopped by the rule of law [...] The number of people migrating into Europe cannot be changed more than that [...] Anyone who calls for checking that no one moves into Germany without permission should have everyone checked. I don’t think many people realize this.” In short: control may seem easy, but it involves the violation of human rights and thus undermines our rule of law. The real problem with migration is that it cannot simply be “solved.” Because migration cannot be stopped unless it is done violently and illegally.

So let us take it a step further: instead of viewing refugees as the scapegoat for our problems, we should view racism and xenophobia as a social problem and address it as such. We also need legal immigration options that give people the opportunity to live safely without risking their lives. After all, fleeing persecution and war is no greater crime than seeking a better life, even if European countries, such as Italy, continue to try to make it a crime.

PUSHBACKS

By our count, 5,950 people traveling to Europe were intercepted in August. Of these, 5,443 were taken to Libya and 507 to Tunisia. These numbers are not certain: the number of unreported cases is probably much higher. With the interceptions (the interception of boats of refugees) that occurred this month, we want to show why the so-called Libyan coast guard is not really a coast guard. The cases illustrate the violence and ruthlessness with which they act against people. They also show that the so-called Libyan coast guard is not interested in rescuing human lives, but only in the business it can conduct through them.

On Aug. 3, Seabird (Sea-Watch's monitoring plane) observed an inflatable boat with 80 people in dramatic conditions. Two nearby boats of the so-called Libyan coast guard intercepted this boat. They left behind two dead bodies. Sea-Watch then radioed to retrieve the bodies, but its attempts were ignored. Sea-Watch commented, "For militias, people's bodies are only valuable if they live to extort money from their families or to sell them as slaves. The dead do not even deserve a proper burial."

Another video was recorded by Seabird: a merchant ship, the Maridive, rescuing a boat full of people. After the rescue, the so-called Libyan coast guard approached and ordered them to hand over the refugees. Seawatch then radioed Maridive that handing the people over to the so-called Libyan coast guard could mean imprisonment, torture, or death for them.

Libya is not a safe place for rescued people. The crew was explicitly committing a crime. But the captain of the Maridive explained that he would not be able to defend himself against the so-called Libyan coast guard. When the people were finally handed over, the Seabird documented the so-called Libyan coast guard beating the people with a stick.

PROJECT JL'S INVESTIGATION OF "MIGRANT RESCUE WATCH."

The X account "Migrant Rescue Watch" has been publishing news about push-backs and rejections by the so-called Libyan coast guard since 2017. It is therefore often one of the few sources that publishes on interceptions, including sensitive and confidential material such as aerial images from Frontex drones and documents from the Italian Coast Guard. However, the motivation of the likely author seems clear enough: The so-called Libyan coast guard is celebrated for its "rescues," the ships of civilian sea rescue organizations are accused of collaborating with smugglers*. Photos and videos are doctored or edited for this propaganda—the violence of the so-called Libyan coast guard is simply omitted. It is also denied that guards in Tripoli governmental detention centers commit torture, rape and murder, while migrants report that they would rather die than return to Libya.

The people who are part of the Josi & Loni (JL) project (which is coordinated by Mediterranea Saving Humans since 2023) have been fighting illegal interceptions by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard through legal channels and with the help of lawyers since 2019: They have been suing those who intercept people and trying to get people who have been returned to Libya out of jail. They have also come across the Migrant Rescue Watch channel. Outraged by the portrayal of this distorted reality, they first sought legal action because, among other things, activists who tried to counter the narrative with the truth about systemic violence in Libya were publicly insulted. Although the judges were able to establish criminal relevance, the investigation of the account owner led nowhere. The members then set out to discover the identity of the owner: After analyzing all 16,000 tweets from the account and many other materials, they were able to trace the probable identity of the manager. They found that it was likely a former member of the Canadian Coast Guard, with previous contacts with the European Parliament and ongoing ties to Frontex and Libyan militias.

However, nothing has changed since then in terms of criminal law. This month, German TV channel ZDF released an investigative documentary in an attempt to track down the person behind “Migrant Rescue Watch.” After reporters were able to confront the official owner of the account, he claimed to have been the victim of identity theft. Although the credibility of this claim seems questionable, the operator of “Migrant Rescue Watch” has not yet been criminally convicted, although his identity is probably known. This means that the account can continue to publish and spread propaganda glorifying the so-called Libyan coast guard.

BIDJA, LIBYAN NAVAL ACADEMY COMMANDER AND MILITIA HUMAN TRAFFICKER, KILLED

Late in the afternoon of Sept. 1, Bidja was killed by gunmen who shot at him while he was sitting in a car in western Tripoli. Bidja, whose full name was Abdurahman Al Milad, was known as one of Libya’s largest human traffickers, involved in crimes in detention centers such as torture and murder, shooting at sea and suspected of drowning dozens of people. He was even wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague for his involvement in mafia-like structures and numerous crimes. In 2018, he was appointed head of the so-called Zawiya Coast Guard and has also been commander of the Libyan Naval Academy since 2021.

At the same time, Bidja had contributed to an agreement between Libya and Italy, even traveling to Italy in 2017, where he was received in Rome by the Ministry of the Interior, despite the fact that the criminal activities he was involved in in the Zawiya region were already known. Bidja’s murder could represent a tipping point in Tripoli, although the exact consequences are still unclear. Above all, this case should remind us of the kind of people the Italian government and the EU are working with. It is clear that they do not care if they are internationally wanted criminals and what methods they use, as long as they prevent migrant people from coming to Europe.

DEAD AND MISSING

According to *borderline-europe's* counts, 40 people died in the Mediterranean in August and 598 are still missing. These cases of missing people mainly include boats that managed to make contact with Alarm Phone but have not been found. Although this does not confirm their fate, it is almost certain that these people were intercepted surreptitiously and thus exposed to the violence of the so-called Libyan coast guard, or died at sea.

It is also assumed that the number of unreported cases is much higher, as deaths are counted only if a body is found, while missing persons appear in the statistics only if they are reported by relatives or fellow refugees, or if they have managed to get in touch with Alarm Phone for a short time. Another example is the empty boats often found in the Mediterranean Sea. Sea-Watch spotted 32 empty boats in four days alone. No one knows what happened to the people.

There is also silence about many deaths and missing people, as in the case of the shipwreck of a vessel with 45 people on board, including women and children, that was heading to Italy from Tunisia on July 30, 2024. This was reported by a survivor of the shipwreck. The Italian government is silent. The Italian government's ignorance and disrespect for the victims and their families was also evident at the burial of those who died in the Roccella Ionica shipwreck in June this year. There was no government representative on site to show solidarity with those affected.

Moreover, many cases are summarized in reports or mentioned only in a brief subordinate clause, which dehumanizes the victims and deprives them of their identity. The media attention and portrayal of the current shipwreck off the coast of Palermo, in which several people died on the sailboat "Bayesian" during a storm, underscores how different the reporting of refugee deaths is. While news about migrants dying at sea is often provided only in numerical terms, the shipwreck off Palermo included information such as names, ages, and occupations. Our critique is in no way meant to trivialize the shipwreck off Palermo, but rather to show that the news obviously differentiates people. But human lives are human lives, and behind each person there is an identity, a relative, a story, a life.

This differentiation in relationships reflects nothing more than the concept of "othering," in which a distinction is made between "us" and "others." In this concept, the "other" is understood as something foreign, external to oneself and is therefore closely related to the question of identification. According to an article in the *daily fact*, the shipwreck off the coast of Palermo may have caused more consternation because people identify more with Western tourists than with people not from Europe forced to flee for various reasons.

The media attention to the shipwreck off the coast of Palermo implies greater concern and relevance for people from Europe, and this against the backdrop of an EU Charter that is explicitly based on the equality of all people.

But inequality is also evident at the level of language. In the case of the shipwreck off the coast of Palermo, the concept of “billionaire” and IT mogul was always emphasized, while in the other case people are simply referred to as migrants. The use of these terms is critical because it reproduces stereotypes and pits two groups against each other. To talk about this, we do not need a division into migrants and billionaires, because the only relevant information should be that we are talking about people who have lost their lives!

CIVIL RESISTANCE

According to our counts, in August, organizations operating civilian sea rescue carried out 56 rescue missions at sea, with a total of 2,007 people rescued. In 17 cases, civilian sea rescue organizations supported the rescue of a total of 733 people in distress at sea, such as by stabilizing boats or distributing life jackets until the coast guard arrived. In addition, August saw an increase in multiple rescues by civilian sea rescue organizations-coordinated by the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center in Rome-in which two to five rescues were carried out in succession.

The Louise Michel (Louise Michel) rescued a total of 189 people in five rescues this month. One of these was a multiple rescue with two missions. Life Support (Emergency) managed to rescue a total of 323 people in two multiple rescues. Geo Barents (MSF) also rescued a total of 321 people in eight missions this month. Two of these were multiple rescues. The Humanity I (SOS Humanity) rescued a total of 343 people in August. Mare Jonio (Mediterranea Saving Humans) conducted multiple rescues in three missions in August. In these missions it rescued 115 people and assisted in the rescue of 67 people. The Nadir (RESQSHIP) intervened about 17 times in August, rescuing about 258 people and assisting in the rescue of another 312 people.

Ships from smaller civil sea rescue organizations, such as the Nadir, are often the first to arrive on the scene and support people in distress at sea, although they do not always take people on board. Astral (Open Arms) has intervened a total of eight times this month. It rescued 175 people and assisted in the rescue of 334 people. On 03.08.24, 196 people rescued at sea by Ocean Viking in late July landed in Ancona.

WHY CIVILIAN RESCUE ORGANIZATIONS ARE NEEDED IN THE MEDITERRANEAN.

On Aug. 26, 2024, 43 people found themselves in distress at sea in the Tunisian SAR zone. Five hours after the alert phone had alerted the authorities, there was still no one on the scene to provide rescue. Meanwhile, however, 12 people were already in the water. Fortunately, all people were eventually rescued from the Nadir. However, the events raise questions: How is it possible that no authority felt responsible to initiate a rescue? On the same day, the Nadir rescued 19 people in distress at sea and brought a total of 62 people ashore in Lampedusa. This incident, along with many other cases, underscores once again how important and necessary the ships of civilian rescue organizations are in the Mediterranean, especially when authorities fail to respond or wait too long to initiate a rescue. If the Nadir had not arrived, these people would probably no longer be alive.

ITALIAN AUTHORITIES UNNECESSARILY PROLONG THE DISEMBARKATION OF MIGRANTS.

In one of these multiple rescues, 88 people were transferred to Lampedusa, while the others had to continue the long journey and arrive in Ravenna. A similar case occurred during the Humanity I rescue: in a large multiple rescue, 273 people were brought to safety. By order of the Italian authorities, 70 people had to be selected to go ashore in Sicily. Deciding who would be allowed ashore first and who would not was a major challenge for the Humanity I team, especially since the medical examination of all the people had not yet been completed and their family relationships had not been fully clarified. This meant that the remaining 199 people had to travel to Genoa, families could be separated, and they were exposed to additional stress and danger.

DETENTION OF THE GEO BARENTS

The Geo Barents (Doctors Without Borders) rescued, in five missions on August 23, 2024, 191 people who arrived in Salerno three days later. The boat has now been detained by the Italian government for 60 days and fined 3,300 euros. The charge: Geo Barents failed to report the incident to the IMRCC (Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Center) in a timely manner. An absolutely unfair punishment, especially considering that this accusation is based on information from the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. The accusation concerns the third rescue of the operation. MSF search and rescue team leader Riccardo Gatti reports that quick action was needed to save people from drowning. Many people jumped into the water or were pushed into the water. In such a

situation, saving people has top priority. We demand that the sanction be lifted and the Geo Barents be allowed to return at sea. “Saving lives is not a crime.”

MARE JONIO HAS BEGUN A NEW MISSION

A collaboration between Migrantes (pastoral body of the Italian Bishops’ Conference) and Mediterranea for a monitoring project was launched at the end of August. A Migrantes-funded sailboat accompanied Mare Jonio’s mission with the goal of better informing the public about what is happening in the Mediterranean, because too many people are uninformed or not informed at all about the situation of refugees at sea. On board were volunteers, associates, journalists from Vatican media as well as leaders of the Migrantes organization from Fano and Caltanissetta. The Pope also commented on this project by personally sending a message thanking the organizers. The Pope’s solidarity with refugees as a representative of the Catholic Church is an important sign of criticism of Italian migration policy and a stimulus for change.

The Italian government’s indictment of Mediterranea Saving Humans’ Civil Fleet remains to be monitored. The Mare Jonio rescued a total of 182 people in three missions between August 24 and 25, in which it rescued in two cases and provided assistance in one case. The operation was supported by the Coast Guard

bringing two groups to Lampedusa and one group from the Mare Jonio (in coordination with the IMRCC in Rome) to Pozzallo. After that, the Mare Jonio went to Trapani to undergo an inspection after the mission, and it was threatened with a fine because it was allegedly not recognized as a rescue vessel. However, this accusation is unwarranted because the Mare Jonio’s eligibility as a rescue ship had already been established in September 2023, only lacking the label as such. The Italian government thus insists on a recognition issue against which Mediterranea has already taken legal action.



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