



August 2026

CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN INFO

Arrivals

According to data collected by *borderline-europe*, **2,856** people on the move/asylum seekers reached Italy by sea in August 2026 representing a significant increase of **93%**¹ compared to July's figures. Compared to data from the previous year, a sharp decrease in arrivals is evident. With more than **5,000** people arriving at Italy's shores in August 2025, arrivals in August 2026 were **46%** lower. The majority of people (**2,290** individuals, or **80%**) arrived in Sicily – primarily Lampedusa, representing a decrease also compared to August 2025. The trend of a wider distribution of arrivals across the country, which was noted in recent months, is continuing with rising numbers in Calabria (**81**), Abruzzo (**137**) and Emilia-Romagna (**138**), which can be attributed solely to the Italian authorities' allocation of safe havens to civilian sea rescue vessels. Sicily nevertheless remains the primary point of disembarkation.

According to our figures, in August **1,482** people (**52%**) were rescued by Italian authorities, while a total of **714** people (**25%**) were rescued by civilian sea rescue services. In July, the percentage was similarly high. Frontex was involved in the rescue of **86** people (**3%**).

The number of independent arrivals is strikingly high, especially compared to the same month last year and July 2026. **430** people (**15%**) reached Italian territorial waters (12 nautical miles off the coast) independently this month, without having been intercepted or rescued beforehand. In July, we recorded only **15** independent arrivals, compared to **174** in the same month last year. Of the 430 independent arrivals in August, **370** landed in Sicily, which is unusual. Independent arrivals have so far been recorded more regularly in Sardinia, with the coast often being reached from Algeria. The reasons for the increase in independent arrivals in Sicily cannot yet be clearly determined, though we will continue to monitor this issue in the coming months.

According to official figures from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, **2,930** people arrived in Italy in August. We verified slightly lower arrival figures for this month, but we would like to note that we do not have access to the background information or sources underlying the figures published by the Ministry of the Interior.

¹ Sea arrivals to Italy have been significantly lower in summer 2026 compared with the previous year(s). The reasons for this decline cannot be determined conclusively on the basis of the available data. Possible contributing factors may include increased interceptions and returns at sea, as well as intensified controls and restrictions affecting people on the move before departure. At the same time, migration routes are highly dynamic and can shift in response to changing conditions in countries of origin, transit and departure, as well as to developments along the routes themselves. The lower number of recorded arrivals should therefore not be understood as necessarily indicating a decrease in the number of people attempting to migrate, but may also reflect changes in routes, interception practices and the ability of people to reach European shores. Unless otherwise stated, all percentages cited refer to the total number of people who arrived in Italy by sea this month.

Overview of the data collected by <i>borderline europe</i>	
Arrivals of people on the move in Italy by sea	2,856
Arrivals of people on the move in Sicily	2,290
Rescues by Italian authorities and Frontex	1,609
Rescues by NGOs	714
Independent arrivals of people in the move	430
Rescues by merchant vessels	0
Mode of arrival unknown	103

These figures are subject to change, as the number of unreported cases could be significantly higher.

Push- & Pullbacks

This month, we recorded **1,121²** interceptions in the Central Mediterranean, during which boats carrying PoM were pulled back or towed to the North African coast. The majority of the intercepted individuals were towed back to Libya, (**1,060** individuals, or **95%**). **61** people were brought back to Tunisia. These figures are not considered certain, as the actual number could be much higher and probably there are also interceptions / pull backs to other countries of departure. Compared to July 2026, when **1,230** interceptions were recorded, the number of documented pullbacks has decreased slightly this month.

These developments continue to highlight the systematic practice of keeping asylum seekers travelling along the Central Mediterranean route away from safe ports in the EU, as well as the persistently high level of danger for PoM at sea.

² Interceptions are violent pushbacks at sea back to a third country. For example, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard—which is largely financed and equipped by Italy and other EU member states—carries out interceptions by intercepting boats on their way to Europe and forcibly returning them to Libya.

Death & Missing:

In August the number of deaths and missing people in the Central Mediterranean increased significantly compared to July. According to our figures **104** people died whilst fleeing across the Central Mediterranean in August, while the fate of **21** people is still unknown, with the estimated number of unrecorded cases assumed to be significantly higher. In July 2026, we recorded 58 fatalities and missing persons, which represents a 115% increase this month compared to the previous month.

What we have been reporting on for months has once again set a sad record this month. While the Italian government celebrates the decline in PoM arrivals on Italy's coasts as a political success, it is turning a blind eye to the growing mass grave into which the central Mediterranean has been turning for years. These deaths are the direct consequence of deadly EU migration policies, which are steadily intensifying cooperation with actors that have been documented to violate human rights and carry out illegal pushbacks on a daily basis. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum continues and further entrenches this policy of externalisation and deterrence, thereby intensifying the deadly consequences of European political decisions on migration. At the same time, political pressure and repression against civilian sea rescue vessels are increasing, making it more difficult to rescue people in the event of a shipwreck. This month, too, there has been a surge in shipwrecks where help arrived too late.

On August 21, a boat carrying [15 people](#) set sail from Tunisia. Most of them came directly from Ben Guerdane, a coastal town in the southeastern part of the country, including [seven members of one family](#). However, they never reached their destination, Lampedusa. Shortly after departure, about 26 km off the coast of Zarzis, the overcrowded boat sank. Only one person was rescued by a commercial vessel and brought back to Libya after drifting in the sea for 48 hours. In the days following the incident, a total of [19 bodies washed ashore on the coast of Ben Guerdane](#); however, it remains unclear whether they were victims of the shipwreck. People from Ben Guerdane reacted to the shipwreck with [intense protests](#), calling on the Tunisian government to take action. They expressed their anger through road blockades, [anger over years of marginalization and limited opportunities](#), which forces their fellow citizens to risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean in search of better prospects in Europe.

Routes to Europe:

The transit countries Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria serve as the primary departure points for the crossing to Italy. In July, at least **1,525** of the people who arrived in Italy departed from Libya and **447** from Tunisia² (FN: The number is expected to be significantly higher, but there has been little information about departures or interceptions from Tunisia lately). **24** people arrived in Italy from Algeria. For **860** people the point of departure is unknown.

Installation of surveillance cameras along the Tunisian-Libyan border:

Once again this month, the European Union's methods of attempting to prevent People on the Move from reaching Europe in the most brutal ways have become evident. The [EUBAM project](#), which is intended to support the Libyan government in "[border management](#)" with [52 million euros](#) in funding over three years, unveiled a new initiative in August.

The 200-kilometer stretch along the Tunisian-Libyan border between Ras Agedir (on the coast) and Al Assah (in the desert) will from now on [be equipped with numerous optical and thermal imaging cameras](#). Each year, [10,000 People on the Move are forced to cross this border](#), while the risk of being abducted to Libyan camps or forcibly abandoned in the desert has already been very high. According to the [Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights](#), Tunisia detained over [100,000 refugees between 2023 and 2024](#) alone and has deported the majority of them across the border to Libya, where they face detention and torture in Libyan camps.

According to official statements, the new cameras are intended to "[detect threats early on](#)". The term "threats" refers to People on the Move, and for them, the cameras increase the risk of being prevented from reaching Europe, and a safe life, and of being abducted or tortured along the way.

The camp / prison to which most people are taken in this part of the border is located in Al Assah, Libya, and is supervised, among others, by Tunisian authorities. [In a report published by "State Trafficking,"](#) affected individuals describe brutal conditions in this Libyan camp. Detained migrants face daily beatings; there are [no sanitary facilities](#); and, out of fear of infection, Libyan guards [force other detained migrants to beat their fellow detainees with sticks](#) to avoid direct contact with them. According to the Italian newspaper "Avvenire," a [European delegation traveled to this area in mid-August](#), together with the Libyan Border Guard Agency and the Ministry of the Interior, "[to verify the implementation of the work planned for the first phase](#)", which refers to the installation of surveillance cameras. With regard to the well-documented and serious human rights violations that occur daily just a few kilometers away, those in charge are choosing to ignore the issue.

This is one of the many measures the EU uses to externalize Europe's external borders; the violent model of Fortress Europe has long since spread far beyond its own borders.

Civil Resistance:

In August, **8** ships of the civilian fleet operated in the central Mediterranean, rescuing a total of **714** people from distress at sea (**25%** of total arrivals).

New Ship and Multiple Rescue

On its first mission, the SOS Humanity's new sailing vessel, the *Humanity 2*, [rescued 71 people](#) in two consecutive rescue operations. The first rescue took place in the Libyan SAR-Zone on August 28, when the ship took 12 people from a small fiberglass boat on board. The next day, the ship encountered another unseaworthy boat carrying 59 people. During the health check, the crew identified three fractures and many people suffering from dehydration. The Italian authorities assigned Lampedusa as the port of safety, where all 71 rescued people disembarked. SOS Humanity highlighted this as one of the advantages of their new vessel. Due to its small size, the Italian authorities cannot assign a distant port of safety because longer journeys are not feasible. Thus, the new *Humanity 2* can avoid some of the usual obstructions imposed by the Italian authorities who tend to assign distant ports to the civilian fleet.

Shots Fired at the Louise Michel

On August 26, the so-called Libyan coast-guard (scLcG) [fired two shots](#) towards the rescue ship *Louise Michel*.

The incident occurred when the *Louise Michel* arrived alongside the scLcG at a boat in distress. The scLcG immediately began interception operations, resulting in two individuals going overboard. Despite the *Louise Michel*'s repeated offers of assistance in rescuing the people in distress, they did not receive a response. Instead, after twenty minutes, the scLcG fired two shots towards *Louise Michel*. While the crew was not harmed, the scLcG completed their illegal interception maneuver and pulled the PoM back to Libya. A place where the PoM will most likely end up in detention centres where their rights are not respected. The incident was [filmed by the airplane Sea-Bird](#), which identified the scLcG boat as an old Italian vessel donated in 2017. This further proves the EU's complicity in these events. The EU is co-funding militias that threaten civil rescue operations and obstruct people searching safety from reaching Europe. We can only reiterate our demand that the EU stop its funding of Libyan militias and establish safe passage routes.

Criminalization of Sea Rescue

In August the Italian government detained yet another [civil sea rescue ship](#). After rescuing six people in distress on August 13 and documenting eight dead bodies, the *Sea Watch 5* of the German rescue organisation Sea Watch was detained in Naples for 45 days and fined €7,500. The grounds for the detention are that Sea-Watch did not inform the Libyan authorities about the rescue. These are the same so-called authorities that have already fired upon the *Sea-Watch 5* in May and on the *Louise Michel* this month. They are further known for pulling people seeking protection back to detention camps in Libya rather than taking them to a safe port. This is not the first case in which a vessel has been detained under these accusations. In similar cases, courts have ruled the detention on these grounds are illegitimate, as Libya cannot be considered as a safe place for PoM, and thus, [NGOs cannot be required to coordinate with Libyan authorities](#).

It is certainly no coincidence that the *Sea-Watch* vessel was detained just as the dispute between Italy and Germany over the [so-called Dublin cases](#) intensified. It began when Germany announced that it would return "secondary migrants" — people who had traveled after their arrival in Italy on to Germany — to Italy. This practice had been suspended since 2023, but it is now set to resume with the [implementation of the CEAS reform](#). In response, Italy threatened to charge the German government for people brought to safety in Italy by sea rescue organizations operating under the German flag. This shows again how, instead of providing safety to those seeking protection, PoM and sea rescue operations continue to be instrumentalised as a political leverage. The events of August once again demonstrate just how much the work of maritime civil rescue organizations is being hindered. These organizations are becoming political pawns in the disputes between Italy and Germany, and they are facing arbitrary detentions. Meanwhile, their work in the central Mediterranean is continuing to become more dangerous. There are an increasing number of reports about the threats and violence that rescue boats face from the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, which pales in comparison to the danger they expose people on the move to. Rather than investing state resources into the criminalization of NGOs, an investigation into the actions of the so-called Libyan coast guard is long overdue. It is time for the EU to take responsibility, stop funding Libya, and provide legal rescue routes.

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