

borderline-europe, Sicily

SCIROCCO

News from Italy



Scirocco [ʃiˈrɒkko-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 newsflash has been published on an approximately bi-weekly basis since March 2021.

Political and social situation

The Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her Greek counterpart Kyriakos Mitsotakis have [agreed to establish an alliance of Mediterranean countries within the EU](#), with the aim of strengthening collaboration with African countries that serve as both the origin and transit points for refugees. The aim of this initiative is to **control and block migration movements to Europe through bilateral agreements with African states**. The states are supposed to enhance their border controls towards Europe (generally the Mediterranean Sea) and take back refugees who have already arrived on the territory of the European Union under certain conditions. In return, they often receive economic, military, or logistical support from EU member states. A similar agreement already exists between Italy and Tunisia (see below).

The Greek government's decision to form joint migration policies with Italy's post-fascist government under Giorgia Meloni is criticized by Greek civil society movements. This cooperation is viewed as cynical, especially in light of the tragic shipwrecks in [Cutro](#) (Italy) and [Pylos](#) (Greece) in which **over 600 people lost their lives this year**.

Growing doubts about the bilateral agreement with Tunisia

As we reported in the [last Scirocco](#), doubts about the bilateral agreement between Italy and Tunisia, which was agreed in July, are growing. The German CSU politician and President of the European People's Party (EPP), [Manfred Weber](#), recently travelled to Tunis to discuss the one-billion-euro financial aid tied to the **expansion of Tunisia's border security to reduce the number of migrants to Europe**. So far, the agreement has had no effect on the migration routes. In fact, the number of arrivals from Tunisia in Italy even [increased by 69%](#) compared to the period before the agreement - however, these numbers are also related to

weather conditions that usually lead to more crossings during the summer months. In the light of the **ongoing authoritarian transformation of the Tunisian state** and the extreme violence and persecution of Tunisia's black population as well as of people on the move, political opponents and civil society actors, Tunisia is still [neither a safe country of origin nor a safe third country](#).

Italian domestic policy

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni [plans to further tighten migration policies](#) due to the high number of arrivals this summer. A new security decree is in progress and could include **measure to speed up deportations**, to strengthen deportation centres and to revise laws related to the protection of minors.



Picture: Calvin Ma, Unsplash

In addition, there are changes in the field of administration such as the introduction of a **centralized body called the Interministerial Committee for the Security of the Republic (Cisr)**, consisting of all responsible ministers with the goal of coordinating measures and avoiding overlapping responsibilities; as well as new measures to accelerate deportations. At the same time, the Italian government is **increasing pressure on the European Union** to negotiate European solutions. In addition to the implementation of the [Piantedosi law](#) to increase deportations and to construct further CPR (Repatriation and Deportation Centres) in various regions of Italy, Giorgia Meloni plans to issue approximately [452,000 new work visas](#) for non-EU citizens between 2023 and 2025 to counteract Italy's shrinking GDP, high debt burden, high youth unemployment, and low birth rate. Instead of

integrating people into the Italian system who have already arrived there, priority is given to issuing work visas based on specific qualifications and categories. This approach is based on **racist and neoliberal thinking**. Migration researcher [Julia Mourão Permoser](#) sees it as a turning point in EU migration policy, suggesting that the "**guest worker model**" could potentially be reactivated due to economic pressure.



Photo: Unsplash

The Italian government spent approximately [132 million euros](#) to operate "quarantine ships" between April 2020 and June 2022. At least **56,000 people** were affected by this [discriminatory system of quarantine ships](#), which was introduced to isolate refugees arriving by sea before they reached the Italian mainland. This system was part of the **development and reinforcement of the hotspot approach** and resulted in serious abuses and violations of basic rights, including inadequate hygiene conditions, poor healthcare for sick individuals, unjustifiably long stays, and the deprivation of personal freedom. This is proven by numerous statements by migrants and workers on board of the ships as well as the **deaths of Bilal Ben Massaud, Abou Diakite and Abdallah Said** (see our [other publications](#) for more information). Housing solutions on land would not only have been much cheaper - after all, the accommodation on quarantine ships cost an estimated 220.00€ per day per person - but also more humane, as noted by [Gianfranco Schiavone](#), President of the Italian Solidarity Consortium of Trieste (Ics): "These costs are more than four times of what could have been spent on a decent reception system on site. A

paradox, given that we declared a state of emergency, but we continue to spend very little to create a decent reception system".

Caritas calls for cooperation between various institutions

Caritas Italia calls for an [open dialogue and a permanent working group](#) between the Italian Government, the municipalities, the regions and the organisations of the third sector to **systematically address migration issues at the national level instead of treating them as emergencies**, as has been the case until now. Coordination is particularly needed for the procurement of suitable accommodations. Caritas emphasizes that migration issues can only be addressed with solidarity and cooperation among the state, church, and civil society.

Situation of the refugees

In Friuli Venezia Giulia and Veneto, **tensions between the local administrative authorities** are rising with increasing numbers of arrivals. In Trieste and Gorizia - the places located in the Italian part of the "Balkan Route" between Slovenia and France - as well as in the provinces of Veneto, [new facilities are being prepared](#). It is highly likely that a **new hotspot** will be built in Friuli, although the exact location and schedule of construction are still undecided. Politicians from right-wing parties repeatedly call for the hotspot to be established in "[isolated areas](#)" far away from residents and local infrastructure. This demand demonstrates a growing **trend of making migration and migrants increasingly invisible and marginalized**.

The mayor of Trieste, [Roberto Dipiazza](#) has emphasized that Trieste is not capable of providing for the large number of arriving people currently in the city. Their numbers have increased during the summer months. Providing care for minor migrants and refugees poses a significant challenge to the city, and Trieste is facing a growing [humanitarian crisis](#) as transfers to other regions have been partially halted, and reception projects have been closed. Approximately [500 people](#) are now forced to live on the streets (as reported in [previous editions](#) of this newsletter). Urgent and solidarity-based solutions

are needed to **provide adequate accommodation and basic medical care**. Many families, children, and unaccompanied minors are also in Trieste.

Parliamentary Inquiries on the CPR of Caltanissetta

According to reports about the inhuman treatment that migrants and refugees had to endure in the [CPR of Caltanissetta](#) - such as the allocation of psychotropic drugs, including strong sleeping pills and anxiolytics, to silence prisoners by force" - the deportation center has become the focus of a public debate. In 2021, 21,000 Rivotril pills were purchased by the center, although only 574 people were detained in the facility during the same period. This raises **serious concerns about the use of medication**, as psychotropic drugs should only be used on medical prescription and administered after psychiatric evaluation. Furthermore, witness statements reveal **unbearable living conditions**: people are addressed by numbers, there is minimal access to medical and legal assistance, and very little information is provided about their rights.



Picture: Manifestation in Caltanissetta, January 2020

The Democratic Party (PD) and the Italian Left have announced **parliamentary inquiries** into the situation at the CPR (return and deportation center) in Pian del Lago, Caltanissetta. The Italian prosecution is also monitoring the deportation center. We have previously reported on the protests by affected individuals against the poor conditions and for the disbursement of their pocket money in the [last two editions](#) of Scirocco.

Reception structures of unaccompanied minors

In [Castelvetrano](#), a new Initial reception centre for unaccompanied minor migrants with **250 beds** will open.

Through the ["Serapta" integration program](#), approximately 30 unaccompanied minors from Gambia, Senegal, Guinea, and Mali have been received in Cariati. They were warmly welcomed by the community. This program is funded by the Ministry of the Interior, Civil Liberties, and Immigration and envisions the **reception of 50 unaccompanied minors for a duration of 30 months**. It represents a positive development in the treatment of newly arriving unaccompanied youth and points the way toward **building an inclusive and open society**, as emphasized by [Salvatore Brullo](#), Director of the Fo.Co. Cooperative.

[The European Court of Human Rights](#) confirmed in a judgment dated August 31, 2023, that unaccompanied minor migrants and refugees should not be accommodated in adult reception centers, as national authorities have "a special duty of vigilance to ensure adequate protection for people in a particularly vulnerable situation."

According to the Court, Italy violated Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights due to **inhuman or degrading treatment** of unaccompanied minors. The judgment was made in the case of M.A. against Italy (complaint number 70583/17): **a young woman from Ghana who was 16 years old at the time of the events** had appealed to the court. She had been taken to the minor reception center in Calabria before being transferred to an adult center in Como after a short period. She had experienced sexual abuse in Ghana and Libya and had not received adequate psychological support in any of the Italian reception centers. Furthermore, the Italian authorities remained unresponsive to requests from the legal representative of the affected individuals.

New beginnings and ongoing struggles

In our [new monitoring article of the Porco Rosso](#) we focus on the situation in settlements of agricultural workers, the situation in detention in Caltanissetta, and the daily challenges faced by refugees in western Sicily.

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

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