



July 2026

CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN INFO

ARRIVALS

According to data collected by *borderline-europe*, **1,479** people on the move / asylum seekers reached Italy by sea in July 2026 representing a significant decrease of **47%**¹ compared to June's figures. Also compared to data from the previous year, a sharp decrease in arrivals is evident, continuing the trend already observed in previous months. With more than 6,000 people arriving at Italy's shores in July 2025, arrivals in July 2026 were **76 %** lower. The majority of people (**986** individuals, or **67%**) arrived in Sicily – primarily Lampedusa, representing a decrease also compared to June 2026. The trend of a wider distribution of arrivals across the country, which was noted in recent months, is continuing with rising numbers in Tuscany (**96**), Lazio (**38**) and Liguria (**170**), which can be attributed solely to the Italian authorities' allocation of safe havens to civilian sea rescue vessels². Sicily nevertheless remains the primary point of disembarkation.

According to our figures, in June **953** people (**65%**) were rescued by Italian authorities, while a total of **370** people (**25%**) were rescued by civilian sea rescue services. Compared to previous months, this marks a decrease in rescues conducted by civilian sea rescue services, in June it was **29%**. Frontex was involved in the rescue of **122** people (**8%**). **15** people (**1%**) reached Italian territorial waters (12 nautical miles off the coast) independently, without having been intercepted or rescued beforehand. This month **19** people (**1%**) were rescued by merchant vessels.

According to official figures from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, **2,179** people arrived in Italy in June. We verified 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. As stated in our last CMI, the general decrease of arrivals which could already be observed during previous months is not a dynamic preserved to the region of Italy but is rather part of bigger global trend.

In the first half of this year, the number of irregular crossings of the Central Mediterranean route fell by 52% compared with the same period in 2025, when [Frontex had already reported the lowest level since 2021](#). However, this is not due to an improvement in living conditions or the resolution of crises forcing people to leave their homes. Rather, it is due to the worsening conditions faced by people on the move, which are driven by politics. For example, interceptions are increasing, making it more difficult for people to seek a better life in a safe and dignified manner.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all percentages quoted refer to the total number of people who arrived in Italy by sea that month.

² Italian authorities are deliberately assigning safe harbors that are far away to maritime rescue NGOs in order to hinder their work.

Overview of the data collected by <i>borderline europe</i> ³	
Arrivals of people on the move in Italy by sea	1,479
Arrivals of people on the move in Sicily	986
Rescues by Italian authorities and Frontex	1,075
Rescues by NGOs	370
Independent arrivals of people in the move	15
Rescues by merchant vessels	19

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 **1109** of the people who arrived in Italy departed from Libya and **60** from Tunisia³. For **310** people the point of departure is unknown.

Tunisia

Just a few days apart, two sad anniversaries fell in Tunisia this July: the [self-coup by President Kais Saied](#) on 25 July 2021, and the signing of the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between Tunisia and the EU on 16 July 2023.

After Saied won the presidential election in 2019, he [suspended parliament in 2021](#) and increasingly concentrated executive power in his own hands. With the [constitution adopted in 2022](#) the president's position was further strengthened, while the powers of parliament and the judiciary were significantly curtailed. Within a short period this largely dismantled the institutional balance that had been gradually built up since 2011.

Since then, Tunisia's political order has been shaped by a [series of intensifying crises](#) ranging from the drastic deterioration of socio-economic conditions and inadequately secured basic services to the widespread repression of political opponents and civil society actors. The country's authoritarian development and its multiple crises crystallize in the [weaponization of migration](#) by the political leadership, and in particular by President Saied himself.

³The number is expected to be significantly higher, but there has been little information about departures or interceptions from Tunisia lately

Following his [racist speech of 2023](#), in which he described the arrival of people from sub-Saharan Africa as an alleged conspiracy to change the country's demographic composition, attempts have since been made to portray People on the Move as the cause of the country's domestic socio-economic ills. The Tunisian authorities pursue this with what at times appears to be limitless brutality: massive violence, [rape](#), [mass deportations](#) (under the guise of supposedly [“voluntary return”](#)), [abandoning people seeking protection in the desert](#), [forcible transfer to Libya](#).

On [this year's Republic Day](#) thousands of Tunisians therefore gathered in the country's capital to demonstrate against the political leadership and against the increasingly deteriorating living conditions, which had most recently been further exacerbated by widespread fires and the resulting power and water outages. The [protest march was the latest](#) in a series of demonstrations in which people from different population and professional groups have not tired of protesting, despite expecting harsh repression, against [“injustice and oppression”](#) and the [restrictions on freedom of the press and of expression](#), and of standing up for [the independence of the judiciary](#).

Against the background of these domestic political developments and the extensively documented serious human rights violations that the Tunisian government deliberately commits against People on the Move as well as against persons of presumed sub-Saharan origin and political opponents, the ongoing cooperation between the EU and its member states with the Tunisian government on “migration deterrence,” as well as the classification of [Tunisia as a “safe country of origin”](#) appears to be more than merely cynical.

To mark the third anniversary of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the EU and Tunisia in 2023, 46 human rights organizations, including [borderline-europe](#), therefore signed a [joint statement](#), in which they called on the Commission and the 27 member states of the European Union to [“immediately suspend support for Tunisia — in particular for its security forces — in the area of border control and the management of migration flows.”](#)

Despite the serious human rights violations described above, the EU has, as part of its cooperation to date, already provided [approximately 105 million euros](#) to support border controls in the form of vessels, equipment, training, and operational support for the Tunisian coast guard and Tunisian security forces.

A country that literally engages in [hunting migrants](#), in which there is [no functioning asylum system](#), and which currently faces trial for its serious human rights violations before the [African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) (see also our latest [CMI](#)) and appears before the [UN Human Rights Council](#), can under no circumstances be regarded as a partner of the European Union — let alone as a “safe country of origin.” The EU and its individual member states must end their complicity with Tunisia's autocratic regime by immediately halting all financial, operational, or diplomatic support.

Death & Missing

In July the number of deaths and missing people in the Central Mediterranean decreased significantly compared to June. According to our figures **8** people died whilst fleeing across the Central Mediterranean in July and the fate of **50** people is unknown, with the estimated number of unrecorded cases assumed to be significantly higher. We count no missing persons this month. Compared to June, the number of documented deaths has decreased. All of the deaths have been documented along the Libyan coast, as a result of the people's attempt to cross the Mediterranean to search for a better life in Europe. The majority of this month's fatalities were caused by two incidents that occurred around July 13.

On July 13, approximately 50 people set out for Lampedusa on a severely overloaded boat. After a few hours at sea, the [boat sank off the coast of eastern Libya](#), dragging the people on board into the sea. Ten people managed to swim to the Libyan island of Al Bardaa, the remaining 40 are still missing. In the days that followed, three bodies washed ashore on the Libyan coast; it is unclear whether they were victims of this shipwreck. The 10 survivors were taken back to Libya, the country they had sought to leave and where they face unjustified detention and severe violence. Twenty-four hours earlier, a boat was spotted off the coast of Libya with 28 people on board; after the rescue, four bodies were recovered. The 24 survivors said they [had been adrift for two weeks](#). All were in very critical condition and were immediately taken to hospitals on the Libyan mainland. [The Libyan authorities have not disclosed how many ultimately survived](#). Those who have survived are now facing criminalisation, detention and violence in the country they were about to leave behind.

Although an official Frontex statement links the decline in arrivals to Italy to ongoing cooperation with partner countries and preventive measures adopted in the main countries of departure, it fails to mention that this is largely due to increased interceptions. It once again fails to consider other factors. From early January to the end of June, IOM numbers show that at [least 872 people died](#) while attempting to cross the Central Mediterranean, which is at least a [57% increase](#) compared to the first half of 2025.

The increase in cooperation with partner countries include strict deterrent measures adopted in recent years by EU countries to curb migration flows, such as signing the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) with Tunisia, which is turning 3 this month, have had the effect of [drastically reducing departures from certain coastlines](#), such as the Tunisian port of Sfax, which were once crowded embarkation points. People seeking a way to cross the sea have always adapted, shifting toward less-patrolled areas and new transit routes, with the frequently observed result that these routes are becoming longer, more complex, and deadlier. These deaths are a direct consequence of a violent border regime characterised by interceptions and abandonment, which is actively supported and financed by the EU.

Push- and Pullbacks:

This month, we recorded **1,230** interceptions⁴ in the Central Mediterranean, during which boats carrying refugees were pulled back or towed to the North African coast. All of the intercepted individuals were towed back to Libya. 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, such as Tunisia. . Compared to June 2026, when **1,090** interceptions were recorded, the number of documented pullbacks has increased slightly this month. Significantly high was the number of interceptions we document days before the earlier reported shipwreck. From July 10–13 alone, we counted 14 interceptions, during which a total of at least 491 people were returned to Libya.

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

Civil Resistance

In July, **8** ships of the civilian fleet were operating in the central Mediterranean and rescued a total of **370** people from distress at sea (**25%** of arrivals), representing a decrease of **24%** compared to the previous month.

Multiple Rescue:

This month the NGO Sea-Watch carried out a multiple rescue.. On its first mission after being fired upon by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard on May 11, the Sea-Watch 5 rescued a total of [52 people from distress at sea](#) in two consecutive operations from July 8 to 9. Before the crew could begin the rescues, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard made [another attempt at intimidation](#) and demanded that the organization change course. Nevertheless, the ship was able to take on board the 40 people from the first boat, who were in acute distress. Among the people were a heavily pregnant woman and her 17-year-old cousin. Due to the critical condition associated with a pregnancy in its 37th week, both were evacuated from the Sea-Watch 5 by the Italian Coast Guard and taken to a [clinic on Lampedusa](#). The following day, a second rescue took place, involving a total of 12 people. Rather than being allowed to head to the port of Lampedusa, which is closest to the rescue locations, the organization's operation was once again made more difficult by Italian authorities. The crew, with 50 passengers on board, had to undertake a four-day journey to reach the port of Carrara, the [port assigned to them](#).

⁴Interceptions are violent forced returns at sea to a third country. For example, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, which is largely funded 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.

Criminalization of Sea Rescue:

Detentions:

This month saw two detentions of sea rescue boats belonging to the NGOs Compass Collective and Louise Michel following their operations in the central Mediterranean.

Trotamar III:

After the Trotamar III, operated by the NGO Compass Collective, docked at the port of Lampedusa following the rescue of 25 people on June 30, it was met with a decision by the Italian authorities ordering a 45-day detention; on July 8, this was followed by a demand for a fine of 10,000 euros. The accusation: failure to communicate with Libyan authorities about the rescue operation, despite [lawful notification of the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre \(MRCC\)](#) immediately after the dinghy was sighted. During the rescue, a boat belonging to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard reached the rescue site; according to the organization, this meant it had most likely [prevented an illegal pushback to Libya](#). The NGO maintains that communicating with the Libyan rescue center, which is under the de facto control of militias, could have resulted in [the people being returned to Libya](#), a country that disregards human rights and cannot offer a safe port. Communication was therefore not an option for the organization.

On July 30, the NGO achieved a partial victory in court; following an urgent appeal against the decision of the Italian authorities, the Trotamar III was [released after 29 days of detention](#), 16 days before the order was originally set to expire. The court in Agrigento nevertheless upheld the fine, against which Compass Collective is continuing to pursue legal action, and has launched [a donation campaign](#) to cover the legal costs.

MV Louise Michel:

On the night of July 23, the ship MV Louise Michel, operated by the NGO of the same name, managed to rescue 6 people who were drifting in the water and bring them on board. The rescued persons stated that shortly before, they had been forced by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard at gunpoint to jump into the water. When the MV Louise Michel reached the location, the crew saw only a speedboat moving away toward the south. After transferring the 6 survivors to a Coast Guard vessel in Pozzallo, the crew was informed that their boat would be detained under the Piantadosi Decree. The stated reason: the crew had disregarded the authorities' order to sail to the port of Catania, for which they allegedly had enough fuel on board. The NGO had stated a day earlier that the fuel would fall below the ship's safety reserves if they had to sail all the way to Catania, following which they were assigned the closer port of Pozzallo. According to the NGO, there is far more behind the detention than the accurate fuel report. Rather, it concerns Italy's and the EU's dwindling responsibility to save human lives and their "willingly having Libyan militias pull people back to torture and abuse".

Planned Naval Blockade

The restriction and possible criminalization of civilian sea rescue in Italy could be further intensified by the new draft law. In an [open letter](#) to the Italian government dated July 6, 2026, six UN experts⁵ raised concerns regarding the [draft bill](#) introduced on April 14, 2026. Read more about the draft bill in our [Scirocco](#).

⁵ Mandates of several Special Rapporteur, such as trafficking in persons.

The UN experts warn that the planned measures could hinder the work of sea rescue organizations and significantly impede access to international protection. Particular criticism is directed at provisions relating to border controls, the so-called "naval blockade," and the possible detention of rescue vessels for up to 6 months. They also raise concerns regarding the transfer of rescued people to so-called third countries and possible violations of international human rights and refugee law.

Since 2023, NGO sea rescue ships have been [detained in Italy at least 42 times](#). A further expansion of such measures will make civilian sea rescue even more difficult and significantly hamper humanitarian aid in the Mediterranean.

Sea-Watch Files Urgent Lawsuit with Berlin Administrative Court

After the Sea-Watch 5 was repeatedly threatened and fired upon by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard on September 26, 2025 and on May 11 of this year, the NGO of the same name is now taking the matter [to the Berlin Administrative Court](#). The lawsuit concerns the German government's obligation to [take effective measures to protect sea rescue vessels](#) flying the German flag. The accusation concerns the [EU's financial and operational support for Libyan authorities](#), despite clear documentation of existing human rights violations. A decision is expected [in early August](#).

Smear Campaign Against Sea-Watch

At the same time, Sea-Watch is currently facing a smear campaign, driven by [far-right media outlets such as Il Giornale and further amplified by the Bild newspaper and AfD leader Alice Weidel](#). At the center is a tactically edited video, published by Frontex, which allegedly shows the NGO cooperating with "illegal smugglers." Behind the accusation lies the difficult rescue operation carried out by the Sea-Watch 5 on May 11, shortly before the shooting by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, during which the ship was confronted by masked Libyan militia members. If there is to be talk of agreements with violent militias, then it should be about the EU's agreement with Libya, Sea-Watch states [in its official statement](#). The organization says it will not be deterred, neither by the [criminal investigation](#) opened against the Sea-Watch 5's captain following the shooting, nor by this smear campaign, [from continuing to save lives](#).

This month's developments once again make clear: civilian sea rescue is at a critical juncture. Both official bodies and several media actors are doing everything they can to criminalize NGOs and everyone who wants to support people in distress at sea. This stands in tension with the rising number of shipwrecks and deaths that occur every month in the central Mediterranean. While authorities pour their resources into the constant administration of detentions and convictions against NGO ships, it is the people fleeing who are hit hardest. Deaths in the Mediterranean will continue until there are safe and legal routes for entry. Until then, the work of civilian sea rescue remains indispensable.

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