

borderline-europe, Sicily

# SCIROCCO

*News from Italy*



Scirocco [ʃiˈrɔkko-Schirokko] is a southeastern, hot strong wind that carries dust and sand across the Mediterranean to Sicily and up to Italy's north often for a few hours only. This newsflash has been published on an approximately bi-weekly basis since March 2021.

## Political and social situation

### Border closure in the Schengen Area

The Schengen Agreement is partially suspended: [Eleven European countries](#), including Italy, have reintroduced controls at their internal borders (we already reported on this in [Scirocco 19/2023](#)). This restricts the freedom of movement within the Schengen area, which is guaranteed by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the Schengen Code. Freedom of movement has been described by the [European Union](#) itself as "one of the most important achievements of the Union". The Schengen Code also states that controls at internal borders may be reintroduced "only as a last resort [...] in the event of a serious threat to public order or the internal security of a Member State" (Code, Art. 25) for the shortest possible period. This threat must be concrete and specific. Furthermore, the reintroduction of border controls must **not lead to a restriction of the right to asylum (Code, Art. 3)**. It is remarkable that the Italian government also considers the conflict in Israel-Palestine, in addition to migration movements, as a "risk to public order and security," which could be contained by closing borders. Another step that does not do justice to this war and once again fuels anti-Muslim racism in European societies, which leads to the criminalization of migrants and refugees.

**Abuses of the Schengen Code have already been criticized by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in the past.** The reasons given by the Italian Government to justify the decision to reintroduce border controls on the border with Slovenia are completely vague and inadequate. In particular, the reference to the existence of the alleged problem of the arrival of a very small number of refugees – around 1,500 people per month during 2023, coming mainly from Afghanistan – throughout the FVG region (Friuli-Venezia Giulia) is completely ridiculous and lacks any logical-legal connection.

[Gianfranco Schiavone](#) from the ICS Trieste association explained this in a critical analysis of border closures.



Photo: [Imre Tömösvári](#) on [Unsplash](#)

"Schengen has been suspended and this Saturday afternoon marks a return to the past, even if only for ten days," writes [Ludovico Poletto](#). But even despite the border closures, **not all borders can be easily controlled**. Migrants who are in the forests between Italy and Slovenia still manage to cross the border. [Mian Lalon](#) from Bangladesh says that there are still many people out there and that the police have not yet stopped migrants and refugees. **"You would need thousands of officers. Just like in the old days. When you couldn't take a step without having your papers in your pocket."** This is contradicted by a statement by the Italian Interior Minister [Matteo Piantedosi](#), who said in a TV program that Italy had stopped 7,000 migrants and refugees at the border with Slovenia this year alone. At the same time, he justified these numbers with racist narratives.

### Tunisia – Italy

During a visit by Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani to his Tunisian counterpart Nabil Ammar and Tunisian President Kais Saied, Tunisia and Italy signed a [memorandum on cooperation in migration control](#). This stipulates that **4,000 (qualified) Tunisian workers should receive a work permit in Italy** next year, particularly to work in agriculture and industry. Tunisian President Kais Saied emphasized the importance of this new approach to "fighting irregular migration" and plans to conclude similar agreements with other EU countries.



Photo: Aboodi Vesakaran on [Unsplash](#)

After previous negotiations on the migration agreement between the EU and Tunisia failed, Italian [Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni](#) now emphasized the **need to treat Tunisia with respect**. She criticized a paternalistic approach and the idea of the superiority of European states over other nations. Meloni mentioned that there has been a lack of respect towards Tunisia in the past, particularly when it came to discuss safe third countries of migrants. Behind these statements there is also the political strategy of **resuming negotiations with Tunisia**, with the goal of isolating and externalizing borders to the African continent. The EU touted this as an important step in migration policy this year – and has still not developed any humane alternatives to it (we reported on this in [previous editions](#) of this newsletter). This can also be seen in the statements made by the President of the European Commission, [Ursula von der Leyen](#). In the EU Council, von der Leyen once again emphasized the **importance of sealing off the EU and preventing the departure of migrants to the EU**. She also mentioned the need to strengthen border surveillance and legal migration opportunities for the labor market, of which the new agreement between Italy and Tunisia is an example (see above).

In a response to the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), the [EU Commission](#) provides information about the **memorandum between Tunisia and Italy**, which is currently on hold. Although the response emphasizes that respect for human rights and democratic principles are cornerstones of cooperation with the EU, the Commission reveals

that **105 million euros** will be paid to Tunisia. The funds will be used to “fight against smuggling and human trafficking, facilitate assisted voluntary return and reintegration in countries of origin and strengthen border management capacities, including the coastal surveillance system”. In addition, cooperation with EU agencies such as Europol and Frontex will be strengthened. The EU continues to supply numerous equipment such as radar systems, thermal imaging cameras, navigation radars and sonars to the Tunisian coast guard. This is to be condemned in view of the **well-documented and far-reaching human rights violations** perpetrated by the Tunisian coast guard.

### **New agreement with Albania**

Another repeatedly discussed measure as part of the externalization of the EU's external borders is the relocation of asylum procedures to third countries. The agreement between the United Kingdom and Rwanda concluded in April 2022 had already [sparked controversy](#). According to this, protection seekers who want to apply for asylum in the UK should no longer enter the country, but rather submit the application in Rwanda and wait for the decision there. A British court of appeal recently [ruled](#) that the agreement was unlawful. Denmark also [announced](#) in April this year that it would start negotiations with Rwanda.

Now the Italian government appears to have similar plans. On November 6<sup>th</sup> Italy and Albania [announced](#) that they had reached an agreement in which Albania agreed to open two centers for migrants in the northwest of the country from spring 2024. Up to 36,000 people who want to seek protection in Italy are to be brought there every year. The centers will be under Italian jurisdiction and funded by Italy. Asylum applications should then be processed in Albania.

The plans have already been criticized as a violation of international law. There is particular concern that the basic human rights of asylum seekers are not adequately protected in the centers. Due to their location outside the EU, there are also doubts as to whether the conditions inside the camps can be adequately monitored.

The agreement still [leaves many questions unanswered](#) (see also the detailed criticism [here](#)): Under international and European law, is it even possible to bring people who are rescued by Italian ships in the central Mediterranean (and who have therefore already entered Italian territory according to international law) to a third country to apply for asylum? Is Italian or Albanian law applied in the centers? Can Italy guarantee the protection of the migrants' rights? How are asylum interviews carried out in Albania?

### Protest in front of the closed center in Pozzallo

There was another demonstration in front of the new center in [Pozzallo](#), which is intended to serve as a closed facility for asylum seekers from so-called safe countries of origin. These centers are often equated in the media with CPR (deportation detention), but this does not correspond to their function. Refugees can buy their way out of these special centers with approximately 5,000 euros (we reported [here](#)). In addition, the new center in Pozzallo is used for accelerated asylum procedures while in CPR there are people whose deportation is being prepared.

The closure of these centers and a **different immigration policy** that guarantees the right to asylum and respect for human rights has been demanded.



Photo: Markus Spiske on [Unsplash](#)

In recent weeks, the construction of new CPR has repeatedly been subject of public discussion. Information has now been released indicating that the new CPR will be built based on the [Panopticon model](#). This was designed by Jeremy Bentham as an

“ideal prison” and became known as a **comprehensive surveillance instrument** thanks to Michel Foucault's essay “Surveillance and Punishment” (1975). There is resistance against the construction of these “all-seeing” prisons. Several mayors, including some belonging to the governing parties, oppose the construction of such facilities and are demanding an explanation to justify this measure.

### UN Security Council on Libya

The UN Security Council unanimously accepted the demands of UN investigators to **tighten sanctions against the Libyan human trafficking system**, which binds together “politics, militias and clans” as the driving force of the chain of exploitation and enrichment. [This article](#) explains in detail how the torture camps in Libya are structured and which actors benefit from them. The tightening of sanctions now decided by the UN is aimed at human traffickers, as well as oil and weapons bosses. From the militia coast guard chief “Bija” to the management of the so-called “oil police” to the director of the torture camp – **Libya is still not a safe place for migrants and refugees.**

### Situation of Migrants

Tunisian [Mohamed Belhaj](#) was held for three weeks in the hotspot Contrada Imbriacola on Lampedusa last August. **The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has condemned this and other undignified treatments.** Nevertheless, the situation in the hotspot has hardly changed. People are still surrounded by fences and are denied the opportunity to leave the initial reception center even though they could hardly hide on the island of Lampedusa or even leave it on their own. The living conditions are chaotic to the point of indignity. There are long queues for basic things such as eating, drinking, showering, and using the toilet. Mohamed Belhaj describes the conditions in [this report](#) as **degrading** and reports of people who were even forced to defecate on the ground.



## Precarious conditions for migrant children

According to data presented at the [Congress of the Italian Society of Pediatrics](#), migrant children in Italy face a “**series of complex challenges**” in obtaining adequate medical care. Language barriers, bureaucratic hurdles, and lack of information about the national health system are endangering their health and their lives. For example, language barriers often lead to misdiagnosis and the administration of incorrect medication, which can be life-threatening. The [ISTAT data for 2022](#) also shows that **migrant children have a higher child mortality rate** than their Italian age mates. One reason for this is the lack of ratification of an agreement between states and regions in 2012 which would guarantee enrolment in the national health service and the allocation of a free family paediatrician to all children in Italy, regardless of the family's legal status. Since the vast majority of regions have not ratified this agreement, it is practically inapplicable.



Photo: Julie Ricard on [Unsplash](#)

A research by [Action Aid and Openpolis](#) shows, the reports repeatedly invoked by institutions stating that the reception system for unaccompanied minors is overloaded, is misleading. On the contrary: according to the available data, almost a **quarter of the funded places remain unused**, mainly in the regions with the highest concentrations of unaccompanied minors. A lack of transparency and cooperation between authorities appears to be the reason for this. In addition, Action Aid reports massive difficulties in even obtaining data from the authorities.

## Healthcare for migrants in Palermo

But it's not just health care for migrant children that is precarious. Palermo is a city that welcomes thousands of asylum seekers and foreign citizens without residence permits every year. For these people, accessing healthcare can be a difficult and complicated experience. The Sans Papiers helpdesk Porco Rosso [reports](#) on the bad but also the good sides of health care in Sicily's capital.

For more information on the situation in Italy, see „Projects“ on our [homepage](#) and previous issues of [Scirocco](#).

Contact

[borderline-europe](#)

human rights without borders

<https://www.borderline-europe.de/>

[italia@borderline-europe.de](mailto:italia@borderline-europe.de)

The Scirocco will be published in 2023 with the kind support of the kind support of the Evangelical Church of Rhineland (EKIR) and the “Förderverein Pro Asyl”

Titelfoto: Wolfgang Hasselmann, unsplash

Translation: Alexa Vittur

**PRO ASYL**  
DER EINZELFALL ZÄHLT.