

borderline-europe, Sicily

# SCIROCCO

*News from Italy*



Scirocco [ʃiˈrɔkko-Scirocco] is a southeasterly, hot strong wind that carries dust and sand across the Mediterranean Sea to Sicily and 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

### Cutro Investigations

There are new developments in the [investigation](#) into the failure of Frontex, the Italian Coast Guard and the Guardia di Finanza to carry out a rescue in connection with the Cutro shipwreck that left 94 dead (including 35 children) and 30 missing. As already known, a Frontex aircraft sighted the boat and then alerted the Guardia di Finanza, which allegedly sent a motorboat to search for the boat, but they did not due to bad [weather conditions](#) at sea. Now, with the help of a search warrant issued by the Crotona Prosecutor's Office, three officers along with non-commissioned officers of the Guardia di Finanza (named Lippolis, Vardaro and Lo Presti) and three other unnamed individuals were added to the register of suspects in early June. Cell phones and tablets belonging to the suspects were also seized. As a [report by Lighthouse](#) points out, both the Italian authorities and Frontex knew that the vessel showed signs of distress (due to bad weather, lack of life jackets, and the overloading of the boat) and that there were probably [migrants on board](#). Nevertheless, the authorities decided not to intervene and later they tried to hide how much they knew.



*Cemetery of Serre in Cutro, Photo: Martina Gentile*

According to the lawyer [Francesco Verri](#), the state has "a clear responsibility". The lawyers of some of the

victims' families are also planning to file a lawsuit at the European Court of Human Rights.

### Bilateral relations Italy Libya

According to the [Italian Ministry of the Interior](#), thousands of migrants have arrived in Italy since the beginning of the year from the part of Libya controlled by Prime Minister Dbeibah of the transitional government and from Khalifa Haftar-dominated Cyrenaica. In both parts of Libya, increasingly harsh measures are being used to prevent people from fleeing. [The prime minister of Libya's interim government](#) has ordered combat drones to be used against so-called alleged "people smugglers." Both Italy and Turkey are supporting the president in this mission. For example, [a recent military operation in Zawiya](#) destroyed seven boats and six warehouses where fuel was allegedly stored. However, it is also alleged that the Libyan prime minister is using this cover to fight his political rivals with the help of the aforementioned financial resources from abroad.

In addition, the action taken against refugees in [Haftar-controlled Cyrenaica](#) is intensifying. A fishing boat with about 500 migrants on board was intercepted and returned to Benghazi. It is believed that the meeting between Haftar and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni led to this turnaround. In addition, there was a rapprochement between Italy and Egypt, an important ally of Haftar, which has great influence in Cyrenaica. On the other hand, [Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni](#) received the Prime Minister of Libya's Transitional Government of National Unity, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, and a delegation of Libyan ministers for an intergovernmental summit in Rome. The summit focused on migration and energy. Deputy Prime Ministers Antonio Tajani and Matteo Salvini were joined by Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi. Claudio Descalzi, CEO of Italian energy company Eni, signed an agreement with the head of Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC). Meloni also reiterated her commitment to support the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

## Bilateral relations Italy Tunisia

Prime Minister Meloni, during the bilateral meeting with Tunisian President Kais Saied in Tunisia, stressed the importance of joint work and plans to intensify cooperation with the Tunisian authorities to prevent people from fleeing. In this framework, Italy is pushing for the release by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of [financing of around \\$2 billion](#) for Tunisia, which was approved in October. However, this depends on adequate guarantees of both reforms and respect for democratic rules on the part of Tunisia's President Saied. Tunisia, with its twelve million inhabitants, is facing national bankruptcy due to loan repayments that are due. [At the EU level](#), Italy has already taken concrete steps to help Tunisia. Italy is advocating for an integrated support package with financial resources.

## Poverty as a reason for flight according to the Court of Cassation

According to a [recent ruling of the highest Italian court](#), it is permissible to protect a migrant for economic reasons under the aspect of humanitarian aid, if poverty in his/her home country violates the dignity of the person. The Ministry of Interior had appealed against the decision of the Court of Appeal, which had granted a residence permit to a non-EU citizen contrary to the previous ruling of the first instance court. The Court of Appeal had recognized the migrant's release from an undignified situation of poverty, while the Ministry of Interior had considered that there were insufficient humanitarian grounds for the protection granted.

## Red Cross manages Lampedusa hotspot

Since the first of June, the hotspot Contrada Imbriacola on Lampedusa has been managed by the Italian Red Cross. The Badia Grande cooperative, which had been in charge of the facility for the previous 15 months, was previously accused of leadership incompetence and poor treatment of residents. [A spokesperson defended the cooperative](#), pointing to the exceptionally high numbers of arrivals

that had made it impossible to provide adequate care at the hotspot. After the takeover of the Red Cross, [the Prefect of Lampedusa stated in a press conference](#) that the equipment and conditions in the hotspot had clearly changed for the better. Sufficient beds, a canteen, garbage collection and even entertainment facilities, especially for minors, are now available, he said. These changes were made possible in particular by the Emergency Directive and the Piantedosi Decree (we reported [here](#) and [here](#)).



Photo: [unsplash](#)

While the mobilization of funds and the provision of decent services and accommodations are to be welcomed, the rhetoric of the emergency, however, must be viewed critically. Indeed, there has been an ongoing supply and shelter emergency on the island in recent years, but it has been systematic in nature and owed to a deliberate political line. The discourse, on the other hand, suggests that the emergency was due to the arrival of refugees. However, for many years, the arrival of people seeking protection has represented a normal state of affairs, not a state of emergency, which, with proper planning and logistics, would not pose a problem. The fact that provision of the absolute necessities, is touted as success and progress, makes it clear that for years a planned undersupply prevailed in the hotspot. After initially praising the more dignified treatment of refugees, the prefect then conceded in his speech that this treatment should be reserved only for those entitled to a residence permit and that greater emphasis should be placed on the immediate repatriation of those who had no prospect of asylum in Europe. The idea of building a detention center for deportees on

the island could not be ruled out. This would mean that people would be deprived of the right to an appropriate individual asylum examination and would be deported immediately upon arrival based on general criteria such as the country of origin.

## Situation of the refugees

### Migrants trapped in a bureaucratic state of uncertainty

The Antiracist Assembly of Trento criticizes that [up to 230 migrants are excluded from the reception system](#). More than 200 people are waiting for access to the asylum procedure in the provincial capital alone. The exact number of migrants on the ground is difficult to determine. According to [Roberto Zaccaria](#), president of the Italian Refugee Council, there is no uncontrollable crisis in Italy, but **a lack of European commitment to sea rescue and support for arriving migrants**. Activists accuse the Government Commissariat, the Province of Trento and the Police Headquarters of creating "intangible barriers" that make life difficult for asylum seekers. For example, they are asked to indicate a place of residence, which is difficult for newly arrived migrants. This prevents them from entering the reception system and registering their asylum application. Activists criticize the requirement of residence as a condition for applying for asylum as an unacceptable practice. The Province of Trento is also blocking reception places in the provincial system and violating Italian law. Migrants who do not have access to the reception system are often forced to live on the streets. The police chief of Trento, [Maurizio Improta](#), rejects the accusations and stresses that the procedures required by law must be followed. He explains that residency is compatible with the law and that it is important to know the whereabouts of migrants. Improta invites the associations that support migrants to a meeting to discuss the issue.

### Capacities overloaded at the Italian French border

The capacity of the Terrasses Solidaires solidarity shelter on the Italian French border is overloaded due

to the [arrival of people](#) fleeing racist violence in Tunisia. The shelter in Briançon, less than 10 km from the border, normally has room for 64 people, but currently houses 100 people. Last week, the number of arrivals peaked at 138 people, Capucine Mounal and Arthur Blanchard, spokespersons for the shelter told [Middle East Eye](#). The high train fares have led to several groups of new arrivals being stuck in the center. In recent months, Africans from countries south of the Sahara have fled Tunisia for Italy due to the political situation on the ground (we reported [here](#) and [here](#)). Briançon is already familiar with the inflow of people, as the Terrasses Solidaires shelter was created in 2015 to house people from the disbanded refugee camp in Calais. The shelter now relies on donations and volunteers to care for the people, while the state has not provided any assistance so far. Instead, border policemen and military police have been deployed to carry out illegal pushbacks at the border. Terrasses Solidaires is calling on the state to provide more transport links, subsidize tickets and provide emergency shelter in nearby empty vacation homes. "We are sounding the alarm for the state to implement policies that are humane and respectful of migrants' rights," Terraces Solidaires said in a press release.

### Dormitory without water and light: the African Community demands "dignity"

A [protest march](#) against the inhumane conditions in the facility for migrants took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June in the streets of Brindisi. **There has been no hot water for a year and no electricity since December**. The *African community* in Brindisi demands dignity for the guests of the shelter in Via Provinciale San Vito. The *African community* itself and various associations in the region are also demanding that the problems in the dilapidated building be fixed. These problems are part of the more complex issue of integrating foreign workers. Many of them are unable to find rental housing despite regular employment contracts because the owners demand conditions that are unrealizable for migrants. The demonstration was also organized to highlight the

conditions in CPR (detention centers for deportees) across the country, which also house migrants with psychiatric illnesses that are incompatible with the operation of these facilities.

**On our own behalf: Bank accounts - Not even capitalism is for everyone?**

The [new article](#) "Bank accounts – Not even capitalism is for everyone?" of our monitoring project with Porco Rosso highlights the problems that migrants in Italy face when it comes to opening their own bank account and consequently being denied access to an economic life.

**Further information on the situation in Italy can be found under "Projects" on our [homepage](#) and in previous issues of [Scirocco](#).**

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DER EINZELFALL ZÄHLT.

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