

borderline-europe, Sicily

SCIROCCO

News from Italy



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

Political and social situation

Following the cutbacks in basic services such as legal counselling and psychological support for migrants living in reception centres in the last few years, the Ministry of the Interior issued a [new circular](#) on the 7th of August. The letter informs the prefectures that **reception measures** for those who have been granted international protection and special protection status (protezione speciale) are to be **terminated immediately**. Those affected will often be people who have already spent a long time in such centres, but who are left **disoriented** on the streets due to the lack of integration measures. The regulation is being portrayed by the government as another emergency measure to deal with the rising number of arrivals and the need for accommodation. It could leave [thousands of vulnerable people without accommodation](#).



Picture: Levi Meir Clancy, Unsplash

Apparently, the government plans to delegate the problem to the **municipalities**, which will have to find solutions for the people who have suddenly become homeless. The [Asylum and Immigration Table \(Tai\)](#), a coalition of organisations in the field of international protection, immigration law and migration policy, strongly criticises these measures, stressing that they would **violate the right to asylum and dignified treatment**.

According to a document of the Ministry of Interior, Italy plans to [redistribute about 50,000 migrants within Italy](#). The quotas for **distribution** are to be determined based on various criteria, including

population size, economic performance and the number of migrants already received. Another new criterion is the inclusion of **territorial expansion** in the assessment. This measure aims to reduce the concentration of migrants in certain areas and to achieve a more even distribution between the regions.

[The Lega is pushing for the immediate introduction of a new decree](#) aimed at tightening **deportation conditions** and speeding up the process. The decree includes various measures to increase the number of deportations. The move has provoked mixed reactions, especially from mayors who express concerns about its practicality and impact on municipalities. Some fear that **accelerated deportation** even of minors could take place without adequate protection and review of their situation. The so-called [Zampa Law, which passed in 2017 to protect unaccompanied minors arriving in Italy](#), will also be amended to the **disadvantage** of the latter. In cases of doubt, a self-declaration was sufficient to determine the minor's age and the associated special protection status, which will no longer apply. In future, police officers are to decide on the age. If the person is clearly a minor, the guarantees of the Zampa Law continue to apply. In case of doubt, adulthood is to be presumed.

Furthermore, [resistance is growing in municipalities](#), especially in the northern regions of the country. Mayors, many of whom belong to the governing parties, feel **left alone** by the government in accommodating migrants. According to Matteo Biffoni, the mayor of Prato and the head of immigration affairs, local administrations are **not able to guarantee** the prescribed legal conditions in view of these numbers. There are no facilities for initial reception and no resources for cultural mediation. In his opinion, the responsibility lies with the state. Numerous politicians in the Veneto region, including its governor Luca Zaia, also criticise the situation.

Meloni's government is under **increasing pressure**. It owes a good part of its electoral success to its promise to stop the ["invasion of illegal immigrants"](#) [sic!]. But it does not seem to be succeeding. According to the Ministry of the Interior, **106,000 refugees** had arrived in Italy by sea by 24 August. At the same time in 2022, 52,000 people had arrived, and 37,000 the year before.

New deportation centre

A new [deportation centre is to be set up in Pozzallo](#) for migrants from **supposedly safe countries of origin**. In the future, those affected are to be brought directly to such facilities to facilitate accelerated procedures at the borders. This concerns people from countries such as Côte d'Ivoire or Tunisia which are classified as safe countries of origin. The main objective is to make asylum decisions within one month and to **speed up** deportations.



Picture: Julie Ricard, Unsplash

This puts Italy fully in line with the 'trend' of the **Common European Asylum Policy** (CEAS). However, the government does not seem to have considered that such bilateral agreements only exist with a few countries. At the beginning of June, the European interior ministers met. Italy and Austria demanded that it should be possible [to deport people to third countries](#) with which they have no connection whatsoever. This proposal was rejected, on the grounds that there would have to be some kind of 'link' with the third country in question (e.g. having lived there for a long time, family members). However, the criteria are open to wide interpretation. We know of similar approaches by the British government, which wanted to deport refugees to Rwanda without any connection to the country. Countries like Tunisia and most possibly Egypt will also only take back their own citizens.

Court ruling on informal readmissions

A court in Rome has declared informal readmissions of migrants based on **intergovernmental agreements** with countries such as Greece, Slovenia and France to be [unlawful](#). Such agreements are **not allowed** to make changes to existing Italian or European laws as they affect

people's fundamental rights. One specific ruling concerns an Afghan minor who was turned back from Brindisi to Igoumenitsa (GR) without the possibility to apply for asylum.

Agreement with Tunisia

Germany and some EU institutions have reacted **negatively** to the EU agreement with Tunisia, which they say was signed without their consultation and would shift migration policy to the right. Leaked documents from the German foreign ministry [revealed German discontent](#) over **being excluded** from the European Commission's recent migration deal with Tunisia. That deal had been negotiated in part by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

The situation of the refugees

Every day, people are transferred from Lampedusa to **Porto Empedocle** to reduce the pressure on the hotspot. However, this measure only solves the problem in a short term. In view of the high number of arrivals in mid-August, [tensions arose](#) there as well. After the facility was completely occupied, refugees were relocated with buses, taking people to Lombardy, Piedmont, Campania, and Umbria. Mayor Calogero Martello explains: "In recent days, the city has had to cope with an "unusual influx of people. In the future, we will continue to focus on what we have always done: **Identifying people** within 36-48hours before they leave the city." The government's decision to make Porto Empedocle a hotspot does not change the situation, the mayor stresses. A new camp has been built in the town. Within three months, modular housing solutions for 200-250 people will be available to cope with the number of arrivals from Lampedusa. "We will move the existing tent structures to the city gates, with prefabricated modules, and house the asylum seekers for a maximum of one and a half days, two days at the most. However, we are not equipped for permanent reception as we are a **transit centre**. It is not sustainable for us to accommodate migrants in the long term."

Situation in the border town of Ventimiglia

Every year, tens of thousands of migrants try to reach France and Central Europe from Italy. The border town of **Ventimiglia** serves as a transit point and last stop for migrants and refugees trying to reach France. [Médecins Sans Frontières' report on Ventimiglia between February and June 2023](#) shows serious attacks on migrants in transit between Italy and France.



Picture: Radek Homola, Unsplash

The report states that border pushbacks are systematic, and **fundamental rights** such as the right to asylum are **denied**. Inhumane conditions, lack of medical care, and inadequate institutional measures worsen the situation, reflecting security-oriented rather than humanitarian trends in European migration policies. The report documents cases of family separations, arbitrary detention, poor medical care, deplorable hygiene conditions, and insufficient support. The number of deportations and pushbacks at the Italian-French border has increased by 30% compared to the previous year. The situation in Ventimiglia is characterised by obstructions, limited access to adequate support and a lack of structured solutions to protect migrants. **Especially since the election of the new mayor**, who belongs to the right-wing party of Matteo Salvini, the situation in the city has **worsened**. France has reintroduced border controls and built fences along known routes. The country **criticises** Italy's handling of migration but sees itself confronted with questionable practices. Italy demands more European cooperation and solidarity in the face of rising numbers of refugees. The situation at Italy's northern borders was also reported on in our report **"Zones of Lawlessness"** (german: Zonen der Rechtlosigkeit), which was published this year.

Unaccompanied minors

In recent weeks, many Italian municipalities have announced that they are **experiencing great difficulties with the care and accommodation of unaccompanied minors**. On Monday, for example, Giorgio Gori, the mayor of Bergamo from the Democratic Party (PD), said in an interview that municipal facilities for the reception of underage migrants were **completely overloaded** and that even social services had no capacities. According

to Gori, the municipality has spent more than 5.5 million euros in the last five years on measures related to the reception of minors who do not fall under its competence: For this reason, the municipality filed a **complaint** with the regional administrative court (TAR). In Italy, unaccompanied migrant minors cannot be deported and must be accommodated in separate facilities from those for adults.

Migrant protests

In the multifunctional center of Pian de Lago in Caltanissetta, Sicily, which includes both an asylum reception center (CARA) and a deportation center (CPR), there has been **another peaceful protest**. Hundreds of migrants demonstrated against **delays in the distribution of pocket money** and demanded **better conditions** at the reception center.

For more information on the situation in Italy, see "Projects" on our homepage and previous issues of Scirocco.

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The Scirocco will be published in 2023 with the kind support of the Evangelical Church of Rhineland (EKIR) and the "Förderverein Pro Asyl".

Cover photo: Wolfgang Hasselmann, unplash

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