

borderline-europe, Sicily

# SCIROCCO

*News from Italy*



Scirocco [ʃiˈrɔkko-Schirokko] is a southeastern, hot strong wind that carries dust and sand across the Mediterranean to Sicily and up to Italy's north often for a few hours only. This newsflash has been published on an approximately bi-weekly basis since March 2021.

## Political and social Situation

### Looking back on 2023

Considering the ambitions of the post-fascist government under Giorgia Meloni, 2023's migration policy was a "flop", says [La Repubblica](#): The previously announced 10 new deportation detention centres (Centri di permanenza per il rimpatri, CPR) have not yet been built, let alone opened. At the same time, the government is planning to invest another 32 million euros in the administration of the existing CPR despite their proven systemic flaws. Moreover, (fortunately!) only few deportations have been carried out and the Piantedosi Decree, which provided for accelerated asylum procedure in a closed centre or a bail payment, has been declared unlawful several times. The centre in Pozzallo intended for these procedures is empty. It should be noted positively, that Italy has not concluded further agreements with migrants' countries of origin in the past year and has been repeatedly condemned by the **European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)** for the inhuman and degrading treatment of protection seekers, esp. unaccompanied minors.

[Eugenio Cusumano](#), professor for political science at the University of Messina, explains in an interview in Panorama magazine that the increased number of arrivals 2023 is attributable to socio-economic and political factors in countries of origin and transit. It must be expected that these countries will continue to have significant economical, security, human rights and climate problems in 2024. Thus, a further increase in arrivals must be expected.

### Outlook for 2024

„From Ghana to Georgia, Rwanda to Albania, the EU is looking for nations that will hold vulnerable people on its behalf." According to [Camille Le Coz](#), Deputy Director for Europe at the Migration Policy Institute,

the externalization of asylum procedures is popular idea "despite shaky legal grounds". Additionally, civilian sea rescue will be made even more difficult in the upcoming year. Cooperation with Tunisia will be strengthened and additional agreements with Morocco, Egypt, and Sudan will be negotiated. Also, cooperation between the EU border protection agency Frontex and the so-called Libyan coast guards is set to increase. These negative developments become especially evident in the agreement on the [reform](#) of the **Common European Asylum System (CEAS)**, with which "the EU has decided to legislate and consolidate a status quo in which violence, neglect, torture and leaving people to die are common practice."



Photo: [borderline-europe](#)

The proposed law on the agreement between [Italy and Albania](#) will be negotiated in Italy at the end of January. The Italian government has requested an **urgent procedure** for this agreement. Moreover, the "Mattei plan" decree for the development of African states has been transformed into a law by the parliament.

Despite the increased number of arrivals, the Italian minister of Interior, [Matteo Piantedosi](#), found a way to frame the Italian migration policies as a success. [157,000 people](#) reached Italy in 2023. He emphasized that the number of arrivals „does not correspond to the objectives of the measures introduced by the government in several directions to combat human trafficking". However, without these political measures – like the agreements with Tunisia and Libya

– the number of arrivals would have been even higher. This means, that Piantedosi presents **pullbacks** as a political success. It is important to keep in mind that they are financed and pursued by Italy in bilateral agreements despite **violating international law**. Moreover, Piantedosi once again refers to civilian sea rescue organizations as a so-called pull factor. This is even though the argument has long been **scientifically proven wrong**: the presence of NGOs at sea does not increase the number of crossings but **reduces the number of (fatal) shipwrecks**. According to a **study** published in August 2023, main reasons for fleeing are violence, poverty, political instability and rising commodity prices.

### The situation in Tunisia

A new report by the **World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)** on the current situation in Tunisia emphasizes, that **migrants are repeatedly deported by Tunisian authorities to the Libyan and Algerian borders**. Building on reports by NGOs, around 30 interviews and image analysis OMCT concludes that forced deportations and expulsions to Algeria and Libya happen regularly. They contradict access to justice and procedural guarantees. Since June, at least 5,500 individuals have been brought to the Libyan and 3,000 persons to the Algerian border, according to OMCT. Additionally, more than 70,000 people have been intercepted at sea and subsequently deported (twice as many in 2022). Activists from the **Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES)** also report on mass deportations and arbitrary arrests in Tunisia. The Tunisian government under president Kais Saied is waging a **“campaign of repression against migrants** at the expense of humanitarian needs in order to satisfy European blackmail and ensure a steady flow of financial and logistical support”, says an official statement. **FTDES** is therefore calling for an end to mass expulsions and arbitrary arrests of migrants and for undocumented migrants to be granted a legal status.

## Situation of refugees

### Seasonal work

14 years after the **uprising of the seasonal workers in Rosarno**, on 7 January 2010, **Domenico Latino** assesses the situation. Back then, thousands of workers took to the streets to protest against exploitation and slavery in seasonal work and demand their rights. Latino concludes that 14 years later, **little has changed in the conditions of seasonal work**: the sector is still characterized by black labour and “caporalato” (an illegal practice of recruiting and exploiting workers). Accommodation is precariously furnished and the hygienic situation for seasonal workers is critical. Water, electricity and heating in the winter months is lacking. The accommodation is still comparable to barrack settlements due to a lack of functioning administrative structures.



*The former accommodation of seasonal workers in Campobello di Mazara, photo: borderline-europe*

**MEDU (Medici per I diritti umani, medicals for human rights)** also criticizes the living conditions of seasonal workers. They are on average around 35 years old and mainly come from West sub-Saharan Africa, especially from Mali, Gambia, Senegal, Ghana and Ivory Coast. Approximately 88% of them have been living in Italy for more than three years. 92% have documents. Nevertheless, the vast majority of them live in precarious, exploitative conditions and are marginalized by the dominant Italian society. MEDU describes the **extreme deterioration of living**

**conditions, neglect and illegality in informal settlements** as “a symptom of a chronic evil” of the Italian system. As part of the “Open Campagne” project, they call for an immediate and definitive solution to seasonal work.

### Accoglienza – Reception in Italy

The Italian reception system – accoglienza – is characterized by **structural problems** that have been known for a long time: Most people arrive on Lampedusa. In the hotspot Contrada Imbriacola, they are identified and registered within 24 to 48 hours. Afterwards, they are distributed to other regions of Italy (which does not always work within the time frame). In the end of January 2024, the centre for identification in Porto Empedocle, Sicily, is to be completed. Followingly, those arriving in Lampedusa can be brought directly there.



Lampedusa, Photo: Enrica Tancioni on [Unsplash](#)

As the extraordinary reception centers (Centro accoglienza straordinaria, CAS) - which, as the name suggests, are not actually long-term accommodation facilities - are often **overcrowded**, migrants are housed in more or less formal, **temporary transit camps** that meet even lower standards. Officially, people should be accommodated there for a few days only. In reality, however, they are often stuck there for months “in inhuman conditions”. Anyone arriving in Italy without papers also risks deportation if they are checked outside the center.

Not having papers or documents from the Italian authorities also means not having access to the official reception systems. This makes persons more vulnerable for exploitation and human trafficking, says [Ciac](#) (Centro immigrazione asilo cooperazione) from Parma.

The results of an inspection at the CAS at the former Hotel Palladio di Montecatini in Tuscany illustrate these structural deficiencies: Democratic Party (Pd) MP [Marco Fufaro](#) visited the extraordinary reception centre, where currently 57 migrants, including 11 children are accommodated. He reported to the Italian parliament that he had found a situation there “that was at the limit of decency” and that was “not worthy of a civilized country”. He describes dirty and run-down rooms, reports that migrants receive neither money nor medical attention for months. Unfortunately, this is not an individual case.

### Precarious housing market

Housing is also difficult for migrants outside the reception system. Even for those with residence permit and an employment contract. This is illustrated by the case of [Alimano Fatty](#), a 24-year-old migrant from Gambia who has been looking for an apartment in Palermo for two years. Despite having a permanent job and enough income, he is often rejected after viewings. Owners claim that the apartment is already occupied as soon as they see his skin colour, reports Fatty. 31-year-old [Dhaker Dahou](#) from Tunisia also has to share an apartment with friends despite his monthly income of €3,000. He cannot get a place because of **racist allocations of apartments**. In our joint monitoring report, we already reported in March together with Arci Porco about the precarious housing situation of migrants in Palermo. In „[The residents’ registration office – the Titanic in the city](#)” we show that migrants are “denied important rights” by municipal offices.

## Accoglienza Minori - The reception of unaccompanied minors

A new [ruling by the ECtHR](#) has ordered Italy to **immediately** transfer a 15-year-old refugee from an initial reception facility in Restinco to a center for unaccompanied minors. He has been unlawfully held in Restinco together with adults and under **“inhuman and degrading conditions”** since October 2023. ASGI (Association for legal studies on migration) was able to visit the closed-off facility accompanied by two MPs and speak to some of the boys there “who had been denied any legal assistance until then” and were in a similar situation to the 15-year-old.

Another facility for the accommodation of unaccompanied minors in Rosolini in the Syracuse region (Sicily) was temporarily closed by the Juvenile Court of Catania due to **“inadequacies and non-compliance with applicable regulations”**. The 180 residents have been transferred to other facilities. This was announced by the president of the Juvenile Court of Catania, [Dr. Roberto Di Bella](#). Several civil society organisations – [ASGI](#), [Arci](#), [Cnca](#), [Defence for Children International Italia](#), [InterSos](#) und [Oxfam Italia](#) – had already previously pointed out that the facility was only intended by law for very short stays. There is also a worrying lack of basic services: The distribution of water is only provided for three hours a day and the minors are sometimes forced to wash themselves with bottled water. Moreover, there are only 5 showers (without hot water) and a dozen toilets, which are outside and often do not work.



*The European Court of Human Rights, Photo: Adrian Gryczuk on [Wikimedia Commons](#)*

The [associations](#) also emphasized that the poor conditions in Rosolini **could amount to “inhuman and degrading treatment”** within the meaning of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights”, based on recent ECtHR case law.

## CPR: Updates on Italian deportation detention centres

Investigations by the authorities into the CPR in [Palazzo San Gervasio \(Basilicata\)](#) led to **measures being taken against ten people**, including the managers of the center, who had been awarded the contract to run the center for approximately €3 million. The allegations include defamation and severe fraud against the state, non-compliance and fraud in public contracts as well as mistreatment of prisoners, forgery and severe coercion. At the same time, searches were carried out on lawyers and police officers due to possible forgery and extortion in the appointment of defense lawyers by CPR detainees. The public prosecutor of Potenza, [Francesco Curcio](#), commented on the conditions in the CPR of San Gervasio as unacceptable, especially with regard to the misuse of the sedative Ritrovil. This violation of human dignity could not be ignored by the institutions. The extent of this case shows **how fraud and violence are commonplace when dealing with migrants in Italy**. It also illustrates how dangerous administrative detention can be for migrants. A [system](#) is revealed, in which public money is wasted and people deprived of their freedom are abused.

Another tragic example is the case of **Moussa Balde**, who committed suicide in the CPR in Torino in May 2021. In this [report](#), his case is described in detail once again, and placed in the wider context of systemic violations of rights in the CPR. After an expert opinion showed that Balde’s psychological instability was not diagnosed, but that a medical report on him was limited to his physical injuries, the case is now being reopened by the public prosecutor’s office.

[Antonio Maria Mira](#) reports on the **situation in Gradisca d'Isonzo (Gorizia) in northern Italy**, where there is both a CPR with around 85 people and a reception center for asylum seekers (formerly CARA) with around 650 people. Surrounded by escapes, riots, and suicides, Gradisca d'Isonzo is a "shocking place" for all those who have to wait to be deported.

On [22 December 2023](#) there were **riots there again – for the third time in 20 days**. After fires were set and power cables cut, three detainees fled. Two of them were later found by the police at [the train station of Monfalcone](#), one fled successfully. Another person was injured after falling from a three-meter-high wall: "Of course the issue [of deportations] is complex, but it is clear that a prison structure described as harsh is certainly not appropriate for people who have only committed crimes in some cases," commented [Giovanni Sammito](#), member of the national board and the Gorizia province secretariat of the Siulp police union.

Mayor [Linda Tomasinsig](#) announced that she asked the Ministry of the Interior to close the CPR because of its poor conditions for detainees and difficult working conditions for staff. She also emphasized that only 86 of the 150 places in the CPR are currently being used, as there is a lack of security staff for further occupancy. Therefore, the massive expansion of CPRs in all regions of Italy is not necessary. Tomasinsig has already previously asked for decentralized accommodation as an alternative to the CARA in her region, but the Ministry of the Interior had rejected her requests. She is therefore now calling for the construction of functioning reception centres instead of new CPRs.

On 30 December 2023, a 42-year-old man was deported to Tunisia from the CPR in Via Corelli, [Milano](#) – **without any consular certificate identifying him as a Tunisian citizen**. His lawyer, Simona Stefanelli, moreover, reports that he has been detained since the end of July and had been complaining about severe pain near his heart and suffered from sudden fluctuations in blood pressure for some time before his deportation. Despite constant requests, **no**

**medical examination** was carried out. The CPR in Via Corelli Milano has already been under investigation by the Milan prosecutor's office. The investigation looked into administrative irregularities and inhuman living conditions for the detainees, such as expired food, dirt, lack of hygiene, lack of doctors and difficulties in accessing medical examinations.



*Photo: borderline-europe*

### Reading tip

The study "[Beyond Borders, beyond Boundaries. A Critical Analysis of EU Financial Support for Border Control in Tunisia and Libya](#)" by Estela Casajuana and Giorgia Jana Pintus critically analyses the financial support of the EU for border regimes in Tunisia and Libya and the connected human rights violations: „In Tunisia, the abuses include physical violence [...], firearms use [...], engine removal and boat collisions ([...] often causing them to sink).“ In Libya, on the other hand, „the UN documented collusion between the DCIM (General Directorate for Combating Illegal Immigration), together with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, with militias and traffickers“. Migrants are intercepted at the coasts, detained, enslaved, and blackmailed. They often become victims of human trafficking, smuggling, and forced labour. An English summary of the study can be found [here](#).

Further information on the situation in Italy can be found under **"Projects"** on our homepage, in **previous issues of Scirocco**, in our magazine **"Spotlight Italy - Zones of Lawlessness"** and in our new podcast **"Al confine"**.

Contact

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