

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

### Judgement on the shipwreck near Cutro

One year after the horrible shipwreck near Cutro (Calabria) on 26 February 2023, in which at least 94 people drowned, a **judgement** was passed for "aiding and abetting illegal immigration, culpable shipwreck and death as a result of another criminal offence". [Gun Ufuk](#), a 29-year-old Turkish citizen accused of being one of the smugglers on the ship, was sentenced to twenty years in prison and a fine of three million euros. Also, **Compensation payments** were awarded to some civil parties.



*At the beach of Cutro after the tragedy 2023*

The compensation payments were granted to relatives of the victims, the Ministry of the Interior, and the region of Calabria. Gun Ufuk is the only one of the four suspected boat drivers to have opted for a [shortened procedure](#). His lawyer will lodge an appeal. Ordinary court proceedings have also started for the other accused. There is also a [second case against Italian authorities](#) for not rescuing the boat, even though they were aware of it and the dangerous situation caused by the bad weather.

The Italian Court of Cassation asked the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) to review the [legality of the decree](#) and subsequent Law No. 50. The decree was passed in March 2023 in response

to the shipwreck, but instead of protecting those affected, it contributed to the further criminalization of flight and migration. The reason for the referral of the case to the CJEU was **doubts** as to whether the payment of a bail of €5,000 for release from a de facto 'detention center' was compatible with European law. This came up after the decision of **Judge Iolanda Apostolico** in Catania. She was the first judge to disapprove detention under the decree and subsequent law issued by the government of Giorgia Meloni. Other judges had followed her judgement since. Pending the decision of the CJEU, the ten ongoing proceedings on detention of migrants based on the so-called 'Cutro Decree' have been suspended by means of interim measures, lawyer [Rosa Maria Lo Faro](#) declared to the AGI press agency.

### „Mattei-Plan for Africa“

As reported in [previous issues](#) of this newsletter, the Italian government is working on the so-called „[Mattei-Plan for Africa](#)“. This plan has clearly **neo-colonial structures**, which are not only reflected in the colonial origin of its name. In an [open letter](#) to the President of the Republic, Prime Minister Meloni and Foreign Minister Tajani, a coalition of 82 African civil organizations argues that the voices and needs of Africans are not taken into account in the Mattei-Plan and that this is a continuation of historical patterns in which decisions affecting Africa are made without Africa. They also alert that the naming of the plan after Enrico Mattei - the co-founder of Italian state-owned oil and gas company ENI - undoubtedly indicates that the main objective of the plan is to expand Italy's access to fossil gas from Africa to Europe and to strengthen the role of Italian companies in the exploitation of Africa's natural and human resources. Therefore, the organizations are calling for **an end to the neo-colonial approaches of European countries**; transparency, participation and involvement of African civil societies in the plan; an end to any agreements that provide for the expansion of gas production and infrastructure in Africa by Italy and other European countries; access to energy and an energy transition in line with the final COP28 declaration; the promotion of agroecology and food sovereignty for self-sufficiency and farmers'

rights; and an integrated approach to climate, energy and development issues in Africa for the benefit of people and communities. The President of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat from Chad, also criticized the "Mattei-Plan" at the recent summit in the Senate. He addressed Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni with the following words: "Madam President, **we would have liked to have been consulted on the Mattei-Plan.** Africa is ready to discuss the frame and modalities of implementation. It is necessary to turn words into deeds, we are not satisfied with promises that are not kept. (...) Our priorities stem from the multiple challenges facing our continent and the obstacles to their realization, from debt to climate change, the rise of violent extremism and terrorism, institutional instability and the lack of adequate funding." He also commented on the blockage of migration movements, Italy's main problem: "Italy is the main point of arrival of migratory flows and the emigration of young people in full force is a drama for Africa that can be solved by creating a new development model and not by security barriers and hostility on the European side. We share the concern to find a sustainable solution to a tragic and recurring phenomenon. For us, the strategy to prevent migration is to transform areas of poverty into areas of prosperity and development. (...) Africa does not want to hold out its hand, we are not supplicants. **We are in favor of a paradigm shift towards a new partnership** that can pave the way for a fairer world if we want to create peace and prosperity."



Viale Pretoria, photo from the [daily news Roma Today](#), Luca Laurenti

## Accoglienza – the reception

The tent settlement in [Viale Pretoriano in Rome](#) is a symbol of **the poor state of the Italian reception system.** The humanitarian emergency is a cause for particular concern and outrage, especially in view of the latest eviction attempts by the Italian authorities. Many of the migrants living there fled from the extraordinary reception centers (CAS) in the south of Italy and are having great difficulty finding protection and stability in Italy. According to [Paolo Ciani](#) from the organization Demos, the political decisions of the current government's migration and reception policy and the increasing difficulty of regularization are contributing to the deterioration of the situation in Rome and elsewhere in Italy. **The lack of structural solutions** and the absence of effective international agreements are making the social and professional reintegration of migrants increasingly difficult, leaving them in **a limbo of illegality and insecurity.** Nella Converti (PD), Chair of the Social Policy Commission, made a similar argument.

## Humanitarian corridors

Italy has renewed the [protocol for humanitarian corridors](#) with the Sant'Egidio Community, the Federation of the Evangelical Churches and the Board of the Waldensians. The aim of humanitarian corridors is to support those fleeing war, discrimination, and climate disasters. Since 2015, almost 6,000 people have been able to enter Italy in this way and have been granted refugee status, mainly from northern Lebanon. The INSPIRE project at the University of Genova, led by Ervis Martani, has made a **critical assessment** of humanitarian corridors.

## Bilateral Agreement with Gambia

At the end of January, the Viminale (Ministry of Interior) approved a [new bilateral migration agreement with Gambia](#). The new **memorandum** was signed by the respective interior ministries in Rome on 4 December 2023 and in Banjul on 5 January 2024. Importance is given to the "strengthened cooperation in border and migration management" through financial and logistical

facilitations for deportations to Gambia and the reinforcement of borders. In the beginning of December 2022, the European Council imposed a tax of 120 euros on all visas issued to Gambian citizens from the age of twelve for entry into Europe; and in the first two months of 2023, the number of Gambian nationals deported from deportation detention centers in Italy (CPR) reached again the record level of 2019.

### European policy

The political agreement from 20 December on the EU's **Common Asylum and Migration System (CEAS)** provides for the adoption of the proposal for five key regulations: Screening, Eurodac, Asylum Procedures, Migration and Asylum Management, Crisis and Force Majeure. **With the adoption of the new regulations, the walls around the European continent will be built even higher and the movements of migration will be further criminalized.** Despite the introduction of a "mandatory solidarity mechanism" providing for up to 30,000 people to be relocated, the EU member states ultimately agreed to maintain the Dublin regime. In general [all refugees may face a border procedure](#) in future, in which a decision is made primarily on the admissibility of the asylum application - without a substantive examination of their individual reasons for seeking protection.



**However, these border procedures could put the Italian state in a difficult situation**, as Giovanna Cavallo from the Forum per cambiare l'ordine delle cose ("Forum for Changing the Order of Things"), a grassroots network of dozens of cities, explains. The forum has used arrival figures from recent years to simulate how the new regulations could affect Italy, starting in 2016, when 181,436 people arrived in Italy by sea.

"According to UNHCR data, only 23,373 people belong to the countries that have a recognition rate of more than 75 per cent - Eritrea, Iraq, Syria. And only these people would have normal access to the asylum procedure under the new pact. The rest - 158,063 people - would have had to undergo the border procedure, stay in hotspots and deportation detention centers". According to Cavallo, these (closed) centers - which have been repeatedly condemned by the European Court of Human Rights and the Italian judiciary - currently have a capacity of 2,000 to 3,000 places, but with the figures of recent years, Italy should have detained 60,000 to 70,000 people at the borders to check their admissibility to European territory. This is an "extraordinary violation of human rights", an unworkable scenario and "a procedure that Italy has already tried to introduce, and which has been condemned by the judiciary", according to Giovanna Cavallo.

An [open letter](#) with more than **200 signatures** from experts from all over Europe and the call from Forum per Cambiare l'Ordine delle Cose, Coordinamento Nazionale Comunità di Accoglienza, Rivolti ai Balcani, Europasilo, Italy must act, Refugees Welcome Italia, Mediterranea Saving Humans, Recosol and Stop Border Violence are calling on Italian MPs and parliamentarians **not to vote** on the Common European Asylum System "to give back the sovereignty to Europe and the Parliament that has been lost".

## Situation of refugees

### Deportation detention centers (CPR)

For Italian Interior Minister [Matteo Piantedosi](#), the origin of the desolate conditions in Italian CPRs are the revolts of the migrants themselves. "Very often, the CPRs are not in optimal condition because the people staying in them are vandalizing them," said Piantedosi. Blaming the detained migrants is fatal given the catastrophic and inhumane conditions in the deportation detention centers.

In the beginning of February, a member of parliament from the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) visited the **CPR in Trapani** to monitor the detention conditions of a detainee for whom the [European Court of Human Rights \(ECtHR\)](#) had demanded appropriate conditions. The ECtHR human rights defenders also focused on the abuses during the detention of [Ousmane Sylla](#), who later took his own life in **Rome's CPR di Ponte Galeria**. There were repeated [revolts](#) in the Trapani CPR: due to repressive measures by the police and security service, the threat of deportation of Tunisians, the bad detention conditions, and the disregard for the fundamental rights of the migrants detained. It was only after the [recent revolts](#) in the CPR Trapani that medical cases and [illegally](#) detained migrants (who had applied for asylum) were transferred to other facilities. On [23 and 24 January 2024](#), detainees had started to protest and set fire to objects in the CPR.



*Former deportation center Serraino Vulpitta, Trapani*

The police used tear gas and water cannons against the protesters. Detainees were injured in the process. Most of the detainees were transferred to other parts of the country and the CPR was

temporarily closed for the duration of the repair work. [Relatives](#) of the migrants who last left Sfax and have since gone missing in the Mediterranean, have expressed their solidarity with the protesters. They are calling for an end to the torture and racist discrimination against the young Tunisians. They criticized the Italian authorities as well as the European Union and the Tunisian government in their treatment of people seeking protection.

In the **joint statement** "[Among the ruins of the Trapani-Milo deportation center: voices from an undignified detention, while the European Court of Human Rights condemns Italy](#)", various organizations have reconstructed the events surrounding the January revolt in the Trapani-Milo deportation detention center: "The European Court of Human Rights has called on the Italian government to immediately transfer a person detained in degrading conditions from the Trapani deportation detention center. This judgement relates to the events of the last week of January in the detention center. Based on the voices of the detainees, we consider it important to reconstruct and publicize these events". We have already reported on the situation in the deportation detention centre in Trapani in Scirocco [02/2024](#).

Another [delegation of parliamentarians](#) visited **the CPR in Caltanissetta**. Here too, migrants are detained under catastrophic conditions. In a video sent to the [Melting Pot](#) network the inhumane detention conditions become clear: areas destroyed by fires, mattresses lying on the floor, filthy corridors and rooms, and toilets made from water canisters. "Look how they treat us... Look at the marks of beatings and torture... Look where we live here: this is Caltanissetta, this is Italy, this is Sicily," explained a voice in the video.



*A graffiti in Palermo criticizes deportation detention centres*

The [living conditions](#) in the **CPR Ponte Galeria in Rome** are also terrible, with many detainees being of poor psychological and physical health. There are news about the death of [Wissem Ben Abdel Latif](#), who died in the CPR Ponte Galeria in Rome in 2021 after being confined to bed for 100 hours: the then head of the psychiatric facility to which Wissem was taken has now been promoted. The committee demanding the truth about the death of the 26-year-old Tunisian protests: "His memory is being disrespected".

During the protests at the **CPR in Milan** - where [migrants](#) had protested half-naked and in the rain against the detention conditions, the lack of medical care and the [inedible food](#) after the facility was taken over by the municipality - two migrants were brutally beaten up by the financial police. On the prefecture's orders, the Milan City Council was denied access to the CPR. Later, two lawyers and a doctor from the Naga association and the Mai più lager network were allowed to enter the CPR, accompanied by the regional vice-president of the prison commission, who has the duty and right to monitor conditions on site. Since January 2024, 34 people have been taken to emergency by ambulance due to serious injuries. Also confirmed was the massive dispense of tranquillizers, particularly Valium, sometimes in combination with

Tavor, numerous skin rashes, and the failure to provide medical assistance to a person who had swallowed a shampoo bottle and was at obvious risk of choking. [Teresa Florio](#) from Mai più lager reported after visiting the camp that "today we have received further confirmation that these places, which are structurally designed to deny fundamental rights and human dignity, must be closed immediately. The CPR, all CPRs, must be [closed](#), starting with the one in Milan, a city that can no longer tolerate the existence of a place where rights are suspended and administrative opacity is the rule".

[Irene Testa](#), the Guarantor for Prisoners in Sardinia, has written an appeal to the President of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture, Alan Mitchell, asking him to visit the **CPR of Macomer (Sardinia)** in the province of Nuoro. "During my visit to the Macomer CPR", Testa said, "I realized that there are (...) numerous and worrying critical points". The deportation detention center houses people who do not need to be there; there is nothing to do, and they are left on their own; they are not allowed to use their mobile phones and are therefore unable to contact their relatives. "Increasing the length of stay to up to 18 months for people who have not committed a criminal offence and are being held in worse conditions than in a prison is frankly unacceptable."

In the beginning of February, around a dozen people protested the conditions of the **CPR in Gradisca d'Isonzo (Friuli Venezia Giulia)**. One person fell from the roof and had to be taken by helicopter to the Santa Maria del Misericordia hospital in Udine. "The recent flare-up of tensions," said PD MP [Debora Serracchiani](#), "which culminated in a serious injury, is a further alarm signal for the borderline conditions in the CPR of Gradisca d'Isonzo, a facility that is now constantly overcrowded with hundreds of people compared to a capacity of 250."

#### **Acquittal for innocent Syrian refugee detained as "boat driver"**

[Shami Mohamed](#) was 21 years old when he arrived in Roccella Jonica on a boat full of people from Syria in May 2022. He fled to Italy via Turkey and was falsely accused of being a boat driver by other

migrants after his arrival because he speaks Arabic and Turkish and was able to interpret during the crossing. As a result, he was sentenced to four years and six months. After two years in prison, he has now been acquitted.

### French-Italian Border near Ventimiglia

In recent months, **fewer pushbacks** have been reported at the border crossing between France and Italy. After almost nine years, France has put an end to systematic pushbacks, marking an unexpected return to compliance with EU migration rules. This decision follows a **ruling by the CJEU**, which condemned pushbacks in September 2023. France then repealed the article that established the derogation of the "refus d'entrée", the direct and collective refoulement in derogation of all Community rules and international conventions. "In the first 15 days of February, there were a fifth of the refoulements observed in January," reports [Jacopo Colomba](#) from WeWorld. In addition, most of the people identified were released on French territory, and some - mainly Eritreans and Sudanese - were even invited to report to the "Pada" (the reception and asylum application platforms in Nice and Marseille) to regularize their status. This constitutes **banal compliance with regulations that is becoming news after almost a decade of abuse of the law**. "The situation is still very recent and completely new," explains Jacopo Colomba, "we need to gather more information to understand whether what we are experiencing is a definitive change or (as we fear) just a phase of "reorganization" of the French refoulement system, which the Transalpine government has always claimed to want to strengthen. We will have to wait for the expected increase in migration in the spring to be able to judge the development in concrete terms".

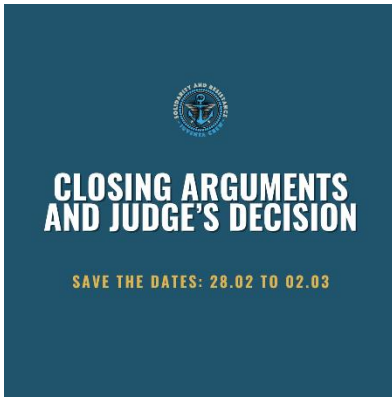
Activists from the Briançon Solidarité Exil collective have erected a [monument](#) on the French side of the border to commemorate the **12 people** who have died and gone missing on the French-Italian border between Oulx and Briançon since 2018. "You are not fighting terrorism or illegal immigration, as you like to claim, you are simply destroying lives and families. People keep dying in Europe and France because they are prevented from moving freely.

Shame on the French state and its murderous border policy" writes the group of activists and [demands](#) that the names of "those who are victims of political decisions that turn France and Europe into a murderous and marginalizing fortress" are not forgotten.

### Slovenian-Italian border (Balkan route)

The emergency situation for migrants on the Balkan route is never-ending. More and more people are building makeshift spots to sleep out of tents and other materials in the [Silos of Trieste](#), a notoriously abandoned and dilapidated building near Trieste railway station, because they cannot find a place in the reception center. "We are forced to stay here between fires and huts: **There is no room for us**," report those affected. Around 170 people are currently sleeping in the silos in Trieste, with an average of 300 people staying there. The situation in the silos is a **"constructed emergency"**, explained [Gianfranco Schiavone](#), President of the Italian Solidarity Consortium (ICS) at an event organized by the Trieste Press Club: "The number of arrivals in Trieste remains very modest, with an average of four people per day". During the meeting, migrant solidarity associations emphasized the dangerous nature of the silo itself, as it is an unsafe building, and the sanitary conditions are precarious. Conditions for which, according to the organizations, the management of the city administration of Trieste is responsible.

In a short documentary, [Elena Testi](#) accompanies around 300 migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who live in an abandoned building in Trieste. "Dramatic hygienic conditions, it's cold and there's a risk of fire: **at night, the place is crawling with rats, they bite us**". We reported on the situation on the Balkan route in [previous issues](#) of our Scirocco.



### Save the date!

Between 28 February and 2 March, the final preliminary hearings of the luventa trial will take place in Trapani (Sicily), at the end of which the court will

decide whether there will be a trial or whether the proceedings will be discontinued. The trial has now been running for almost seven years. The four defendants from the luventa crew helped to rescue more than 14,000 people who had made their way to Europe from Libya. If convicted, they each face up to 20 years in prison. A total of 21 people, including from Médecins Sans Frontières, Save the Children and luventa, as well as the shipping company Vroon have been charged. On trial is, therefore, also the criminalisation of solidarity and the exercise of human rights.

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

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The Scirocco is published in 2024 with the kind support of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland (EKIR).

Coverphoto: Wolfgang Hasselmann, unplash

Translation: Fanny David