What the numbers tell us
Data for the months of March

Chronicle of the facts of the Mediterranean
The most important events of the month of March

Women at the Frontlines
A., The Tubman Network

Ucraina - Interview from the Frontlines
Alessandro Ricci

Ukraine - #safepassage Mission
Report from the Polish border

Ukraine - Borders of solidarity
Report from Romania

Borderline Europe Report
News from the Central Mediterranean
Forced to flee across the Mediterranean, 1,296 people managed to arrive in Italy during the month of March—less than the previous month’s 2,439 arrivals which included 348 minors.

### Nationalities Declared at the Time of Landing (Updated to March 31, 2022)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>1,621</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>1,276</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
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<td>Eritrea</td>
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<td>Syria</td>
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<td>Cameroon</td>
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<td>Sudan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others*</td>
<td>942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6,770</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 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.
The Mediterranean Sea continues to be a place where more and more people, fleeing war and persecution, meet death.

In the first 14 days of February, more than 70 people drowned off the coast of Libya. “I am shocked by the continuous loss of life in the central Mediterranean and the lack of action to deal with this ongoing tragedy,” said Sara Msehli, spokesperson for the UN agency for Migration. Daily death reports continue.

On March 12th, a fragile boat carrying 25 people capsized off the Libyan coast of Tobruk. The IOM continues to call for “concrete action to reduce the loss of life in the central Mediterranean route through search and rescue activities and a safe landing mechanism in accordance with international law.”

More than half of this year’s deaths were recorded near the Libyan coast. Federico Soda, head of the IOM Libya mission explains, “Every report of missing migrants represents a bereaved family looking for answers regarding loved ones.”

These data are processed on the basis of information provided by the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior of the Italian Republic. The data refer to the landing events detected by 8.00 on the reference day.
CHRONICLE OF MARCH OF THE FACTS IN MEDITERRANEAN
Day 1

Greece classifies Turkey as a “safe third country” despite its many human rights violations. In a contrasting action, Refugee Support Aegean (RSA) and PRO ASYL ask the European Commission to pursue immediate legal action against Greece for systematic violations of EU and international law.

The Libyan Red Crescent Society recovers 4 lifeless bodies off the coast of Sabratha, a city located in northwestern Libya.

The bodies of 7 people are found in Epano Skala, in northern Greece. They were most probably victims of yet another shipwreck.

Day 2

A Spanish central government delegation reports, in the media, that approximately 2,000 people attempted en masse to jump the fence at the border between Morocco and the Spanish enclave of Melilla. About 500 succeeded in crossing into Spanish territory.

The Libyan Red Crescent Society recovers another 3 lifeless bodies off the coast of Sabratha. 4 bodies were found the previous day.

Day 3

3 Libyan ministers are abducted on the day the new government is to be sworn in. Several Libyan media outlets report a convoy of cars was at the center of an armed attack around 7 a.m. and Libyan airspace is currently closed.

At dawn, approximately 1,200 people attempt to jump the fence at the enclave in Melilla at the border between Morocco and Spain. Following the previous day’s attempt, this is the second effort to cross en masse into Spanish territory.

The Libyan Red Crescent Society recovers yet another 2 lifeless bodies off Sabratha. 7 bodies had been recovered in the previous days.

Day 4

Aboard Seabird, Sea-Watch’s crew witnesses the so-called Libyan Coast Guard engaged in yet another illegal pushback of a boat carrying about 200 people. A Frontex drone most likely led the Libyan military to the fleeing vessel.

Aboard the patrol boat, Fezzan, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard intercepts a boat carrying 66 people, including a woman and 10 children. In the same period of the day, 194 people, including 40 women and 14 children, are intercepted in two separate operations involving the Libyan military aboard their patrol boat, Zawiya.
DAY 5

In international waters, Open Arms’ crew rescues 28 people, including 2 minors, who had escaped Libya on an overcrowded wooden boat.

At the same time, around dawn, MSF’s crew aboard GeoBarents rescues 80 people on board a fragile boat. There are also children among the survivors, including 6 younger than 4 years of age. In the evening, MSF’s crew executes a second difficult rescue operation in Malta’s SAR area. After searching in the dark for 6 hours, under adverse weather conditions, the crew locates a fragile boat carrying 31 people.

Stability Support, an agency created by al-Sarrāj, intercepts a boat carrying 37 people, including 7 women and a child.

In the same period of the day, the Libyan military intercepts another boat carrying 35 people, including 7 women and 8 children.

DAY 6

Yet another rescue in Malta’s SAR area. Alarm Phone issues the alert. After searching in adverse weather and in the dark for 6 hours, MSF’s crew, on board GeoBarents, succeeds in rescuing a boat in distress carrying 31 terrified people.

DAY 8

Many women and children under the age of 10 are among the 185 people of various nationalities that land in Roccella Ionica a little less than a month after the last landing. The group of migrants were aboard a fishing boat in distress due to the rough weather. They were intercepted approximately 60 miles from the coast by Roccella and Reggio Calabria Coast Guard patrol boats. After the landing, the survivors took molecular diagnostic swab tests and were accommodated within the suspension structures built in the port area and managed by Red Cross and Civil Protection volunteers.

DAY 11

The Refugees in Libya team announces the death of Abdo. He had been burned by traffickers 5 months ago and was admitted to the central hospital in Tripoli where he was treated, but did not receive adequate care. UNHCR Libya had enough time to relocate him to receive better treatment, but he was neglected until his death on March 11th.

In 2 separate operations, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard aboard the patrol boat, Zawiya, intercepts approximately 155 people, including 11 women.

The Libyan Red Crescent Society locates a lifeless body near the city of Sorman.
DAY 12

Yet another boat sinks in the Mediterranean. 20 people die off the coast of Libya. Alarm Phone reports the news on Twitter, “They were trying to reach Europe.” Again, on February 26th, we read that another 50 people died because their boat sank directly off Sabratha. “We need safe migration routes for everyone,” adds Alarm Phone.

However, the 111 survivors aboard GeoBarents, renamed the “children’s ship,” will land in Augusta, Syracuse. The migrants were rescued in 2 separate operations in the central Mediterranean between March 5th and 6th. They had to wait over a week for a port of safety to be assigned. There are 52 children among the survivors, 6 of them are under 4 years of age. The youngest child on board is just 4 months old. 45 of the minors are traveling alone. There are also 10 women on MSF’s ship. 2 of the women are pregnant. Many of the survivors show signs of severe psychological distress. A great number of the survivors have been treated for symptoms of fuel poisoning and hypothermia.

DAY 14

Italian authorities designate the Port of Augusta as a port of safety for the secure disembarkation of the survivors aboard GeoBarents.

The Libyan Red Crescent Society recovers 2 lifeless bodies in the area of Dahla in northern Libya.

DAY 15

“Negli ultimi 8 giorni siamo stati allertati di due barche partite dalla Tunisia: una con 60 persone e una con 24.

Le autorità si rifiutano di dare informazioni.

Temiamo siano naufragate.

Continuiamo a chiedere alle autorità di lanciare un’operazione di soccorso!”. A lanciare l’allarme è Alarm Phone.

DAY 16

There is a new arrival of migrants at Roccella Jonica’s Porto Delle Grazie. 104 people of Egyptian and Syrian nationalities land after they are saved during a rescue operation carried out in the territorial waters of the Ionian Sea by Roccella Jonica’s Finance Police’s naval division and by a Taranto Yellow Flames’ offshore patrol boat.

DAY 18

The Libyan military recovers a lifeless body near the city of Tobruk.
DAY 19

Yesterday, 17 dead bodies were recovered off the northeastern coast of Tunisia. They were at sea near Cap Bon, a peninsula just 80 km from Pantelleria and 147 km from Marsala. “The migrants came mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, but there were also Syrians,” said Tunisian civil protection spokesman, Moez Triaa. There is no information on the date and time the boat sank or whether there may be more victims. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), around 200 people lost their lives along the central Mediterranean route in the first two months of the year 2022. The majority of them sailed from Libya. Last year there were more than 2,000 victims. However, these statistics are on the low side, because only confirmed deaths are counted.

A few hours after the previous discovery, the Libyan military recovered another lifeless body near Tobruk.

DAY 21

According to the Tunisian news agency, Tap, at least 20 people have died after a boat sank off the Tunisian coast. According to Alarm Phone, the migrant boat might have been one of the two that left the coast of Nabeul 10 days ago and that has not been seen for 9 days. Alarm Phone also claims that there are 60 and 24 people respectively on board the 2 dilapidated boats. “The authorities refuse to give any information,” explains Alarm Phone, “and we are afraid they also have drowned.” Most of the migrants are Syrian.

DAY 23

Approximately 60 people, including women and children, on board a boat fleeing Libya are rescued off the coast of Lampedusa by the Italian Finance Police. Their identities will be documented and they will be taken to the island’s hotspot.

DAY 24

Off the coast of Libya, 30 people on a rubber dinghy are rescued by Sos Méditerranée’s team working together with the Red Cross. Weather conditions in the central Mediterranean are highly unstable. Thankfully, the dinghy was spotted in time.

DAY 27

At dawn, a pregnant woman is transferred from the Ocean Viking carrying the Sos Méditerranée’s crew.
DAY 28

Adnkronos learns that the 157 people recently rescued by the Ocean Viking in 2 separate operations will disembark at Augusta in Siracusa. Last Friday, there were 128 men, women, and children on board the last raft rescued. There were also the corpses of what appeared to have been 2 young people. The rescue operations, in adverse weather conditions, lasted over 5 hours. “We managed to recover only one of the two bodies,” Sos Mediterranée explains. “Yesterday, a pregnant woman was evacuated by the Coast Guard and taken by helicopter to Catania’s Cannizzaro Hospital. The evacuation was necessary because of the sudden contractions the woman was experiencing and which made her assume the child’s birth was imminent. And, yet again, yesterday, the humanitarian ship’s crew repeated their request for a port of safety for disembarkation.” They said, “We have already sent numerous requests to authorities. The weather is getting worse. A navigational warning has been issued and we must get to safety. The survivors must disembark immediately.”

DAY 29

MSF’s crew aboard GeoBarents rescues 113 people on a fragile boat in distress.
A. is 23 years old, has blue eyes, and has many kilometers to go. I meet her on a usual afternoon on the threshold of my apartment. She is accompanied by Serena. At 23, she has not returned from the Erasmus program, but from a war. She is traveling light with a very compact roller bag and a wristlet swinging freely at the end of her arm. As she is getting settled in at a complete stranger’s apartment, it takes a while to break the ice. This is new for both of us. All we need is a couple of glasses of water and a beer to make us feel comfortable.

She is nervous because her mom is still in Kyiv where the alarms have begun to sound louder and louder. If she is already here, it’s because she listened to the right advice. Few people know this, but the best way to cross the border with Poland is to reach Warsaw by car in order to avoid the endless queues in the most crowded Ukrainian railway stations. Instructions are confusing, but comprehensible: take the train to the border, meet family and friends in the city, and then drive away to Warsaw. She tells me that the train that crosses Ukraine is an invisible train. Cell phones and the train lights must be turned off in order to avoid being seen by the Russians. Arrival in Poland brings a sigh of relief. The first friendly faces emerge with tea, biscuits,
and some snacks so travelers can rest for a bit. But time is a tyrant in tyrannical times. It’s time now to run and catch another train. Destination? Berlin.

Here in Neukolln, we are again sipping beer, distracting ourselves from what is happening. Alona is worried. Her mother is faraway. She has many reasons for delaying her departure: she doesn’t want to abandon her house or her cat, there are friends staying behind, and there’s their own land to defend. Who among us would want to flee from their own home if their lives weren’t at risk. No one would. A., however, manages to handle all the problems that come up with each new bulletin. She leaves her office job with a nice group of friends. They, too, are on the road. She says each of them was ready to scatter throughout Europe’s territory.

A. walks with me through the streets of Berlin. When morning breaks, we go to have breakfast together. She is happy about the new stage in her journey. She is headed for Palermo. G., together with her partner and her teenage son, is waiting for her. They met A. when she was only 12 years old through an intercultural exchange that allowed Ukrainian children to go to the seaside and breathe in “the good air,” as she calls it. And 11 years later, they are not betraying the family bond that they established and they are welcoming her to a place of safety.

A. doesn’t know what she wants to do. Maybe study, maybe work. She heard negative stories about Italians not liking Ukrainians, because they’re not good people. “You know what they think,” she tells me with a disarming calm and with that slowly creeping habit that people have of getting used to rotten things and idle chatter. A. doesn’t care, though. G. will know what advice to give her. For now, she doesn’t think about much, except about her mother. However, good news has arrived and A. can relax. Mom is finally in Poland.

She arrived in Warsaw without any problems and now she has to find a way to reach Palermo. Not knowing any language other than Ukrainian, the European grid is becoming increasingly difficult to understand. But, G. has a solution: take the train going to Palermo from Warsaw, 40 hours. It seems like the imperfectly successful, perfect escape plan.
Just a bit darker shade of melanin demonstrates how the border is harmful, very much so. It's 11:50 p.m. on a chaotic night at the Tubman Network Reception Center. This social network was founded by and for BIPOC people who need support in the area. It became a relief center for refugees fleeing Ukraine because of the war. Fatigue has set in, but the arrivals never stop. In order to meet the continuous demand for assistance, we divide ourselves into teams: Covid testing, housing search and assignment, medical and kitchen teams. I am happy to be part of the housing search team, but it is late and we are getting close to that time of night when, as usual, there are more requests than accommodations available. We are getting more nervous, but the cold weather in Berlin reminds us that we must summon up the last of our energy to help the new arrivals.

News reaches me that a family has arrived. They are not doing well. We need someone to go talk to them. I make my way to the back of the Covid test room and I find them there. The family is comprised of 5 people: mother, sister, daughter, and 2 grandchildren, the younger of which is 4 years old. The mother is in tears. She is ready to go back to Ukraine from which they just arrived. She cannot believe that her sister and her sister’s husband and son have been lost there. She can’t remember the station where they were separated. What she does remember, however, is sufficient. They were all together when the crowd at the station started to push, and in an instant, they were lost. The story is interrupted by weeping and disbelief. We do not become disheartened, however. We give the names of the lost family members to the teams that are leaving to bring food and clothing to the border. A slight expression of hope comes to their faces.

I stop to talk to the mother of the group and to one of her daughters. They are the only ones awake at this hour. The mother is a doctor at the hospital in Kyiv. Her 22 year old daughter studies medicine. They tell me they fled Tigray and found a future in Ukraine. The period of peace lasted less than a year. I begin to feel their distress. It's almost 1 a.m., now, and they are barely able to speak. Trying to ward off the darkness of this horrible situation, I hold the 4 year old in my arms and we play together. However, the specter of darkness continues to cast its shadow. While we wrap up the formalities, the reception team is continuously on the phone trying to find a solution for their accommodation. I get through to them. And, after a few unproductive attempts, we find a way to allow the entire family to be accommodated and housed together. Soon, the volunteer driver will arrive to bring them to a place that is safe and warm. In the meantime, loud and spontaneous applause has broken out among the volunteers. There is a mix of satisfaction and emotion. You have to consider that none of us has any training for this work. My colleague is unemployed. Another colleague sells furniture online and, yet another is a customer service representative for a large company in Berlin. Even so, it is the human sense of gratification that brings us closer and unites us, even on a night like this that is like so many other nights of this sudden war.
ALESSANDRO RICCI

INTERVIEW FROM THE FRONTLINES
Alessandro, we would love to see the world through your eyes. What have you seen these days? Who have you talked to? How are people doing? Men? Women? Children?

I think it is very difficult to convey in a precise and detailed manner what life is like living in such a place. I arrived in Lviv on March 1st. The Russian invasion had just begun. In chronological order, what struck me most were the mothers and children in Medyka who had crossed the Polish border on foot. There was a mix of despair and joy. On the one hand, there was joy because people had escaped the bombings. On the other hand, the thought of leaving behind that seemed like a normally flowing life, until the first bomb dropped, brought despair. Once passed the border, there were 10 km of cars lined up in -7c weather. Here, civilians had literally started to come to life while waiting, for even more than a day, to cross the border. However, it was in the days that followed that the true magnitude of the humanitarian situation west of Ukraine became evident.

Lviv is the destination for some and a transit point for others. It is the destination for men between the ages of 18 to 60 who cannot leave the country and must enlist in the army. It is a transit point for women and children being sent to safety within the borders of the European Union. If you wanted to describe what the station of Lviv was like with an image, imagine a column of thousands of people waiting in total silence for the train leaving for Poland. The anti-air siren sounds and everyone remains motionless as they are certain they are now so close to their objective that they cannot give up. Most of the people we met in the first few days came from Kharikiv and Kyiv which the Russian armed forces had carpet-bombed. There was an elderly woman attending her fate together with her cat under the snow. She was crying. She had no contacts and no home. There was also the director of the theater in Kharkiv who had traveled an entire day on a train full of people. He had fled together with his mother and his wife. He said that people were so fatigued that they had learned to sleep standing, just like horses. The train ride lasted 15 hours. Crammed with 3 times as many people allowed per compartment, the train had no air, food, or water. He was exhausted and could not remember his own name. According to him, it was the 7th day; rather, the 7th day since the beginning of the conflict.

There are many stories. In particular, there are stories of mothers who fled together with their children while their husbands remained to fight in their hometown. I still find it difficult to talk about what Kasha, a woman I met, told me in a trembling voice and with terror in her eyes. She said to me, “Every day, I call my husband and ask him ‘Are you alive? Are you OK?’” Then, there was Alina who told me that she had described everything to her daughter as a game, just like in the movie Life is Beautiful. She told her that there
were bad guys in the sky and that she, along with her dolls, had to go, in the dark, down to the shelter. When they left for Lviv from Kyiv, the little girl packed for herself and for her dolls and said goodbye to her father.

Mariupol was next. The first people who managed to escape arrived in Lviv after traveling for at least 7 days. They had initially fled to Zaporizhzhya. Then, they were taken by train to Lviv. Nadia, who is 39 years old and has 3 children, told us of the city’s devastation and the journey that had tested her limits. She told us of the deaths she came across along the way and of the mass graves dug single-handedly by neighbors in order to bury the dead that had accumulated on the streets. She, too, had told her son the story of the game. But, Svetoslav, who is 5 years old, did not want to believe it.

After finally leaving the city on their third attempt, Svetoslav witnessed a man killed by the debris from a nearby vehicle hit by a missile and this episode, especially, made it hard for him to believe it was a game.

Furthermore, in the buffer zone between the Russian-controlled and the Ukrainian-controlled areas, there is a single file line of vehicles advancing at a walking pace. Being led across a 3 kilometer minefield by minesweepers, there is a single column of cars and buses carrying women, children, and the elderly. “When I arrived in Zaporizhzhya, I was the happiest person in the world.”

I heard so many stories that I could not fit them all in a book. There were so many. It may seem strange, though, that the stories I heard from 2 people in particular impressed me the most and weren’t the ones that were the most ‘intense’. They were told to me by the two facilitators who were with me. First, there’s Kyrylo. He’s a young man from Kharkiv who’s my age. I saw a lot of myself in him. He had a normal life and was at an age where he thought he had built a life for himself. He had a family, a child; he bought a house. He worked in IT for a large international company in Kharkiv. Presently, his wife is safe in Hungary while he lives here with friends of friends. He is separated from his family, from those he loves. Everything he built has been destroyed. From one day to the next, it was all gone. There is no solution, no exit to take. There is no security for the future. The second facilitator lived in Italy for 17 years and returned to Lviv in December. Her name is Svitlana. She stayed here because her boyfriend, who is also Ukrainian, was visiting from Munich when the war broke out. He decided to enlist. Now, she waits every Sunday to see him. At night, she cannot sleep because she is worried.

Even though these two stories cannot compare to the tragedies others have experienced, I think that they convey just how close this war is “culturally” to us.
What do you think of Europe’s reaction so far? Do you think it’s too weak and insufficient? Or adequate and well-timed?

Regarding European countries’ preparation to receive refugees, I think Europe’s response has been prompt and effective starting from the initial days of the war. The response was not just from an institutional level. Associations, NGOs and private individuals who came and wanted to help have also been involved. The situation has changed considerably since I arrived at Lviv. I believe this change is due to “Western” aid. The station at Lviv is almost empty now. The refugees are managed in an organized manner. They are given information, aid, free tickets, and there are organizations that put people fleeing in contact with people who would like to host them.

The response has been without a doubt very positive, especially considering that the same cannot be said of other instances. In particular, I am thinking of Poland which has a double standard when it comes to the two different migration crises. Being on the Polish-Belorussian border at present, I have noticed that the attitude towards Ukrainian refugees is completely different from the one towards Afghans, Iraqis, and Kurds arriving from Minsk (thanks to a crazy move by Lukashenko to put pressure on the EU). They find the border closed to them and are repelled by the army because they are regarded as invaders.
We are witnessing a contradictory application of the reception process that is discriminating against refugees fleeing from Ukraine based on their nationality. Is all this tragically true? What is happening? Have you spoken to any of these people and gotten to know their stories?

The media here and in Europe talked a lot about this early on. This isn't much of a problem on the EU side, but it is on the Ukrainian side. We were told by some young men from Angola that they had problems in Kyiv, because “whites” were given priority status on evacuation trains. We heard the same story from some young people in Lviv who had issues crossing the border because they were black.

However, there's another type of discrimination that isn't spoken about much: discrimination against trans women. Those women who are still undergoing the transition process still have a passport indicating 'male' as their gender. Given that under the Conscription Act, men between the ages of 18 and 60 cannot leave the country, so this is a huge problem. Alisa told me that she initially tried using a fake HIV certificate, then she photoshopped her passport. Now, she's going to attempt getting a certificate saying she's mentally ill. During her previous attempts to cross the border, she was accused of treason to the fatherland after she was examined to verify whether her breasts were real, if she was wearing a wig, and whether she had an Adam's apple. This, however, is just one of the transgender stories of people who want to leave the country and can't.
#SAFEPASSAGE
UKRAINE: THE FIRST MISSION

Report from the border with Poland and from Lviv
The first Mission “Safe Passage in Ukraine” – promoted by MEDITERRANEA Saving Humans and supported by CNA, Gesco Group, Fiom, Fiom Lazio, Archdiocese of Bologna, Municipality of Bologna, Casetta Rossa of Rome, il Cantiere, and the Spazio di Mutuo Soccorso of Milan, Officina 31021 of Mogliano, Veneto – left Naples and Bologna on Wednesday, March 16th, and arrived at the border between Poland and Ukraine the following day.

9 TONNES OF HUMANITARIAN AID DELIVERED TO LVIV.
177 WOMEN, CHILDREN AND MEN BROUGHT TO SAFETY IN ITALY.

16-22 MARCH

The first activity carried out by our caravan was at the refugee centre in Przemysl, where part of the humanitarian aid destined for the people who had crossed the border was unloaded, and where the mission was divided into two parts. The first part, led by Head of Mission, Laura Marmorale, remained in the refugee centres on the border, and the second part, led by Beppe Caccia, continued to the Ukrainian city of Lviv.

On the Polish-Ukrainian border, the mission worked in the refugee centres: first in Przemysl and, then, in Korczowa, where it stayed until Sunday, March 20th. Thanks to the essential help of our Ukrainian cultural mediators and our medical staff, we were able to bring first aid to the people fleeing the war.

Many of them were wounded during the bombings, while others had been suffering for a long time from serious illness which had gone untreated due to the ongoing conflict. They included a woman with breast cancer, other women with multiple injuries, and a young man with psychiatric issues. In the Korczowa refugee centre, we found dozens of voluntary organisations from all over Europe and Israel, with whom we actively cooperated both in welcoming the refugees, organising a safe journey to Italy, and in running the centre.
Overall, the caravan brought about 100 people back to Italy from the centres in Przemysl and Korczowa, in addition to those who were brought to Italy by the vans that entered Lviv and by another bus that arrived from Veneto to accompany the caravan.

A total of 177 people traveled to a place of safety thanks to our mission.

Of these, the vast majority were women and children. A total of seven different nationalities were rescued: Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Georgians, Russians, Italians, Ecuadorians, and Colombians (the latter were students at the University of Dnipro).

One of the objectives of the caravan was to provide safe entry routes to the borders of the European Union for all people fleeing war, without any kind of discrimination on the basis of nationality or origin, and we succeeded.

Of the people who arrived in Italy, 91 arrived in Naples, where they underwent medical screening and are, now, hosted by families thanks to the help of Mediterranea volunteers and the support of the CNA and the Gesco group, which have been engaged in mediation between the refugees and the families willing to host them. Two women were hospitalised at the Ospedale del Mare in Naples. Others were entrusted to the Association “Amici Bambini di Chernobyl” of Monselice (in the province of Padua), which mediated with the families willing to receive the refugees. Others reached their families directly from Bologna, where they were transported by the caravan buses.

From the refugee centres we visited, we heard the alarm of Polish volunteers and the authorities over speculation of the skin color of the people fleeing the country. The first phenomenon is that of “paid passage”, whereby people fleeing war are asked for hundreds of euros per person for a car transfer.

This is a horrible phenomenon of speculation, carried out by people from different countries who travel to the border in rented vehicles. Many people, who have arrived without money both at the border and in Lviv, cannot afford a paid trip. “Safe passage in Ukraina” gave 177 people the opportunity to arrive to a safe place free of charge.
The second phenomenon is the disappearance of young women from refugee centres.

Strict controls on people leaving the centres have been made necessary precisely because of the disappearance of people, mainly young women, whose traces were lost after they had been registered. Mediterranea Saving Humans was accepted as an Italian actor in the centres of Korczowa and Przemysl, where it operated with the utmost transparency, receiving, especially in Korczowa, the cooperation and appreciation of the other organisations present.

We share the same alarm regarding the speculation of the skin color of those fleeing the bombings and regarding the dangers of human trafficking on the Polish-Ukrainian border.

Passing through several border controls and checkpoints, our caravan entered Lviv in the early afternoon of Friday, March 18th. We arrived just a few hours after the Russian missile attack hit the city’s airport, damaging hangars and infrastructure.

With our six vans, we transported and distributed about 9 tonnes of humanitarian aid, including: medicines and medical devices, food, basic necessities, warm clothes, and blankets.

Part of this aid, collected by the Belarusian association in Bologna and Emilia-Romagna, was delivered to a local association that helps children with Down’s syndrome. Clothes and food were mostly unloaded at the Salesian Fathers of Don Bosco family home in Lviv, which is primarily committed to supporting refugees and has given us hospitality during our stay.

Medical equipment and medicines were taken directly to the “Veterans” Hospital in the suburb of Vynnyky, a facility reserved for the hospitalisation of wounded civilians and soldiers from war zones.

200 patients were already being treated for gunshot wounds, severe and very severe burns, and crush injuries as a result of the Russian bombing of cities in the east and south of the country.

Just as we were meeting the director of the hospital, the first of a long series of air raid alarms sounded. We, along with the doctors and patients, had to go to the hospital’s underground shelters in search of safety. This was an unprecedented situation for Lviv, signaling that even the westernmost regions of Ukraine have become a potential target of Putin’s aggression and the Russian forces’ missile attacks.
While our ship Mare Jonio is ready to set sail for Mission #11 of monitoring and rescue in the Central Mediterranean, we can safely say that the one that ended last week will be only the first of the #SafePassage missions on land. MEDITERRANEAN Saving Humans activists are, in fact, preparing to participate, together with a wide range of Catholic and lay pacifist associations, in the “STOP THE WAR NOW” delegation that will travel to Ukraine from March 31st to April 2nd.

During the 48 hours we spent in Lviv, from Friday to Sunday, Detjon Begaj, the Mayor of Bologna mission’s town councilor and envoy, and Gianluca Peciola, from the region of Lazio, joined us in meeting with Regional Authorities and the Municipality’s Head of International Relations.

These important meetings served to establish relations between these cities and to clarify the primary needs of an urban area of about 700 thousand inhabitants that found itself having to manage an influx of over 200 thousand refugees in the period of three weeks. Symbolically, thanks to Mediterranea’s convoy, Councillor Begaj was then able to transport to Italy the children’s books destined for the Ukrainian stand at the Bologna Book Fair that is currently underway.

In spite of the terrible war situation and the subsequent feeling that all our efforts are just a drop in the ocean, the objectives that our Mission had set for itself were achieved: delivering humanitarian aid to Ukraine; providing a safe route for refugees to enter Europe, without any discrimination, and their dignified reception in Italy; and, building relationships with the Ukrainian civil society in order to create future initiatives.

Finally, on Sunday, March 20th, our caravan of six vans left for the Polish border. About 40 refugees occupied the last available seats. They, like all those who traveled on board the buses that left the refugees centres, arrived at their destination, by the following morning of Tuesday, March 22nd, and were welcomed in various Italian cities: from Turin to Bologna, from Padua to Naples, from Rome to Palermo.

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This is our way of being against war and always putting the protection of people first.
UCRAINA
BORDERS OF SOLIDARITY
ROMANIA 8-16 MARCH 2022

Dorina Achlaritei
Tiziano Schiena
As soon as we land, we don’t feel like we arrived in a country that is experiencing a full-scale refugee emergency. So far, out of a total of over 2 million refugees scattered throughout neighboring European countries, more than 150,000 people have been in transit through just Romania.

Getting on the first train to Bucharest was all we needed to be reminded of the historical importance of this moment. During the trip, we catch fragments of a conversation in English and Russian involving three women. The conversation is interrupted by the arrival of the train conductor who asks them for their tickets.

Two of the women show their Ukrainian passports, which in Romania, are presently considered valid passes for all public transportation. These two young Ukrainian women were born and raised in Odessa which, according to Kristina, is probably Putin’s next target.

This is the reason she, her sister, and their four children fled their city.

The rest of their family, as well as their parents, is still there.

The sisters are with Gabriela, a young woman from Bucharest who helped them find housing when they went to an improvised information desk at the Romanian capital’s central station ten days ago. They had traveled through Giurgiulești, the village on the Danube where the borders of Moldova, Ukraine, and Romania meet, before reaching Galati and then, finally arriving in Bucharest. Their final destination is Treviso, Italy, where they have family members waiting for them. They are coming back from the airport where they went for information regarding the need for any further travel documents.

Gabriela tells us about the mobilization of thousands of people to help the refugees and host them in their homes, especially in northeastern Romania, where entire hotels have been made available.

The two young Ukrainian women confirm Gabriela’s account. People welcomed them in the best possible way and they consider themselves lucky to have met Gabriela who has accompanied them to the airport at such an hour at night. The two of them and their children are now safe, but what about the rest of the family? What if Russia succeeds in occupying Odessa? Before we are able to even contemplate the possibility of such a scenario, a voice over the train’s speaker system tells us that we are about to arrive in Bucharest.
As we walk toward the station’s exit, the stories we were told start to materialize around us. The colors of the Ukrainian flags that adorn the signs and information posters around Bucharest’s central station’s volunteer tent stand out to us perceptibly.

We stop someone wearing a yellow vest and ask him for information. His name is Cosmin and he has been coming to the station for three days to offer his time and assistance. The tent is covered with signs written in Ukrainian and with ticket price lists for trains traveling to larger Romanian cities and for trains destined for Istanbul, Budapest, and for Bratislava via those larger Romanian destinations. Cosmin tells us that help is needed day and night. Volunteers who speak Ukrainian are needed. Or, because there are so few volunteers who speak Ukrainian, volunteers who speak, at least, Russian are also needed. In fact, the volunteers wearing orange vests, the color for the translators, can be counted on one hand.

Another young woman, also a volunteer, tells us that she will go to Isaccea in the next few days, because following the news that Odessa will be bombed, many people will enter Romania from there, across the Danube.

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Duccio Facchini, a journalist for the Italian newspaper Altra Economia, uncovered various inconsistencies in the Italian Ministry of Interior and Coast Guard figures for 2021 arrivals in Italy. But the dangerous game about the numbers already started in 2019. Since then, the majority of rescue operations on the Mediterranean Sea are treated as “police operations” by the Italian coast guard. Rescues of refugees are therefore no longer recognised as sea rescue operations – a politically important distinction. “This is not a mere formal detail, but a profound change in practices that could have a significant impact on our country’s application of the rules on sea rescue, further accelerating the proxy rejections practiced by the Libyan coastal militias,” Facchini said in 2019. Until December 2018, the Italian Coast Guard published a monthly newsletter listing all the operations managed by the Maritime Rescue Control Centre (MRCC). “These lists contained three data: the number of
'search and rescue' operations, the number of people ‘rescued’ under Italian coordination, and the type of vessels involved (Coast Guard, Navy, Guardia di Finanza, EUNAVFOR MED - Operation Sophia, NGOs or others). Everything was run as ‘SAR activities’, Facchini said.

From 2019 onwards, the reports appeared only quarterly and were now called 'events related to the phenomenon of irregular immigration by sea on the Italian coast'. In addition to the persons rescued from distress at sea in the chart, there were now also “persons intercepted within the framework of security police measures, technically referred to as ‘law enforcement measures’”. By mid-2019, the number of ‘intercepted persons’ was already double that of those classified as rescued. Politically, this different label means that it is not a matter of following the Maritime Rescue Conventions, which besides rescue also implies transfer to a safe port, but of securing the territorial sea. One of the consequences is the systematic arrest of people as so-called ‘boat drivers’. Compared to the numbers of the coast guard in 2017, the number of security police operations is negligible. At that time, virtually all operations were considered SAR operations, as human lives were at risk on unseaworthy boats. It did not matter whether the boat was outside the Italian SAR zone or not, the first rescue centre to learn of the case had to deal with it. But even then, Malta had abandoned this understanding of the Law of the Sea Conventions. In 2017, the Italian Coast Guard was still complaining about Malta's approach of dismissing virtually all sea rescue cases as a safety problem.

According to Rear Admiral Nicola Carlone, then head of a division of the General Command of the Coast Guard’s Port Authority Corps, since 2021 General Commandant there, Malta was already avoiding its responsibility to fulfil the maritime rescue obligations at that time. Thus, even then, the responsibility to rescue was not seldom transferred to the neighbouring state - Italy. Since 2019 - any data from the Italian coast guard is missing from 2018 - Italy’s attitude has changed. What had previously been condemned by Rear Admiral Carlone was now also the order of the day here: overloaded boats with fugitives were in most cases classified as ‘stopped by the security police’ as long as the boat was still afloat.

In March 2022, Duccio Facchini revisited the issue. Regarding the arrivals of refugees in 2021, he makes clear how the figures of the Italian Ministry of the
Interior are inconsistent and do not match the official data of the Italian Coast Guard either. 38,887 out of 67,477 arrivals according to the Ministry of the Interior were labelled as ‘intercepted by the security police as part of their operation’. The Italian coast guard, on the other hand, claims to have coordinated the rescue of only 14,346 people. In short, it seems that the authorities are not able - or rather not willing - to make clear statements on a simple issue: how many people were rescued at sea in the Central Mediterranean and by whom? A statement that seems to have been possible only until 2017. More rescues are not considered SAR missions. This and the increasingly frequent assignment of a ‘Port of Destination’, a normal port of arrival instead of a ‘Place of Safety’, a safe port in the sense of the Law of the Sea Conventions, shows ever more clearly: Italy, too, has long since abandoned compliance with the Law of the Sea Conventions. Unclear or lacking data are meant to conceal this fact.

ARRIVALS

According to our counts, 1321 people arrived on the Italian coasts in March.

According to UNHCR, this number was 966 and the Italian Ministry of the Interior counts 1358, which is about 1000 arrivals less than in March last year.
The number of illegal pullbacks remain lower in the month of March than in previous months, due to a decrease in departures because of bad weather. 1006 people were intercepted according to our counts. Of these, 984 were returned to Libya and 22 to Tunisia.

Meanwhile, the European border and coast guard agency Frontex also continued to engage in pullbacks to Libya. On 05 March, a Sea-Watch aircraft observed a Frontex drone directing the so-called Libyan Coast Guard boat “Zawiya” to a maritime emergency. The military vessel “Zawiya” is one of the 22 boats that Italy has donated to Libya as part of the cooperation for border protection and coast guard in recent years. Officially, however, the cooperation between Frontex and the so-called Libyan coast guard is denied. So far, it has not been observed that Frontex drones also guide sea rescue NGOs or commercial vessels to sea rescue cases.

On 31 March, 145 people were in distress in an inflatable boat off the coast of Libya. The refugees contacted the Alarm Phone because their engine failed. They stated that several women and children in the boat were in a critical state of health. When the so-called Libyan Coast Guard finally picked up the rescued persons to tow them back to Libya, eleven women and children could only be recovered dead.

On 30 March, the German government decided to extend the participation of the German Armed Forces in EUNAVFOR MED Operation Irini to enforce the arms embargo off the coast of Libya for another year - until the end of April 2023. In the declaration of mandate, the German government for the first time commits itself to active sea rescue in the Mediterranean and announces its intention to advocate at the European level for a state-coordinated and EU-financed sea rescue. The training of the so-called Libyan coast guard by German soldiers is to be stopped due to the “repeatedly unacceptable behaviour” of the units against refugees and NGOs. Signalling such a clear stance from the political side towards the so-called Libyan coast guard would be a political milestone. Nevertheless, the German Armed Forces have de facto not participated in the training of the coast guard, so a change at the operational level will not take place. Moreover, the Irini ships are located so far away from the flight routes that not a single person has been rescued from distress at sea since the operation began in 2020.
We count at least 70 dead and 64 missing in March alone. We know of two shipwrecks off Tunisia and one off the eastern Libyan coast of Tobruk.

On 4 March, 60 people disappeared without a trace after setting sail from the Tunisian coast towards Europe. Relatives informed the Alarm Phone, which spent more than ten days asking the authorities to fulfil their duty to launch a search and rescue operation. On 18 March, the tragic scale of the state’s inaction in this case became apparent. 25 bodies, mostly of Syrian origin, washed up on Tunisian beaches, 35 more people remain missing.

The whereabouts of 24 people who left Tunisia on 10 March also remain unclear. Neither European nor North African authorities provide information on whether the boat has reached the mainland.

On 13 March, another tragedy occurred, this time off the coast of Tobruk in eastern Libya. Again, the figures are ambiguous, with different authorities and journalists reporting different numbers of rescued and recovered bodies. According to our counts and compilations from various sources, six people were saved from drowning by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard but were taken back to a Libyan detention camp. Intensive search efforts by Libyan authorities have recovered 18 dead bodies from the sea. One person remains missing.

On the night of 24 March, another boat capsized off the Tunisian coast, three survivors were recovered, six bodies were found, more are missing.
On 1 March, in collaboration with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, the Italian Ministry of Interior and Foreign Affairs and the National Institute for Health, Migration and Poverty, 99 refugees, including several women and children, were evacuated through a Humanitarian Corridor from Libya to Italy. The refugees from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen were distributed throughout the country in shelters of the Reception and Integration System (Sistema Accoglienza Integrazione (S.A.I.)). This is the first Humanitarian Corridor in 2022. The selection criteria for the Humanitarian Corridor are not transparent. From 2017 until today, only about 1100 people have been evacuated from Libya to Italy via Humanitarian Corridors, while in the same period hundreds of thousands had to risk the crossing in unseaworthy boats to leave Libya.

In early March, the Maltese and Italian authorities once again refused to rescue 26 people in distress at sea. The Alarm Phone drew attention to the case. The merchant ship CMA CGM Rivoli rescued the people on 6 March but was then not allowed to enter a Maltese or Italian port, a scenario that has often played out in the central Mediterranean. In many cases, merchant ships had to wait weeks before they could bring the rescued people ashore. The CMA CGM Rivoli decided not to become a pawn in the hands of the authorities and immediately continued its planned long voyage to Dunkirk in France. While Italy and Malta refused to accept them, the 26 refugees were allowed to disembark in the French port.

An empty boat found in Muravera, Sardinia, is puzzling the authorities. The 10-metre wooden boat was washed up empty on the beach of the village of San Giovanni by the rough sea on 23 March, without an engine but with fuel reserves, clothes, and identity documents of a Bangladeshi citizen. Residents of the area, when questioned by the police, said they had not noticed any people arriving. It remains unclear whether this was a tragic accident or whether the people were able to come ashore unnoticed.
CIVILIAN RESISTANCE

Rescue ships of civil organisations were able to save 488 people in March. This involved the Open Arms from the Spanish organisation Proactiva Open Arms, the Geo Barents from Médécins Sans Frontières, the Ocean Viking from SOS Méditerranée and the SEA-EYE 4. 297 of the rescued were able to find a safe haven in Augusta in Sicily, all the others are currently waiting for a safe haven to be assigned by European authorities. The disembarkation of the people rescued from Ocean Viking on 28 March was overshadowed by the fact that two deceased people were found in an earlier rescue operation, only one of whom could be recovered due to the difficult weather conditions. The body was handed over to Italian authorities in Augusta.

On 28 March, the merchant ship Karina of the North German shipping company KLINGENBERG rescued 32 people from distress at sea in international waters off Libya. The ship was on its way from Malta to Libya, but was alerted to the nearby distress at sea by the Alarm Phone, as government institutions of all littoral states again refused to coordinate the rescue. According to the Karina crew, the wooden boat almost capsized in the waves, which were up to four metres high. However, as there were not enough resources on the container ship to provide food and medical care for the rescued people and the Ukrainian captain was in favour of disembarking the rescued people in Europe instead of Libya, the 32 people were handed over to the Sea-Eye 4 on 30 March, which had already contacted the shipping company and the ship before the rescue to signal its willingness to help in the maritime emergency. The ship was able to bring the rescued to Augusta in Sicily on 6 April.

Doctors without Borders gives a particularly powerful account of their rescue of 31 people on 06 March. After a search lasting more than six hours in the midst of bad weather and darkness, they were able to rescue all the people at the last second who had capsized shortly before with the wooden boat and were already in the water.