

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

Since taking office, the government under Giorgia Meloni has introduced numerous changes in the field of [administrative detention of migrants](#), such as a significant increase in funding for the expansion of deportation centers (CPR) and the extension of the maximum duration of detention for incarcerated migrants and refugees. These are just a few examples of measures that clearly indicate a political direction focused **not on reception but on the exclusion of asylum seekers**. These decisions primarily have negative consequences for migrants themselves, but they also carry significant economic burdens and the socio-political risk of **exacerbating marginalization and social discomfort**.

The University of Bari, in collaboration with ActionAid, has released a [report about Italian deportation centers \(CPR\) between 2014 and 2021](#). According to this report, between 2018 and 2021, 50% of detained migrants and refugees were Tunisian citizens. They were also affected by 70% of deportations. However, Tunisians represent only about 18% of all incoming individuals in Italy. The authors conclude that CPRs are primarily used as a **tool for the accelerated return of Tunisians**. Furthermore, the report highlights **systematic violations of migrants' rights** within these centers. Unlike conventional prisons where the main goal is reintegration into society, [CPRs do not initiate work or education for detainees](#) and do not offer leisure activities. Additionally, on October 25th, the report "[Al di là di quella porta](#)" (Beyond that door) by the organizations "Mai più lager - No ai CPR" and "NAGA" on the Milan deportation detention center was published. Over the course of one year (May 2022 to May 2023), data, witness testimonies, research, medical records, file inspections, general public access, inspections, and messages to the special phone center ("SOS CPR") were used to gain

insights into the operations within the deportation detention. The report describes the violation of (human) rights and the dignity of those held there.

Meanwhile, the Italian newspaper [Domani](#) has unveiled the government's secret plans for the proposed nine deportation detention centers. These centers are designed in the form of a circle resembling a Panopticon model. Inside are the detention cells, which are to be extra secured, and surrounding them are the authorities, medical stations, and administrative offices. This represents a costly high-security prison for 120-300 individuals who have not committed any crimes. Completion of the centers is expected in two years.



Picture NAGA

## Detentions under the Piantedosi Decree unlawful

In a judgment, the [court in Catania](#) has followed the decision of the chamber under judge Iolanda Apostolico ([see Scirocco 18/2023](#)) and ordered the **release of six migrants** who were detained in the detention center for asylum seekers in Modica-Pozzallo. Attorney [Emanuela Rosa Lo Faro](#) also submitted an urgent request for the release of her Tunisian clients. The detention of these individuals under the Piantedosi Decree violates particularly Article 8 of European Directive 2013/33/EU, which stipulates that detention should only be ordered after an individual assessment and as a last resort, as stated in Judge Apostolico's ruling. According to [judges in Potenza and Catania](#), following this judgment, there have been no further detentions of migrants. Instead, we are aware of **five cases where judges rejected the application of the Piantedosi Decree by the government under Giorgia Meloni to detain asylum seekers**. In Potenza, Judge Filippo

Palumbo did not confirm the decision of the police chief of Forlì to detain a Tunisian asylum applicant in the CPR of Palazzo San Gervasio (Potenza), while in Catania, Judge Rosario Cuprì also did not confirm the detention of five migrants in Pozzallo, ordered by the police chief of Ragusa.

Currently, the **84 places in the detention center in Pozzallo appear to be scarcely occupied**. The reason for this, however, seems to be not the aforementioned judgements but rather the [lack of resources, management, and staff](#) at the center.



Picture Meltingpot, Hotspot Pozzallo

### Another ECtHR Judgment in Favor of Refugees

The [European Court of Human Rights \(ECtHR\)](#) has ruled in the case of three Tunisians who were present in the hotspot on Lampedusa between 2017 and 2019. The court found that the three individuals had been subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment. Furthermore, a violation of Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) was found. The court ruled that the **individuals were arbitrarily deprived of their liberty, not informed of the reasons for their detention**, and had no opportunity bring forward a legal challenge. As a result, Italy was ordered to pay compensation of 9,000 euros per person. This is not the first ECtHR decision in favor of refugees in Italy. In August, the Italian state was convicted by the ECtHR due to inadequate protection of a minor girl ([as reported here](#)).

### Fines for Racist Propaganda

The court in Catania has convicted five individuals of propaganda and incitement to racial, ethnic, and religious offenses. Fines ranging from 667 to

2,000 euros were imposed. The judgment pertains to a [video shared on Facebook](#) in which the convicted individuals commented on the presence of migrants in a district in Catania.

### New Budget Plan of the Italian Government

As part of the new budget for 2024-2026, the Italian government has decided to impose an **annual fee of 2,000 euros for the use of the national health service by third-country nationals** (non-EU foreigners). However, it is still [unclear](#) who will be specifically affected by these fees and which groups may receive an unspecified discount. The government currently appears to be making the right to health and asylum purchasable. Just recently, it was decided that asylum seekers from purportedly "safe third countries" must undergo an accelerated border procedure in detention or alternatively, they can "buy their way out" with a bail of 5,000 euros ([see this edition of Scirocco](#)).

### European Politics

Throughout this year, we have repeatedly reported on the controversial agreement between the EU and Tunisia, which aimed to "cooperate on managing migration flows". The memorandum essentially aims at externalizing European borders to the North African continent to fortify the EU, in exchange for stabilizing Tunisia's economy (see previous issues of this newsletter). Now, Tunisia has paid **60 million euros of previously received financial aid back to the EU**. Tunisian President [Kais Saied](#) explained this decision by stating that the EU was putting the country before ready-made facts and that they were only willing to cooperate if they were treated with equality and respect.

However, there is also a lack of respect on the part of the Saied government. According to [Human Rights Watch](#), **the Tunisian National Guard collectively deported over 100 migrants from various African countries, including children**, across the border to Algeria in just two days in September. Moreover, violent attacks against Black migrants in Tunisia are

exacerbated by the government's racist rhetoric.

According to a proposal from the [EU Commission](#), EU member states may have the authority in the future to force a "person considered a threat to public security and subject to a deportation order" to leave. This is part of the new EU Asylum and Migration Pact. Currently, these individuals can only be requested to leave voluntarily.

### **Schengen Agreement increasingly suspended**

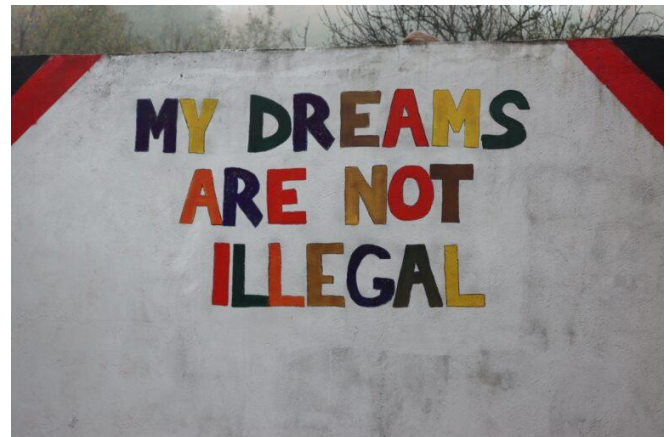
Italy has suspended the [application of the Schengen Agreement](#) at the border between Italy and Slovenia, reintroducing border controls between the two countries. This decision was justified (as known) as part of the "fight against irregular migration, national security, and the risk of terrorism". German Interior Minister [Nancy Faeser \(SPD\)](#) also announced in mid-October that Germany would temporarily reintroduce controls at its borders with the Czech Republic, Poland, and Switzerland. Controls between Austria and Germany have been in place for years. During a meeting of the European interior ministers in Luxembourg, it became clear that **the Schengen Agreement for regulating freedom of movement on the continent is currently in question**, even though Italy was [criticized](#) for suspending the Schengen Agreement.

### **Situation of Migrants**

In a speech on the general situation of migration in Italy, Italian Interior Minister [Matteo Piantedosi](#) announced that he would seek financial support from the EU for the construction of new deportation detention centers, known as "CPR" (Centro per il Rimpatrio). He argued that these facilities would benefit the entire Union. However, there have been protests against the plan to build new repatriation centers in many Italian cities in recent weeks. On the banners held by [protesting migrants in Bologna](#), demands for freedom and assistance for those arriving in Italy were written. **"We want our rights;**

**we want documents"**, says one of them as he speaks up. They then provide insight into the conditions at the Emergency Reception Center (CAS) on Via Mattei and other reception facilities. "We live - they say - here with 800 people, although there is only room for 250 people. It's like a prison, but we haven't done anything wrong."

Also in Bolzano, a thousand people participated in the **"No ai CPR"** demonstration. The demonstrators stated that **deportation centers are black holes where all rights are suspended**. They highlight that repeated abuses are hidden behind these walls, which drive people to daily self-harm and suicide attempts.



Picture: RiVolti ai Balcani

### **Precarious Arrival Conditions in Italy**

A survey by [the International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#) reveals that migrants arriving in Italy face extreme challenges. The survey found that nearly half of the respondents were not informed about their legal situation in Italy, while 29% did not have enough to eat. High inflation makes it difficult to cover even basic needs such as adequate food.

In [Salerno](#), 258 migrants arrived with the civilian search and rescue ship GeoBarents. Due to the application of the Piantedosi Decree, which speeds up asylum procedures for people from "safe third countries," 60 of them, who come from Egypt and Bangladesh, received **deportation orders within a few hours**. Similar experiences were encountered by asylum seekers from Syria who did not apply for asylum



because they intended to travel to other European countries and feared that they would not be able to do so due to the Dublin Regulation. All of them were put on the street via deportation orders.

### **Miserable Conditions in Reception Facilities**

In an [accommodation center in Romano di Lombardio](#), over 60 asylum seekers were admitted to a hospital due to **symptoms of food poisoning**. The fire department subsequently declared the accommodation as "unsuitable." After an inspection by the mayor, the prefect, and the fire department, almost all residents returned in the evening. Two months earlier, the mayor of the city criticized the accommodation as prison-like and pointed out that it didn't even have a kitchen and a dining hall, so meals had to be taken in the beds.

In another [facility in Rosolini](#), where 210 migrants are currently staying, **the hygiene and sanitary conditions deteriorate daily**. Only half of the 12 available bathrooms are working, and there is insufficient Wi-Fi, forcing residents to go to the city to communicate with their families.

In [Rome](#), an **unaccompanied refugee minor was detained in security cells of two different police headquarters for over ten days** because there was no space in a reception facility for minors. This practice is to be strongly condemned.

The reception situation in [Trieste in northern Italy](#) is alarming as well. Due to enormous difficulties in accommodating approximately 40 arriving people per day, they inevitably end up in **emergency shelters** or have to sleep outdoor near Piazza Libertà due to limited sleeping spaces. Organizations and communities have been drawing attention to this situation for months ([see previous editions of this newsletter](#)).

The residents of a [CAS in Cronaca near Bologna](#) held a **protest against the living conditions in the facility**, which they describe as a prison: "**È come stare in un prigione**" (It's like staying in a prison). The CAS has been overcrowded for months,

with many people sleeping in tents outside the facility and not receiving adequate clothing. According to reports, they have to wait hours for their meals.

A [report by ASGI](#), the Italian Lawyers Association for Migration Studies, highlights the **unacceptable conditions at the first reception center in Crotona** in Sant'Anna: ASGI states that unaccompanied minors are wrongfully detained, and unfair distribution practices are carried out. Furthermore, the facility acts as a hotspot, although it is formally designated as a reception center, violating numerous rights, including deprivation of personal freedom, lack of legal information, and the creation of ethnic profiles (racial profiling) for deportation orders. As the report shows, the hotspot approach, combined with an emergency policy in migration and asylum, leads to a worrying **deregulation of border procedures and a vacuum concerning the rights of migrants and refugees**.



*Picture: RIVolti ai Balcani*

On September 30, the anniversary of the deaths of Omar Baldeh, Ousman Diallo, and other victims who died due to the consequences of the **exploitation of land and people in rural areas** was commemorated. A demonstration took place on this day, attended by various solidarity networks from Palermo to Campobello.

In an [open letter](#), Arci Porco Rosso, along with other organizations, calls for an urgent meeting with local authorities, community representatives, and

seasonal workers in Campobello di Mazara ([we have previously reported on the situation on site](#)). Despite the upcoming start of the olive harvest, nothing has been done to provide the necessary accommodation for seasonal workers. [The situation worsened](#) when people who were previously accommodated in the former cement factory were evicted once again.

### **Tunisian Diary**

In the Tunisian diary, our volunteer Ludovica reports on the living realities of migrants in Tunisia. [The fourth part](#) tells the story of Mr. Waffo, who lost his wife and son while attempting to cross the Mediterranean. The author details the difficulties Mr. Waffo faced in identifying and burying his family and how migrants are let down by Tunisian authorities and international organization.

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

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