



Civil MRCC

Coordination and documentation platform for people in distress in the Central Mediterranean

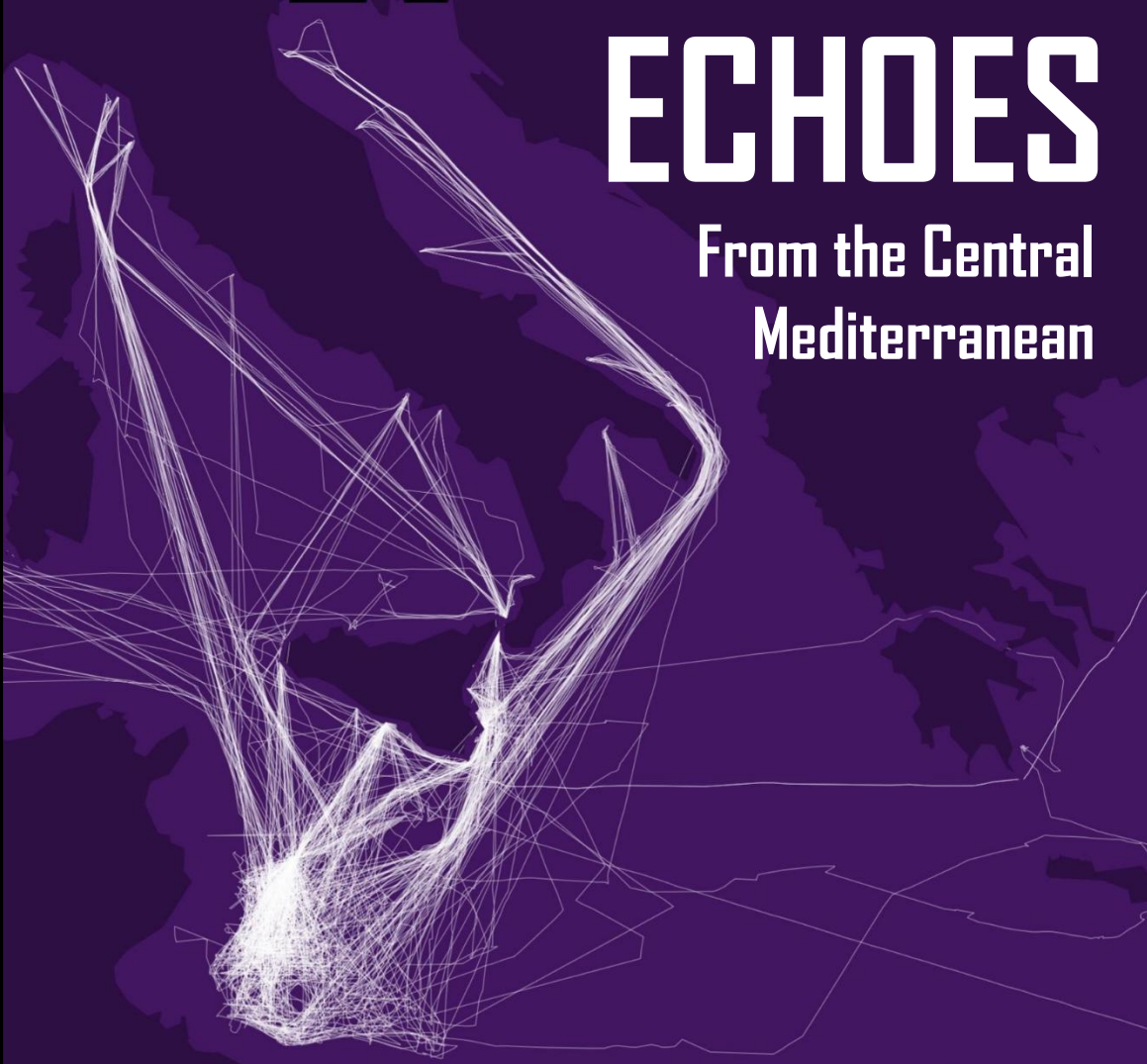
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N°21

June
2026

ECHOES

From the Central
Mediterranean



Tracks of the civil fleet operations in 2025 (CMRCC documentation team)

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FOR A NEW PACT... WITH PEOPLE ON THE MOVE!

Those responsible for the ongoing deaths at Europe's borders are already preparing the next wave of rights deprivation for refugees and migrants. On 12 June 2026, the so-called Common European Asylum System (CEAS) is set to come into force. This pact against migration introduces new detention centres and accelerated asylum procedures with limited legal safeguards, expands the use of supposedly "safe" third countries and chain deportations, prolongs Dublin transfer deadlines, and allows for the activation of "crisis" regulations.

At the same time, the experiences of recent decades have shown that racist policies of exclusion can be undermined through concrete acts of everyday resistance and challenged in countless small struggles. Strengthening and expanding structures of solidarity within and together with the communities affected appears to us to be one of the central tasks for the months and years ahead!

Since the beginning of 2026:

- **8,972** people arrived to **Italy** and Malta by sea, many of whom arrived autonomously (UNHCR figures up to May 17).
- **1,367** people were rescued by the **Civil fleet** from 34 boats in distress (CMRCC figure up to April 30).
- **6,811** people were pushed back to Libya after they were intercepted by the EU-supported so-called **Libyan Coast Guard** (IOM figure up to May 16).
- **822** people have been **reported dead or missing** on the Central Mediterranean Route (IOM figure up to May 16).

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

MELONI ON THE DEFENSIVE? WHAT'S NEXT?

It has certainly already been an ongoing pain for the Meloni-Piantedosi government to lose many important court cases regarding migration. Over the last few months, civil fleet actors regularly won appeals against attempts to detain rescue ships. The intention to intercept people on the move already aboard rescue ships and to externalize their asylum procedures to Albania failed again and again. And last year, in front of the EU Court of Justice in Luxembourg, Meloni finally lost the legal dispute over the government's interpretation of safe countries of origin. The two appealing asylum seekers from Bangladesh won their cases.

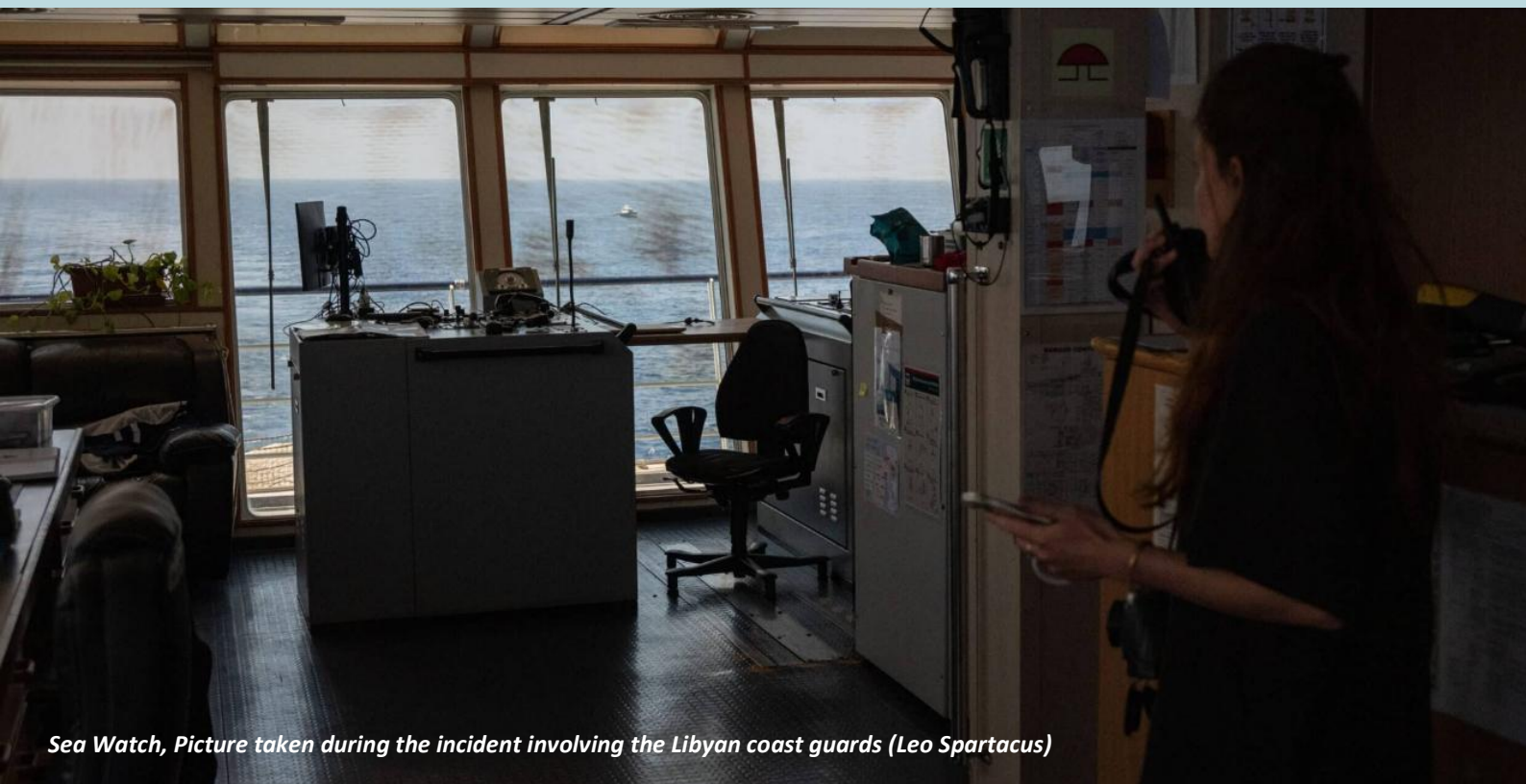
But all these reversals on migration appear as minor setbacks in comparison to what happened on 22–23 March 2026. Meloni suffered a strong defeat in the referendum on the so-called judicial reform. While she counted on a clear victory, 54% voted against it and thus against her policy. This was followed by subsequent resignations within her government. Meloni's special friendship with Trump has created another problem since a large majority in Italy opposes the war in Iran. The dispute between the US president and the Pope brought her additional difficulties, and she was forced to officially step back from Trump.

All in all, the events of recent weeks have taken quite a toll on the Italian government: Meloni has lost her aura of invincibility. This situation might create new hope in view of the autumn 2027 elections; at least, further developments appear much more open again at the moment.

It is, of course, impossible to anticipate the consequences of Meloni's strategy for the next period. On the one hand, she might try to appear more moderate, more pragmatic, and thus less polarizing. On the other hand, her last defeat might lead to the opposite: a stronger ideological polarization and a renewed attempt to fully play the racist card.

The ongoing escalation against civil sea rescue speaks in favour of the latter. While the rescue ship Sea-Watch 5 was reportedly shot at and threatened by Libyan forces during a rescue operation in international waters at 11th of May, shortly afterwards Italian authorities opened a criminal investigation against the ship's captain for "aiding illegal immigration." A further intensification of administrative attacks and the criminalization of solidarity with migrants must be expected. We should be ready for this option!

Echoes' editorial team



Sea Watch, Picture taken during the incident involving the Libyan coast guards (Leo Spartacus)

IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

A DIARY OF RESCUE COORDINATION BY CIVIL ACTORS IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN SEA

The following section provides an overview of the level and impact of rescue coordination by civil actors in the Central Mediterranean Sea, using brief reports and social media extracts.

FEBRUARY 2026

February 2 Pilotes Volontaires' **Colibri 2** alerts a wooden boat which is then rescued by the **Sea Eye 5**. 47 survivors are safely disembarked in Vibo Valentia.

February 3 **Humanity 1** rescues 12 people in international waters off the coast of Libya. A few hours later, **Seabird 1** spots and alerts a second boat which is also rescued by the crew of **Humanity 1**. The 33 survivors are brought to Trapani for disembarkation, however, tragically, on the way to the assigned port of disembarkation, 2 dead bodies are found floating in the water. The Italian authorities then issue a 60-day detention and 10,000 euro fine to the NGO vessel.

February 10 Early in the afternoon, **Colibri 2** alerted a boat with 20 people. **Solidaire** responds and rescues the people from the unseaworthy rubber boat. Later in the day after a call from **Alarm Phone**, **Solidaire** is able to find and rescue an additional 41 people from a second rubber boat.

February 11 **Solidaire** conducts another rescue after overhearing a mayday relay and spotting by **Seabird 1**. 49 people are rescued from a wooden boat, bringing the total people rescued by **Solidaire** to 120. All are safely disembarked in the distant port of Ravenna, requiring five additional days at sea for crew and survivors.

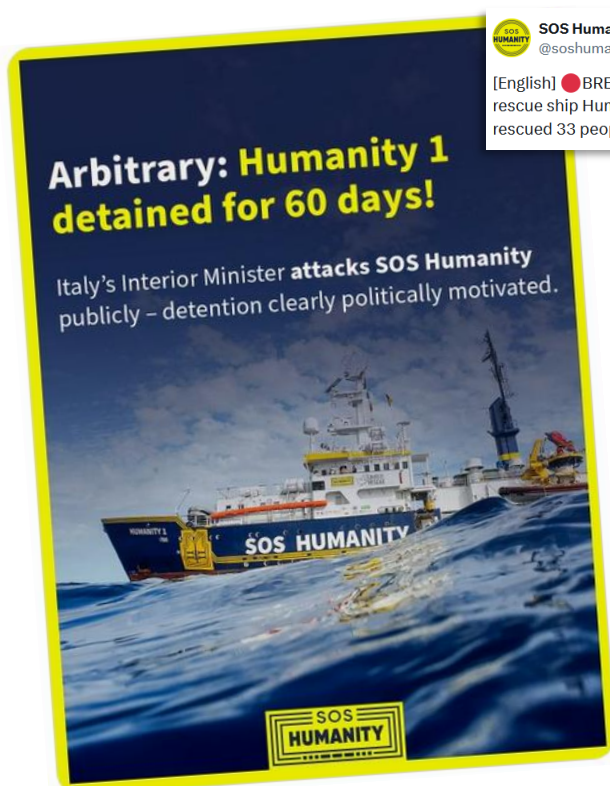
February 22 During the night, the crew on the **Ocean Viking** performs a rescue of 97 people, including 14 unaccompanied minors, following an alert by **Alarm Phone**.

February 23 After a spotting by **Albatross UNO**, **Ocean Viking** rescues another 50 people in the Maltese Search & Rescue Region. Survivors are brought to the distant port of Livorno.

Albatross UNO spots provides additional support by alerting another boat which is then rescued by NGO vessel **Aurora**. During the rescue operation, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard sped towards the scene. Nevertheless, the 22 people are brought on board, with one person requiring immediate medical evacuation. The rest of the survivors are brought to Pozzallo.

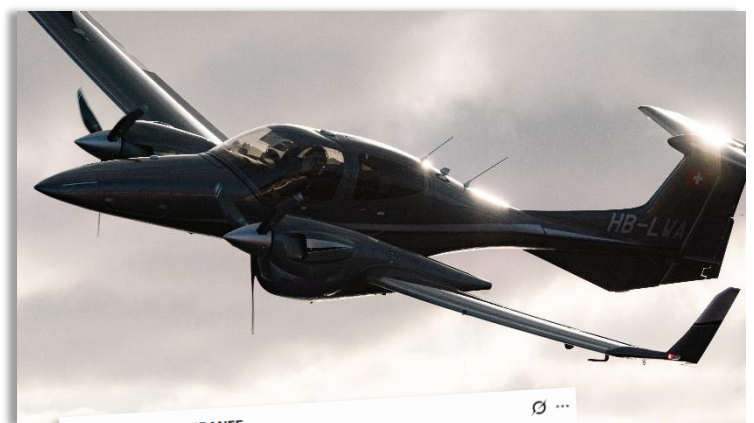
February 27 **Life Support** spots and rescues 14 people on an unseaworthy fiberglass boat. The people are disembarked in the distant port of Bari.

Albatross UNO alerts a boat which is rescued a few hours later by the **Aurora**. 30 people are brought on board from the unseaworthy fiberglass boat and disembarked in Catania.



SOS Humanity (International)
@soshumanity.en

[English] 🔴 BREAKING: Italian authorities have detained our search and rescue ship **Humanity 1** for 60 days and issued a €10,000 fine – after we rescued 33 people from distress at sea. 1/5



SOS MEDITERRANEE
@SOSMedIntl

Today, **#AlbatrossUNO** was monitoring from the sky, and sighted an overcrowded boat in the Maltese Search & Rescue Region, allowing the **#OceanViking** to rescue 50 people in distress. The information was relayed to the competent authorities in line with intl and Italian regulations.

MARCH 2026

March 4 After an alert by **Alarm Phone**, **Ocean Viking** rescues 36 people from a rubber boat. Distant port Ancona is assigned, requiring 4 additional days of sailing for the survivors.

March 5 **Alarm Phone** alerts another case which is also rescued by **Ocean Viking**. Another 64 people are brought on board. Ocean Viking resumes course to the distant POS Ancona where the 100 survivors are disembarked.

March 7 Following an alert by **Alarm Phone**, **Seabird 2** spots 10 people stranded on the Miskar oil platform. After being left stranded there for days by European authorities, **Solidaire** rescues after having to wait many hours near the platform for the bad weather condition to improve. The survivors are brought to the distant port of Ortona, requiring many more unnecessary days at sea.

March 12 After overhearing a mayday relay by a Frontex aircraft, **Solidaire** rescues 42 people from a rubber boat. Survivors are brought to the distant port of Ortona.

March 13 **Life Support** rescues 41 people from an unseaworthy rubber boat. Later, following an alert by **Alarm Phone**, Life Support rescues another 57 people from a rubber boat. The distant port of Civitavecchia is assigned, requiring an additional 4 days of travel for the survivors.

After spotting by **Seabird 1**, **Safira** rescues 40 people from a rubber boat. Survivors are transhipped to the Italian authorities and brought to Lampedusa.

Solidaire arrives at scene of an overcrowded rubber boat after having been informed by **Life Support** and **Seabird 1** of a mayday relay issued by Frontex. 30 people are rescued and the distant port of Ortona is assigned, requiring an additional 5 days of unnecessary travel.

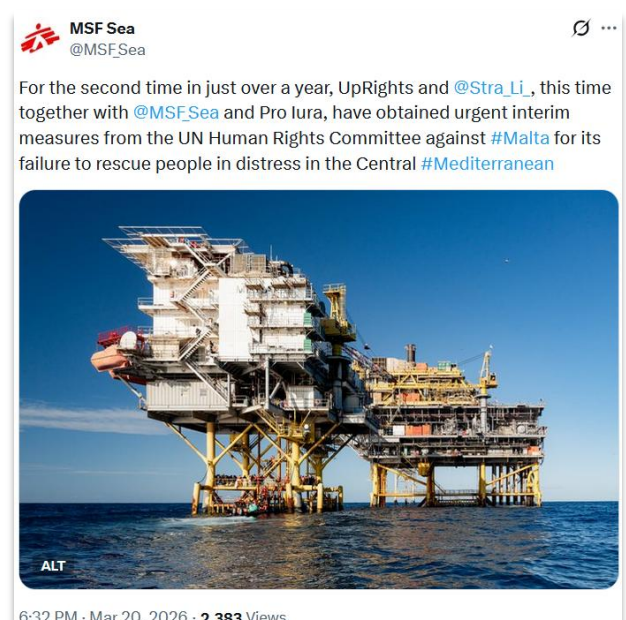
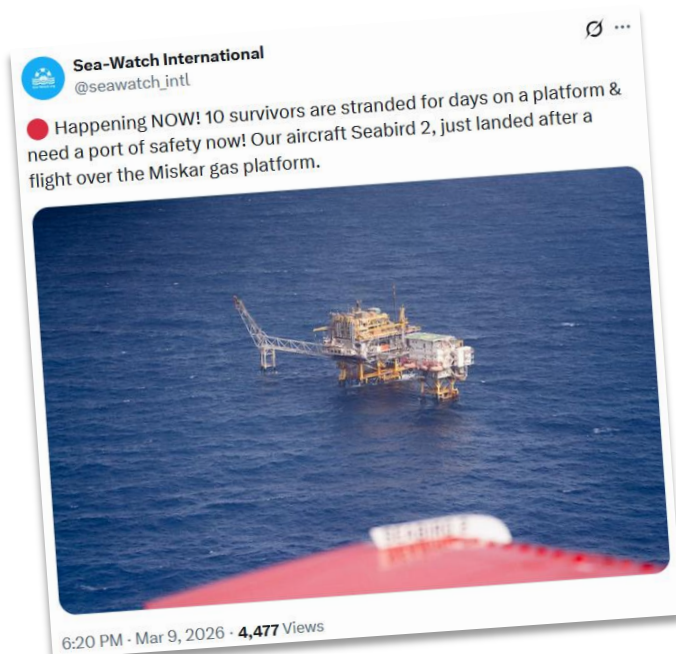
March 14 **Life Support** performs a third rescue following a mayday relay and alert from **Alarm Phone**. 25 people are taken from an unseaworthy rubber vessel and Life Support continues to Civitavecchia.

Solidaire rescues another boat after an alert from **Alarm Phone**. 8 people are brought on board from a rubber boat. Solidaire, with 90 people on board, requests a closer port of safety than Ortona, but the request is denied, forcing survivors to continue the long and unnecessary travel to Ortona.

Alarm Phone informs that two boats are brought to Miskar platforms. **Ocean Viking** responds to the two cases totaling 116 people, for which interim measures from UN Human Rights Committee were issued after authorities failed to coordinate rescue. Days after the initial alert from Alarm Phone, Ocean Viking successfully rescues the people. Genoa is assigned POS.

March 15 Following an alert by the **Alarm Phone**, **Aita Mari** rescues 32 people from a rubber boat. The distant port of Vibo Valentia is assigned, requiring an additional 3 days of sailing for the survivors.

Sea Watch 5 rescues 54 people from a rubber boat after the case is alerted by **Alarm Phone** and spotted by **Seabird 1**. Later that afternoon, following another spotting by Seabird 1, the crew of Sea Watch 5 rescue another 39 people from a rubber boat. 9 people require medical evacuation, and despite deteriorating weather conditions, the distant port of Marina di Carrara is assigned. Sea Watch 5 decides to defy orders and disembark in Trapani anyways, avoiding unnecessary and dangerous travel for the survivors.



MARCH 2026 - NEXUS CASE: A PUSHBACK BY MERCHANT VESSEL TO LIBYA AGAINST THE WISHES OF CAPTAIN AND CREW

On 10 March 2026, Alarm Phone received reports of a boat carrying 38 people in distress while travelling from Tobruk in eastern Libya to Crete. The boat was located in the Egyptian search and rescue (SAR) zone, close to the border with the Greek SAR zone. Alarm Phone alerted both the Greek and Egyptian authorities. The network also contacted two nearby merchant vessels heading towards Europe, but without success. Instead, JRCC Cairo instructed another merchant vessel, the NEXUS, to search for and rescue the people in distress.

The captain of the NEXUS responded immediately, located the boat, and brought the people safely on board. However, the rescue took place just across the SAR border, inside the Libyan SAR zone. JRCC Cairo therefore, ordered the captain to disembark the rescued people in Libya.

The captain knew that Libya is not a safe place (a fact confirmed by several court rulings) and refused to take the rescued people there. He requested permission from the Greek authorities, specifically the Hellenic Coast Guard, to disembark them in Crete, the nearest safe port. The Hellenic Coast Guard reportedly threatened to arrest the crew if they entered Greece. Nevertheless, the captain insisted that he would not return the people to Libya, a country they had fled at great risk in search of safety in Europe.

Despite Alarm Phone's efforts to support the captain through legal advice and calls to the Maltese and Italian rescue coordination centres, as well as to the NEXUS company, the return could not be prevented. Ultimately, SUPER BARU, the company operating the NEXUS, took over communication with the Libyan authorities and appears to have pressured the captain into complying with the order to return to Libya. Under immense pressure from the company and faced with inaction from all RCCs involved, the rescued people were disembarked in Tobruk on 12 March and immediately transferred to a detention centre, where they face torture and extortion. Alarm Phone fears for their lives and safety.

This violent and unlawful pushback is the direct result of the EU policies of deterrence. Responsibility lies not only with political leaders, but also with coastguards and shipping companies that enable such practices. Alarm Phone's thoughts are with the survivors and their families. The network also thanks

the captain and crew of the NEXUS for their efforts to bring the rescued people to a place of safety.

Timeline (all times in CET)

MARCH 10

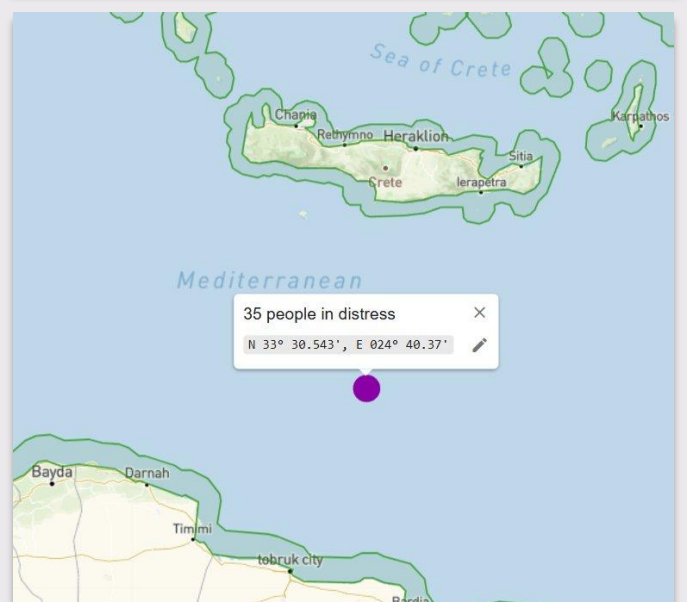
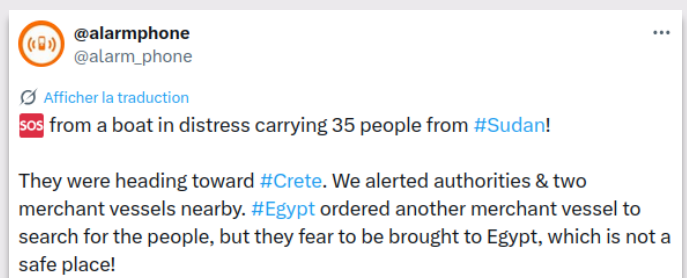
20:12 Alarm Phone (AP) alerts via email to Greek and Egyptian authorities and two merchant vessels about a boat in distress, carrying 35 people (it later became clear that there were 38 people on board) near the Greek SAR border in Egyptian SAR.

21:12 JRCC Cairo reacts to the alert and sends an email to the merchant vessel NEXUS and to Alarm Phone, referring to the distress case, requesting NEXUS to assess the situation and provide assistance to the people in distress.

21:40 The captain of the NEXUS confirms via email that they will begin the rescue.

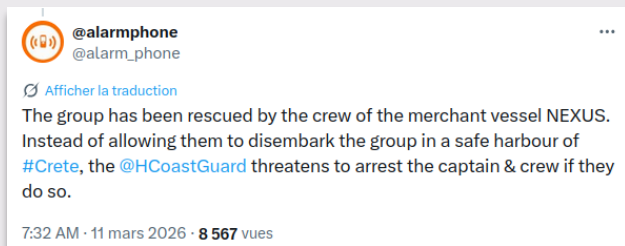
21:45 JRCC Cairo responded to both the captain and Alarm Phone, thanking the NEXUS for its efforts in contributing to safety at sea.

23:30 Alarm Phone tweets:



MARCH 11

07:33 AP tweets again:



07:59 A member of the SAR NGO community involved in the case was threatened by phone by representatives of the company operating the NEXUS. The company's management was reportedly putting pressure on the captain to return the rescued people to Libya.

14:47 The crew of the NEXUS contacted Alarm Phone for advice, explaining that the company was refusing to support their decision not to bring the rescued people to Libya. The crew reported being placed under significant pressure and feared losing their jobs.

17:38 The NEXUS received instructions from all surrounding RCCs to coordinate with Libya. Italy, Greece, and Egypt were all avoiding responsibility for providing a place of safety.

18:27 The company operating the NEXUS coordinated directly with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, which was reportedly on its way to the vessel.

20:09 Alarm Phone contacted JRCC Piraeus. The duty officer stated that the Greek authorities could not allow the rescued people to disembark in Crete because the distress case had not occurred within the Greek SAR zone and therefore fell under the responsibility of JRCC Cairo.

21:17 Alarm Phone attempted to re-establish contact with the rescued people on board the NEXUS, but without success.

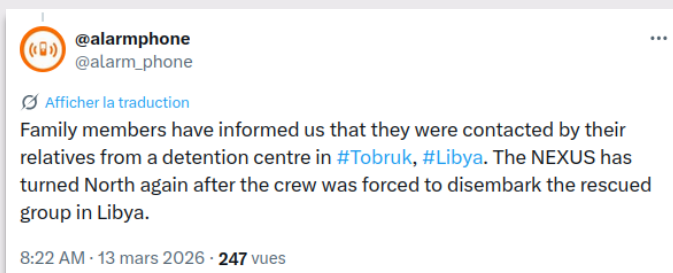


MARCH 12

08:45 AP tweets again, as NEXUS is going towards Libya.

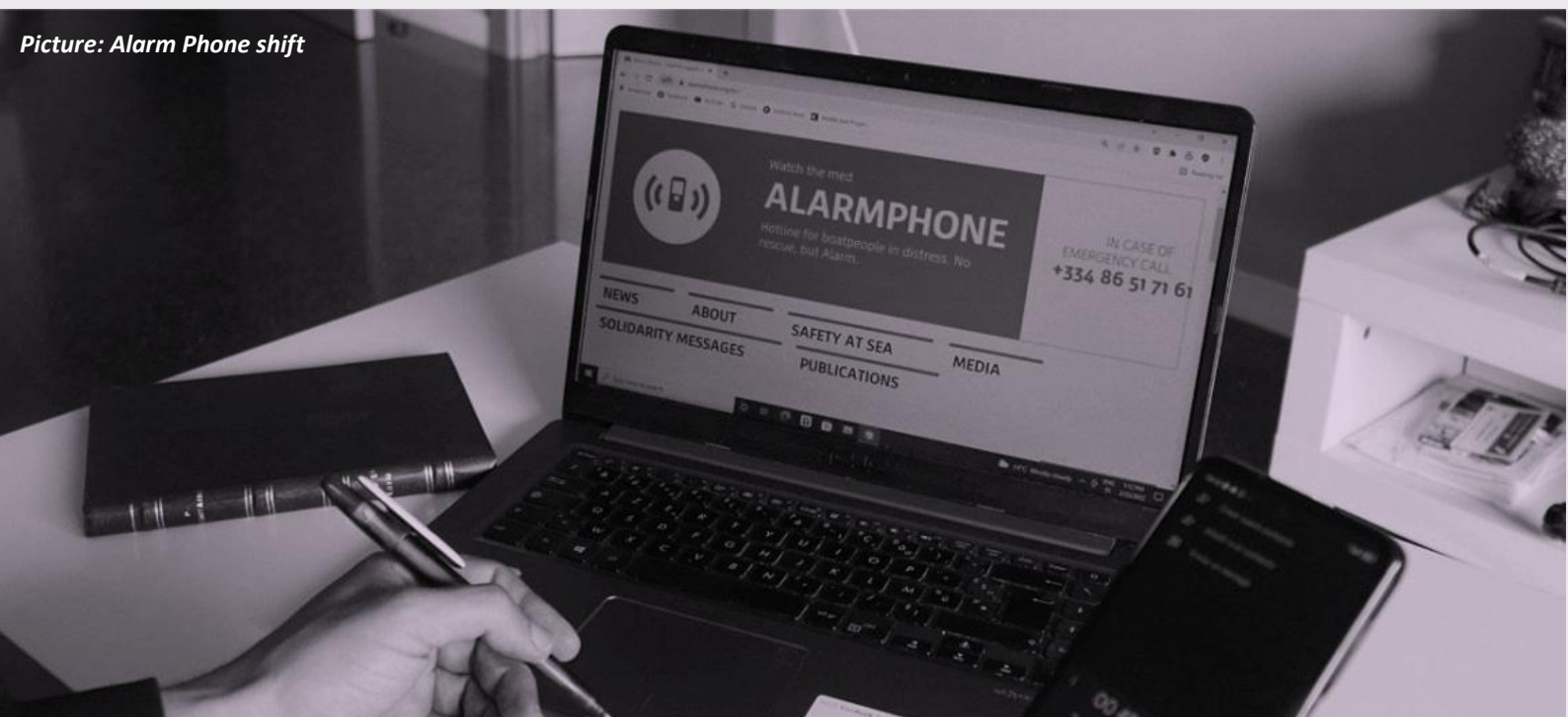
14:15 The NEXUS was observed off the coast of Tobruk on VesselFinder, a public ship-tracking platform that provides real-time vessel positions based on AIS (Automatic Identification System) data. Its location suggested that the vessel may have been waiting for a so-called Libyan Coast Guard boat to take custody of the rescued people.

20:00 The NEXUS changed course and turned north, indicating that the transfer of the rescued people had likely been completed.



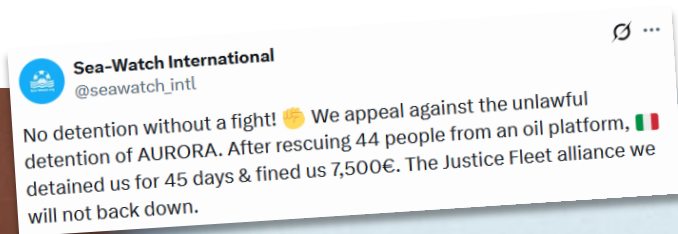
AlarmPhone Central Med group

Picture: Alarm Phone shift



APRIL 2026

- April 1** Following an alert by **Alarm Phone**, **Aurora** reaches the Didon oil platform where a group of 44 people had been stranded for 3 days. Aurora is assigned the distant port of Empedolce as place of safety, but due to lack of fuel disembarks the survivors in Lampedusa. Aurora is then detained by Italian authorities for 45 days and issued a fine of 75,000 euro.
- April 8** **Life Support** rescues 71 people from an overcrowded rubber boat. La Spezia is assigned as a place of safety requiring an additional four days of travel for crew and survivors.
Safira finds and stabilizes a boat with 71 people on a fiberglass boat, who are then transhipped to two Frontex patrol boats for disembarkation in Lampedusa.
- April 13** **Seabird 1** alerts a rubber boat with 53 people, which is then rescued by **Nadir**. Survivors are brought to Lampedusa.
- April 21** **Trotamar III** informs it found and rescued 18 people from a rubber boat. Survivors are disembarked in Lampedusa and Trotamar III is subsequently detained by the Italian authorities.
Nadir rescues 47 people from a rubber boat close to the Didon oil platform.
- April 22** **Nadir** rescues 20 people from a fiberglass boat in the middle of the night. Shortly after, following an alert by **Alarm Phone**, Nadir performs a second rescue of 25 people from a wooden boat. All survivors are disembarked in Lampedusa.
Alarm Phone alerts another boat which is found by the crew of **Solidaire**. Upon arrival, several people have to be recovered from the water. Luckily, all 79 survive. The distant port of Livorno is assigned, requiring an additional 4 day of sailing.
- April 26** After an alert by **Alarm Phone**, **Life Support** rescues 38 people from a rubber boat. Life Support rescues a second rubber boat with 30 people following a mayday relay by Frontex. The distant port of Ortona is assigned, requiring another 4 days of travel for crew and survivors.



Picture: Aurora, Sea Watch

ANALYSIS

COMMERCIAL VESSELS IN SEARCH AND RESCUE: NAVIGATING MARITIME LAW, POLITICS AND PROFITS

For over a decade, the Civil Fleet has operated in the Central Mediterranean, monitoring Europe’s deadly border regime and facilitating or carrying out rescues at sea. Merchant vessels have also played an important role in many distress situations. They are contacted either by Alarm Phone or by coastguards to search for boats in distress, take people on board, provide food, water, and fuel, or shelter boats from wind and waves until further assistance arrives.

At times, however, merchant vessels fail to provide assistance, acting only when instructed to do so by local authorities. In some cases, authorities even order them to not carry out rescues. Sometimes merchant vessels comply with maritime law and disembark rescued people in safe ports; at other times, they deliver them to places known to be unsafe. Merchant vessels thus reflect the broader power struggles at sea, where deadly border enforcement clashes daily with basic solidarity.

Drawing on long-term data collected since 2019 by the Civil MRCC, this article presents a brief analysis of cases involving merchant vessels.

Merchant vessels in distress cases: A statistical overview

The following table (Table 1) presents yearly data on the total number of distress cases, the number of cases involving merchant vessels (MerV), and the corresponding percentage. It shows that the proportion of cases involving merchant vessels has remained relatively stable, ranging between 2% and 6%, although it has generally declined since 2020. This decrease may reflect a reaction from the maritime shipping industry, as diverting routes to carry out rescues can cause delays and financial losses for merchant vessels. Some shipping companies may therefore choose alternative routes in order to avoid encountering boats in distress.

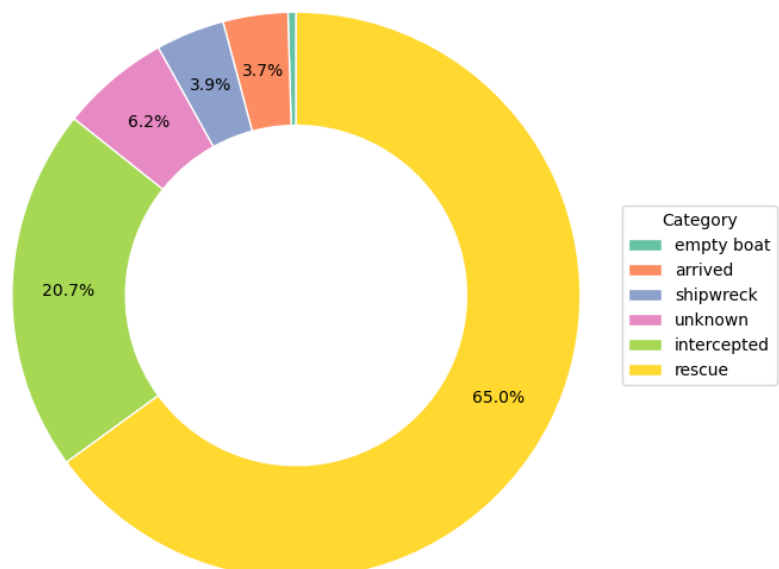
Year	All Cases	MerV Cases	MerV percentage
2019	266	9	3.383 %
2020	521	34	6.526 %
2021	921	51	5.537 %
2022	1202	71	5.907 %
2023	2894	125	4.319 %
2024	2061	58	2.814 %
2025	1958	81	4.137 %

Table 1 : number of distress cases, number of Merchant vessels (MerV) cases and corresponding percentage, on a yearly basis.

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of outcomes in cases involving merchant vessels. The most common outcome is rescue leading to disembarkation in the EU, which maritime law defines as disembarkation in a "place of safety" (in this context, a European port). The second most common outcome is interception, resulting in people being returned to the country where they departed from.

As the figure shows, more than half of all merchant vessel cases end in rescue, most likely because the majority occur within the Maltese or Italian Search and Rescue (SAR) zones, where the chances of being disembarked in a EU country are higher.

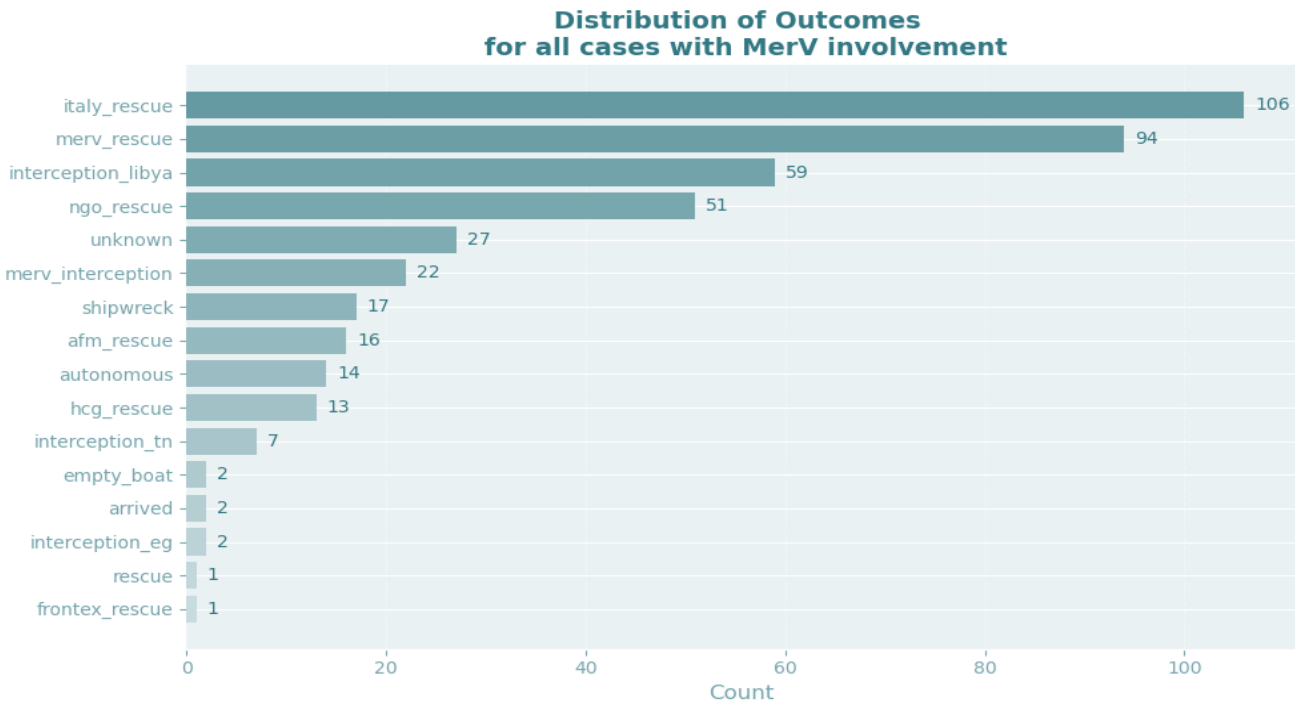
Distribution of Outcomes for all cases with MerV involvement



The label "arrived" indicates autonomous arrivals, in opposition to rescues. "empty boat" indicates that we have no information about the people in distress but that an empty boat was reported.

Figure 3 shows the outcomes of all cases involving merchant vessels, together with their respective counts. Most rescues are carried out either by the Italian Coast Guard or by the merchant vessels themselves. Most interceptions (which are illegal

under international law) are conducted either by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard or by the merchant vessels themselves, although it is often unclear which Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) was responsible for coordinating the operation.



AFM : Armed Forces of Malta, HCG : Hellenic (Greek) Coast-Guard, EG : Egypt.

Between solidarity and border violence

The data shows that merchant vessels remain important actors in rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean, although their involvement appears to be decreasing. These cases also reveal the difficult position of merchant crews, who are caught between their legal duty to assist people in distress at sea and the growing pressure of state border enforcement policies.

While international maritime law requires rescue and disembarkation in a place of safety, Mediterranean border practices often undermine these obligations through conflicting instructions, political pressure, and cooperation with actors involved in illegal interceptions and returns.

These experiences highlight a fundamental tension between solidarity and deterrence, and between legal obligations and political interests. Despite this, many seafarers continue to prioritise saving lives at sea.

Civil MRCC documentation team

" Dear Seafarers [...]

In the Mediterranean Sea, as well as in the Atlantic and the English Channel, you often rescue refugees who are in distress. Sometimes the boats are small, and sometimes they are very big, and they are almost always overcrowded. We have seen how you carry out these rescues no matter the weather conditions, even though when the waves are high it is dangerous for you as well.

We know that when you provide help your vessel becomes delayed, meaning there is more stress and harder work for you in the next port. But your hearts are wide, and you don't want to pass by when brothers, sisters and their children are close to drowning.

Today we want to say: we see you! We will never forget every one of you who did what they could to stand by the side of the people in distress.

May you have always a safe journey – and may we all see the day where you never have to rescue refugees again, where we live in a world where freedom of movement is everybody's right."

Alarm Phone's 2024 message "Dear Seafarers", expressing gratitude to seafarers involved in rescue operations at sea.

THE PROLIFERATION OF 'BORDER ZONES': HOW ITALY IS PREPARING TO IMPLEMENT THE EUROPEAN PACT ON MIGRATION

With only few days to go before the implementation of the [European Pact on Migration and Asylum](#), it seems worthwhile to turn our attention once again to Italy, as a border country, and to Sicily, which over the years has become a testing ground for policies and practices increasingly aimed at hindering freedom of movement and undermining the substance of the right to asylum.

In February 2026, the Council of Ministers approved a [draft law](#) introducing provisions on immigration and international protection, as well as provisions for the implementation of the European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum. It consisted of two parts: the first introduced provisions that would come into force following the publication of the law in the Official Gazette; the second part, however, granted the Government broad powers to adopt, within six months, the legislative decrees necessary for the transposition of EU directives and alignment with new EU regulations.

In addition to introducing the possibility of a so-called 'naval blockade' (see "legal fragment" section), the text contained a series of measures aimed at 'defending the borders' and 'preventing irregular departures' in various areas, including: the detention of asylum seekers whilst their asylum applications are being examined; the expansion of the grounds for judicial expulsion; the establishment of an integrated surveillance system for the control of maritime and land borders; the introduction of an accelerated procedure at border crossings or in transit zones, aimed at the return/expulsion of persons arriving from third countries with asylum applications deemed "unfounded".

Finally, in addition to providing for amendments to the Consolidated Law on Immigration regarding the withdrawal of reception and the tightening of sanctions to prevent secondary movements, the draft law established the framework for the integration of the Italian legal system with the new Common European Asylum System (CEAS), delegating the government to adopt decrees to transpose the regulations and directives provided for by the pact.

Yet, to date, the Italian government has not yet officially published the operational document containing details regarding the locations for implementing the new procedures introduced by the Screening Regulation and the accelerated border

procedures, to be applied to those arriving in Italy in accordance with the criteria introduced by the new Procedures Regulation.

About a month after the deadline set by the EU for member states to publish information, namely 11 April, [Il Manifesto](#) managed to informally view the documentation produced by the Italian government and to make the information contained therein public. In particular, this concerns the designation of certain territories as 'border zones' – in which the so-called "presumption of non-entry" would apply, i.e. the assumption that people present there have not yet entered the national territory – and the geographical distribution of the 8,932 places that Italy had made available for the implementation of accelerated border procedures, as part of the negotiations conducted with the EU following the approval of the Pact.



Picture: Closed center in Empedocle, Malsusa

According to the leaked document, around 4,400 places will be allocated in the "border zones" identified by the August 2019 decree, including Ragusa (356 places, of which 84 are for detention in Modica), Agrigento (150 places, of which 50 are for detention in Porto Empedocle), Crotone (841 places), Caltanissetta (564), Cagliari (340) and Brindisi (328). Additional border zones already identified in 2019 were Lecce, Catania, Messina, Matera, Cosenza, Syracuse, Taranto and Trapani in southern Italy, as well as Gorizia, Udine (1,440) and Trieste (427) in the north-east.

According to the aforementioned document, other border zones would be added to those already known, at ports where, from January 2023 onwards and as part of the implementation of the so-called Piantedosi Decree civil rescue NGOs have been diverted, in accordance with the unjust 'distant ports' policy, one of the measures through which the Italian government seeks to hinder the presence of NGOs at sea.

In these locations – including Bari, Livorno, Naples, Ortona, Ravenna, Reggio Calabria, Civitavecchia, Salerno, and Vibo Valentia – Italy would make available a further 3,000 places for accelerated border procedures. To these would be added Ancona, Massa, La Spezia, Savona, Palermo, and Genoa, which are still under consideration.

Since 2019, with the decree issued by the Minister of the Interior, Salvini, on 5 August regarding the "identification of border or transit zones for the purposes of implementing the accelerated procedure for examining applications for international protection," the concept of 'border zones' has emerged as a key tool in the implementation of more restrictive and less protective procedures for those arriving in Italy by sea. Subsequently, in 2023, it was confirmed as an essential element in the implementation of the procedures introduced by the Cutro Decree, including the detention of asylum seekers from SCOs (Safe Countries of Origin).

Yet, in the context of the legal battles that unfolded over the issue of the (lack of) 'validation' of the detention of asylum seekers – first before the immigration divisions of the courts of Catania and Palermo, and subsequently in Rome, the court competent to validate detentions ordered in Albania – the concept of 'border zone' was itself challenged.

For example, according to Judge Escher (see non-validation decision number 9375 of 17 September 2024), in the case of an asylum seeker who had landed on the island of Lampedusa – already designated by the Ministerial Decree of 5 August as a border zone, as it lies in the province of Agrigento – and who had expressed a wish to apply for asylum there (news report), it was not legitimate to detain him in the province of Ragusa, as a "border zone", despite its designation as such in the Ministerial Decree.

Yet, according to the new provisions introduced by the pact – in particular the screening regulation – it would appear that the intention is precisely to "avoid" judicial review of these procedures. In fact, the screening regulation makes no mention of "detention", despite the introduction of the so-called "residence requirement" for asylum seekers during screening which – if breached – would entail the implicit withdrawal of the asylum application.

Furthermore, through the introduction of new selection criteria for channelling applicants into accelerated procedures – including, in addition to the safe country or origine criterion, the 20% recognition threshold for protection applications – the Pact clearly aims to make ordinary asylum procedures a residual option, thereby undermining the safeguards that the right to asylum would otherwise provide.

Thus it is even more important that people on the move, who have been rescued and brought to the new "borderzone-ports" will get proper information and contacts to counseling offices and solidarity groups (see for example W2E website) - before their disembarkation.

And it remains absolutely essential to continue monitoring the territories and the procedures that will be applied in the new border zones, where the 'presence' of asylum seekers on Italian territory is 'denied' through the pretence of non-entry.

This is nothing more than a pretence: those who survive the crossing of the Mediterranean will be present, in flesh and blood, on Italian territory, and it is necessary to guarantee them access to all fundamental human rights, constitutional safeguards, and the right to asylum!

Chiara Denaro, Sicily monitoring project

LEGAL FRAGMENTS

ITALY'S NEW MIGRATION LAW: A TACTICAL "NAVAL BLOCKADE" CHALLENGING INTERNATIONAL LAW

The Italian government has recently presented a draft law that significantly impacts the country's migration and asylum framework, in part to implement the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum at the national level. However, the timing and substance of the proposal suggest a deeper domestic motivation. Amidst a climate of intense political polarization, reaching a peak after a defeat in the March 2026 constitutional referendum, the bill serves as a rhetorical provision aimed at reaffirming the Executive's agenda ahead of next year's political elections.

Among the bill's clauses is the so-called "naval blockade", a measure that the government has always announced as a flagship issue. Legal experts emphasize that, at Article 2, the bill introduces a temporary administrative interdiction of Italian territorial waters. Referring to it as an actual naval blockade is not only lexically incorrect but also legally risky. Applying a wartime instrument – governed by the San Remo Manual – to civilian actors, frames NGOs vessels as enemy ships, in contrast with Italy's international obligations.

The temporary ban on entry into Italian territorial waters is justified by broad threats to public order or national security. These grounds include the concrete risk of terrorism, unusually high migration pressure, public health emergencies, or high-profile international events. The interdiction is designed to be exceptional, lasting initially for thirty days with possible extensions up to a cumulative maximum of six months.

To enforce the interdiction of access, the legislation introduces a severe punitive system: offenders face administrative fines ranging from €10,000 to €50,000, and in cases of repeated violations with the same vessel, the law mandates an immediate precautionary seizure followed by the final confiscation. Furthermore, the provision establishes that rescued people may be transferred to a third State, with which Italy has signed cooperation agreements.

The proposed Article 2 introduces four primary profiles of illegitimacy that have drawn sharp criticism from humanitarian organizations and legal scholars alike.

The Misclassification of Rescued People

The first critical issue lies in the bill's fundamental compatibility with the international law of the sea. The legislation seeks to apply immigration enforcement measures to individuals still at sea, incorrectly qualifying them as "migrants" before they have reached land.

Under the established international framework of UNCLOS, SOLAS, and the SAR Convention, these individuals must be legally classified as shipwreck survivors until the moment of disembarkation at a Place of Safety (POS). This is not a mere terminological dispute; it is a vital legal distinction. By applying migration law prematurely, the bill undermines the master's duty to provide assistance and threatens the integrity of search and rescue operations, which must remain distinct from law enforcement activities.

Vague Grounds for Territorial Interdiction

A second profile of illegitimacy stems from the broad and indeterminate nature of the grounds for issuing entry bans. The bill allows for interdictions based on "unusually high migration pressure" or a "concrete risk of terrorist acts," yet it fails to provide objective parameters or quantitative criteria for these assessments.

This lack of precision grants the administrative authority excessive discretionary power, making the government's actions difficult to predict or legally challenge. Such vagueness risks the "political instrumentalization" of the law, where security concerns may be invoked without a clear evidentiary basis to prevent the disembarkation of specific humanitarian vessels.

Moreover, security and defence matters, on whose justification the ban would be grounded, restrict civil actors' ability to access public documents, which may be classified, most especially when terrorism is implied.

Risks of Collective Expulsion and Refoulement

The third major concern involves the protection of fundamental rights and the potential for collective expulsions. By authorizing the transfer of rescued persons to third countries - such as those defined in recent bilateral agreements like the Italy-Albania Protocol - the law bypasses the required individual assessment of each person's protection needs. This practice directly threatens the principle of *non-refoulement*, which prohibits the return of individuals to countries where they may face persecution or inhuman treatment. Furthermore, the European Court of Human Rights has established that a State's jurisdiction begins the moment it exercises effective control over survivors, meaning Italy remains legally responsible for their rights even before they step onto Italian soil.

Disproportionality of the Sanction System

Finally, the bill introduces a sanctioning regime that could violate the principles of proportionality and reasonableness. The legislation mandates heavy administrative fines up to €50,000 and, most severely, the detention and potential confiscation of vessels in cases of repeated violations. This punitive framework applies an "automatic" measure that does not

account for the specific context of a rescue or the severity of the conduct. By targeting the assets of NGOs, the law creates a deterrent effect that threatens the operational capacity of civil society and interferes with the fulfilment of mandatory international duties to save lives at sea.

Conclusions

In light of these systemic legitimacy issues, the draft law presents a framework that prioritizes political signalling over legal consistency. The proposed measures not only risk overlapping and contradicting the EU's crisis governance architecture – that envisages forms of solidarity in case of high migration pressure – but also place shipmasters before an operational dilemma between domestic penalties and international legal duties. Consequently, civil society organizations are calling for the integral withdrawal of Article 2. Italy must instead focus on coordinating search and rescue operations in accordance with international maritime law, ensuring that humanitarian efforts are not obstructed and that the fundamental rights of people on the move are upheld.

EMERGENCY Advocacy Department



CRIMINALISATION

SEVEN HOURS FOR SEVEN YEARS - FREEDOM FOR THE EL HIBLU 3

Seven years after their arrest following the El Hiblu case, Abdalla, Amara and Kader continue to face prosecution in Malta for resisting an illegal return to Libya and acting as mediators on board the merchant vessel El Hiblu 1. On 28 March 2026, members of civil society gathered in Valletta to renew calls for justice and the immediate dropping of all charges against the El Hiblu 3.

Excerpts from the speeches held in Valletta in solidarity with the El Hiblu 3

"... Today, Saturday 28th March 2026, we mark the 7th anniversary of the wrongful arrest of three human rights defenders, our friends Abdalla, Amara and Kader. As a Coalition made up of many local and international organisations and individuals, we continue to stand in solidarity with the three young men, whom we celebrate as Human Rights Defenders. In the face of an illegal pushback to Libya, Abdalla, Amara and Kader showed incredible bravery as mediators and translators. As a Coalition, we reiterate our call to the authorities to end this injustice and drop the charges! We join a chorus of international NGOs, among which are various United Nations bodies who, most recently, this January 2026 urged Malta to end the unjustified prosecution of the El Hiblu 3...."

Dr. Cetta Mainwaring, Coalition for El Hiblu 3

"... This case has now been ongoing for seven years. Seven years of uncertainty. Seven years in which these young men have lived under the weight of serious criminal charges, without resolution.

Justice delayed to this extent is not neutral. It is not procedural. It is itself a form of injustice. The European tradition of justice, to which Malta belongs, is not blind to time. It recognises that proceedings must be conducted within a reasonable time, and that the burden placed on individuals by the criminal process must be proportionate and justified.

That standard is not being met here. The continued pursuit of these charges, in these circumstances, raises serious questions about proportionality, about fairness, and about the responsible use of prosecutorial discretion...."

Prof. Vicki-Ann Cremona, President, Repubblika

"... On Thursday, the Minister for Home Affairs posted on his Facebook account a photo of a Black person being arrested by two police officers. The caption read: 'We will send back any foreigner who doesn't collaborate, even if they have spent 15 years here.'

There was no explanation of what "collaboration" means, but that Black person was exposed there, mobbed by a cyber crowd of racists. That is how

Picture: Coalition for El Hiblu 3



stories without context are channelled, and some people are immediately seen as a problem before they are even seen as human. (...)

People -I mean real human beings- are easily reduced to labels: Illegal. threat. As if their lives, their stories, everything they've been through, doesn't matter.

But people are neither categories, nor headlines. People are human beings. And yet, again and again, we see people who have already gone through so much - violence, danger, loss - arriving here and being treated with suspicion instead of dignity.

Some are in their seventh year of one of the most unjust court cases in the history of Malta: the El Hiblu case. Seven years of fear, of anguish, of broken hopes. Seven years hoping that the case will be dismissed because, when we look closely at it, there is simply no case. Some people will say that it's complicated. But honestly, it is not complicated. It is not complicated to treat people with dignity and to recognise someone's humanity. It is not complicated to refuse injustice. What is complicated is the system that keeps justifying why some people deserve less. And we shouldn't accept that...."

**Regine Nguini, Director, African Media Association
Malta**

"...As we speak, the International Criminal Court has in its custody a Libyan individual accused of committing crimes against humanity against Libyans, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. In light of all this evidence, it is our hope that the Maltese authorities and judicial system will deliver immediate justice and free the El-Hiblu 3. They have been wronged and accused of terrorism for saving themselves from torture and enslavement.

For us, and for many around the world, you are heroes. You are true human rights defenders. We say now: seven years are enough and we can only thank you for fighting still. This nightmare must come to an end because we truly believe and know that you are all innocent of the allegations and charges placed against you.

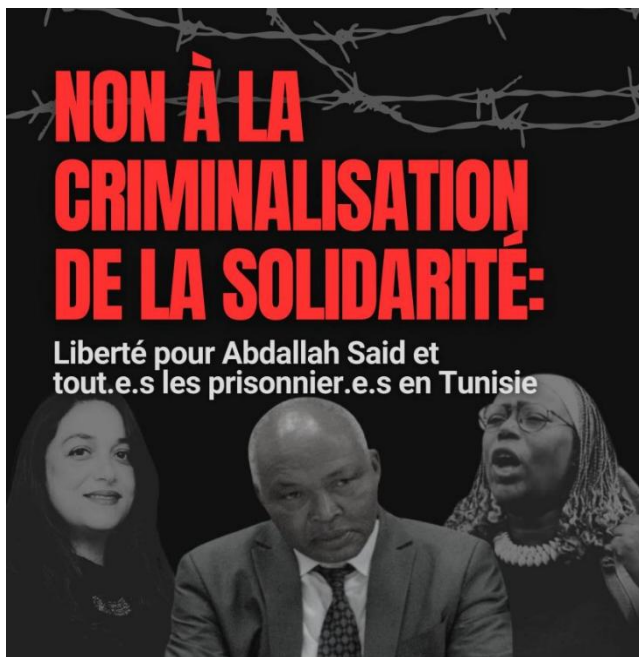
Thank you for doing the right thing."

David Yambio, Refugees in Libya

Full-length versions of all speeches:

<https://elhiblu3coalition.org/sevenhoursforsevenyears/>

CRIMINALISATION OF ANTI-RACIST AND CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISM IN TUNISIA



Since 2023, Tunisia has witnessed an alarming escalation in the criminalisation of anti-racist activists, migrant solidarity groups, and civil society organisations. Following racist statements by

President Kais Saïed targeting people on the move, Black communities and human rights defenders have faced increasing harassment, arbitrary arrests, judicial intimidation, and smear campaigns.

Activists and association leaders have repeatedly been accused of offenses such as money laundering, threats to state security, or terrorism-related activities, often without credible evidence. These prosecutions have raised serious concerns among international human rights organisations regarding the shrinking civic space and the use of the judiciary to silence dissent in Tunisia.

Saadia Mosbah

Saadia Mosbah, President of Mnemty and an anti-racist activist, was arrested back in May 2024 following a wave of anti-Black racism in Tunisia. She was in a pretrial detention that exceeded legal limits and during her time in prison, she reported facing severe racial discrimination and a physical assault by a prison guard.

On March 19, 2026, the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced Mosbah to eight years in prison and a fine of over TND 120,000 (around 36,000 euros). Saadia Mosbah was charged with "illicit enrichment" and "money laundering." Five other Mnemty staff members received sentences ranging from one to three years.

Abdallah Said

Abdallah Said, the former president of The Children of The Moon association in Medenine, Tunisia, was arrested at the end of 2024. Initially he was "suspected of terrorism"; however, the "counter-terrorism unit" later dropped the charges due to lack of evidence. The case was then returned to a public prosecutor on charges of money laundering, embezzlement, and offenses against state security.

On April 22, after spending 18 months in pretrial detention, the Court of First Instance in Medenine, Tunisia sentenced Said to one year in prison.

Resisting!

On 11 April 2026, hundreds of demonstrators recently gathered in Tunis to protest against racism and discriminatory policies targeting Black people. Protesters marched against racism, the

criminalisation of civil society work, and the detention of anti-racist and migrant rights activists, including Saadia Mosbah.



As racism and xenophobia continue to intensify, the growing mobilisation of demonstrators in Tunis shows that many within Tunisian society continue to resist discrimination and defend the rights and dignity of Black Tunisians, migrants, and civil society actors!

Alarm Phone Tunis

Picture taken during the anti-racism demonstration in Tunis, 11 April 2026



FORCED TO DISAPPEAR

AT THE EDGE OF THE SEA: CHRONICLES OF DEATH AND DISAPPEARANCE

This section documents the shipwrecks, deaths, and disappearances along the Central Mediterranean Route. These tragedies are the result of an EU policy, and can be prevented if safe passage was available to the millions who want or are forced to move.

This list does not include all the shipwrecks that occurred in the Central Mediterranean, since many could have disappeared in invisible shipwrecks or through other forms of state violence. We stand with their families, friends, and communities in the demand for truth and justice.

One is too many.

FEBRUARY 2026

4th of February

On the 3rd of February between two rescue operations, the crew of Humanity 1 encountered a heartbreaking sight: a deceased person floating in the water. After the second rescue, a second body was discovered. In both instances, the conditions indicated that they had been in the water for some time – and could not be recovered. ([SOS HUM](#))

9th of February

A rubber boat carrying dozens of people has capsized off the coast of Libya, leaving at least 53 people dead, including two babies. The vessel, which was carrying 55 people, overturned north of the coastal city of Zuwara on 6 February. It departed from al-Zawiya at around 11:00 p.m. on 5 February, and capsized approximately six hours later. Only two Nigerian women survived. One woman lost her husband and the other woman lost her two babies. ([RiL](#), [IOM](#), [Alarm Phone](#), [Media](#))

18th of February

At least 15 bodies have washed up on the shores of Calabria and Sicily in recent days. Fifteen people who tried to cross the Mediterranean. ([Media](#))

21st of February

A boat with around 50 persons onboard has capsized near Heraklion, Greece. The people have called for help on 112. According to information, 3 people were pulled unconscious from the sea, 20 people have been rescued and are being transported by a nearby Panamanian-flagged container ship to Kali Limenes, while 27 persons are missing. ([Media](#))

Several bodies were washed ashore in the Qasr al-Akhyar area, east of the Libyan capital, Tripoli. This is unfolding amid the aftermath of Cyclone Harry, where over 1,000 people are feared dead, and alongside the recovery of more than a dozen bodies off the coasts of Sicily—without any attention or response commensurate with the scale of loss. ([RiL](#))

MARCH 2026

2nd of March

At least four migrants died, and at least ten are missing after an incident involving a migrant boat off the coast of Tobruk in eastern Libya on Sunday, UNHCR said. No details have yet been released about the nationalities of the people on the boat. ([Media](#))

13th of March

Alarm Phone reported about 9 people that have died in a shipwreck near Algiers, Algeria. The boat was carrying 33 people from different sub-saharan nationalities. The survivors were pushed back to Algeria. ([Alarm Phone](#))

15th of March

A boat carrying migrants capsizes off Lampedusa, leaving a child missing. Coast Guard patrol boat rescues 64 people including the child's mother ([Media](#))

17th of March

According to Alarm Phone, 17 people did not survive the storm. The survivors were returned to #Libya and are now in a detention centre. The boat shipwrecked when the so-called Libyan coastguards tried to go on board. The bodies of the 17 people who were killed were left behind and were not brought to land to be identified and buried. ([Alarm Phone](#))

26th of March

17 people missing in the Central Med. Alarm Phone was contacted by many worried relatives asking about a boat that left with ca. 17 people from Sabratha, Libya on the night of the 22nd of March. ([Alarm Phone](#))

29th of March

A boat carrying around 60 people has been shipwrecked near Tunisia. 16 people survived and 19 people died. Around 25 people remain missing. All survivors were pushed back to Tunisia. ([Alarm Phone](#))

30th of March

22 people are feared dead after their dinghy drifted for 6 days without food or water, according to survivors. 26 others were rescued & brought to safety on Crete. The boat had departed Tobruk with 48 people on board. ([UNHCR](#))

During its routine patrol activity, an Italian Coast Guard patrol boat recovered a lifeless body, likely at sea for several days, and landed it at around 3 pm at the Favalaro pier. ([Mediterranea](#))

APRIL 2026

1st of April

Shipwreck in the Central Med. On 1 April at 11:50h, Alarm Phone alerted authorities to a boat with 75 people. When rescue arrived, 8 people had already died, 11 others died before reaching land. Some survivors are in critical condition. Another crime by the EU border regime! ([Alarm Phone](#))

4th of April

According to Sea-Watch, 105 people were on that boat. Only 32 survived, rescued by the nearby merchant vessels SAAVEDRA and IEVOLI GREY. This morning, the survivors and 2 bodies were brought to Lampedusa. 71 people are still missing. ([Sea-Watch](#))

10th of April

A boat capsized near Sorman, Libya. No further information ([X platform](#))

18th of April

A migrant's body washed up on the shore of Tajoura, eastern Tripoli, on Saturday, the Libyan Red Crescent reported.

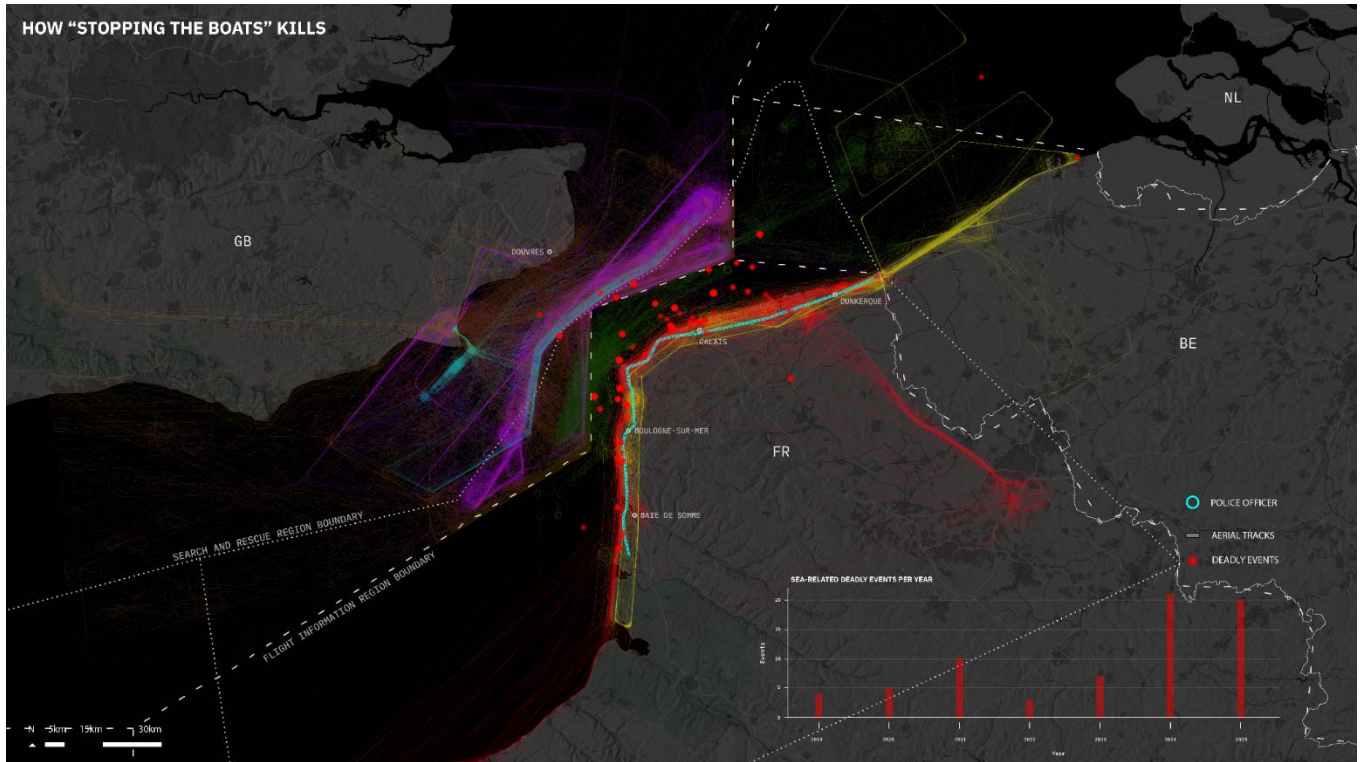
Meanwhile, in the western coastal city of Zuwara, the recovery of migrant bodies has increased dramatically. The Emergency Medicine and Support Center reported that 17 bodies were retrieved from the beaches in just a few days. ([Media](#))

A rubber boat capsized off the coast of Tobruk. 4 people were brought back to Libya and 6 bodies have been recovered. ([Media](#))

REPORTS

How "STOPPING THE BOATS" KILLS

A digital counter-forensic investigation of the human cost of the UK's externalised border in the Channel



In the years since migrants began crossing the Channel from France to the UK we have seen more and more money spent on border policing, and more deaths as a result. This report from a collaboration at the University of Bristol, UK and Border Forensics breaks down how increased security has made migrants' journeys more dangerous.

After the report was published, the UK and France agreed to renew their cooperation for another three years. The British government will give France as much as £660 million between 2026-29 to stop small boat crossing attempts. £500 million is guaranteed and will reportedly pay for:

- five new police units, including a new squad of specialist riot police;
- more maritime police to intercept boats already at sea;
- more police intelligence to target smugglers;
- more aerial surveillance.

These are exactly the measures the report links to the at least 170 sea crossing related deaths which have occurred since the last deal in 2023 was agreed.

An additional £160 million will be given if the French can further reduce the numbers of crossings. This

arrangement has meant that the French police are now directly incentivised to put people in greater danger in exchange for more money from the UK.

The counter-forensic investigation

How 'stopping the boats' kills presents findings from a year-long collaborative investigation by researchers at the ESRC Centre for Sociodigital Futures at the University of Bristol, and Border Forensics, an independent research agency based in Geneva, Switzerland. The report demonstrates how the UK government's 'Stop the Boats' policies, and over £625 million given to the French to prevent departures, have directly contributed to a sharp rise in deaths of people attempting to cross the Channel in so-called small boats.

Drawing on data from migrant solidarity activists in northern France, French coastguard records, and UK Home Office transparency data, this investigation identifies a dramatic surge in fatal incidents beginning Summer 2023. Crucially, **this rise in deaths came as the numbers of dinghies and people arriving to the UK fell**, and despite an increase in aerial surveillance and maritime search-and-rescue capacity.

Geospatial analysis showed these increased deaths occurred closer to French shores, and interviews with activists and migrants revealed them to be the result of new deadly mechanisms: **extreme overcrowding**, resulting in people being crushed inside of dinghies, and **chaotic launches**, often in the midst of violent police interventions to prevent departures. The entangled effects of three border policing practices behind these mechanisms are examined in detail in the report:

—1— **‘Upstream’ anti-smuggling measures and supply-chain disruption**: International cooperation has reduced the availability of dinghies and other materials needed for small boat journeys, leading facilitators to source larger and lower quality inflatables which are increasingly overcrowded. Anti-smuggling measures have also reduced the opportunities for under-resourced groups to organise their own journeys—strengthening the hold of professionalised smugglers on the market—and fuelled competition for places onboard.

—2— **Expanded aerial surveillance**: Although framed primarily in terms of supporting search and rescue operations, analysis of flight tracks and state documentation showed most aerial surveillance of the Channel is focused on coordinating police patrols on the ground, and gathering data and intelligence for prosecutions. By enabling faster detection and police intervention, surveillance has contributed to overcrowding and the advent of new dangerous tactics for small boat departures.

—3— **Increased police activity on the French coast**: The ever larger numbers of police on the French coast, funded by the UK, has altered the geography of small

boat departures, and driven the adoption of the ‘taxi boats’ which present greater risks for travellers who must board dinghies already afloat. Police’s violent tactics, especially the use of riot control weapons such as tear-gas, stun grenades, and rubber bullets, have also directly endangered travellers and led to panics, crushes, and people drowning in shallow waters.

The report demonstrates how these border policing practices, which authorities claim ‘save lives’ by preventing crossing attempts, have amplified the risks facing people compelled to make illegalised journeys to reach the UK. It also shows that British and French officials knew, or ought to have known, the deadly consequences of their policies.

Decades of increased security and policing at the UK’s externalised border have not ended illegalised journeys and, despite being a political priority since 2019, small boat journeys have not stopped. As this report shows, greater enforcement has not only failed to achieve its stated objective, but led to more deaths in the Channel. Whether this reality can be recognised by policy-makers and prompt a fundamental reassessment of UK border externalisation remains an open question. For now, as the next phase of bilateral cooperation for 2026-29 is set to begin, the UK government appears determined to continue using large payments to leverage the French to adopt ever riskier tactics to police its border, regardless of the human costs.

Full investigation

<https://www.borderforensics.org/investigations/channel/>

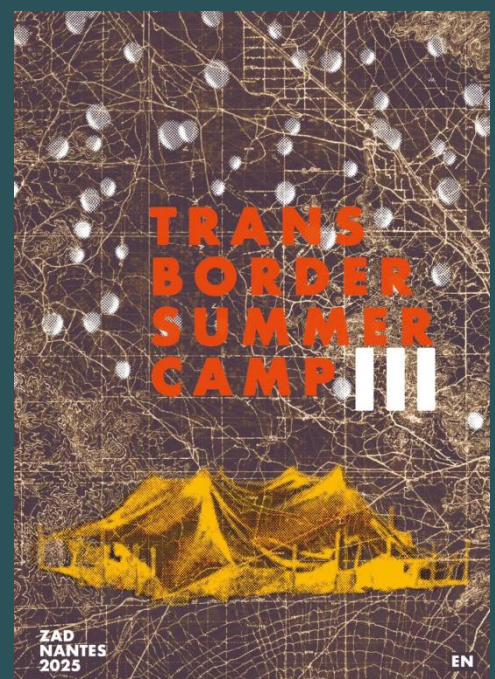
TRANSBORDER SUMMER CAMP III - NEW BROCHURE

In May 2026 the brochure about the third Transborder Summer Camp from August 2025 near Nantes was published, available so far in English and French. This camp was 6 days of coming together, exchange, learning, discussing, meeting new and old friends and co-fighters.

In the end 680 participants from around 100 groups formed 24 working groups for the organization of the camp and held 20 workshops on solidarity on the routes, commemorations, struggles against criminalization, deportations and detentions, and for freedom of movement and equal rights for all.

The brochure offers collective reports and conclusions, but also personal memories and thoughts, and photos and graphics.

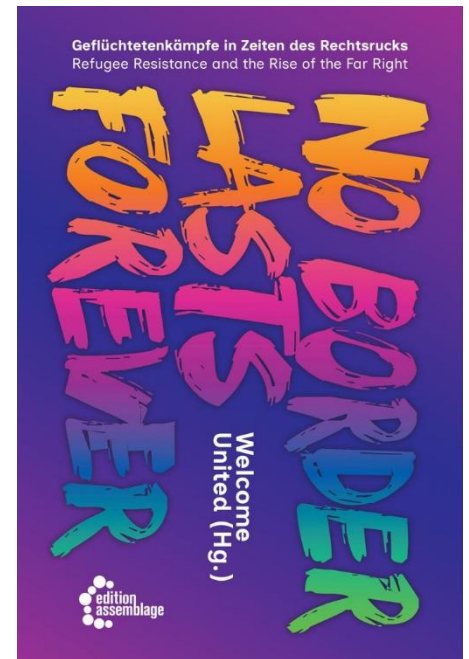
Download the brochure: <https://trans-border.net/>



NO BORDER LASTS FOREVER - REFUGEE RESISTANCE AND THE RISE OF THE FAR RIGHT

In March 2026 a new book from the Germanwide network We'll Come United was published. It is a collection of texts, speeches and photos in German and English. From the announcement: "Europe is turning right, and refugees are being cast as enemies. Yet across Germany, Europe, and African transit routes, they are resisting – fighting for their rights, dignity, and freedom of movement. From billions spent on border fortifications and racist laws to deal with authoritarian regimes, European politics seeks to block or deport those on the move. But refugees are organizing, forming transnational networks like We'll Come United to oppose isolation, violence, and injustice. This book tells the story of their struggle: from EU-funded abuse in Libya to night-time deportations from German "Dublin centers," from the first movements in the 1990s to today's new anti-racist alliances across Europe and beyond the Mediterranean. A powerful testament to resilience, solidarity, and the fight for human rights."

Website: <https://www.welcome-united.org/>



WOMEN STATE TRAFFICKING

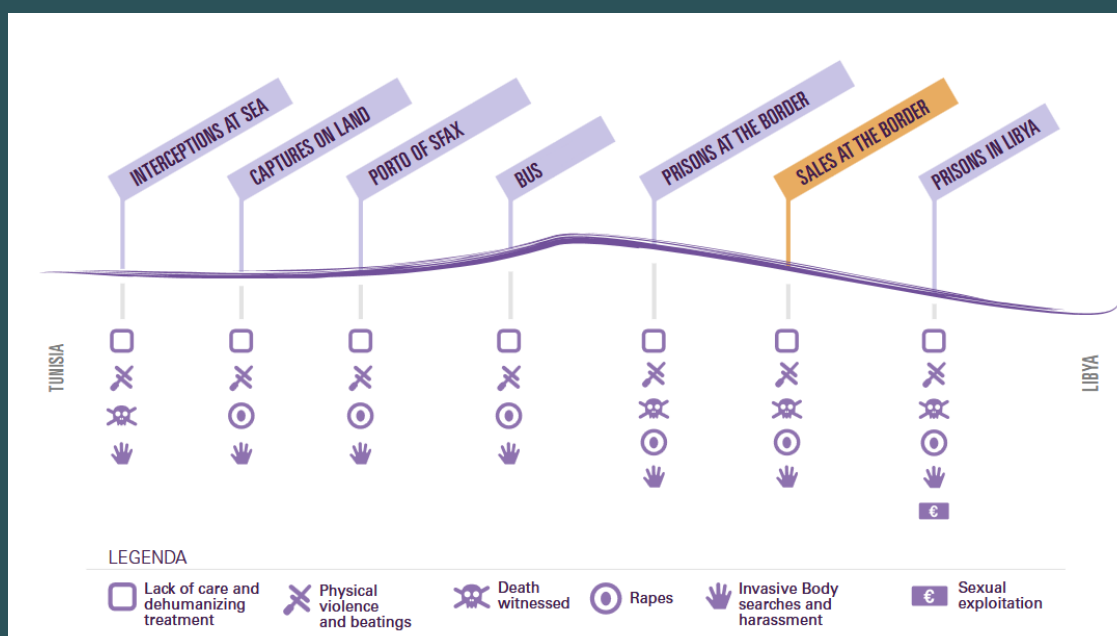
Gender, racialisation and state violence in Tunisia and Libya

This report, produced by the RR[X] collective in partnership with ASGI, Border Forensics, The Routes Journal, On Borders and Melting Pot Europa, documents the systematic violence experienced by migrant women along the Tunisia-Libya route. Based on 33 testimonies collected between December 2024 and February 2026, it exposes a chain of detention, trafficking, sexual violence and exploitation involving both state and non-state actors.

The report identifies three interconnected stages of abuse: dehumanization, violence and prostitution. Women describe arrests, invasive searches, beatings, rape, forced transfers to Libya, detention, ransom

demands and sexual exploitation. Many survivors recount being treated as commodities within a system where release often depends on payment or forced labour. It also highlights the responsibility of European migration policies, arguing that EU funding and border externalisation practices contribute to this system of state-sanctioned violence, while Tunisia continues to be presented as a "safe" country by European institutions. By centering survivors' testimonies, the report reveals the human cost of current migration policies and the particular violence faced by racialised migrant women.

Report: <https://statetrafficking.net>



The figure illustrates the widespread and pervasive nature of physical and sexual violence throughout the trafficking chain that the witnesses of the Women Stat Trafficking report have experienced and survived.

MOBILISATION

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM IN COTONOU

4 to 8 August in Benin



In August 2026, the next World Social Forum (WSF) will take place in Cotonou in West Africa. Several migration-related networks, which are active or even based in Africa, have started to organize their collective participation. Finally a delegation with about 60 activists - for example from Alarm Phone Sahara, Boza Fii, Refugees in Libya and WatchTheMed Alarm Phone - will try to intervene in the frame of this big transnational event for their common demand for freedom of movement.

General information about the WSF:

<https://fsm2026benin.org/?lang=en>

AMPLIFYING VOICES

FROM MITIGA TO THE HAGUE: REFUGEES IN LIBYA CONFRONT IMPUNITY!

Appeal from Refugees in Libya to civil society in reference to the El Hishri case at ICC

On 19 May 2026, a moment long denied arrived: for the first time in history, one of our torturers—a Libyan suspect accused of crimes against humanity and war crimes— appeared before the International Criminal Court. The Confirmation of Charges hearing in the case of Khaled Mohamed Ali El Hishri is not simply a legal milestone, but a confrontation with a structure that has enjoyed impunity for far too long. This case exists because we, the survivors, refused silence. We spoke under threat, carried the evidence, and endured repeated interceptions, detentions, tortures, enslavement, rapes, and systematic dehumanisation. We built the very places where we were imprisoned. Yes! We know the perpetrators. We know the system.

We demand justice. Rescue at sea saves lives, but without accountability, the conditions producing deaths at sea and in torture camps designed to contain people seeking safety will continue. Every interception, every forced return, every detention centre, every act of violence—these, as you know, are not isolated incidents. They are the direct outcome of policies funded, coordinated, and sustained by European states.

The crimes committed at Mitiga do not stand alone either. They are part of a broader detention system inseparable from the Italy–Libya Memorandum, EU-funded interceptions, cooperation with Libyan militias under the label of “coast guard,” and the wider architecture of migration containment. You know this. And because you know this, this moment demands more than solidarity. It demands position and responsibility. We call on the civil fleet, rescue organisations, and all allied networks to speak and act with clarity and urgency. (...)

What happens in this confirmation of charges hearing will shape what international justice is willing to see—and what it is willing to ignore. If migrants and refugees are not fully recognised as victims, the conditions that produce their suffering will remain intact.

We have done our part. We have spoken, documented, and carried the truth to one of the doors of justice. Now we expect you to stand where it matters and act, because without justice, rescue will remain a repetition.

This fight does not begin in The Hague, and it does not end at sea!

Refugees in Libya

Five Arguments to amplify the Voices of the Victims in the ICC case

—1— The El Hishri case is a first step toward justice for victims of Libya’s detention system. The case is formally about the conduct of one accused person, but it also opens a space to discuss the context in which his conduct occurred, to expose the widespread and systematic nature of the crimes committed at Mitiga Prison and across Libya’s wider detention system.

—2— Mitiga is part of a wider system of detention, exploitation, and violence. Victims and survivors (both Libyan as well as migrants and refugees) have described torture, sexual violence, forced labor, enslavement, extortion, racialized and other forms of intersecting discriminatory persecution, and killings.

—3— Europe’s border regime contains and returns people seeking safety to detention, exploitation and abuse in Libya’s detention system. European border control policies, surveillance, funding, training, and cooperation with Libyan actors incentivize and enable interceptions and forced returns in the Mediterranean. These are not rescues when they send people back to crimes against humanity; they are crimes themselves.

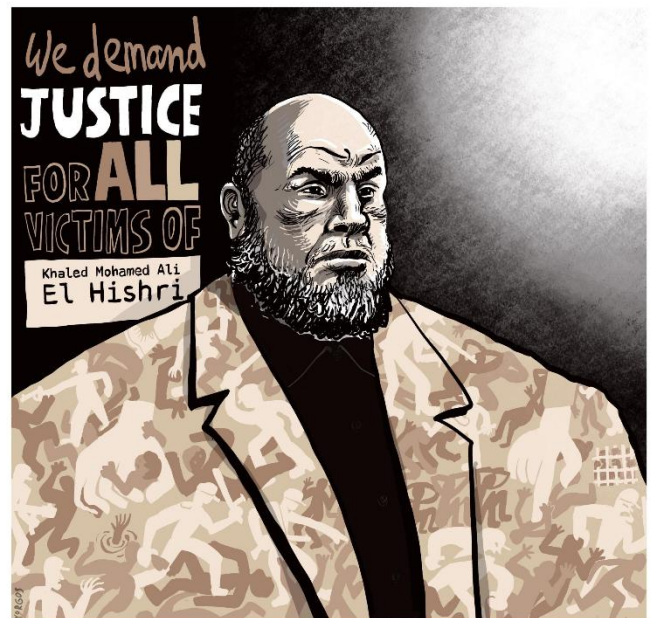
—4— Victims are not only evidence-bearers, but rights-holders. Survivors and families of victims must not be treated only as sources of information for criminal cases. They have the right to participate, to be heard, and to demand justice, truth, and reparation.

—5— El Hishri is in ICC custody because Germany surrendered him to the Court, while Italy released Osama Elmasry Njeem despite an arrest warrant. These divergent responses should not obscure the broader picture: European states, including Germany, are simultaneously supporting policies like the Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that sustain the system of abuse and the ongoing crimes against humanity.

From the preparation group for the ICC- pre-trial

More information and latest news:

<https://www.refugeesinlibya.org/dailyupdate>



„A BEACON OF HOPE FOR VICTIMS...“

Impressions from the first day at ICC in The Hague

„...these proceedings today present an important milestone in our collective pursuit of justice. The commencement of the confirmation of charges hearing against Mr. Khaled Mohamed Ali El Hishri is a testament to the tenacity of those most impacted by his crimes. To the courage and foresight of the international community. (...) The need for accountability in this case is exemplified by the words of witness P17-36. Khaled El Hishri tortured and raped her while she was detained at Mitiga Prison. During her detention, she told him that one day she would face him and seek justice for the wrongs he committed against her. During an interview with my office, she declared, and I quote, I will be reborn when justice is achieved. End of quote. Madam president, your honors, the independent and impartial justice

that this court can deliver is a beacon of hope for victims. These crimes must end and must not recur. I would like to express my gratitude to the victims, the witnesses and the civil society organisations who displayed patience, resilience and a resolute belief in justice...“

These sentences from the beginning and the end of the introduction statement of Nazhat Shameem Khan, the Deputy Prosecutor in the El Hishri case, contributed in setting the tone on the first day of the 19th of May 2026 pretrial in The Hague. The first day in the ICC was clearly characterized by heavy accusations against the Libyan torturer by numberless quotes of victims and testimonies. The system of dehumanization in Libyan torture camps

appeared at the center of this hearing through the voices of the women, men and children who went through the hellish conditions. It might have been a first step for all victims to be heard and to be recognized, if the court accepts and confirms the charges and starts the trial in probably autumn 2026.

The court's decision is expected to come within 60 calendar days at the end of July. The wider solidarity movement should then be ready and prepared to push for bigger mobilization around this case to support the incredible strength of the self-organised activists from Refugees in Libya and - thanks to the cooperation and efforts of ECCHR - their crucial role in this potential "milestone case"

With a solidarity event on 18th of May, which was well attended by local people in the evening before the start of the hearing, strong banner messages held in front of the courthouse, and lobby meetings between NGOs all contributed to a good start leading

up to the proceedings. The next weeks and months should be used to prepare a wider campaign where while one finger points to the crimes against humanity by El Hishri, attention is kept on the responsibility of the EU. "El Hishri at the ICC - EU must stop Complicity" was the slogan brought to The Hague by Refugees in Libya. One of the prosecutors even gave a clear hint when stating there has been "international complicity to operate in impunity." This context of incredible violence in the Libyan detention system must be highlighted again and again to denounce the ongoing suffering and injustice that is part of EU's externalization policy - not only, but especially by all civil fleet actors.

Hagen Kopp, no one is illegal Hanau

ICC Website: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/libya/el-hishri>

Hearing: <https://youtu.be/wLTtYOsgf2g>



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