



**COVID19 – CoronaUpdate Italy  
borderline-europe, Sicily – Part 18  
Palermo, 15.01.2021**



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*Note: as the corona situation currently determines all aspects of life, in future we will also include important events in these two-weekly short updates that are not directly related to the disease and its consequences.*

### Political and social situation

To draw attention to the inhumane conditions on the **quarantine ships**, more than **150 Italian and international organisations**, scientists and experts signed a document demanding that the Italian government should abolish the Quarantine ships.



Adequate, dignified accommodation on land should be the alternative. The Civil society continues to advocate for the rights of refugees and migrants: on 22 December 2020, some representatives of the organisations met with the Ombudsman for the Rights of Persons Detained or Deprived of their Personal Liberty, Mauro Palma, to discuss the practice of quarantine ships. Another event for the abolition of quarantine ships is being planned. [Here](#) you can find the full document.

On January 8th, borderline-europe took part in a mailbombing campaign directed at the Ministry of the Interior, among others. The reason for this was the death of **Abdallah Said**,

a minor refugee of Somali origin. He died on 15 September 2020 in a hospital in Catania after spending several days on the quarantine ship GNV Azzurra. After Bilal's and Abou's deaths, Ab-dallah's is another crime against refugees confined on ships in times of pandemic: Quarantine ships are not the appropriate place to provide medical care to minors and adults. The signatories demand the abolition of quarantine ships and adequate medical care for all refugees. [Here](#) you can find the E-Mail in German and Italian.

Associations such as borderline-europe, NGOs, activists and legal experts have written a letter to the Minister of the Interior, Luciana Lamorgese, calling for five **evacuation flights** from Libya to Italy. In the letter, they describe the urgency of evacuating people in need of special protection and criticise the general European asylum policy. Opening humanitarian corridors alone cannot be a sustainable solution, but it is the only way to save at least some people from Libya, a country at civil war. [Here](#) you can find the letter to the Minister of the Interior in German.

The Ministry of the Interior and the National Institute for the Support of the Migrant Population and the Fight against Poverty Diseases have decided to intensify their cooperation in order to increase the knowledge of the spread of the **coronavirus in reception centres**. The [agreement](#) is valid for the entire duration of the national emergency and provides for the organisation of information tools to best address the spread of the virus in reception centres. It remains to be seen whether anything will really change.

### About Rescue at Sea

The ship **Ocean Viking** of the civilian sea rescue organisation SOS Mediterranée has set sail again after [five months of blockade](#).

**Looking back at 2020** - arrivals increased: according to [UNHCR figures](#), 34,154 migrants and refugees arrived Italy by sea in the last 12 months. Unfortunately, 708 dead or missing persons were counted. There is no way of knowing how many people actually died at sea. In comparison, 11,471 migrants and refugees have ar-

rived in 2019, 750 dead or missing were counted. These losses are directly attributable to European asylum policy, which criminalises civilian sea rescues and does not prevent deaths in the Mediterranean. Many people trying to reach Italy by sea are intercepted by the so-called Libyan coast guard. In 2020, **11,265** people were returned to the civil war country of Libya.

Among the dead who risked the journey to Europe are repeatedly young teenagers and children. In December 2020, **four small children** washed up on the coast of Libya. They were aged between five and ten and probably died in a **boat accident involving 30 people** off the coast of Tunisia while trying to reach the Italian mainland.

After five days at sea, 50 people, mainly from **sub-Saharan Africa**, were picked up by the Tunisian military on 11 January. After contact with the boat broke off on 6 January, the people were only rescued when it was already too late. The **body of a baby** who had frozen to death was recovered on the boat.

The **Open Arms** rescued 256 people in two missions at the turn of the year. Among them were about **50 minors**, six of them babies, and a heavily pregnant woman. The minors will spend the quarantine in a reception centre in Sicily, while the adults will be transferred to the quarantine ship GNV Rhapsody.

On 9 January 2021, the preliminary hearing against the former Minister of the Interior, **Matteo Salvini**, who is charged with deprivation of liberty, took place in Palermo. The trial was postponed until **20 March 2021**. The Spanish sea rescue organisation Open Arms had rescued several boats with a total of around 160 people from 01.08.2019 to 10.08.2019 and had to wait until 21 August until a safe port was finally allocated. Salvini refused this entry without considering the mental and physical condition of the rescued people. Civil organisations and activists spoke out for the rights of refugees and sea rescue organisations and **protested** on the day of the trial in Palermo for the case to be clarified.



Sit in on 9. Januar in front of Aula Bunker in Palermo

On 23 December, the Regional Administrative Court of Palermo referred **Sea-Watch's** appeals against detentions of Sea-Watch 3 and Sea-Watch 4 to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). The Regional Administrative Court asked the European Court of Justice to rule on the legality of the application of European Directive 2009/16/EC (on Port State Control) to all foreign-flagged humanitarian vessels. The CJEU's decision is important as it could serve as a **precedent** for future cases. In order to await the CJEU's decision, the Palermo Administrative Court has postponed its decision until 26 January 2021.

On 5 January 2021, **Sea-Eye** filed a **complaint** against the detention of the rescue ship Alan Kurdi with the Italian Administrative Court in Cagliari. For three months, the Italian coast guard has been holding the Alan Kurdi in Olbia, Sardinia, after the crew of the rescue ship rescued 133 people in September. Now the court is to decide on the legality of the detention in summary proceedings, a trial date has not yet been set.

On 11 January 2021, the ordinary court of Rome dropped the lawsuit brought by **Mediterranea Saving Humans** against **Matteo Salvini**: The former interior minister had prevented the sea rescue ship Mare Jonio from entering a safe port. In August 2019, he issued a ban on entry, transit and stopping in Italian territorial waters against the Mare Jonio, even though the ship, which had only rescued around 100 people, still had many **children and pregnant women** on board. He justified this by

saying that the ship was supporting illegal immigration.

## Situation of Refugees

A report by [Borderline Sicilia](#) about interviews with migrants at Christmas time shows the hopeless situation of many. Especially in winter, people struggle with **homelessness and poverty**, sleeping on park benches or in abandoned train carriages. During the feast of charity, the refugees remain forgotten; "This is my eighth or ninth Christmas Eve that I spend on the street; maybe this year, thanks to the Virus, there are no people to disturb me with their firecrackers. For us it's the same miserable evening every time, alone under a blanket and a cardboard box, hoping it won't rain: This is my Christmas" - reports Malik, who lives without shelter in Palermo.

Corona reduces the number of volunteers - and the social exclusion of the people increases. The migrants and refugees not only have no access to information in the Covid hotels or on the quarantine ships, the virus also makes it difficult to find counselling appointments.

The organisation [Medu](#) (Doctors for Human Rights) reports on the living and working conditions of foreign agricultural workers employed in the citrus fruit harvest in the Gioia Tauro plain. They are more dramatic than ever, not only because of the **severe exploitation of labour**, but also because of the increasing precariousness of social housing conditions. The pandemic would have found fertile ground in the precarious settlements, where [poor sanitary conditions](#) have favoured the rapid spread of infection.

For more information on the situation in Italy, see our [Steiflicht Italien](#) and our previous [Corona updates](#) on our [homepage](#).

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