

borderline-europe, Sizilien

# SCIROCCO

*News from Italy*



Scirocco [ʃiˈrɔkko-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

### EU migration policy

The Italian government continues to rely on cooperation with non-European third countries on migration issues, despite numerous reports of systematic human rights violations. As is the case every year, the summer months see an increase in the arrival of people seeking protection on Italy's Mediterranean islands. Instead of learning from the politically induced supply emergencies of previous years and looking for adequate solutions, Italian policy repeatedly focuses on increasing Italy's isolation. In an interview, Italian Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi stressed the importance of a "strategic and cooperative approach" to manage, together with the main countries of origin and transit, the numerous arrivals on Italian coasts during the summer months. With regard to the closure of the Mediterranean Sea by the Tunisian and so-called Libyan coast guards, Piantedosi stated in an [interview](#) that the two coast guards had already **intercepted and returned more than 40,000 people** to North Africa this year. In the context of the humanitarian emergency and violence against refugees and migrants in Tunisia and Libya, he argued that the EU was behind the cooperation and that there was no reason to doubt that the living conditions of migrants were at the center. As the numerous [reports](#) and [investigative researches](#) of the last years on human rights violations by the EU at its borders show, this statement is a big lie.

Despite the humanitarian and political crisis in Tunisia, which has led to extreme racist violence against Black migrants, the [agreement between the EU and Tunisia](#) was signed. Giorgia Meloni stressed that these agreements would become models for other North African countries. Afterwards, the negotiators - besides Meloni, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the President of the European Council, Charles Michel -

spoke in front of an **audience from which journalists were excluded** and were not given the opportunity to ask questions.

Despite the criticism of numerous civil and humanitarian [organizations](#) as well as ASGI (Association for Legal Studies on Immigration) of the new Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and Tunisia, the Italian government, together with representatives of the European Commission, continues to pursue its political strategy of migration defense at an **international summit in Rome** initiated by Italian Prime Minister [Giorgia Meloni](#). At the "[Conference on Development and Migration](#)", in addition to the Med-5 countries of the EU (Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Italy and Spain), representatives of North African and Arab countries discussed "common and cooperative" strategies to block migration movements across the Mediterranean to Europe.

For weeks, NGOs have been denouncing the consequences of such an agreement based on the "Tunisian model" for migrants and refugees on the ground. According to this, the EU provides the Tunisian state with 105 million euros to "combat unauthorized immigration". **"No agreements on our skin"** is the slogan of the [African Counter Summit](#) in Rome, organized by the NGOs Refugees in Libya and Mediterranean Saving Humans with the participation of activists\* from different African countries to tell a different story of migration. [Mediterranea Saving Humans](#) spoke of a "shameful agreement" and recalled how memoranda and military, as well as commercial agreements between the EU or Italy and dictatorial, anti-democratic regimes of sub-Saharan Mediterranean countries are used to **prevent women, men, and children from leaving for the EU**.



Picture: Mike Stevens, Unsplash

At the same time, these agreements increased the likelihood of arbitrary arrests. [Médecins Sans Frontières](#) noted that the future would be even more dangerous for those fleeing and that the Rome summit was another step toward externalizing Europe's external borders to so-called third countries where "the risk of exploitation, violence, torture and other serious and well-documented violations of fundamental rights" was high. [Amnesty International](#) also expressed concerns about human rights violations by Tunisian authorities and classified the agreement as a reinforcement of failed migration policies.

### Italian politics

While Giorgia Meloni signed the Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and Tunisia in Tunis, [Valerio Valenti](#), EU Commissioner for the "Migration Emergency", announced new temporary first reception facilities, modeled on the hotspot in Lampedusa, for the regions of Sicily and Calabria. After the adoption of the "Piantedosi Decree" this spring, several [integration projects in small towns](#) in southern Italy complain about the difficult situation on the ground. In recent years, these initiatives have allowed many migrants to be welcomed into small communities, where they found a safe home and at the same time made an important contribution to the revitalization of the often abandoned towns. With the introduction of the decree, these projects were blocked. Caritas and Tavolo Asilo also criticize the **unacceptable conditions of public tenders for**

**reception centers**, which are characterized by intransparency and corruption. The Italian government itself claims that everything is going according to plan and that there have always been local problems.

[Italy's Conference of Regions](#), a policy coordination body, said the country was experiencing a **"very big failure" in receiving migrants**. While regions with left-wing governments wanted more freedom in managing resettlements, regions with right-wing governments called for a national authority that would take over the organization of migration itself and relieve the regions.

With the new **"decreto flussi"**, which has now been passed by the Italian government, about **half a million workers** are to come to Italy in the next three years. This is remarkable in that it is the highest number of migrant workers ever targeted by an Italian government.

Members of the [Partito Democratico \(PD\)](#) called on the Italian government not to delay the docking of rescue ships in Italian ports. Previously, the government had decided to land **346 rescued refugees and migrants** in two phases in the ports of Marina di Carrara and Livorno, over 70 km away. This decision was strongly criticized because it made it difficult to provide humanitarian and medical care as well as assistance to the arriving people.

In a **dispute between politicians and judges**, the Italian government admonished the courts and declared that the state was not obliged to issue visas for humanitarian reasons. Instead, humanitarian corridors and organized evacuations would be used to reach Italy regularly and legally. Who would be allowed to enter Italy would be decided by the government, according to the Foreign Ministry. The [dispute](#) arose from a decision by the court in Rome, which allowed the appeal of an Iranian citizen against the blocking of his evacuation from Iran.

[ASGI](#), [EMERGENCY](#), [Médecins Sans Frontières \(MSF\)](#), [Oxfam Italy](#) and [SOS Humanity](#) have filed a complaint with the European Commission asking for an examination of the new Italian law on "migration

management" (Law No. 15/2023). The NGOs point out that the new law raises serious **concerns about its compatibility with EU law and Member States' obligations under international law** regarding search and rescue (SAR) missions at sea. They accuse the Italian government of thereby hindering civilian search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea and **affecting the rights of migrants and refugees**.

### Lampedusa

The hotspot Contrada Imbriacola on Lampedusa is overcrowded despite the use of airplanes, ferries and military ships for the transfer of refugees and migrants to the Sicilian mainland. At the moment, **more than 3,000 people** are again arriving at the 400 designated places of the hotspot. A conflict between around 100 young people who have been detained in the hotspot for several weeks has left 15 people injured. It is unclear what caused the conflict. However, **resentment** among the up to **1,150 minors** is high, as many of them have been in the hotspot for several weeks, while adults do not stay there for more than 36 hours. The bureaucratic procedures for minors are more complicated, which at least partly explains the longer waiting times. The ban on leaving the hotspot is another source of frustration for those who have to stay for weeks in a facility that is far too small. Since some people have once again managed to climb over the fences, monitoring of the hotspot has now been doubled, according to the authorities.

Lampedusa **fisherwo\*men have been protesting** since July 19 against the use of fishing vessels for transfers between the hotspot and other facilities in Sicily, as they complain of economic losses due to the foreign use of their boats. **Salvatore Martello**, head of the Lampedusa Fisherwo\*men's Consortium, said he understood the difficult situation on the island caused by the numerous arrivals, but did not think it was fair that fisherwo\*men had to pay the price. "If the president does not receive us or does not find a solution to our problem, we are ready to strike and we will blockade the port for the entire duration of the strike," he added.



Picture: Giuseppe Gallo, Unsplash

In view of the high arrival figures on Lampedusa, the EU Commission is now supporting the **Contrada Imbriacola hotspot** on Lampedusa with an **emergency aid of 14 million euros**. This is intended to improve conditions for refugees in the overcrowded reception center and provide clothing, food and medicine, among other things.

In addition, the Italian government is currently planning to build a **new hotspot** in Porto Empedocle (Agrigento, Sicily) to alleviate the burden on Lampedusa. This is intended to speed up identification procedures and enable rapid transfers to other reception facilities. The groups **"Fare rete"** and **"Sos razzismo"** from Agrigento fear similar conditions as in Lampedusa, and clearly position themselves against the emergence of another overcrowded facility where human dignity is not respected. The problems of Italian authorities - from the organization to the transfer and distribution, to the hearing of protection seekers - are rooted, among other things, in the system of hotspots itself, which leads to the **irregularization of many people** by dividing arriving refugees into two classes (potential asylum seekers vs. others). Work on the new facility is already nearing completion. The new **"tension structure"** will replace the one decommissioned at the port of Porto Empedocle and, according to authorities, will serve a "safe and efficient environment for the transit and identification of

migrants." The previous facility was deemed unsuitable due to its proximity to the city center.

### The situation of the refugees

Once again there was a fire in an unofficial camp for refugees, this time in a [settlement of Crotone](#). In the approximately fifty huts lived more than 200 people, **most of whom had lost their residence permits due to the so-called security decrees**. The twenty or so people present were rescued unharmed, but they lost everything in the fire.

### Admission in Northern Italy

In the [Veneto](#), **there is disagreement about the organization of the reception of migrants** and refugees, especially within the right-wing party Lega. Proponents of decentralized reception are opposed to those who are in favour of expanding the (anti-migration) hotspot and deportation system. Due to the expected high number of arrivals, the first military tents have already been erected in [Verona](#) not far from the former NATO site at the Torricelle to organize the accommodation of arriving people.

Meanwhile, the prefects, the president of the region and the ANCI signed a [joint protocol for the distribution of refugees and migrants](#) to receive the approximately 200 arriving migrants and refugees - who are usually on the onward journey but are turned away at the borders and therefore have to be housed in northern Italy on a makeshift basis. The goal is to **avoid critical situations and a concentration of people** like in the municipalities of Cona and Bagnoli and instead to implement a broad-based reception. Many mayors do not agree with this.

"After years of making propaganda on the skin of unfortunate people, inciting hatred against foreigners\* and winning votes with the cry "Let's close the ports", Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her party Fratelli d'Italia are today discovering the difference between simple populism and the difficulty of managing such a complex phenomenon," said the [mayors\\* of the municipalities of the Unione dei Comuni Empolese Valdelsa](#), underlining the concrete emergency in which the municipalities currently find

themselves: In the **first six months of 2023 alone, there were almost 70,000 arrivals**, compared to less than 30,000 in the whole of 2022. The mayors\* call on the government under Meloni to tell the truth, immigration cannot and must not be stopped. Instead, the **necessary means are needed to organize the reception in a humane way**, otherwise those affected will end up in overcrowded centers where they will be "crammed like animals".



Picture: *Borderline Sicilia*

### Precarious reception situation in Massa Carrara

After the arrival of the civilian rescue ship Geo Barents in Massa Carrara, the [director of the cooperative "Casa Betania"](#) criticized that the arrivals would increase, while the existing structures that serve the reception would decrease. One of the last arrivals of refugees of the Geo Barents would have let her sleep on a sofa because **there were no more places**. The cooperative "Casa Betania" currently manages 12 CAS, two of which house unaccompanied minors.

### Migrant protests

In the [polifunctional center of Pian de Lago in Caltanissetta/Sicily](#) - which includes both a reception center for asylum seekers (CARA) and a deportation center (CPR) - about 100 migrants and refugees protested for better hygienic conditions, the payment of the pocket money available to them and for the **possibility to learn Italian**. Only a few weeks earlier, [protests](#) had already taken place there against the detention and imminent repatriation of some migrants.

At the deportation center in Via Corelli in Milano, the **inhumane conditions** of the facility also triggered an uprising: In protest, a young man decided to set fire to his mattress and the few objects at his disposal, whereupon a column of black smoke rose from the windows. 23 people were evacuated, no one was injured.

### **An insight into the work of Arci Porco Rosso**

The article "[Six months of the contact point Sans-Papiers](#)" by Arci Porco Rosso gives an insight into the project of the association in the first half of the year. Porco Rosso offers various types of support free of charge. These include legal and social support, assistance in finding housing, bureaucratic and administrative support in obtaining documents. They also offer comprehensive information, on the right to medical care and access to health services, as well as on how to access education, training, and employment.

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

Contact

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