



Scirocco
borderline-europe, Sicily - Part 4
Palermo, 06.05.2021



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Scirocco [ʃiˈrɔkko-Sirocco] is a southeasterly, hot strong wind that carries dust and sand across the Mediterranean to Sicily and Italy's north for often only a few hours. These news in brief in the age of the pandemic will be published from March 2021 in an approx. bi-weekly rhythm. Scirocco replaces the Corona Update Italy.

Political and Social situation

On May 3, the President of the Sicilian Region, [Nello Musumeci](#), met with [Prefect Michele Di Bari](#), Head of the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior. One of the topics of the meeting was the expansion of reception centres for migrants and refugees. First, the **hotspot in Lampedusa is to be expanded** and its capacity increased fourfold. The current capacity is said to be around 200 people (the number fluctuates constantly in the press). This would mean that 800 people could officially be crammed there. Musumeci also asked for the opening of more "villages for seasonal workers", provided that the population agrees, which is rather rare.

In mid-April, the Italian Ministry of Infrastructure and Sustainable Mobility had put out to **tender five ferries** to be used as **so-called quarantine ships** for newly arrived refugees over sea. Grandi Navi Veloci (GNV), which has repeatedly provided its ferries for months, has applied again despite the government's reduced funding and will provide all five 'quarantine ships'. Therefore, the restriction of fundamental rights through [deprivation of liberty on ships](#) continues.

In Palermo, something absurd happened regarding the **vaccination of homeless peo-**

ple, among them many migrants and refugees from the city's largest emergency shelter: a privately run [museum](#) in a bourgeois district has made its halls available since the end of April for a promotional vaccination campaign including a visit to the museum. The people concerned had to be brought by bus there instead of setting up vaccinations in homeless shelters and centres at the points where the people are staying.

About Rescue at Sea

A lot has happened on the Mediterranean in recent days and weeks. The EU has again proven several times that it accepts the loss of human life without batting an eyelid in order to "secure its borders". Compared to last year, the death toll in the central Mediterranean has more than tripled. [More than 500 people](#) died in the first four months of 2021 on the dangerous crossing to Europe. In the previous year, 150 people died in the same period.



The South Coast of Lampedusa

The [Alarm Phone](#) reports how 130 people came to death who were on board a boat that the relevant authorities in Italy, Malta and Libya had been informed of two days earlier and failed to act. When the Ocean Viking finally arrived at the boat on April 22, it was already too late. They found no more survivors. At the same time, another boat had set off with about [100 people](#), but they

were taken back to Libya. A mother and her child did not survive.

Based on the tragic shipwreck, eight humanitarian search and rescue organisations wrote an [open letter](#) to the Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi calling for an urgent search and rescue operation to prevent more lives from being left in the Mediterranean and to respect the law of the sea, which states that people in distress at sea must be rescued.

The [Sea-Watch 4](#) was able to set sail again after months of blockade and rescued a total of 455 people from six boats within a very short time. During one rescue, the Sea Rescue Organisation was asked by [Malta](#) not to intervene. The crew of the ship also witnessed three '[pull-backs](#)' back to Libya (repatriations by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard). As with the people rescued by the Ocean Viking (236 rescued, of whom 114 were unaccompanied minors), a large part of the people on board the Sea-Watch 4 were unaccompanied minors.

In early May, the Alarm Phone had alerted to a boat with a broken engine in international waters with about 95 people on board. In a [joint statement](#), Alarm Phone and Mediterranean Saving Humans explain in detail what happened afterwards.

More deaths have occurred due to the lack of legal entry routes: according to the International Organisation for Migration ([IOM](#)), there were at least 11 dead and 12 survivors off the Libyan coast. Shortly afterwards, Al Arabiya Agency reported another shipwreck with [at least 50 dead](#), citing a statement from the Libyan Red Crescent.

Situation of the refugees

At the end of April, a [Tunisian mother, Jalila](#), managed to bring **her dead sons home from Sicily**. Hedi and Mehdi had

drowned in a shipwreck in November 2019 while trying to reach the Italian coast from Bizerte in Tunisia. Their bodies had been washed ashore the Italian coast a few months later. In order to identify them, the Italian prosecutor in charge published photos of the tattoos. Jalila recognised them and set all wheels in motion to bring her children, long since buried in Sicily, to Tunisia, no easy feat for people who have already been buried. Jalila's story is unusual because most parents of children missing at sea can never mourn them in a cemetery.



Jalila, Palermo - Photo: Silvia Di Meo

But it is not only Jalila's story. On her return to Tunisia, she met other mothers of the disappeared, she wants to create a memory for them, to give meaning to their deaths. "My children have been the engine of enquiry, now they will be the engine of justice for all the children of the Mediterranean. In the face of these crimes, we cannot sit back and do nothing." Jalila's story will soon be published in German on the website of [Borderline Sicilia](#).

In the **Sicilian village of Cassibile** near Syracuse, a [container village for seasonal workers](#) opened at the end of April. Up to 80 people

can live here during the harvest. Cassibile, like other harvest villages, has been known for years for its precarious accommodation and working situation. The vegetables and fruit that we get on the table are harvested by migrants and asylum seekers under intolerable conditions. Most of the time, the harvest workers live under plastic sheets or in condemned houses. The work is organised by so-called caporali, who organise the transport to the fields for a fee. Those who do not manage to fill 100 boxes of 20 kg each with the respective harvest are not allowed to continue working. [A daily wage of 30-40 euros for 9-10 hours of work](#) is not uncommon.

Now, after years of doing nothing, the city of Syracuse has constructed the container village in the village so that the workers, who are in Italy on a regular basis, can stay there during the harvest. But nothing is gratis: despite the lousy wages, they still have to pay two euros for the bed. Many residents of Cassibile think the container village is an imposition. "Cassibile wants to live and doesn't deserve all this" is written on the protest posters of the protesters who are close to the right-wing parties.

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

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