

SAVING HUMANS

MEDITERRANEA



MEDREPORT
APRIL 2022

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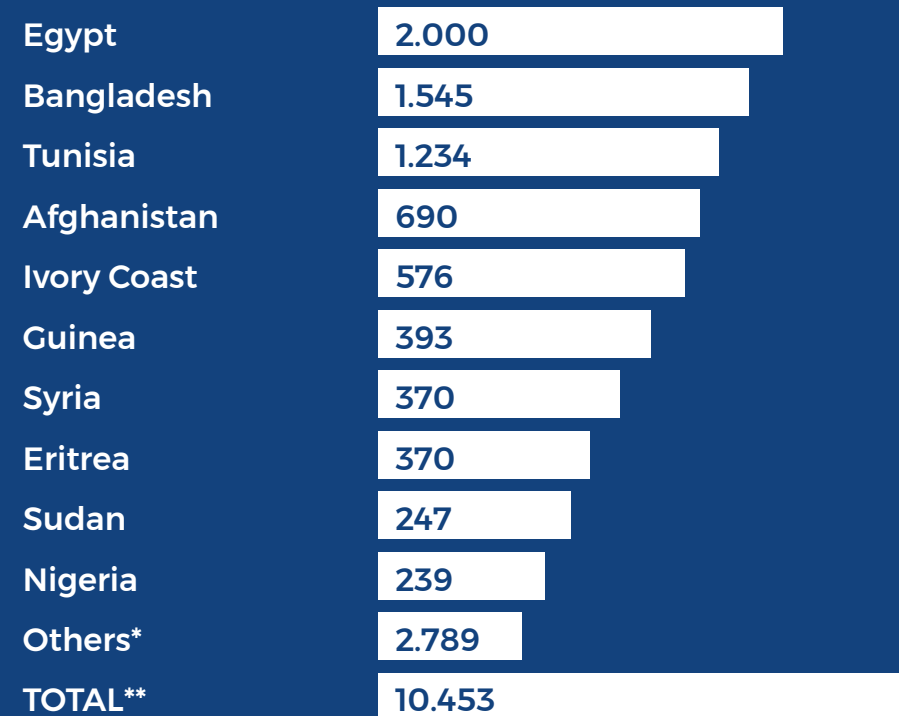
WHAT DO THE NUMBERS TELL US

In April, the number of people who found themselves forced to flee, to cross the Mediterranean and who managed to arrive in Italy was 1,296.

A number, this, lower when compared with the arrivals of the previous month: 2,439 had arrived.

Among the people who arrived in this second month of the year there are 348 unaccompanied minors.

NATIONALITIES DECLARED AT THE TIME OF LANDING (UPDATED TO MAY 4, 2022)



* 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 wars and persecutions, meet death.

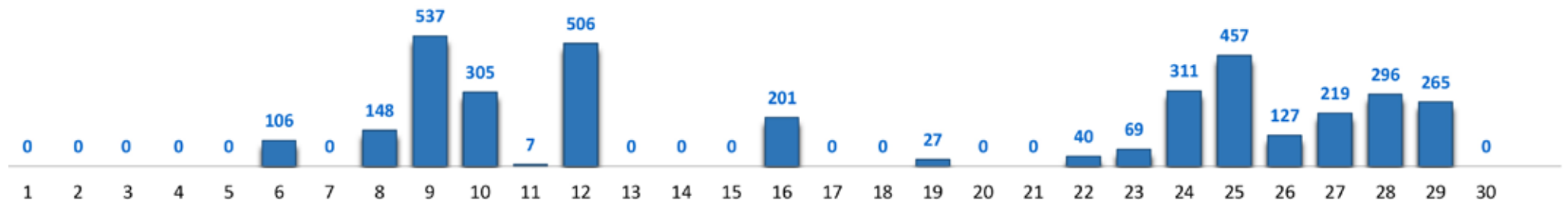
In the first fourteen days of March, over seventy people drowned off the coast of Libya. “I am shocked - said Sara Msehli, spokesperson for the UN agency for migration - by the continuing loss of life in the central Mediterranean and by the lack of action to tackle this ongoing tragedy.

Continuous daily death reports: on 12 March a fragile boat carrying 25 people capsized near the Libyan coast of Tobruk.

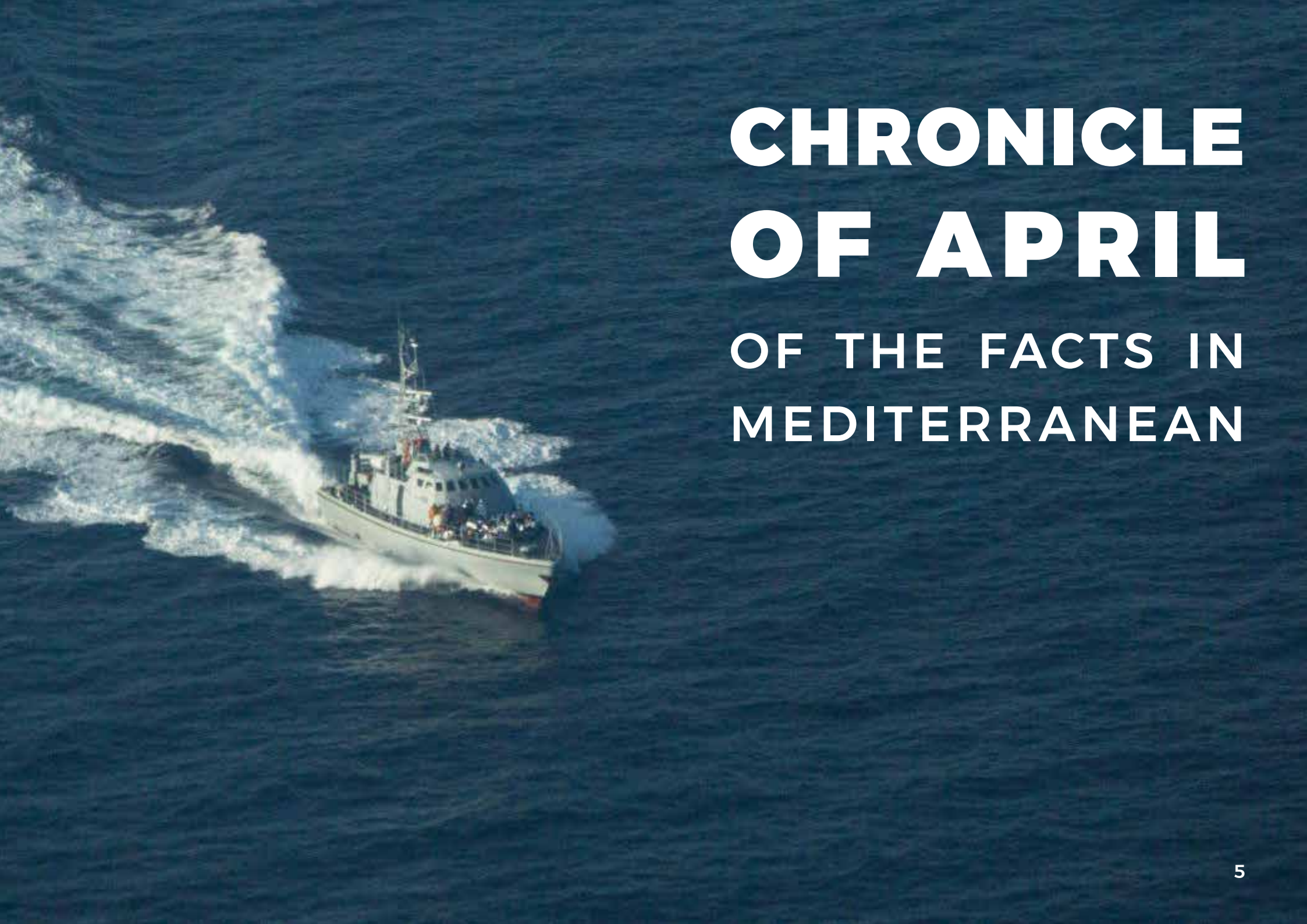
IOM continues to call for “concrete action to reduce the loss of life on the Central Mediterranean route through search and rescue activities and a safe landing mechanism in accordance with international law”.

More than half of the deaths this year were recorded near the Libyan coast.

“Every report - explains Federico Soda, head of mission IOM Libya - of missing migrants represents a family in mourning in search of answers about their 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 APRIL OF THE FACTS IN MEDITERRANEAN

DAY 1

30 people are reported missing after they left the Libyan town of Khoms.

DAY 2

On this day, the Sea Watch crew on board SeaWatch3 reaches the search and rescue area. Despite rough seas and difficult nautical conditions, the crew starts patrolling for any boats in distress.

Yet another tragic shipwreck in the central Mediterranean: there are only four survivors on a boat carrying around 100 people. They had left the Libyan coast a few days earlier.

The patrol boat Zawiya of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard intercepts 33 people on board a vessel attempting to escape from the Libyan coast. All of them are taken to the port in Zawiya city

DAY 3

In coordination with the Libyan armed forces, the Libyan Red Crescent recovers a lifeless body off the coast of Al-Hawatah. On the same day, the Libyan Red Crescent Society recovers two more lifeless bodies off the coast of the Al-Mutrad area.

DAY 4

Pope Francesco, in his address to the 200 migrants in the Giovanni XXIII Peace Lab Center in Hal Far (the crowning moment of his apostolic journey to Malta), recalled the need for an agreement among the European countries to facilitate protection for migrants.

DAY 6

The Sea-Eye 4 docks the port of Augusta with 106 people on board. The ship had been off the coast of Sicily since last Saturday, after the Maltese state authorities refused to welcome the survivors.

DAY 8

The crew of Sea Watch 3 rescues 13 people in distress on board a fragile wooden boat. This had been noticed earlier in the morning. Among the survivors are four children.

A few hours later, the same crew executes a second rescue operation in favor of 13 people in distress on board a small wooden boat. Some of them were already suffering from hypothermia. It was a blessing and relief to have reached them before nightfall.

The Stability Support Agency, i.e. the Libyan force apparatus instituted by Al-Sarraj, recovers three lifeless bodies off the coast of Zawiya. Shortly afterwards, the same patrol boat engages in the pushback of a fragile wooden boat carrying 120 people.

In the meantime, 217 people are intercepted in three separate operations involving the patrol boat of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, Zawiya. They were attempting to reach the Italian coast and all of them are taken back to the port of Zawiya.

A shipwreck off the Tunisian coast of Sfax: 4 victims.

DAY 9

After two rescue operations the previous day, the crew of Sea Watch 3 rescued 60 people on an overcrowded dinghy. On board the humanitarian ship, many are in need of medical care.

A few hours later, the same crew witnesses yet another tragedy in the central Mediterranean. After receiving a Mayday, the crew arrived at the scene of a shipwreck: a dinghy was sinking and dozens of people were in the water. The so-called Libyan Coast Guard was on the scene, the situation was extremely chaotic. The Sea Watch crew carried out the rescue of 34 people. It is feared that the number of people in distress was much higher: at least 50. It is likely that these people drowned.

Shortly afterwards, a fifth rescue in 24 hours by the same crew: 87 people rescued. At this point there are more than 200 people on board the humanitarian ship.

The Tunisian armed forces intercepted and pushed back around 20 people on board a boat attempting to reach the Italian coast. During this operation, four lifeless bodies were found and six people were reported missing. A few minutes later, five people died in a second shipwreck.

DAY 10

After an unjustified delay of several days on the part of the Italian state authorities, disembarkation operations began in the morning for the people rescued by the MSF crew on board the Geo Barents. The place of safety assigned to the 113 survivors is the port of Augusta.

DAY 11

Five people with serious health problems were evacuated, in two separate operations, from Sea Watch 3. Among them, two pregnant women. One man was allowed to accompany his wife.

The Libyan Red Crescent recovers a lifeless body near the Al-Mutrad area, not far from the town of Zawiya.

Only a few days after the previous three shipwrecks, a fourth shipwreck off the Tunisian town of Sfax causes the death of four people.

DAY 12

Representatives of the Italian Embassy visited the headquarters of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard in Tripoli in order to 'assess the progress of the maintenance carried out and to evaluate the technical and operational requirements of the maritime vessels.

DAY 15

For the crew and all those on board the Sea Watch 3, the wait is over: the Italian authorities assign the port of Trapani for disembarkation.

DAY 23

At 7.30am, the MSF crew aboard the humanitarian ship Geo Barents rescued 101 people aboard a boat in distress northwest of Libya. The alert had come from Alarm Phone operators. Among the survivors were four small children and a pregnant woman. The rescue brought them to safety.

In the afternoon, the crew of Geo Barents spotted a fragile wooden boat, empty and burnt, floating at sea. It is likely that a few minutes earlier the people had been intercepted and pushed back by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

The so-called Libyan Coast Guard, in three separate operations, intercepts and turns back 255 people.

Yet another shipwreck off the Tunisian town of Sfax: 3 survivors were taken to the nearest hospital; 4 lifeless bodies were found; there is a high number of missing persons.

DAY 24

The Sos Méditerranée crew aboard Ocean Viking rescued 70 people in distress on board a boat in international waters. A patrol boat of the Libyan armed forces, which arrived during the rescue operation, caused panic. Among the shipwrecked, there are 17 minors.

The Italian authorities allow the rescue of 51 people in distress on board a boat about 30 miles from Lampedusa. They had been in distress since the previous night. Rescued, they all disembarked on the island of Lampedusa.

The patrol boat Zawiya of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard intercepts and turns back 165 people. During the operation, the Libyan armed forces recover a lifeless body.

DAY 25

Twenty-four hours after the previous rescue, the Sos Méditerranée crew aboard Ocean Viking rescued 94 people from an overcrowded boat in international waters. Again, the arrival of a Libyan armed forces patrol boat caused panic among the castaways. Among them were two women, 47 minors and a one-year-old child.

DAY 26

Three days after the previous discovery, the MSF crew on board the Geo Barents spotted another empty boat. It is likely, again, that the shipwrecked people were intercepted and turned back by the Libyan armed forces.

DAY 27

During the night, the Sos Méditerranée crew on board Ocean Viking carries out a third rescue since the mission began: 72 people were rescued.

The mayor of Lampedusa, Totò Martello, calls for the quarantine ships to be replaced by a system to transfer people who have arrived on Lampedusa to the mainland: a fundamental step that would make it possible to combine the right to rescue with the right to rapid relocation and a dignified reception.

Safa Msehli, spokesperson for the International Organisation for Migration in Geneva, recalls that since the beginning of the year there have been more than 530 victims who have died trying to flee from the Libyan coast in search of a better destiny.

DAY 29

On the day a castaway rescued by the MSF crew jumped into the sea from the Geo Barents. A gesture of desperation made almost a week after the rescue.

Fabrice Leggeri, executive director of Frontex, the European border control agency, resigns.



**JUVENTA
LET SOLIDARITY WIN!**

On 21st May, the Trapani court will hold the preliminary hearing for 21 members of three different NGOs: Jugend Rettet, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and Save the Children.

Those involved are all charged with the crime of aiding and abetting illegal immigration following a series of rescues that took place in the Central Mediterranean between 2016 and 2017.

They now face a sentence of 20 years in prison and a €15,000 fine each.

The trial comes at the tail end of a series of legal proceedings that have come down against various actors and organisations active in both rescue at sea and reception ashore: Sea Watch, Linea D'Ombra and Baobab to name but a few. Also on the list of NGOs affected by the criminalisation of solidarity is Mediterranea Saving Humans.

The Iuventa case is of particular importance, and not only because of the pioneering role played by the NGO that owns the ship. In fact, we are talking about a story that began at least six years ago, at the height of the Gentiloni government and with Marco Minniti as Minister of the Interior, even before the infamous Italy-Libya Memorandum.

The start of the investigation by the Trapani public prosecutor's office dates back to 2016, only to become internationally known on 2 August 2017, when the NGO Jugend Rettet's ship Iuventa was seized by the Italian authorities. In particular, it should be noted that in those days former Interior Minister Minniti had introduced a code of conduct for NGOs. According to some observers, the seizure of the Iuventa may have been a manoeuvre to leverage other organisations into signing up to the code of conduct.

The case of the Iuventa is particularly heated today because it represents the first court case brought against a search and rescue NGO in Italy.

In order to seize the ship, the Italian authorities referred to three different rescue operations that took place on 10 September 2016 and 18 June 2017. Exacerbating the NGO's position is the fact that the rescue operations involved more than five people. What is alleged against the Jugend Rettet crew is that they cooperated with Libyan traffickers and thus facilitated the illegal entry into the European Union of the migrants on board the Iuventa.

In addition, the prosecution argued that the rescue operation carried out by Jugend Rettet should not be considered as such, as the elements to consider the boat in danger were not present. These arguments refer to violations of Article 12 of the 1998 Immigration Law.

Concerning the first contested rescue (10 September), the NGO crew is accused of having transhipped from a rubber dinghy all the people on board except two, allegedly the presumed smugglers, who then headed back towards the Libyan coast. However, Jugend Rettet stated that, after carrying out the rescue operations, they set fire to the boats

they encountered on that date, precisely in order to prevent their re-use by human traffickers. Regarding the events of 18 June 2017, on the other hand, the allegations concern the alleged towing by Iuventa of a dinghy towards the Libyan coast. The reconstructions presented by Jugend Rettet were confirmed by the investigation 'Blaming the Rescuers', carried out by Forensic Oceanography, part of the Forensic Architecture agency of Goldsmiths University of London.

As part of the 2019 Motion to dismiss the investigation, Jugend Rettet's activists referred to Forensic Architecture's detailed analysis, pointing out in particular how, in fact, the vessels referred to were in a real state of distress, and therefore in need of intervention by the NGO.

The Motion also recalls how the 1994 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides for the obligation to rescue any vessel in distress.

The same document also highlights the fact that no shipwrecked persons disembarked independently and before the port of arrival was assigned by the authorities, thus calling into question the accusation of having allowed an illegal disembarkation. Finally, Jugend Rettet recalls that all migrants on board the Iuventa, until proven otherwise, were potentially entitled to apply for asylum.

Therefore, just as it is not considered illegal to present oneself at a land border to seek protection, neither should it be considered illegal to arrive by sea.

The outcome of the preliminary hearing is still to be written, but what is certain is the role that NGOs have played in the Central Mediterranean in recent years: civil society actors have had to make up for a substantial absence of European institutions. What is certain is that the defendants belonging to Jugend Rettet collaborated in the rescue of more than 14,000 people between 2016 and 2017. Similarly, the crews of Doctors Without Borders and Save the Children fought to rescue people in danger from certain death in the Central Mediterranean.

With the hope that the charges can be dropped already at the preliminary hearing, Mediterranea Saving Humans will be in front of the Court of Trapani together with the whole Civil Fleet to show solidarity and protest against the shameful criminalisation of solidarity for which those who save lives are prosecuted, while those who let them drown in the Mediterranean are rewarded.



UCRAINA #SAFEPASSAGE2

#SAFEPASSAGE 2

**TOGETHER WITH
THE “STOP THE WAR
NOW” CARAVAN AND
THE UKRAINIAN CIVIL
SOCIETY: KEEPING
A CORRIDOR OF AID
AND SUPPORT FOR
REFUGEES OPEN**

The full report of Mediterranea Saving Humans’ second mission to Lviv with the testimonies of people coming from war zones

Two weeks after the #SafePassage 1 mission, we decided to go back to Lviv, on the territory of Ukraine at war. We did so with the mission #SafePassage2 , which participated with a delegation of 6 vans and 25 activists from Milan, Brescia, Mogliano Veneto, Cesena, Naples and Sesto Fiorentino in the “Stop the war now” caravan, born from the initiative of several Italian pacifist associations, both Catholic and lay.

A total of over 70 vehicles loaded with around 35 tonnes of humanitarian aid met at dawn on 1 April in Gorizia, a border town that still bears the mark of the violence of war and of the borders that split the world between the hammer and the anvil of superpowers fighting each other, devastating bodies and lands.

After spending the night in Medyka, on the Polish-Ukrainian border, the caravan set off again in the direction of Lviv. Along the 30 kilometres separating the border crossing from the city, the increase in fortifications and checkpoints reflects a state of alert that has grown in recent weeks, as well as inside Lviv itself, where Ukrainian mourning flags have appeared at every doorway. In the days leading up to the mission, the war has arrived here too, not only through the more than 250,000 refugees who have arrived from the east of the country, but also through direct bombardments that have

hit some strategic targets on the outskirts of the city. It is now clear to everyone that there are no “safe havens” and will not exist until the end of the Russian aggression.

Since the early hours of April 2, we have met with various local organisations to deliver medicines, medical and sanitary supplies, non perishable food, warm blankets and other humanitarian aid. In particular, our collaboration with the secular and religious civil society of Lviv is being strengthened with every mission, with the intention of improving the effectiveness and usefulness of everyone’s efforts. The first load was delivered to the Salesian Fathers of the Don Bosco Centre, who run one of the main reception centres for refugees and who are actively involved in the “relay” transmission of aid which arrives in Lviv to Kiev and the other areas most affected by the brutality of the war. They tell us of the urgency of not leaving alone the inhabitants and organisations still active in eastern Ukraine, who are in great need of support and have great difficulty in receiving it.

The second load went to the Cultural Centre/Volunteer Hub, one of the five largest centres for the collection of people and the distribution of basic goods. Like the first time, we were impressed by the number and the level of coordination of the many women and men who work tirelessly, engaged in loading and unloading, cooking and serving, pharmacy and medical assistance, distribution of clothes and blankets, legal assistance and orientation. They are all civilian volunteers, the director we interviewed proudly tells us. Together with a volunteer, he expresses the fear of abandonment: the aid arriving is gradually decreasing,’ he says, ‘but the need

remains. The fear is that the war will become something so normal for Europeans that it will no longer make the news, beyond the sensationalist logic of the emergency to which our media are all too used. “We are alive here,” says a volunteer, “we continue to stay alive, that’s why it’s important that you don’t leave us alone, that’s why the presence in Ukraine of people from all over Europe and the world is so important”. Before saying goodbye, they insisted on offering us a hot tea to exchange a few more words and give us the updated list of the items the need: it is very important to have this list in a timely manner, because it is possible for the supply needs to change from one week to the next.

Afterwards, we regrouped at the Lviv Central Station, a hub for thousands and thousands of people arriving and trying to leave by the available trains and buses. At that very moment, convoys from Mariupol were entering the station, causing a stir among the volunteers of the first reception team: “People are arriving who are increasingly traumatised and in an increasingly precarious state of health”, explained a Red Cross volunteer we had already met during the first mission, “it is clear that the more time they are forced to spend in the bunkers, the more they develop kidney, lung and heart diseases. Humidity, cold and stress are often unbearable. Just a few metres away are the tents of World Kitchen, an NGO involved in emergency cooking, which churns out hot soup non-stop for the many people in the queue. Many refugees arrive here without any money, a condition that prevents them from even buying food, let alone a ticket to cross the border. #SafePassage also means a chance to escape the war regardless of your means.

On the second floor of the station, where there is normally an area dedicated to families with children, since February 24 the rooms have been dedicated only to refugees arriving by train. The volunteers offer a shelter, a safe space with specific medical and psychological support, a service created in collaboration with the Lviv regional government and coordinated by Halyna Bordun, head of the medical and psychological service for the Lviv administration. The management by public and credited medical institutions is organised in cooperation with the regional Psycho-neurological Hospital. These elements and support are not at all taken for granted in such a context. The support of the 120 volunteers, who take turns every day, also includes guiding people, giving them correct information on what to do and where to go once they leave the country. We know that for many people, running away also means exposing themselves to the risk of having to suffer various forms of gender-based violence, culminating in the abomination of disappearance and human trafficking, especially for sexual exploitation.

From the station, we marched for peace: with hundreds of people who had arrived with the #StopTheWarNow caravan, we walked to Lviv City Hall with white banners and messages of solidarity with the people affected by the conflict.

The ##StopTheWarNow peace caravan was the new tangible sign of a possible intervention of “interposition from below”: to stand for peace does not mean to stand by and watch, or worse to show “equidistance” between aggressors and aggressed, but to take our own bodies where they are needed; it means sending medicines and food, not weapons; helping people fleeing from war; promoting humanitarian

corridors, financing and organising a dignified reception for refugees from all wars, not to commit resources to a mad race for rearmament.

Reinforcing the humanitarian corridor from below which we opened with the #SafePassage 1 mission, was the last and most important goal of Mediterranea Saving Humans' second expedition to Ukraine.

Through the cooperation with the associations in Lviv and the other organisations of the Caravan we brought more than 300 people to Italy, 20 on Mediterranea's vans.

In particular, three of the refugees came into contact with us thanks to the relationship established with some Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ associations, who explained to us the multiple forms of vulnerability and violence to which people from this community are exposed. We think of T women, who are considered ‘men’ who can be recruited at the border and who do not only risk ending up at the front, but also to be at the mercy of sexist violence in the barracks. They report cases of people being physically harassed by border controls, by soldiers who wanted to ‘verify’ their gender by hand, ignoring legal documents certifying their transition. They explain that many of them do not even try to run away , such is their fear of being identified when they leave their homes. More generally, LGBTQIA+ people are very familiar with the stratification of forms of violence on their bodies, to which war and a journey through militarised and bombed-out territories expose them even more than before.

We were very impressed by the very first testimonies of our new travelling companions, many in a delicate state of health. A. and O., who arrived in Lviv from Mariupol a few hours before leaving, have lost everything, and a phone call informed them that there was nothing left of their home. They are wearing very heavy jackets, but despite the heating in the van they cannot get the cold out of their bones after 18 days in an icy bunker. One woman suffers from heart disease, she is very nervous, afraid of not being able to travel, she knows she cannot stop. Only the presence of the doctor in our crew reassures her. K. arrives from Hostomel', during the journey she feels like talking, she shows us the videos she recorded with her phone: her sister's house reduced to rubble, the tins of food abandoned by Russian soldiers who used her flat as a base, the bodies burnt on the ground. With impressive coldness and lucidity she tells us: the world needs to see what it means to live in a war. An unaccompanied minor has been temporarily entrusted to one of our volunteers by his parents, in the hope of giving him a chance at a dignified life. Arriving alone in Lviv, he is relieved to meet us and make friends with other young people in the caravan.

Among the people brought across the border is Volodymir, an Italian volunteer of Mediterranea of Ukrainian origin and with double nationality. Volodymir has been living in Italy for over 30 years, where he has a wife and two minor children in his care. A few days before the beginning of the war, he went to Ukraine to bury his father, who had just died. After the funeral, his double passport obliged him to stay in the country, as he was considered Ukrainian by the country's government, which does not recognise dual citizenship and, therefore, he could potentially be enlisted as a 56-year-

old male. Volodymir also risked arrest for trying to assert his right to leave the country and his desire not to take up arms: he risked being considered a deserter for all intents and purposes. The caravan of Mediterranea Saving Humans was blocked for 24 hours at the border – between Sunday 3 and Monday 4 April – trapped in an institutional stalemate that was only resolved thanks to the tenacity of our volunteers and the effective work of the Italian and Ukrainian diplomats, who allowed Volodymir to cross into Polish territory with us in the early afternoon of April 4. We are and will always be on the side of those who reject war, whether they are Italian, Ukrainian, Russian or from any nation.

Many of the people we offered a lift to had relatives ready to take them in, others did not. As Mediterranea Saving Humans we have found a worthy solution for all, relying on the solidarity networks from below that in several Italian cities are activating to guarantee accommodation, but also help with bureaucracy, psychological support, linguistic mediation and sociality, in the face of the disarming lack of institutional intervention.

#Safe passage 2 was a further step in the construction of a continuous intervention, along and beyond the borders of the European Union, in war territory. Mediterranea has already started planning the next mission.

REPORT BORDERLINE EUROPE



NEWS FROM CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ARRIVALS

Due to many storms and high waves, departures from North Africa were mainly concentrated on two weekends in the month of April. According to our counting, a total of 4030 people arrived in Italy via the Central Mediterranean Sea in April 2022. The UNHCR counts 3878 arrivals for the same period, while the Italian Ministry of Interior's figure is 3621 arrivals.

An analysis of the Italian Ministry of the Interior's numbers, carried out by the news agency SIR, revealed that 11.7% of the refugees who have arrived since the beginning of the year are unaccompanied minors. While more than 20% of those arriving by sea are of Egyptian origin, people from Bangladesh (17%) and Tunisia (11%) are also currently arriving on the Italian mainland. Since the Taliban took power, there has been a steady increase in the number of refugees from Afghanistan trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean. This year, at least 586 people of Afghan nationality have arrived in Italy, mainly via the Ionian Sea.

PULLBACKS

Since the beginning of the year, at least 4013 people have already been illegally pulled back to Libya, a figure that was published by IOM on 19 April, already before the two major departure weekends of that month. According to our counts, the number of illegal pullbacks to Libya up to the same date amounts to 4523. In April alone, we count 1076 pullbacks by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

Meanwhile, Italian authorities continue to be involved in equipping the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. This month, Italian authorities donated two new speedboats, so-called RHIBs, to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard to intensify the refoulement of refugees. Meanwhile, a Twitter account apparently sympathetic to Libyan militias published internal government documents to which only high-ranking state officials should have access. This again raises the question of the extent to which Italian authorities are cooperating with Libyan militias.

The Tunisian navy was also very active in April. In numerous shipwrecks off Tunisia, a total of 260 people were saved from drowning, but were then returned to Tunisia, where conditions for refugees are increasingly precarious.

DEAD & MISSING

According to our counts, 65 people have died crossing the Central Mediterranean in April this year, while at least 204 people remain missing. In the same period, UNHCR and IOM count 125 and 232 dead and missing respectively.

According to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), 90 people are believed to have lost their lives in a shipwreck off the Libyan coast on 2 April. They had previously spent four days on the open sea in an overcrowded boat. The only four survivors were rescued by the commercial tanker “Alegria 1”, whose crew ignored MSF’s offers of help, as well as their requests not to return the people to Libya.

Six of the eleven shipwrecks this month occurred off the coast of Tunisia. On 23 April alone, 24 people lost their lives in four shipwrecks off the coast of Sfax, while another five people remain missing. Fortunately, the other 97 people were rescued that day.

ROUTES TO EUROPE

After we reported in January that arrivals via the Ionian Sea had dropped significantly, the route became busy again in the end of April 2022. Typically, these are boats from Greece or Turkey arriving on the coasts of Calabria or Apulia. All such arrivals were concentrated in the last week of April, when at least 1049 people arrived in Calabria and Puglia in a total of 10 boats.

A distress case occurs when a person or vessel is threatened by a serious and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance. Refugee boats are often small, overcrowded and almost always unseaworthy.

In very few cases do the people on board have life jackets or life-saving equipment, and both fuel as well as food and drinking water are not sufficient for a crossing to Europe. Especially when boats lose propulsion and the people on board panic, they are in imminent danger of capsizing.

These facts are sufficient to consider the mere presence of boats on the open sea as a status of distress. As we reported in previous issues, many European authorities have recently been denying boats with refugees the status of distress at sea. The audacity of European authorities regarding this practice is increasing.

According to Alarm Phone, the Greek coast guard went to a boat with 86 refugees off the coast of Greece but did not rescue them. They had to continue their way to Italy, even though there were people with serious health conditions on board.

In another case, an unseaworthy boat observed by Frontex for hours was drifting just 30 nautical miles south-east of Lampedusa in the Maltese search and rescue zone. Malta, as usual, did not react and the boat was eventually rescued by the Italian coastguard.

No fatalities were reported, but several people required emergency medical treatment after arriving in Italy.

CIVILIAN RESISTANCE

The rescue of 94 people by the SOS Méditerranée team on the Ocean Viking proves how dangerous the crossing in unseaworthy boats is and how quickly a situation that the authorities describe as harmless can turn into deadly danger. Those rescued report that 15 people went overboard in an unexpected high wave the previous night, of whom only three made it back on board. The remaining twelve people are believed to have drowned. A total of 607 people were rescued in April through the operations of Sea-Watch 3, Geo Barents and Ocean Viking.

The question of refugee boats in distress was also discussed in the last hearing of the court case on deprivation of liberty and abuse of office of Matteo Salvini, who as the former Italian Minister of the Interior prohibited the rescue ship Open Arms from landing in Italy. On the day of the trial on 8 April, it was to be proven that the rescued refugees were actually in distress at sea shortly before they were rescued by the Open Arms.

In several rescues, it was also reported that boats of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard caused panic by coming very close to the scene during the ongoing rescue by NGOs.

For example when the presence of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard caused at least 20 deaths during a Sea-Watch rescue on 6 November 2017. The case is ongoing before the European Court of Human Rights.

Meanwhile, Sea-Watch, together with FragDenStaat, has filed a lawsuit against Frontex in the European Court of Justice, seeking the release of information withheld by Frontex to prove that the agency is significantly involved in illegal pullbacks. In a Frontex operation on 30 July 2021, in which the Sea-Watch 3, as the closest boat to the distress case at sea, was not alerted and people in distress were illegally pulled back to Libya by the so-called Libyan coast guard, 73 documents, images and a video were stored, according to Frontex. However, Frontex has not released those data even after repeated requests. One day after the lawsuit, Frontex CEO Fabrice Leggeri asked for his resignation.



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