What do the numbers tell us

In the month of November, the number of people forced to flee across the Mediterranean and managed to arrive in Italy is 11,245.

Departures from Libya and Tunisia did not stop even on days when the sea was very rough despite the continuous and often brutal interventions of the so-called Coast Guards of those two countries. Mid-month, the United Nations Organization for Migration, reported from Libya that a fragile boat carrying approximately 90 people had capsized off Zuara, in western Libya, resulting in at least 75 deaths. In recent months, there have been more departures from Libyan and Tunisian coasts compared to the same period last year. Moreover, there still aren’t enough monitoring and rescue resources at sea to avert similar tragedies.

These data are based on information provided by the Ministry of the Interior’s Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration. These data refer to landing events recorded by 8:00 a.m. on November 30, 2021.
“Turn off the engine or we will shoot you.”
Yet another threat of abduction from a Libyan patrol boat. Sea Watch 4’s onboard recordings provide yet more evidence of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard’s modus operandi. The Libyan commander orders the humanitarian ship to leave the rescue area. The German commander, Klaus Merkle, points out that the ship is more than 40 miles from the Libyan coast, therefore innocent passage is legal. The threats against the humanitarian ship continue throughout the night. “Turn off the engine or we will shoot you,” the commander of the Libyan patrol boat says over the radio. The patrol boat refused to identify itself, violating maritime communication laws, and illegally ordered us to leave,” writes Sea Watch on Twitter posting a video showing what happened following the abduction threats.

The humanitarian disaster does not end
Mid-month, on Wednesday, November 15th, 75 people die after a boat capsizes off the coast of Libya. The confirmation comes from the spokesperson of the International Organization for Migration, Safa Msehli. She cites the accounts of 15 survivors who were rescued by fishermen in Zwara. “At least 1,300 men, women and children drowned trying to cross the central Mediterranean this year,” she estimates. “This is the cost of inaction,” she adds. It is a huge number, a number much higher than was recorded for all of 2020 whose total was 978 drownings.
An initiative by Resq-People Saving People seems to have succeeded in ending forced isolation for every humanitarian ship that reaches an Italian port at the end of a rescue mission. On October 15th, 58 people disembarked in Pozzallo at the end of Req’s second mission.

As usual, the Office of Maritime, Air and Border Health (USMAF*) ordered a 10-day quarantine period, an administrative formality as all swab test results were negative. Resq lawyers’ decision to appeal Catania’s Regional Administrative Court allowed the court to order a one day injunction so that the USMAF could explain its reasoning behind the quarantine order. The USMAF, and consequently the Ministry of Health under which it operates, preferred to revoke the measure by implementing its compliance and enforcement powers.

*acronym in Italian

119 people, all Afghan nationals, land autonomously on the coast of Portopalo di Capo Passero during the night after departing Turkey aboard a sailboat. Among them are 18 women and 17 minors. All of them test negative for Covid-19.

Turkish security forces capture 104 people, mostly Afghans, who entered Turkey from Iran. The apprehensions take place in the provinces of Ardahan, Bitlis and Van. Everyone is transferred to detention centers. Overall, 11 people are arrested on suspicion of being human traffickers. Over the summer, following the seizure of power in Afghanistan by the Taliban, the number of Afghan migrants headed to Turkey from Iran rose. Referring to the approximately 300,000 Afghan refugees already present in the country, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the G20 in Rome stated, “We will not open our doors to a new flow of migrants to Turkey.”

The crews of Sea-Eye 4 and Rise Above work together ceaselessly from the early morning and complete five rescue operations. 325 people, including 153 minors, are brought on board.
In an interview with the newspaper, Il Manifesto, Jean Paul Cavalieri, spokesperson for the UN agency in Tripoli, recalls the current difficult situation in the Libyan capital. Over 2,000 people lost everything after the October 1st roundups. According to Cavalieri, the UNHCR was forced to suspend assistance to refugees for security reasons. There are not enough reception facilities in Tripoli. Moreover, it seems that many of those arrested during the raids left the Al Mabani center on October 8th. Libyan authorities were not able to handle them. Most likely clashes had taken place. Libya has never signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not see itself as a country of asylum. The UNHCR maintains the least Libyan counterparts could do is grant work permits to these people. Non-documented people find themselves in more precarious situations and are more vulnerable to becoming victims of human trafficking. Mediterranea Saving Humans expresses its solidarity with the refugees in their struggle and joins them in their call for the immediate evacuation to countries of safety in Europe of refugees blocked in Libya.

In the afternoon, the crew of the SOS Mediterranée rescues 106 people from an overcrowded wooden boat in distress in international waters off the coast of Libya. Among them there are: 46 men, 14 women and 46 minors (29 are unaccompanied, 7 are under the age of 5, 8 infants). There are now 245 survivors aboard Sos Mediterranée’s ship. Alarm Phone reports two dire situations in Malta’s SAR zone: 350 people are on a boat that is taking in water and another 200 people have been in distress for 12 hours. All authorities have been alerted of the need for immediate action. Off Libya’s coast, the Ocean Viking rescues 44 people during the night after having rescued another 94 migrants aboard an overcrowded dinghy that was taking in water earlier that afternoon.

At the same time, autonomous landings continue at Roccella Jonico with more than 50 people arriving in the past week. These stable numbers are indicative of a phenomenon which has been constant for months and includes many minors.
During the night, both the civilian fleet's Sea-Eye 4's and Rise Above's ships rescue over 400 people aboard a wooden double-decker boat in mortal danger. Although the boat in distress was in international waters in Malta's SAR zone and Alarm Phone first reported the case Wednesday morning, Malta's authorities ignored requests for intervention. When the two ships of the civilian fleet arrived in the area, they found several people in the water panic-stricken. The boat was taking in water due to a leak in the hull. Following seven separate rescue operations carried out in the last 48 hours, more than 800 people are now on board the Sea-Eye 4 as it heads to the island of Lampedusa awaiting a response from Rome.

After rescuing 245 people off the coast of Libya in the preceding days, SOS Mediterranée's Ocean Viking is also located south of Lampedusa. There are now over a thousand people rescued in the central Mediterranean waiting for a port of safety.

A sailboat carrying 75 migrants, including some children, is stranded in front of the Le Cannella resort located in Calabria's Isola Capo Ristoto's municipality. Due to strong winds reaching up to 20 knots and force 4 waves, Red Cross operators, police, and the Coast Guard create a bridge between the boat and the beach with the help of a raft and manage to rescue everyone in peril.

Alarm Phone reports that the VasApollo, a merchant ship, rescued 85 migrants who left Libya the previous day and brought them to Tunisia, a country considered unsafe for refugees.
Two ships, the Sea-Eye 4 and the Ocean Viking, are now carrying 1,110 people waiting for a response from the Italian Ministry of Interior regarding the assignment of a port of safety. The decision to go to Sicily, and not Malta, is a lawful practice supported by the fact that La Valletta has not ratified the amendments to the SAR and SOLAS conventions that would oblig it to grant access to its ports and by the precedent set by the numerous criminal proceedings brought against NGOs.

"We have never had so many people on board. The crew is doing their best, but it's not easy. Food is running out. There are not enough blankets. Some migrants are injured. Others suffer from seasickness. Things are calm now. But, if the wait were to get longer, things could get complicated. It is necessary to disembark quickly. These people deserve to be treated with dignity, ashore," comments Sophie Weidenhiller, spokesperson for the Sea-Eye.

News arrives in the afternoon that Trapani has been assigned as the port of safety for the disembarkation of the 800 people on board the ship, Sea-Eye 4. The operation will commence the next morning. The survivors, except unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable people, will be transferred to quarantine ships.

In the evening, the Coast Guard evacuates 6 people from the Ocean Viking: 2 people suffering from fuel burns and other serious health issues and 4 of their family members. The remaining 308 survivors remain on board waiting for a port of safety to be designated.
At 2 p.m., the ship, Sea-Eye 4 finally enters Trapani’s port. Medical examinations, including Covid-19 swab testing, are carried out. Next, the migrants who will be transferred to two quarantine ships off the port and to reception centers in Sicily undergo the identification process. Among those rescued, exhausted by the journey and days of uncertainty on the ship, many are vulnerable. There are 150 unaccompanied minors, 5 pregnant women, and numerous men with injuries and signs of torture on their bodies.

In the vicinity of several merchant ships within Malta’s SAR zone, Sea Watch’s Seabird spots a wooden boat in distress carrying approximately 250 people. Neither the MCRR nor the merchant ships respond to Seabird’s alerts as the Tunisian Coast Guard reaches and surrounds the boat. Soon after, the NGO discovers that the so-called Libyan Coast Guard had identified itself as the Tunisian Coast Guard and had communicated with Seabird. Malta is being asked to fulfill its international obligations by offering a port of safety to these migrants and preventing their illegal return to Libya.

Sea Watch reports that the boat spotted the previous day was actually carrying 385 people and reached Lampedusa with the help of the Italian Coast Guard’s patrol boats. The situation at the island’s hotspot is dire as 500 people are now accommodated there—twice its capacity.

Later in the day, the coast of Lampedusa sees two more landings. In the afternoon, a boat arrives carrying 21 sub-Saharan, including 5 women and 3 accompanied minors. It is followed by a second boat carrying 29 migrants, mostly Tunisian nationals, including 13 women and 3 minors.

The humanitarian crisis created by the political tension between Belarus and the European Union along the Belarus-Poland border continues. Those who reach the border are mostly women and children on foot hoping to enter Polish territory and seek international protection. Today, counter-terrorism units have been added to the cordon of police and military forces waiting for them. On the other side, Belarusian frontier guards are pushing migrants towards the border. At present, there are 3,000-4,000 people unable to cross into Poland or turn back.
A few miles from Lampedusa in the SAR zone, a boat carrying about 48 people is in distress. It is taking in water and is at the mercy of the rough sea. The people on board have already contacted authorities, but have received no response.

The Ocean Viking, with 306 people on board, has been waiting for a port of safety to be assigned for 7 days. SOS Mediterranée's crew is still waiting for a response after sending 9 requests for a port of safety to be designated. In the meantime, weather and sea conditions have worsened. The physical and psychological well-being of the survivors who are now exhausted has also deteriorated. In fact, in just a few days, urgent medical evacuation was requested for 4 people who were in very serious condition and required immediate hospitalization. The International Red Cross' staff is also aboard the humanitarian ship and is treating injuries and burns which appear to be evidence of torture.

Meanwhile, autonomous landings in Lampedusa and elsewhere in Sicily continue despite adverse weather conditions. A fishing boat carrying approximately 400 migrants arrives in Pozzallo. By evening, it is discovered that hostile weather and strong winds ran the fishing boat aground into rocks. The NosAries, a tugboat, intervenes and slowly evacuates the migrants, shuttling them in groups of 10 from the boat to the Coast Guard. The operation will take all night. By the next morning, all 398 migrants will have been rescued. All result in negative Covid-19 tests and none are in need of urgent care.

By evening, approximately 380 people from Libya and Tunisia arrive on the coast of Lampedusa in 6 reported autonomous landings. Lampedusa, already a hotspot where conditions are critical, now shelters 938 people.
The refugee protest in Tripoli reaches its 40th day and the situation is getting worse. According to the UNHCR, this is an unprecedented crisis. Last week approximately 50 demonstrators left the permanent encampment at the UNHCR Community Day Center and reached the organization's headquarters in order to request and register for resettlement.

Over 5,000 migrants are arrested after the October 1st raids in the Gargarish district. Many are still in detention. Others set up the encampment in order to demand evacuation. The UNHCR, however, does not see evacuation as a viable solution.

It takes 8 days for the Italian authorities to finally designate Augusta as a port of safety for the Ocean Viking which has 306 on board. After difficult days of waiting and cold, harsh weather conditions, the staff of SOS Mediterranée welcomes the news with relief, but reasserts that establishing a mechanism for landing and reception is necessary to avoid the unnecessary suffering caused by deadlock at sea.

The Ocean Viking reaches the port of Augusta, Sicily. The 306 survivors rescued in the last nine days will disembark here. Regarding the delay in granting a port of safety, Alessandro Porro, a rescue worker aboard the ship, wonders whether it is really so necessary to test these people further, beyond what they have already had to suffer and what they are still going through.

Alarm Phone team members report 70 people need to be rescued. They are aboard a boat off Abu Kammash, about 25 kilometres from the Tunisian border. Soon after, they are intercepted and pushed back by the Libyan military aboard the patrol boat, Sabratha. Everyone is taken to the commercial port of Tripoli where they will face horrific human rights abuses. According to the statement by a relative of the people on board, someone disappeared during the trip. In the same period of time, another boat carrying approximately 35 people is pushed back by another patrol boat.
After a 48 hour operation, the 306 survivors rescued by the humanitarian ship, Ocean Viking, disembark at the port of Augusta.

In the afternoon, the sailboat, Nadir, assists and tracks 14 people aboard a boat in distress in Malta’s SAR zone. After several hours, they are able to reach the island of Lampedusa with the assistance of Italian military forces.

The so-called Libyan Coast Guard’s patrol boat, Sabratha, pushes back 61 people aboard a boat attempting to cross the Mediterranean. There are also 7 women and 11 children on board.
MSF's rescue crew aboard the humanitarian ship, Geo Barents, rescue a wooden boat in distress in the SAR zone under Malta’s jurisdiction carrying 25 people. After more than 2 days at sea, these men, women, and children are tired, hungry, and thirsty. The small boat had been spotted by Sea Watch’s crew just before the rescue operation took place.

Alarm Phone reports about 55 people aboard a fragile boat off the coast of Libya urgently need assistance. Despite the lack of response from institutional actors, after a short time, the survivors are reached and brought to safety by MSF's crew aboard Geo Barents.

During the night, following Alarm Phone's alert, MSF's crew aboard the humanitarian ship, Geo Barents, rescues 62 people aboard a fragile and overcrowded wooden boat in distress. Darkness and the boat's precarious condition make rescue difficult.

Sea Watch's rescue team returns to the SAR zone aboard the humanitarian ship, Sea Watch 4. With the support of reconnaissance aircraft, a new mission to rescue human lives in the central Mediterranean begins. On the same day, Sea Watch’s crew spots 4 boats in distress: a large wooden boat carrying about 200 people, a dinghy carrying about 100 people towing an inflatable raft that is sinking, another boat carrying approximately 100 people in danger of capsizing, and a final dinghy carrying approximately 40 people.
Yet another tragedy in the Mediterranean. 10 people lose their lives attempting to reach Europe. Spotted by both Alarm Phone and Seabird, they left the Libyan coast aboard a fragile overcrowded boat together with 99 other people rescued by the humanitarian ship, Geo Barents. When rescuers aboard the ship reached the boat's position 30 miles off the Libyan coast, their lifeless bodies were found at the bottom of the boat. “10 deaths that could have been avoided—like the other 1,225 who lost their lives this year crossing the central Mediterranean,” Doctors Without Borders (MSF) commented bitterly. Safa Msehli, the International Organization for Migration’s spokesperson, pointed out that at least 1,300 people have drowned since the beginning of the year in an attempt to cross the central Mediterranean.

In two separate operations, boats carrying 116 people attempting to escape the Libyan horror are intercepted by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard's soldiers aboard the patrol boat, PB P-301. Everyone is taken to the commercial port of Tripoli. On the same day, 191 people intercepted in two separate operations by the patrol boat, Ubari, are also taken to the port of Tripoli.

50 people of various nationalities arrive at Favaloro’s pier in Lampedusa after leaving Libya. They are cold and exhausted after the long journey. 70 people, including 8 women and 11 children, are intercepted by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard's patrol boat, PB-300. Everyone is returned to Libya and taken to Tripoli’s commercial port. On the same day, in three separate operations, 141 people, including 29 women and 18 children, are intercepted by the patrol boat, Zawiya. Everyone is taken to the coastal town of Zawiya. Meanwhile, in another two separate operations, 103 people, including 14 women and 3 children, are returned to Libya by the patrol boat, Sabratha. By evening, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard's soldiers threaten to accuse the crew aboard the humanitarian ship, Sea Watch 4, of abduction in Libya. In reality, the patrol boat had illegally ordered the ship to leave the area despite being in international waters outside of Libyan jurisdiction. In the preceding hours, Sea Watch's crew rescued 92 people, including pregnant women and children. 86 of these people were aboard an overcrowded dinghy and had been spotted by Seabird's plane. The other 6 people were later rescued by Sea Watch's crew because they panicked and jumped overboard after being illegally intercepted by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard's patrol boat. Soon after, the crew rescues another 24 people. The number of survivors on board has now risen to 120.
Alarm Phone receives a call reporting that approximately 75 people are on a fragile boat in distress off Lampedusa. They are moving slowly and are facing strong winds. Over 24 hours later, there is no news of any intervention despite reports to authorities. After yet another day, all contact is lost with the survivors. It will be many more hours before any news is had of them. The boat will eventually be spotted by Seabird and everyone on board will be rescued.

The relevant authorities designate the port of Messina as a port of safety for the disembarkation of all 186 survivors on board the humanitarian ship, Geo Barents. Moreover, the bodies of the 10 people who lost their lives at sea will finally be able to receive a proper burial.

Aboard the humanitarian ship, Sea Watch 4, Sea Watch’s crew rescues a dinghy in distress carrying 73 people, including 20 minors and 13 women—7 of whom are pregnant. 193 survivors are now aboard the humanitarian ship. A port of safety is needed as soon as possible in order to disembark safely.

At Messina’s port, the 186 survivors rescued by MSF crew on board the humanitarian ship, Geo Barents, disembark resulting in a positive ending. Everyone will receive safe shelter and access to medical and mental health services.
Sea Watch 4’s crew rescues 102 people aboard an overcrowded dinghy in distress. The so-called Libyan Coast Guard’s boat, ready to intercept them, is also on the scene. A few hours later, another 73 people aboard a dinghy in distress are also rescued by the same crew in yet another operation. There are now 375 people aboard Sea Watch’s humanitarian ship waiting for a port of safety to be designated.

A boat capsized off the coast of Libya: 75 people drown. According to survivors’ statements, a large boat capsized off the coast of Libya on Wednesday. Fishermen saved 15 people, but it is believed that 75 people have died.

Alarm Phone receives a call for help from approximately 60 people aboard a fragile boat located in Malta’s SAR zone. After running out of fuel, the boat is adrift. There is no food or water on board. A few hours later, it turns out that yet another boat is adrift in the vicinity. Over 90 people are in danger, including 9 women, 4 of whom are pregnant, and 17 children.

After the previous day’s 3 interventions, the crew of Sea Watch 4, the humanitarian ship, rescue 107 people aboard a wooden boat. There is even a baby girl born just hours earlier among them. Both the newborn and her mother are evacuated from the humanitarian ship later in the afternoon. In order to receive medical care ashore, a pregnant woman with her 2-year-old son are also evacuated along with an injured man, his wife and their son.

After supporting three Sea Watch 4 rescue missions from the air, Seabird spots a boat carrying approximately 40 people adrift in the eastern part of Malta’s SAR zone. Seabird issues a mayday relay appeal and also contacts the Asso29, a merchant ship, which seems to be heading for the boat in distress. However, it is very slow and too distant.
In just a few hours, 221 people land on the island of Lampedusa during the night. A first boat carrying 68 people, including 2 minors, is intercepted by the port authority about 18 miles from the island. Another fragile 10 meter boat carrying 98 survivors, including 4 minors, is also spotted by the port authority 28 miles off the coast of Lampedusa. Shortly after one o'clock in the morning, 45 people of various sub-Saharan nationalities, including 7 women and 3 children, arrive at the pier in Favaloro.

An appeal for help from Tunisia is received regarding 22 people whose family members say they have not heard from their relatives who left Sfax on board a boat two days ago. 235 people are intercepted by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard’s patrol boat, Zawiya, in four separate operations. Women and children are among the people returned to Libya. Everyone is taken to the oil refinery district located in the port area of the city of Zawiya.

At the same time, 140 people, including 27 women and 21 children, are intercepted by Libyan military aboard the patrol boat, PB P-301, and are taken to the port of Tripoli.

The Libyan Coast Guard’s patrol boat, PB P-301, intercepts and pushes back 31 people attempting to escape Libya by boat. Women are also among those who are returned to Libya.
After days of waiting, 8 pregnant women, a person with severe burns and 3 family members are evacuated from Sea Watch’s humanitarian ship. The situation on the ship is very complicated and the weather is worsening.

Salvamento Marítimo volunteers attempt to rescue 53 people in distress, including 8 women, aboard a boat that is adrift. The boat had set sail 48 hours earlier. However, Salvamento Marítimo is forced to interrupt its rescue operation prematurely due to the arrival of the Royal Moroccan Navy which takes over command of the operation even though it arrived many hours later.

The so-called Libyan Coast Guard shoots at a boat adrift in Malta’s SAR zone. A relative of one of the people aboard the boat reports that there are approximately 85 people on board. Soon after, there is confirmation that the Libyan military has carried out yet another illegal pushback to Libya.

More than 40 people are in danger aboard an overcrowded boat that is sinking in international waters. Alarm Phone alerts the authorities. However, Italian authorities respond they are not responsible for the area. Many hours of reprehensible delay pass. The next day, there is news that many people on board died. Moreover, many survivors report that the Tunisian Coast Guard began a rescue operation after many hours after its arrival.

During the night, nearly 300 migrants, including 14 women and 8 minors, aboard a boat in distress 14 miles from the island of Lampedusa are rescued by the Italian Coast Guard. Many people had been thrown overboard and were at the mercy of the rough sea.

The Libyan military aboard the patrol boat, Sabratha, pushback a boat carrying 112 people. Everyone is brought to Tripoli’s naval base. At the same time, the Tunisian military pushes back a boat off the Kerkenna Islands carrying 487 people, including 13 women and 93 children. The boat had left the Libyan coast the night between the 23rd and the 24th of November.

The Libyan Red Crescent finds the lifeless bodies of 4 people on the beach near the town of Sabratha.
During the night, the crew aboard Sea Watch’s humanitarian ship declares a state of necessity. Soon after, they receive authorization to seek shelter in front of the port of Augusta. Bad weather hits the ship hard putting the 461 people aboard at risk of hypothermia. 4 people lose consciousness and are assisted by the medical team. The Sea Watch 4 is only allowed to dock in the port of Augusta the next afternoon.

Italian authorities interrupt the process of disembarkation of the hundreds of people rescued by Sea Watch's crew which had begun the previous day. Disembarkation will resume the next day.

Threatened by huge waves and stormy weather, more than 20 lives, including 15 children’s lives, are in danger aboard a boat in distress east of the Calabrian coast, 81 nautical miles off the coast of Italy. The Italian Coast Guard intervenes after several hours and rescues the survivors from the life-threatening situation.