

October 2026

CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN INFO

ARRIVALS

According to figures from borderline-europe, **3,650** people on the move arrived in Italy by sea in October 2026. This represents an increase of **33%** compared to the previous month. However, it also shows a significant decrease of **56%** compared to October last year, which is a result of increasingly restrictive migration policies in Europe.

The majority (**2.613** individuals, or **72%**[1]) arrived in Sicily, primarily on Lampedusa. **152** people (**4%**) arrived in Calabria and **294** people (**8%**) arrived in Sardinia, showing an increase in arrivals in Sardinia compared with the months up to August. This shows a change in the migration route, especially compared to last year, when the arrivals in Sardinia were less than **1%** of all arrivals in October 2025. **591** (**16%**) people arrived in other regions of Italy.

In at least **three** cases with a total of **155** people, the crossing to Italy took place via the Ionian route, the Eastern Central Mediterranean.

According to our records, **1,172** people (**32%**) were picked up by Italian authorities and brought to shore. In total, **1,133** people (**31%**) were rescued by civil maritime rescue services. According to data from borderline-europe, Frontex was involved in **11** cases with **292** people (**8%**) that month, which shows an increase in their activity compared to last month's **1%. 819** people (**23%**) reached Italian coastal waters (12 nautical miles off the coast) on their own without first being intercepted or rescued. For **234** people (**6%**), no information was available regarding the manner of their arrival or rescue.

According to official figures from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, **3,917** people arrived in Italy this month. We were able to document arrival figures for this month that were slightly lower. However, we would like to note that we do not have access to the background information or sources for the figures published by the Ministry of the Interior.

[1] Unless otherwise specified, all percentages cited refer to the total number of people who arrived in Italy by sea this month

Overview of the data collected by borderline-europe [2]	
Arrivals of people on the move in Italy by sea	**3,650**
Arrivals of people on the move in Sicily	**2,613**
Rescues by Italian authorities and Frontex	**1,464**
Rescues by NGOs	**1,133**
Independent arrivals of people in the move	**819**
Rescues by merchant vessels	**234**
Arrivals with no information regarding arrival or rescue	**3,650**

Routes to Europe

This October´s issue commemorates the shipwrecks of October 3 and October 11, 2013, off the coast of Lampedusa. October 3 commemorates both shipwrecks and is a manifestation of the daily brutality of the European border regime that has to be condemned. However, it is also a moment of solidarity for all those for whom October 3 and 11 have been a daily reality ever since. The suffering of many people, knowingly tolerated by the EU, ends fatally on the passage across the Central Mediterranean for far too many. For others, the suffering continues after their arrival. We hereby wish to express our solidarity with all of them.

The criminalization of alleged "boat drivers" (in Italian: scafisti) is part of the EU´s legal deterrence against migration to Europe via the Central Mediterranean and beyond. On October 13, the Court of Appeal of Catanzaro rescheduled the case concerning the "shipwreck of Cutro", Calabria, in February 2023 for potentially aggravated sentences for November 11.

[2] The data is provided without guarantee, as the number of unreported cases could be significantly higher

More powers, fewer checks: The EU is expanding Frontex

The shifting of responsibilities and human rights violations through the externalization of borders have long been a common practice of the EU. On October 27, the EU announced the expansion of this initiative by broadening Frontex's powers. Thus, the Frontex mandate is broadened, allowing it to carry out deportations between non-EU countries, and giving it the capacity to act beyond EU territory. Furthermore, Frontex´s standing corps is supposed to be expanded to 30.000 officers and a new EU Return Coordination Center and Online Monitoring Center are planned to allow Frontex a central role across the entire EU deportation processes. Additionally, the collaboration with third countries for deportation projects and as locations for so-called return hubs of EU member states is becoming possible and will be supported by Frontex. Rights groups and lawmakers criticize this expansion for lacking proper oversight of accountability and a threat to fundamental rights and international law. Frontex officers would knowingly be placed outside of EU law to fulfill a human rights violating mandate.

Extension of the Italy-led IRINI mission & EU-training for eastern Libyan militias

On October 13, the EU stepped up its efforts to turn the Central Mediterranean into a security zone. The growing focus on maritime security, hybrid threats, including migration, and the protection of European strategic interests led to the renewal of the EU´s IRINI mandate until March 2029. While the Italy-led naval mission was initially created as a Libya-focused embargo operation it recently transferred into a broader instrument of European maritime security in the Mediterranean. In the light of continuous demands of Italy's far right government to create a naval blockade, which would go against Italy's obligations under international maritime and refugee law, including the duty to rescue people at sea. The work of humanitarian search and rescue organizations operating in the Central Mediterranean would be undermined.

The expansion of the IRINI mandate contributes to the paradoxical relationship between cooperation and demarcation between the EU and Libya. While on the one hand there is the maritime embargo on the other hand there is the collaboration with the militias and the training of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

This month, the EU expanded this cooperation with new fundings for the authorities in eastern Libya. Reportedly, the EU aims to keep Sudanese genocide victims out of Europe. This racialized support and transfer of responsibility to Libyan authorities known for their human rights violations is taking place with full knowledge.

Hate campaigns and dissatisfaction with the EU-Libyan relation regarding migration politics led to the rise of an anti-immigration movement demanding the deportation of at least three million migrants from Libya and threatening explicitly black migrants living in Libya. Furthermore, on October 28, they banned Iranian and Afghan nationals from entering territory under its control and arbitrarily rendered them irregular.

Forced voluntary returns from Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya

On October 14, the EU stated its intention to intensify its collaboration on forced voluntary returns of people intending to reach Europe from Tunisia. Forced voluntary returns from Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria are part of efforts to intercept people in the Mediterranean and pull them back, or even stop people before they attempt to reach Europe by sea, and allegedly push them back to their countries of origin. While the initiative of such purportedly voluntary returns are supposed to offer an opportunity for safe return, the repatriation often puts people in severe danger and does neither consider individual health, nor statuses of protection. One case this October particularly illustrates the structural violence and coercion inherent to the system of pull- and pushbacks surrounding so-called "forced voluntary returns." At least 36 people from Bangladesh have been intercepted at sea and were pulled back to Libya before being deported to Bangladesh among 138 other people (of which 41 were reportedly ill).
Hundreds more of such forced voluntary returns, often in collaboration with the IOM, continued to take place mainly from Libya and Algeria this October.

Push- and Pullbacks:

This month, we recorded **35** interception cases, in which a total of **2,245** people were pulled back to the North African coast. This is a **35%** increase in interception cases compared to **26** reported cases in September.
According to the September figures all of those intercepted were pulled back to Libya. While the October figures predominantly capture pullbacks to Libya there were also pullbacks to Tunisia and Algeria. Of those intercepted, at least **1,897** were forcibly returned to Libya, **291** to Algeria, and at least **57** to Tunisia. These figures are approximate, as the actual number of unreported cases is likely much higher. Compared to September, when at least **1,184** interceptions with pullbacks to Libya were documented, the amount of people being pulled back to North Africa increased significantly by **90%.** This suggests that the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, which is largely financed and equipped by Italy and other EU member states, actively and increasingly continues to intercept boats bound for Europe and forcibly return them to Libya.

Death & Missing

In the Central Mediterranean, the overall number of deaths, and people whose fate remain unknown decreased this month, while the number of people missing increased. According to data from borderline-europe[3], at least **four** people died while crossing the Central Mediterranean, and **30** are considered missing this month. While the death-figures are considerably lower than in September, the missing-figures are considerably higher. In September, at least **12** people died and **six** were considered missing. However, the figures of people whose fate remain unknown has increased significantly from **136** to **153** people. So in total the number of people crossing the Central Mediterranean with unknown fate rose by around **13%** between September and October.

The *Missing Migrants Project* of the *International Organization for Migration* (IOM) has documented **32** deaths and missing people in October, which is significantly higher than our figures. This illustrates the difficulties of collecting information and determining between figures of death, missing, and unknown fates in the Central Mediterranean. Unfortunately, further data comparisons were not possible, as IOM and UNHCR had not yet published the respective data by borderline-europe's editorial deadline on November 9.

Civil Resistance

During October, **twelve** ships from **ten** different NGOs were operating in the Central Mediterranean and rescued **1,133** people in distress at sea (**31%** of all arrivals). Italian Authorities brought around the same number of people ashore. This marks an increase in civilian activity, as last month NGOs only accounted for **18%** of arrivals. Sea-Watch alone rescued **360** people (**32%** of all NGO rescues). Civilian maritime rescue vessels also assisted in **five** additional rescue operations, with **53** people rescued before being brought ashore by government authorities or Frontex.

In **seven** cases, civilian organizations rescued more than one boat in distress during one operation. That is notable because of Italian legislation, NGOs are required to return directly to the assigned harbor after one rescue. As civilian rescue crews continued to operate despite this policy, another **eight** boats were reached.

[3] These numbers capture only a fraction of deaths and missing cases in the Mediterranean, as multiple shipwrecks remain undocumented.

New ships in the Mediterranean

The NGO RescueFleet has a new ship named Samia in its fleet, which is supposed to have its first operation in the next few weeks. RescueFleet is a civilian sea rescue association working with sailing boats. They are working closely together with RESQSHIP, the NGO who established the concept of using sailing boats in civilian maritime rescue. The benefit of using sailing boats is that they are often smaller and more agile. Therefore they are faster, but also cannot travel great distances. This, however, gives them the advantage that Italy assigns the port of Lampedusa most of the time. That gives them more resources and time to help.

Another Court ruling in favor of civilian sea rescue

After three years, the court finally ruled that the detention of the Humanity 1 in 2023 was unjustified. The ship of the NGO SOS Humanity had been detained for not following the instructions of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. The Court of Appeal in Catanzaro declared on September 23, 2026 that Libya cannot be considered "a place of safety" and the instructions of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard therefore were illegitimate. With this ruling, the Italian court affirms again that orders from the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, which would result in the people being pulled back to Libya are unlawful and should therefore not be followed. This is yet another win for the civilian rescue fleet. However, this does not stop Italy from detaining ships again.

Italy's strategies to block civilian sea rescue

Assigning distant ports after rescues remains one of Italy's most effective measures. This month, the Humanity I, Sea-Watch 5, Ocean Viking, and Solidaire were each assigned a distant port twice this month. Two assignments were to a port in Tuscany, three in Campania, and one each in Apulia, Liguria, and Lazio. The strategy keeps the civilian rescue ships travelling for days to and from port, time they cannot spend rescuing people.

What we count as a distant port is anything further than Sicily. But even a port in Sicily instead of Lampedusa can also mean 14 extra hours of travel instead of three, as it was the case during an operation of the Aurora in the beginning of October, where they rescued 17 people in the Middle of the Central Mediterranean.

Alarm Phone has been working for 12 years

As a response to the two shipwrecks in October 2013, Alarm Phone was founded year later on October 11, 2014. 24 hours a day the Alarm Phone team is there for people in distress at sea, or for those worried about someone who is. In over 4,380 days and nights with around 300 volunteers, they have coordinated the rescue of about 11,000 boats in distress not only in the Mediterranean but on all sea routes along Europe's borders. When they receive a call, the team will try to coordinate a rescue operation through the Coast Guard or civil rescue. That role makes them often the last line of hope for people stranded in the middle of the sea, which also means the crew witnesses not only the rescues but also the deaths. Day after day, they see what it means that Europe does not help people on the move, or lets them die or be violently pulled back to North Africa, where they face persecution.

Sea-Watch rescues 227 in 48 hours

The German civilian rescue organization Sea-Watch rescued **227** people between October 11 and 13 with the Sea-Watch 5 and the Aurora. On October 11, the Sea-Watch 5 first rescued **28** people in distress after the plane from the NGO SOS MEDITERRANEE spotted them. Shortly after, they rescued another boat with **51** people, who had called Alarm Phone. Between the two rescues, an unidentifiable boat circled the Sea-Watch 5 multiple times. The final rescue was a boat in distress with **72** people near an offshore oil platform. After they received permission to enter the zone, Libyan authorities ordered the crew over radio to stop the rescue and leave, threatening to abduct the crew and bring them to Tripoli. At the same time, the Aurora rescued another **76** people from two boats and helped stabilize a third one until the Italian Coast Guard arrived.

October once again showed the importance of civilian rescue missions. Not only because they saved **1,133** people from drowning, but also because crews keep working despite Italy's restrictions and the threats and violence of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

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