



**COVID19 – CoronaUpdate Italy  
borderline-europe, Sicily – Part 19  
Palermo, 11.02.2021**



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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

Politically, Italy is in a delicate situation with a **government crisis** during the Corona pandemic. The Italia Viva party of former head of government Matteo Renzi tried to **overthrow the current government**. Two ministers of Italia viva resigned. The vote of confidence, which was held in both chambers (the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate), was won both times by a very narrow margin by the ruling Prime Minister Conte.

The newspaper [Sole24ore](#) sums up the situation as follows: "The prime minister is half a winner: he has received the support but finds himself with a weakened majority; the leader of Italia viva has lost the bet and risks the flight of the deputies from Iv [Italia viva]; the Pd [Partito democratico] now fears competition from a party of Conte and Salvini is not sure about betting everything on the elections".

Italy continues to hold its breath as Giuseppe Conte submitted his **resignation** on 26 January after trying to expand the **government majority**. He is still in office for current business, but within 48 hours it will be decided whether a new majority can be formed after all, or whether Conte will ultimately leave. You can read here how things might go from [here](#). What is certain, however, is that this critical political phase will only end with the swearing-in of a new prime minister and his ministers by President Mattarella.

The [Rome Court](#) has ruled that **Italian refoulements to Slovenia are illegitimate**. Since spring 2020, the Italian Ministry of the Interior has ordered an increasing number of refoulements at the Italian-Slovenian border. The court ruled, following an appeal by lawyers for a Pakistani man who arrived in Trieste, that

these **refoulements violate constitutional obligations** and international law, and that migrants on the Balkan route, including asylum seekers, are knowingly subjected to "inhuman and degrading treatment" and "torture by the Croatian police". They are kicked on the back, beaten with batons wrapped in barbed wire, sprayed with pepper spray and chased by dogs.

Like many others, the Pakistani had been deported from Slovenia to Croatia and then to Bosnia.

These informal expulsions (at least **1,400** in 2020) take place within the framework of a bilateral agreement between the two border countries from 1996, which has never been ratified by the Italian Parliament. They have now been recognised as a clear violation of, among others, the Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

### About Rescue at Sea

On 13 January, the **Open Arms** team was finally able to end their **quarantine** in Porto Empedocle. A week later, they set off again for [Barcelona](#) to prepare for the next mission.

Also on 13 January, the slightly different arrival of **26 people** was discovered at the port of Salerno. Officers of the Maritime Coastal Police discovered them trying to get out of two containers that had arrived on a ship from Turkey. The ship had left Aliaga on Monday evening, so the 20 adults and 6 unaccompanied minors were probably locked in the containers for more than three days. Fortunately, they are all in good health. But the adults are denied entry to Italy, while the minors are entrusted to the social services of the city of Salerno.

On 19 January, we mourned the death of at least **43 people** in a **shipwreck** just off the Libyan coast. 10 people were taken back to Libya by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

The following day, another 48 people (including 1 woman and 11 minors) were brought back to Libya. This **illegal pull-back** was observed by the [Moonbird](#), Sea Watch's plane.

The ship Fezzan of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard arrested the people and took them to the unsafe port of Tripoli. Even though the [Alarm Phone](#) had informed the authorities and a Frontex plane was spotted near the boat, Italian authorities did not intervene. Of those affected, three were from Burkina Faso, six from Cameroon, one from Egypt, seven from Guinea, five from the Ivory Coast, five from Liberia, 17 from Mali, one from Somalia, one from Sudan and two from Togo.

On 20 January, after several days without arrivals in Italy, there were two autonomous arrivals on [Lampedusa](#) with **30 Tunisians**. About 10 of them are deaf. After a Covid rapid test, they were taken to the hotspot for identity verification. On 25 January, 27 of them, including those in need of special protection, were taken to the quarantine ship [Rhapsody](#).

The **Ocean Viking** rescued **119 people** from an overcrowded inflatable boat in distress 37 nautical miles from the Libyan coast on 21 January after the Alarm Phone received a call and alerted the authorities. The Sea Watch [Moonbird](#) aircraft searched for the vessel after receiving the alert. Among those rescued were four children, the youngest only one month old. The following day, the Ocean Viking rescued another 149 people from two inflatable boats in distress, again 37 nautical miles from the Libyan coast. Later in the day, another dinghy was spotted in distress and 106 people were rescued 28 nautical miles from the Libyan coast. On 23 January, a heavily pregnant woman was evacuated by the Italian Coast Guard, while the Ocean Viking had to wait until 24 January to bring the **373 other survivors** to Augusta. For the quarantine of the rescued, the [GNV Adriatico](#) was driven from Trapani to Augusta.



The Ocean Viking. Foto: [SOS Méditerranée](#)

A shipwreck on 24 January killed **17 people**. The 82 survivors of the boat, with which the **Alarm Phone** had contact, were forced back to Libya by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. In the middle of the night of 25 January, 45 sub-Saharanans were taken on board by the **Italian coast guard** from a rubber dinghy almost at the border with international waters.

In the morning of the same day, the **Asso 30** arrived at the port of Lampedusa with another 75 sub-Saharanans. After an initial health check, all 120 rescued refugees were taken to the Lampedusa [hotspot](#), where 31 people were already being held. Two quarantine ships are currently in operation.

The **hearing** on the measures blocking the [Sea Watch](#) ships was postponed to 23 February. A ruling by the regional administrative court on the Sea Watch 4 determination was expected on 26 January, but it postponed the decision as it wants to wait for the ECJ.

### Situation of Refugees

Since 16 January 2021, [Sicily](#) has become a "red zone" due to high infection rates. This means that most of the social services that were still offered to refugees can no longer take place in the form in which they were previously able to. Now we have to wait and see what will be possible from 1 February, when the restriction will be lifted.

A [Tunisian](#) convicted of human smuggling died in Termini Imerese prison on 24 January. In June 2020, his conviction had been confirmed



and somewhat reduced. The body is being autopsied. Even though the prison management says it was a cardiac arrest, the circumstances of an assault suffered in the cell are still being clarified.

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

#### Contact

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