

borderline-europe, Sizilien

# SCIROCCO

*News from Italy*



Scirocco [ʃiˈrɔkko-Schirokko] is a southeastern, hot and strong wind that carries dust and sand for often only a few hours across the Mediterranean to Sicily and Italy's north. This short report is published since March 2021 in a bi-weekly rhythm.

## Political and social situation

### Demographic change in Italy

According to the recent [report of the ISTAT](#), concerning the current Italian demographic developments, the population decline which was characteristic until 2021 throughout the country, has decreased in 2023. The birth rate as well as the death rate have decreased, while more immigrants and less emigrants were registered than in the year before. **Therefore, migrants have a crucial role for the Italian demographic context:** in 2023 not only, they have countered the population decline, but also contributed to the slowing down of the country's aging process.

### Italian Politics

With the support of the Chamber of Labour in Bologna of the CGIL union, the [migrant worker M.](#) can now appeal his work residence permit in court after his appeal was granted: The Chamber of Labour supports M. in converting his **residence permit under the "protezione speciale" (special protection) into a permesso di soggiorno di lavoro ("work residence permit")** - a procedure that the Italian Government has tried to block with the so-called "Cutro"-Decree.

With the court decision of 7 March this year, the blockade was suspended. The decision still must be awaited, but given the indications in the court's decision, it is conceivable that the claim of the worker M. will be successful. Among the principles to which the Court refers is the "right of respect for private life in Italy", which would obviously be at risk in the event of forced repatriation. „There is a consolidated case law - both in the ordinary courts and in the regional administrative courts - which determines the convertibility of special protection permits from the time before the "Cutro"-Decree," says [Nazzarena Zorzella](#), lawyer at the Association for Legal Studies on Immigration (ASGI). For later approvals, however, one would have to wait up to 18 months after adoption of

the decree (and later law). Only then would the first appeals be filed in view of the virtually "hopeless rejection of conversion requests". According to Zorzella, the lawyers of ASGI have already worked on a strategy to enforce the rights of foreign citizens who live and work in Italy. If M. wins in court, his case could become a **precedent against the blockade of the conversion of residence permits** and give hope to numerous people currently living in Italy under the "protezione speciale" to a long-term legal stay including the right to work.



*"The government kills": protests on the walls of buildings against the Italian migration policy*

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni defended the "Cutro"-law decree of 9 March 2023, which was **adopted shortly after the fatal shipwreck in Steccato di Cutro (Calabria), which had its first anniversary on 26 February.** „At the time the government did not consider it necessary to pay last respects to the victims at their coffins, or to express their solidarity with the survivors“, states the association Arci in their report ["The shipwreck of Cutro: one year later"](#). The „Cutro“-decree was partly declared as inadmissible by Italian courts and is disputed now on European level: "I stated, that I prefer structural results to immediate but volatile results, even if I have to pay a price for it in the short term (...). Italy has been the protagonist of a series of innovative initiatives, with which we could convince other European countries: the Memorandum with Tunisia,

the memorandum with Egypt, the agreement with Albania (...). So, there are some very important things happening and we are leading the way.", stated [Meloni](#) in the show [Fuori dal coro](#) on the (Berlusconi-) TV-programme Rete 4. There she defended the **Italian policy of preventing migration**, which, in view of the still high numbers of refugees arriving, does not seem effective, contradicts EU law and at the same time further worsens the (over) living conditions for refugees. According to current data from the Ministry of the Interior, although arrivals at the Italian coasts have fallen by 58.5% compared to the previous year 2023, this year's arrivals are still higher than those of 2022 at the time of the Draghi government. The [fact check](#) of pagella politica also reminds that 2023 was the year with the [second highest arrivals](#) since 2016 with **almost 158,000 arrivals**. What Meloni also does not communicate: **The departures from Lebanon and Syria** towards Cyprus and the European Union are increasing sharply. This is one reason why the Prime Minister travelled to Lebanon.

### **Cooperation between Italy and Lebanon**

During a visit to the Lebanese prime minister Najib Miqati in [Beirut](#), Giorgia Meloni spoke out for the **support, security and stability of Lebanon**, positioned herself on the current war between Israel and Palestine and declared that there should be a mediation attempt between Lebanon and Israel, which also addresses **the legalization of irregular movements of migration**. The [meeting](#) – in which a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas according to the UN-resolution was discussed – provided an opportunity to debate on new "measures to combat irregular migration flows", which also concern Lebanon. The country gives shelter to **around 1.5 million Syrian and 489,000 Palestinian refugees**, making it one of the countries with the highest number of refugees in relation to territorial expansion. In addition, cooperation of both states concerning the sectors economy and energy as well as other activities in support of the Lebanese armed forces (Lef), as carried out by the [Italian bilateral military mission in Lebanon \(Mibil\)](#), were negotiated.

Italy supports the immediate de-escalation of the war and, in the medium term, the full implementation of the resolution 1701 by the UN-Security-Council, including the demarcation of the Israeli Lebanese border.



*Migrants at the hotspot Porto Empedocle, Italy*

### **Labour migration between Italy and Morocco**

The [new agreement](#), which was signed between the Association of Foreign Workers in Sicily, the Human Solidarity Consortium and the General Union of Moroccan Workers (UGTM), aims to offer **migrants from Morocco new job opportunities in Sicily**.

Accordingly, workers should complete a training course supported and financed by the UGTM Fez in their country of origin before they start seasonal employment in Bronte (province of Catania) and in Valledolmo (province of Palermo). In Sicily, they are offered not only vocational training, but also adequate housing and social support. The Italian state is interested in such agreements to control the movements of migration and to limit irregular migration movements. Nevertheless, the offers of labour migration are only aimed at a limited number of migrants from certain countries and **ignore the many who are already in Italy** looking for legal employment opportunities.

### **The Italian approach prevails in the EU**

At the request of the Italian Government to the [European Commission](#), "measures to combat smuggling" are to be strengthened. The European Council also agreed, as part of a **global alliance**, to respond to the "challenge of the smuggling of migrants". It turns out that the [approach of the post-fascist Italian government](#) led by Giorgia Meloni,

President of the Italian State, has prevailed at European level: The bilateral agreements that Italy has already concluded with countries in (North) Africa - e.g. Libya, Tunisia and Egypt - are an essential part of this strategy of the EU. Likewise, the Italian government's neo-colonial Mattei-plan, which was presented at the "Italy-Africa Summit" in January 2024 (see [previous issues](#) of this newsletter).



Italy- and EU-flag, Foto: Ivan Oštric, [Unsplash](#)

### "Pragmatism in rescue and legal entry options"

„A large-scale European operation to rescue people at sea, an important focus on humanitarian corridors and also thinking about entry permits and regular visas. We need regulated immigration (...) **No country can do it alone, but Europe can do it**“, stated [David Sassoli](#), president of the European parliament during a meeting of the European Council. The EU's migration policy will next be on the agenda at the June meeting of EU state and government leaders. [Flavio Di Giacomo](#), spokesperson for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Coordination Office for the Mediterranean, also spoke clearly about the current situation of migration movements in Italy: **There is no migration political urgency justifying a policy of externalising routes or closing borders.**

It is true that there has been an increase in migration last year, but it is neither exceptional nor unbearable for Italy. Similar or even higher numbers were handled in the past **without a national emergency.**

The partnership agreements such as the one that the EU signed with Egypt on 17 March, and which seeks to externalise migration movements was a short-term solution and a short-sighted policy which would force migrants only to longer and **more dangerous routes.**

### Number of asylum applications in the EU in 2023

The [Italian Refugee Council \(CIR\)](#) announced that 135,820 applications for international protection were filed in Italy in 2023.

Of these, 49.8% were rejected; 11.9% of applicants were recognized as refugees under the Geneva Refugee Convention (NVC) and 14.9% of applicants received subsidiary protection status.

In addition, 23.4% received the special protection status "protezione speciale". According to the report, a total of **157,652 people reached Italy by sea**, while according to official data 2,476 people died or disappeared in the Mediterranean - making the Mediterranean the world's deadliest migration route.

The President of CIR, Roberto Zaccaria, stated that the emergency was not the number of people arriving and seeking protection, but the **lack of adequate answers** regarding protected access, reception, integration, the assisted voluntary return and rescue at sea - "or in all those instruments that would make it appropriate to deal with this phenomenon of its complexity and respect for the rights of these people".

In [comparison](#): **three times as many applications** were submitted in Germany during the same period (351,510) and significantly more in Spain (162,420) and France (166,880) than in Italy. Taken together, the 27 Member States of the European Union submitted **1,129,640 applications for international protection**, as many asylum applications as have not been submitted since 2018.

### Situation of refugees

#### Refugee minors

In Italy, many unaccompanied minors arrive „without anyone noticing. They arrive without parents (...) and we lose sight of them,“ reports [Marco Birolini](#) for ANS (Agenzia Info Salesiana). In 2023, the host municipalities reported **17,535 missing persons**: For every 5,723 people who reached Italy safely, two young people have been found dead. More than



11,800 people disappeared after their (registered) arrival and no one knew what had happened to them.

The non-profit organization [Don Bosco Salesiani](#) in Naples supports minor refugees during their migration with sleeping places, food, and a social community. The centre offers **medium and long-term support** for the social and professional integration of young people, helps with documents and administrative procedures, with medical care and language courses. "And then we're a bit like their second parents, we try to give them an education based on encouragement," says the director of the center, Father Giovanni Vanni, who has become an important point of contact for young refugees in Naples. In the last six years he has seen arriving 799 young people from 37 different countries: "**The world goes through Naples, but few seem to notice it (...). Naples is like a big filter in which this lost young humanity gathers,**" he sums up.



Neapel, Foto: Thèo Roland, [Unsplash](#)

### Death in Detention and repatriation centres (CPR)

The 22-year-old Guineer [Ousmane](#) committed suicide on 4 February 2024 at the CPR Ponte Galeria in Rome. He arrived in Italy in July 2023. **The death of the young man sparked protests in the CPR**, the public prosecutor's office initiated an investigation for "incitement to suicide". Meanwhile, Ousmane's family hired lawyers to clarify the death of Ousmane and understand what happened. His brother Djibril Sylla travelled from France to Italy to identify the body. He says that his brother was not mentally ill, but panicked

when he was arrested and wanted to sue for his rights. On a [wall of the detention centre](#), Ousmane left a message, probably with a cigarette end: "If I should die, I want my body to be brought to Africa, my mother would be happy." In his farewell letter he also wrote that he missed Africa very much "and my mother too, she must not cry for me. Peace for my soul, may I rest in peace." With the help of [LasciateCIEntrare](#), the family now collects the money needed to return his body to his family. The words of Ousmane reveal the **despair** of a man who came to Italy in the hope of a better life and was imprisoned there for several months. **Unfortunately, suicides in CPRs are not isolated cases** - again and again refugees take their lives there because the conditions are unbearable, and the state takes away their hope for a life in dignity.

### Institutional racism kills

In [seinem neuen Artikel](#) spricht der Verein Arci Porco Rosso über den Fall Kitim, über den wir schon im letzten Scirocco Nr. 6 berichteten. Menschen mit und ohne Papiere leben in einer täglichen Gewaltspirale, sei es die physische oder aber die institutionelle Gewalt, die es verhindert, ein normales Leben zu führen.

In [his new article](#), the Arci Porco Rosso association talks about the case of Kitim, which we reported on in the last Scirocco No. 6. People with and without papers live in a daily spiral of violence, be it physical or institutional violence, which prevents them from living a normal life.



"End Racism", Photo: Benjamin Finley, [Unsplash](#)

*You can find more information on the situation in Italy under "Projects" on our [homepage](#), in the previous editions of *Scirocco* and in our "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: Isabel Pirlich