What do the numbers tell us
In December, the number of people who found themselves forced to flee, forced to cross the Mediterranean, and who managed to arrive in Italy is 4,097.
Since the beginning of this year, 67,040 people have arrived in Italy.
In contrast, Frontex has stated that a little less than 200,000 migrants arrived in Europe in 2021—the highest number since 2017. The central Mediterranean was, once again, the most traveled route taken by approximately a third of total arrivals—a increase of 83% compared to 2020. This route saw more arrivals from the Tunisian and Libyan coasts, but also more arrived directly from the Turkish coast. Tunisian nationals comprised the highest number of those taking this route, along with Egyptians (a seven fold increase) and Bangladeshi Bangladeshis.
In line with the previous year, less than 1 in 10 arrivals were women. Compared to 2019, the number of women arrivals dropped significantly. In contrast, the percentage of minors remained largely unchanged as did that of unaccompanied minors.

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 December 31, 2021.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality declared at landing</th>
<th>Totale**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>15,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egitto</td>
<td>8,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>7,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>3,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa d'Avorio</td>
<td>3,807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>2,645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>2,446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>2,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siria</td>
<td>2,266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marocco</td>
<td>2,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>altre*</td>
<td>15,593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totale</strong></td>
<td>67,040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frontex- almost 200,000 migrants in 2021

In its latest report, Frontex, the European Union’s external border agency, noted that 2021 saw the highest number of migrant arrivals in Europe since 2017 - almost 200,000. As in previous years, the central Mediterranean route, the route which most concerns Italy, was “the most used, accounting for one third of all illegal border crossings.”

Frontex’s numbers do not take into consideration those who did not make it across, either because they were refouled or returned or whether they were lost at sea. Even in these cases, the numbers are increasing, but many prefer to not see them. According to the IOM, the United Nations’ International Organization for Migration, 1,552 died or went missing in the central Mediterranean route alone. In 2020, the number was 978. Another 34,425 migrants, including 2,428 women and 1,308 minors, were refouled by the Libyan Coast Guard alone. In the whole of 2020, there were 11,891

Belarus, yet more horror for those who migrate

$10 for a bottle of fresh water; $20 for 2 cups of hot water; yet another $25 to partially charge the battery of a smartphone. These are the horrific tariffs meant, once again, for the migrants present at the border between Belarus and Poland. After visiting the center in Bruzgi, a few meters from the border checkpoint shared with the Polish town of Kuznica, journalists described what they saw and provided us with evidence that many sleep on the ground, curled up in sleeping bags using cardboard as mattresses. Since the beginning of the crisis, a total of more than 40,000 people were rejected by the Polish authorities even before the migrants could apply for asylum.
GOOD NEWS!
Good news /1
Agrigento's preliminary investigation judge, Micaela Raimondo, has conclusively ended the investigation against Carola Rackete, Sea Watch's commander. Judge Raimondo stated that Rackete did not commit any crime by entering the port of Lampedusa with the survivors who were rescued at sea and pointed out that she “acted in fulfilling the duty to rescue under national and international maritime law.”

In 2020, Italy's highest court declared Carola Rackete's arrest illegitimate. Last May, the initial charges of resisting a public official and violence against a military vessel were dropped against the former commander. Last December 22nd's dismissal filing ended all criminal investigations against Sea-Watch's members and former commander. The closing of the investigation, therefore, confirms what had been previously established by Italy's highest court: Libya cannot be considered a place of safety for asylum seekers. Under international law, there is an obligation to render assistance to anyone in distress at sea and to deliver the people rescued to a place of safety. Moreover, by declaring Sea-Watch 3's entry into Italian territorial waters and docking in Lampedusa a fulfillment of a legal obligation, the decision to drop the charges undermines the application of Security Decree Bis regarding the rescue of people in distress at sea.

Good news /2
In an historic decision, on December 16th, Italy's highest court cited the principle of “legitimate defense” in overturning Palermo's Court of Appeal's decision that convicted two survivors rescued by the offshore supply vessel, Vos Thalassa, of aiding and abetting illegal immigration, violence and aggravated resistance of a public official when they opposed being returned to Libya while on board the rescue vessel.

On June 3, 2020, Palermo's Court of Appeals sentenced the two young refugees to three years and six months imprisonment with a fine of 52,000 euros. The Court concluded that the initial trial judge's approach was “ideological” and it pointed out that “these issues must find an appropriate solution in the only place that is designated to do so—namely the political forum of national debate.” Distancing itself from such an approach and reasserting the principle of legitimate defense as recognized in the same case by Trapani's preliminary hearing judge in 2019, Italy's highest court reasserted that respect for human rights is based on the norms of international law which protect the life and integrity of the person by affirming that “the act of resisting a public official by the migrant rescued at sea who was asserting his right of non-refoulement and opposing his return to the country of Libya” was justified.
The Italian military ship, San Giorgio, arrives in Tripoli to deliver a mobile center for the Coordination of Maritime Rescue (MRCC) to the government of Libya. A series of containers equipped with computer terminals and radio equipment whose purpose of increasing navigation safety at sea have the objective of also enhancing the so-called Libyan Coast Guards’ anti-immigration interventions in the Mediterranean. The center is financed by the European Union as part of an agreement overseen by the Italian Ministry of the Interior which will also provide assistance and training for Libyan personnel.

Several questions directed at the EU Parliament have focused precisely on the nature of the new center, its costs, and, above all, regarding its management. What safeguards will be in place to guarantee that it will not become an instrument to perpetuate abuses against migrants and asylum seekers?

The Tunisian Coast Guard announces that it intercepted a boat carrying 78 people during the day. On board, there was also a lifeless body. The boat left the coast of the Libyan city of Abu Kammash the previous day.
In the afternoon, Seabird witnesses the so-called Libyan Coast Guard attacking and pursuing 2 boats carrying over 100 people who they intercept and illegally return to Libya.

Together with the assistance of Seabird Sea-Watch’s air support, Sea-Eye 4 and Rise Above rescue, respectively, 126 and 66 people in life-threatening danger south of Lampedusa.

After a nightlong search, Ocean Viking rescues 114 people at dawn from a dinghy in distress in international waters off the coast of Libya. There are women and babies among the survivors. The youngest is only 11 days old.

The Tunisian Coast Guard intercepts 41 people aboard a boat in distress off the coast of Le Kef about 40 km from the Algerian border. Meanwhile, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard’s patrol boat, Sabratha, carries out 2 separate operations intercepting boats in distress carrying 87 people, including 10 women and 6 children. While this is taking place, yet another Libyan patrol boat intercepts 72 people aboard another boat in distress.

Thanks to Alarm Phone’s alert, Geo Barents rescues 49 people, including women and minors, from a dinghy that had been at sea for 2 days in the cold.

A boat carrying 26 people capsizes in Lampedusa while rescue operations are underway. A woman drowns in front of her 14 year old son. They had embarked on the journey together. There are reports that about 500 people have arrived on the island in the last 24 hours.

Locri’s court publishes the reasoning behind Mimmo Lucano’s conviction. Last September 30th, the former mayor of Riace was given a sentence of 13 years and 2 months in a primary trial court. In the court’s explanation of the basis for the conviction, we read that his political image.” The conviction hits Riace’s praiseworthy inclusion project hard by to the hospitality system.
There are many reports of lifeless bodies off Zawiya’s coast. The day’s search conducted by the Libyan Red Crescent and the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, however, is unsuccessful. It will take another 24 hours before 3 lifeless bodies are found off the coast of Dakhla.

The Libyan Red Crescent recovers a lifeless body off the coast of Joudiam.
In the morning, less than 48 hours from what was to be the opening of the polls, the Libyan High Electoral Commission (HNEC) announces that the elections in Libya scheduled for Christmas Eve will not take place. The electoral commission says it is unable to announce the eligible candidates due to continuous legal disputes. Rival factions have accused each other of intimidating or bribing judicial officials in order to ensure the reinstatement of their candidates. The commission is trying to establish whether the decisions were valid.

Later in the day, MSF’s Geo Barents rescues 237 migrants aboard 3 boats in distress. There are now 355 people aboard the ship. Many show evidence of physical violence on their bodies.

Lampedusa’s hotspot, Contrada Imbriacola, now hosts 370 people while having a capacity of 250. On Wednesday, 221 people arrive on 4 boats. Another 19 migrants arrive on the island during the night.

Thanks to Alarm Phone’s alert, Geo Barents saves 27 people, including many children, aboard a small boat during the night. At 4 a.m., the crew of Doctors Without Borders rescues another 76 migrants aboard an overcrowded dinghy.

The so-called Libyan Coast Guard’s patrol boats, Fezzan and Sabratha, intercept 534 people aboard boats attempting to escape the Libyan coast during several operations carried out in the previous 48 hours. There are 26 women and 11 children among the people intercepted.
In the morning, Geo Barents spots a wooden boat in distress and rescues the 100 people crowded on its 2 floors. After having carried out a total of 8 rescue operations, the ship hosts 558 survivors and requests a port of safe be assigned by authorities.

After 8 days of waiting at sea, Italian authorities finally inform SOS Mediterraneé's Ocean Viking that the 114 people rescued on December 14th will be allowed to disembark in Trapani.

On the same day, 135 migrants arrive in Lampedusa on 3 boats after being rescued near the island.

After having set sail on December 22nd, Sea-Watch 3 carries out its first rescue operation and welcomes 93 people who were aboard an unstable double-decker boat south of Lampedusa.

The Libyan Red Crescent reports having found 5 lifeless bodies off the coast of Dakhla.

Hundreds of migrants remain blocked at the Belarus-Poland border in extreme weather conditions. In the meantime, the Lithuanian Parliament adopts amendments aimed at limiting the movement of migrants in Lithuania for a period lasting up to a year in order to "prevent an attraction effect for illegal immigration." The amendments pass with a large majority. According to the President of the Parliamentary Committee on Defense and National Security, the intent is to not give migrants the idea that they can arrive in Lithuania, wait 6 months, and then continue on to travel to Germany."
During the night and in the early morning, Sea-Watch 3 rescues 180 people from 2 boats in distress. In the afternoon, Alarm Phone reports there is a dinghy in distress. The civilian fleet ship manages to intervene and takes on board another 78 migrants. Sea-Watch now hosts a total of 350 people.

The Greek Coast Guard reports that at least 30 bodies have been recovered in the sea near the Greek islands between Thursday, December 23rd and Saturday, December 25th. On Thursday, 11 bodies are recovered within sight of the island of Antikythera (Anticitera) and another 16 off of Paros. Among the deceased are 3 women and a newborn. 63 people are rescued after a rubber dinghy carrying at least 80 people capsized. A third incident of a sinking vessel, a capsized dinghy near the island of Folegandros is reported on Christmas. 3 people drowned. However, between 32 to 50 people were onboard and they are still missing.

Shortly after 6 a.m., an Italian Finance Police patrol boat intercepts a sailboat from Turkey carrying 100 migrants, including 25 children, attempting to reach Capo Rizzuto on the coast of Calabria.

During its 5th operation in 3 days, Sea-Watch 3 intercepts a dinghy that has been taking in water. 96 people are rescued, among them are a pregnant woman and a 2 week old baby.

490 migrants arrive at Crotone’s port in one day. The first vessel, a sailboat, arrives at dawn with 90 people on board. A second group of people, 400, arrive late in the morning after a rubber dinghy carrying at least 80 people capsized. A third incident of a missing.
MONDAY, DECEMBER 27
After 8 rescue operations and a 4-day waiting period, Italian authorities assign Augusta as a port of safety for the 558 migrants aboard Geo Barents. Médecins Sans Frontières' staff is relieved especially for the most vulnerable on board: 145 minors, 80% of whom are unaccompanied, 6 children younger than 4 years of age, and a woman who is 8 months pregnant.

A pregnant woman and her 3 year old daughter, both in need of special medical care, are evacuated from Sea-Watch 3. Aboard the ship, there are still 444 people waiting for a port of safety to be assigned.

The Red Crescent reports that the bodies of 27 migrants, including the body of a child and the bodies of 2 women, were found on the beach of Khoms, Libya. The bodies were transported by waves after a boat sank attempting to cross the Mediterranean. Only 3 people on board survived. They were recovered on the beach of Al-Alous, 90 km from Tripoli.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31
After 5 rescue operations, the evacuation of 6 people for medical reasons and 5 days of waiting at sea, Italian authorities assign Pozzallo as a port of disembarkation for Sea-Watch 3. Aboard the ship, there are 440 people of which 116 are women, 35 are accompanied children ranging from 2 weeks of age to 4 years, another 7 children are between 5 and 12 years of age, and there are yet another 167 unaccompanied minors between 8 and 17 years old.

Mediterranea Saving Human's Mare Jonio leaves Venice's port for Sicily where final preparations will be completed for its 10th mission after having spent 13 months at the island of Certosa's docking area, Chioggia's shipyard where important maintenance was carried out, and the quayside in Marghera.

Fair winds always!