

borderline-europe, Sizilien

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

Anniversary of the shipwreck near Cutro

The [Network 26th of February](#) (rete 26 febbraio) criticized the Italian government for **failing its state responsibilities** in connection with the tragic shipwreck near the coast of Cutro on 26th of February 2023. Together with the families of the victims, the network is calling for legal immigration routes to the EU, justice, and a rejection of the agreements with Tunisia, Libya, and Turkey. For the anniversary of the shipwreck, the network has mobilized to support the families in the identification and burial of the bodies.



„Piantedosi-Decree“

The Locri Court of Appeal examined the constitutionality of the Piantedosi Decree (later converted into Law No. 50), which was passed in the spring of 2023 and in which, for example, the

penalties for migrants suspected to have driven their boat, were increased. The legal challenge was considered "not manifestly justified" as "the penalty does not manifestly exceed the legislature's discretion in determining penalties in a clearly unreasonable manner". This means that the Piantedosi Decree or Law No. 50 is upheld.

Open Arms process against Matteo Salvini

The former Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini has been questioned by the Second Criminal Chamber of the Court of Palermo for **abduction and refusal of an official act**. This is because he held 147 migrants for over six days on the civilian sea rescue ship Open Arm of the Spanish NGO Proactiva Open Arms near Lampedusa and refused the disembarkment of the rescued people.

On the 12th of January, during the first hearing of the year, Salvini gave a [long monologue](#) in which he justified that the majority of the government at that time – such as the head of the Interior Ministry cabinet Matteo Piantedosi – was on his political track and that “the participation of the European institutions [for the distribution of migrants] was planned”. [Salvini](#) thus attempted to reject his guilt for the refusal. He also emphasized that "national security" was important at the time and that he could not rule out the possibility that "there were terrorists on the boat".

The Open Arms was not an Italian ship, and the rescue took place outside Italian waters without Italian coordination. So, in Salvini's opinion, the Italian state was not responsible for the case. He had not known anything about an emergency - for instance, that people had jumped into the water - or these situations had not been presented to him as problematic. He was proud that he had saved lives, reduced costs for taxpayers, and drastically reduced the number of arrivals during his time in government. According to [Marika Ikonomu](#), these statements are contradicted by a study from October 2018, in which the Ispi Institute found that **during Salvini's term, there was a "further decline in arrivals, but also a sharp increase in the number of deaths and missing persons"**, which more than doubled. In this [article](#), Ikonomu analyzes and criticizes the process and Salvini's statements.

Accoglienza – The reception

For years, hundreds of asylum seekers in Italy have been forced to endure long and inhuman waiting procedures in immigration offices or police headquarters to formalize their applications. As a result, **thousands of people are forced into a state of invisibility and precariousness.**



Appointments with the immigration office and the municipality are sometimes only given a year later. Following the Piantadosi law, the situation has worsened as many of those affected are unable to renew their residence permit. In this article, [Chiara Caraboni](#) criticizes **the state of permanent limbo** with the stories of Daniel and Samuel, two asylum seekers from Peru and Nigeria: "What the Italian system shows is a complete disregard for immigration policy and a very strong disregard for

integration that does not go beyond the words with which it is told. And so, the dramatic reality of those crises who are waiting for a chance to integrate and are forced to fight against the coldness, despair, and **indifference of a system** that is slow to respond to one of the most urgent humanitarian challenges".

EU-Egypt Agreement

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the EU and Tunisia (see [here](#)) to block the movement of migrants appears to have an effect. The declining number of arrivals from Tunisia (which, according to [official figures](#), has fallen by 70% compared to the previous year) is encouraging the EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs, [Ylva Johansson](#), to declare new steps before the European Parliament's Justice Committee on January 23: „We are close to an agreement for a **joint declaration with Egypt**". Egypt, unlike Tunisia, is not a transit country. Therefore, in the "partnership agreement" with Egypt, "immigration must be combined with other issues such as economic development and human capital". However, the MoU with Tunisia remains a successful model that must be followed. However, this "successful model" is based on systematic [human rights violations](#), and in the negotiations between the EU and Tunisia, diplomatic protection is given to the Tunisian authorities, while they have verbally and physically escalated the **racist violence against Black migrants** from sub-Saharan African countries.

To this end, Amnesty International has described the memorandum between Tunisia and the EU as a "failure", also in terms of reducing the number of arrivals from Tunisia: "The number of arrivals in Italy has increased from 105,000 in 2022 to 150,000 in 2023. At the same time, **the number of people missing or dead at sea has risen from 1,417 in 2022 to 2,498 in 2023,**" said [Hussein Baoumi](#), Head of Foreign Policy at Amnesty International. Looking at the systematic violation of human rights, the MoU, Baoumi said, "has not reduced the level of oppression but has created an environment in which migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are subjected to great abuse. All this is happening in **a general state of impunity**, protected by large

corrupt sections of the police, who are responsible for the ill-treatment of people in their custody and who collaborate with the same human traffickers that the Memorandum of Understanding, funded by hundreds of millions of euros from the EU, aims to combat". The EU defends the MoU and claims that EU funds will be blocked if fundamental rights are violated.

Unimpressed by this, Italian Prime Minister [Giorgia Meloni](#) is delighted with the EU's recognition of her approaches and thanked EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for attending the "**Italy-Africa Conference**" (whose name already has colonial traits) on the 28th of January in Rome. Several African heads of state and government attended, to discuss the so-called "Mattei Plan" of the Italian government and negotiate potential agreements that will effectively block the movement of migration to Europe and bring forward (externalize) border controls to countries in North Africa. The plan is intended to stabilize the north of Africa and strengthen "economic synergies". [Critics](#) see the plan as an opportunity to "seek out the right **dictatorships** to stop migrants before they arrive in Europe". The bilateral negotiations with Tunisia and Turkey demonstrated this. Giorgia Meloni and the supporters of the "Mattei Plan" from Africa itself were dealt an unexpected blow: [the president of the African Union Commission](#), Moussa Faki Mahamat, expressed displeasure that no African country had been asked by Italy to discuss the plans together.

The situation in Tunisia

According to the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#), numerous **packages containing hygiene items** were distributed to 1,360 migrants in the Tunisian cities of Sfax, Al Hamra, and Khcherma. The affected people mostly came from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo. They are currently being blocked from leaving Tunisia. Most recently, they lived in local olive fields and suffered from a lack of drinking water, food, clothing, blankets, and hygiene products.

[Tunis Afrique Presse \(TAP\)](#) reports that, simultaneously, **IOM carried out the deportations of**



Refugee camp south of Sfax, photo by the refugees

392 migrants, including 163 persons from Burkina Faso, 165 Gambians, 33 Malians, 23 Senegalese, seven people from Guinea, and one person from Liberia. In total, the number of deportations carried out by IOM in 2023 has increased by 2,257 persons (45%) compared to the previous year.

Bilateral Meeting between Italy and Türkiye

In Istanbul, a [bilateral meeting](#) took place between Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. They intend to initiate **a new chapter in the relations** between the two countries. During the meeting, the issue **of blocking the movement of migrants** from [Libya](#), the situation in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa,) and potential economic cooperation were discussed. The closer cooperation aims to further reduce migration along the Italy-Türkiye corridor and to intensify economic cooperation between Italian and Turkish [armaments manufacturers](#).

Trilateral meeting between Italy, Croatia, and Slovenia

In January, Italian Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi visited Buzet (Croatia) to take part in a trilateral ministerial meeting with Croatian Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Davor Božinović and Slovenian Interior Minister Boštjan Poklukar on the **issue of migration movements via the Balkan route**. [Piantedosi](#) praised himself for 900 pushbacks at the Italian-Slovenian border and 76 arrests (out of

160,000 people checked), 52 of whom were arrested for "aiding and abetting illegal entry".

In this context, the [Italian Ministry of the Interior](#) announced **that border checks at the Italian-Slovenian border would be extended until June 2024**. Italy already temporarily suspended the Schengen Agreement on freedom of movement within the European Union (EU) in October 2023. Slovenian Prime Minister Miro Cerar commented on this decision as "unacceptable".

At around the same time, however, the Slovenian government announced that it would set up **temporary facilities made of tents and containers** on the border with Croatia to facilitate the work of the police. These are planned for a maximum of three years and mainly relate to the [border crossings at Obrežje](#), which have become more frequented in recent months.

Situation of refugees

On the night of 24 to 25 January, Tunisian detainees at the deportation detention center (Centri di permanenza per i rimpatri, CPR) Milo in the province of **Trapani protested against the deportation of 29 migrants** by setting fire to objects, furniture and mattresses. According to media reports, fortunately, no one was injured. The NoaiCPR network, however, reported on its Instagram account that many people were injured. An unannounced visit by a member of parliament, organized by support groups for detainees in deportation centers, took place immediately. It revealed [inhuman accommodation conditions](#) for the 56 remaining people, who are crammed into two compartments that are still accessible, mostly without mattresses, and only one bathroom. After the first protests, the prefecture of Trapani had already transferred some migrants or issued them a deportation order. [Ilaria Cucchi](#), a senator from the Green Left Alliance, strongly criticized this approach. What is happening in the center for the detention of migrants in Milo in the province of Trapani is very serious and shows that the **deportation detention centers are inhumane places where basic rights are denied**.



Photo: Silvia di Meo

The minimum standards in the CPR are not being met and the fundamental rights of migrants are not being respected. "It is necessary to resolve this situation as quickly as possible and find appropriate solutions for those detained in Milo," adds Cucchi. This and similar protests are currently increasing in CPRs (see [previous issues](#) of this newsletter). In Trapani itself, around 30 people tried to flee in 2019 and another 40 people last September. The national secretary of Sinistra Italiana and deputy of the Green Left Alliance, Nicola Fratoianni, requested the Minister of the Interior to "avoid the repetition of similar situations that violate people's decency and dignity". Migrant support organizations and the [CGIL](#) joined the **criticism of the detention conditions** as well as the **human rights violations and the violent repression of the protests**.

The situation of seasonal workers

Our [monitoring partner Arci Porco Rosso](#) reports on the situation in the small town of Caltabellotta in Western Sicily. Migrants lived there in an abandoned stable and tents while working on the harvest. On the 19th of November 2023, one person was killed in a dispute, after which the shelters were evacuated. The migrant seasonal workers were then taken to live in **the stadium in Sciacca**. Some received a deportation order (decreto di espulsione), and others were told that the issuance of their residency permit would be delayed, presumably due to investigations into the previously mentioned murder.

Those who have been released are now left without information or help.



10 years after the shipwreck of the 11th of October 2013: "I want to kiss my sons goodnight"

In 2012, [Refaat Hazima](#) and his family fled the war in Syria and came to Europe in search of a free and better life. As a wealthy family, his wife Feryal works as a doctor and he is a hairdresser, they were able to flee with 50,000 dollars and all of Feryal's jewelry. **This is how the now 50-year-old Refaat begins his story.** After a forced stay in Libya - where their visa applications to Italy were rejected several times - the family boarded a boat that sank off the coast of Lampedusa on the [11th of October 2013](#) with over 500 people on board. Their two 10-year-old sons Mohammad and Ahmad have been missing ever since, while his 16-year-old son Anas and his wife Feryal survived. "My children have disappeared at sea, but for me, they are still alive. I want to kiss them goodnight," says Refaat during the **commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the shipwreck**. A massacre in which [268 persons](#) died because the Italian and Maltese coastguards waited for hours to begin the sea rescue when the boat had already overturned and the first people were drowning. **Refaat has been**

trying to find his two sons for 10 years now: He has been a guest on 45 European, Arabic, Asian, and American TV and radio programs from Al Jazeera to the BBC. He traveled to Milan to the forensic genetics laboratory of the university's Department of Biomedical Sciences to have his DNA tested to see if it was compatible with the DNA of the bodies recovered from the sea - so far without success. Refaat often dreams of Ahmad and Mohammad and is convinced that they are still alive. "My wife says we have to accept that too much time has passed. I, on the other hand, don't give up and keep looking for them because it's my duty. **Just as it is my duty to keep telling you what we have experienced.**" His story can be read [here](#).

In [January 2023](#), the court in Rome ruled that the Italian coastguard and navy were **guilty of willful failure to rescue** and were therefore responsible for the deaths of the 268 refugees. However, the two defendants, Captain Leopoldo Manna and Frigate Captain Luca Licciardi, escaped conviction because the case was **already statute-barred** by then.

Further information on the situation in Italy can be found under "Projects" on our [Homepage](#), in previous issues of [Scirocco](#), the [spotlight "zones of lawlessness"](#), and our new podcast "[Al Confine](#)".

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