



**MED REPORT**

FEBRUARY 2025

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**BORDER STORIES**

# **THE SAUDI BORDER**

**THE GUARDIAN'S  
INVESTIGATION**



A new investigation by The Guardian exposed how Saudi Arabian forces have used indiscriminate force against migrants along the country's borders, killing, injuring and sexually abusing women. Hundreds of people may have been killed and abandoned along a border few people talk about.

### **Saudi Arabia's violence against immigrants**

A new investigation by The Guardian exposed how Saudi Arabian forces have used indiscriminate force against hundreds of migrants along the country's borders, with reports of several deaths and injuries and several women being raped. Decomposing bodies have also, reportedly, been seen in the border area.

These testimonies have been collected among Ethiopians that tried to cross the border from Yemen between 2019 and 2024. An Ethiopian man, who tried to cross the border in the Saudi province of Najran in 2022 along with tens of others, was shot by a machine gun and lost his leg. He reported having personally seen at least three people die next to him. Another man reported witnessing the rape of three Ethiopian women, another one said he got shot on his leg and his back, others said they saw people being beaten and raped. Still in 2023 men in Saudi border patrol uniform have been seen shooting young women who died because of the shots. Others were injured, detained, others fell from a cliff while trying to escape. Those who can't pay the smugglers' fees in full were forced to lead the group, making them more likely to be injured or killed by explosive attacks or gunfire

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**A Human Rights Watch report from August 2023 estimated that Saudi border guards had killed, between March 2022 and June 2023 alone, “hundreds of Ethiopian migrants and asylum seekers”. They reported a “widespread, systematic pattern” involving the use of firearms and explosive weapons. A man said he had seen cameras that could be used by Saudi Arabia to monitor the movement of migrants.**

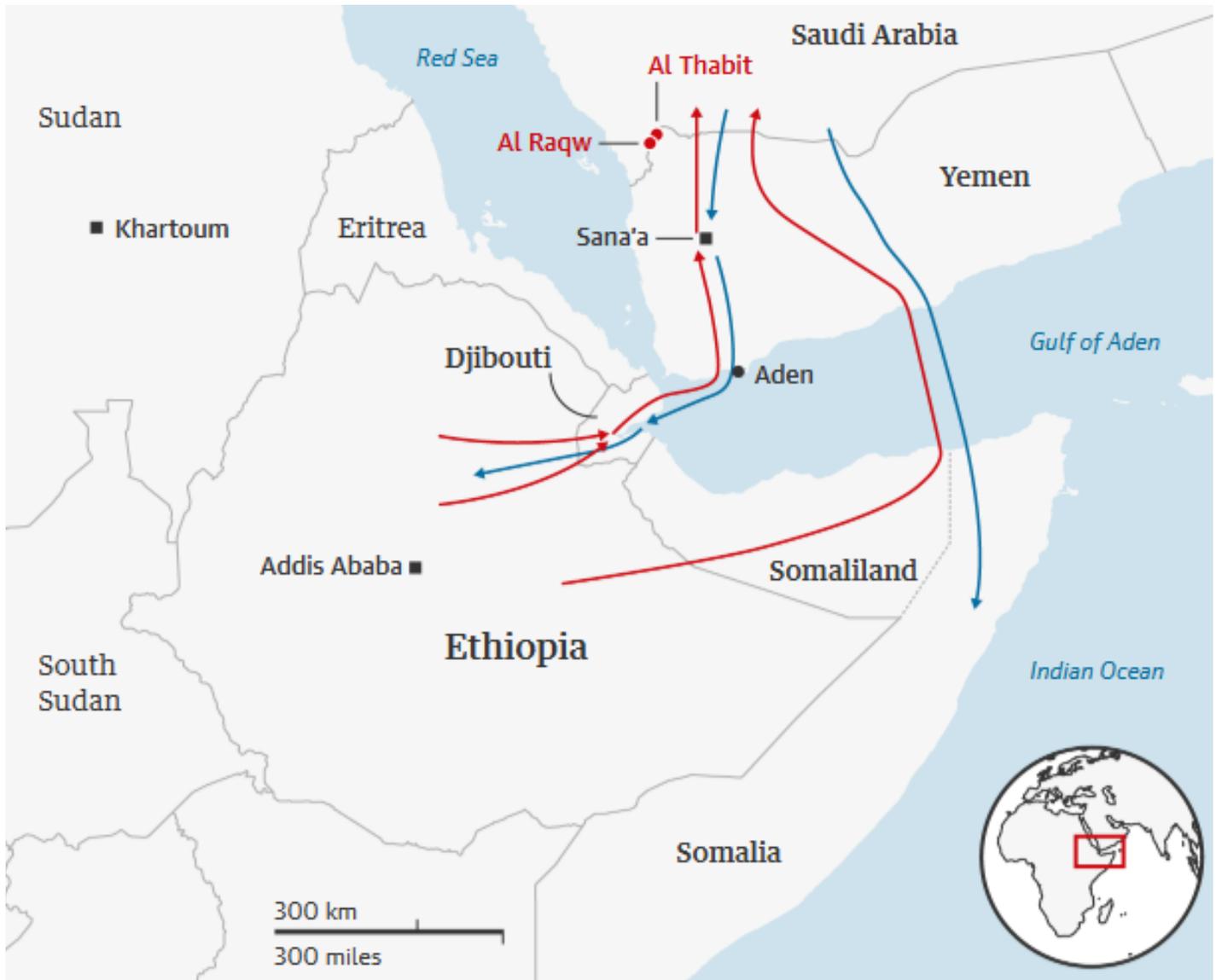
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According to Human Rights Watch, Saudi Arabia's behaviour might be a crime against humanity. Nadia Hardman, author of the report, stated that “there's a culture of impunity and irresponsibility at the border” that makes it impossible to calculate the exact number of victims, also due to lack of access to the areas in question. Satellite images collected by Human Rights Watch show at least 12 graves in the main burial site of the Al Raqw migrant camp in February 2022, and at least 27 at the end of June 2023.

About 750.000 Ethiopian migrants live in Saudi Arabia, more than half of which entered the country illegally. The path to enter Saudi Arabia from neighboring Yemen is hard to cross and full of dangers. Before reaching the border, migrants have to cross the desert and the sea, often falling victim to human traffickers, armed gangs and Yemeni rebels. Those who manage to enter the country are usually employed as construction workers, in farms, or as low-cost domestic workers. The United Nations has estimated that Ethiopian migrants along this route have increased by 32% between 2022 and 2023—a total of 96670 people. This route is also used by people fleeing from Somalia and Eritrea, and, more rarely, from other African countries.

Saudi Arabia will host the Football World Cup in 2034, and employs a huge number of people to build the stadiums, hotels, and transportation and infrastructure networks for the event. In many cases, these are migrants: exploited and working in inhumane conditions. In the last few years, operations have been conducted to search, detain and deport tens of thousands of irregular migrants to Ethiopia. Those who succeed at reaching Saudi Arabia live in constant fear of being identified, arrested and forcibly deported.

Hardman from Human Rights Watch has called out the silence of those states who collaborate with Saudi Arabia and tolerate its abuse and violence, effectively allowing the continuation of a violent, repressive system that every year involves hundreds of people fleeing war, violence and poverty.



Map from The guardian, source: IOM Regional Data Hub



# THE NEW US IMMIGRATION POLICIES

A DIRECT ATTACK ON THE  
FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES  
OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Inhuman deportations, violation of the right to privacy, prolonged detentions, physical and psychological abuse, fear, uncertainty: the Trump administration's new immigration policies are clearly a step back in the path towards a just, equitable system and violate the fundamental principles of human rights.

### **Trump administration's inhuman deportations**

Since taking office in early 2025, the Trump administration has made clear its intent to transform the US immigration policy into an even more repressive system. The measures adopted so far aim at strengthening border control and drastically limiting the access to international protection while indiscriminately targeting migrants and ignoring the serious humanitarian crises that force them to flee their countries.

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### **Increasing deportations has been a central element of the new policies.**

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There have been over 37,000 deportations in 2025 already. The administration has prioritised removing "irregular" immigrants, particularly those with a criminal record, but undocumented people were also targeted.

Deportations are carried out with charter flights, often separating families and without providing any protection or legal counsel. In a few cases, people were deported through the "Expedited Removal" program, which allows deportation without a formal hearing, depriving people of their right to seek asylum.

In many cases, immigrants from at-risk countries like Honduras, Salvador and Guatemala were deported while in extremely vulnerable conditions and exposed to human rights violations in their country of origin.

Another measure involves the introduction of a mandatory register for the 11 million irregular immigrants in the US. This system forces immigrants, including minors, to register and provide their digital fingerprints under the threat of criminal sanctions if they don't comply. This practice not only violates the right to privacy but also generates fear and uncertainty, making people more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse: this kind of register can easily turn into a tool for surveillance and social control. Immigrants, knowing they're at risk of identification and deportation, might avoid essential services like medical care and legal advice for fear of being reported to the authorities. This further exposes them to precarious life conditions, social isolation and financial vulnerability. Furthermore, extending the obligation to register to minors is a serious violation of children's rights. Children and adolescents are treated like adults and deprived of the special protections that international conventions provide minors with.



### **Detention centers and inhumane conditions**

To accelerate deportations, the administration has started building detention centers in military bases—like the one in Fort Bliss, Texas, designed to hold up to 10,000 migrants. These centers have been criticised not only for being overcrowded, but also for their unsanitary conditions that threaten the health and safety of the detainees. Report after report, evidence has emerged of spoiled, insufficient food, inadequate access to medical care and facilities unfit to house children and families.

Reports include cases of physical and psychological abuse perpetrated by guards, along with documented incidents of neglect towards detainees with chronic illness or pre-existing trauma. In these conditions, many migrants lose any hope of a better future as they're forced to live in a limbo of uncertainty and suffering.

Furthermore, the pressure on countries like Panama and Costa Rica to welcome deported migrants only exacerbates the situation. Migrants from countries like Afghanistan, Iran,

China and Pakistan are sent to overcrowded, unsafe temporary shelters, without a clear path towards regularization or asylum. Externalizing deportations is a serious violation of international law, and exposes migrants to further abuse and deprivation.

Separation from their family, prolonged detention and criminalization have a devastating impact on immigrants' rights and dignity. The Trump administration's immigration policies are clearly a step back in the path towards a more just and equitable system and a direct attack on fundamental human rights principles. It's crucial to keep advocating to end mass detention and instead invest in more humane solutions that ensure compliance with the international laws for the protection of asylum seekers and children.

# LET'S TAKE STOCK

## MONTHLY REPORT ON MIGRATIONS

What happened on the migratory routes of Europe, of the Mediterranean, of the world?

What measures have governments taken?

Who provided assistance?

Who, instead, sanctioned, detained or rejected?

Let's take stock.

## **Libya, February 5th**

160 people were pushed back to Libya.

## **Libya, February 12th**

Pakistan's foreign ministry stated that at least 16 Pakistani migrant people died after a ship sank off the coast of Libya over the weekend. 10 others are untraceable, while 33 out of the 37 survivors have been taken into custody by the Libyan police and one is hospitalized.

## **Libya, February 17th**

Libya. 139 refugees arrived in Fiumicino with humanitarian corridors.

An Emergency evacuation was carried out thanks to a flight organized by UNHCR. They will be welcomed by the community of Sant'Egidio, Arci and SAI.

## **Libya, February 18th**

67 people were pushed back to Libya.

## **Turkey, February 22nd**

Turkey: Six people drowned in the waters off the mainland.

## **Libya, February 27th**

75 people were pushed back to Libya.

## **France, February 5th**

An eritrean man died near the French city of Calais, on the English Channel coast.

## **France, February 10th**

The bodies of two men were found on a beach in Northern France.

## **Canary Islands, February 11th**

389 migrant people were rescued near the Canary Islands while attempting the dangerous Atlantic crossing from Northwest Africa. Among them were 46 women and 7 children.

## **Italy-Albania, February 12th**

Giorgia Meloni (i.e. Italian Prime Minister) aims to relaunch the centers in Albania, possibly opening repatriation facilities.

## **Canary Islands, February 13th**

More than 1.500 migrant people have arrived in several Spanish island territories in the Atlantic and in the Mediterranean; more than 1400 of which arrived on various Canary islands and more than 111 arrived on the seaside islands of the Mediterranean. At least one person was found dead.

## **Greece, February 22nd**

40 people were rescued in Crete.

## **Poland, February 27th**

As Poland increases deportations as part of a strategy to fight organized crime, the Parliament has approved a new bill that could suspend the right to seek asylum on Polish soil.

## **Netherlands, February 27th**

Netherlands revives the plan to push back unsuitable asylum seekers to Uganda.

## **France, February 26th**

France asks Europe to cooperate in expelling undocumented migrant people.

### **Civil Fleet, February 13th**

20 people that were spotted yesterday by Seabird 1, were all rescued by the Italian Coast Guard.

### **Civil Fleet, February 13th**

Nihayet Garganey VI rescued 55 people.

### **Civil Fleet, February 19th**

SOS Mediterranean spotted two empty ships at sea in two days. They saw the so-called Libyan coast guard ships patrolling nearby, also in the Maltese SAR, and they fear that people on these vessels have been illegally brought back into the cycle of abuse that awaits them in Libya.

### **Civil Fleet, February 20th**

SOS Humanity rescued 60 people, while Open Arms rescued 116.

### **Civil Fleet, February 23th**

During a joint mission aboard the civil ship Sea Eye 4, the Sea Eye, Sea Watch and Mediterranea Saving Humans crews rescued 41 people.

### **Civil Fleet, February 25th**

SOS Humanity rescued 70 people.

### **Lampedusa, February 4th**

10 people rescued by the Italian Coast Guard in Lampedusa.

### **February 5th**

Luca Casarini revealed that WhatsApp (i.e. a very popular mobile messaging app) informed him that his mobile phone had been targeted by a military-grade spyware produced by the Israeli company Paragon Solutions.

### **Rome, February 6th**

Lam Magok Biel Ruei, from South Sudan, victim and witness of the abuses committed by the Libyan general Osama al-Masri, filed a criminal complaint with the Rome Prosecutor's office. The complaint claims that the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the Minister of Justice Carlo Nordio and Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi aided the alleged war criminal, wanted by the International Criminal Court, arrested in Italy in mid-January and then pushed back to Libya with an Italian plane.

### **February 7th**

Maysoon Majidi, an Iranian Kurdish activist, was acquitted by an Italian court on human trafficking charges.

### **February 11th**

An activist for migrant people has been targeted by a spyware attack. David Yambio, critic of the Meloni government, was informed of an attempt to compromise his phone.

### **February 11th**

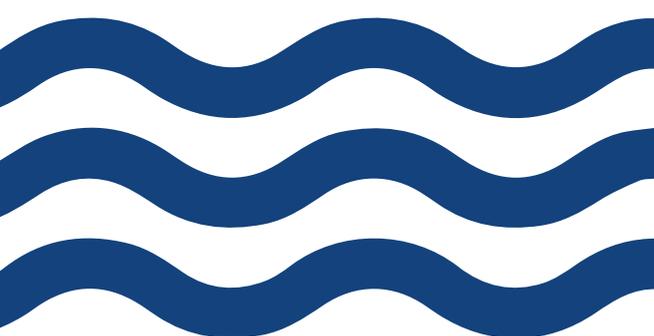
94 people were rescued in Lampedusa.

### **February 19th**

30 people were rescued by the Italian Coast Guard.

### **Rome, February 26th**

The ministers' court is examining the reports of a man from South Sudan and a woman from the Ivory Coast who claim to have been victims of the head of the Libyan judicial police Osama Almasri, arrested in Turin on January 9th on a warrant from the International Criminal Court (ICC) on war crimes and crimes against humanity charges, only to be released two days later on a technicality and brought back to Tripoli on a State flight.





**REPORT**

**BORDERLINE EUROPE**

**NEWS FROM THE CENTRAL  
MEDITERRANEAN**

## Arrivals

According to Borderline-Europe, 3.417 people reached Italy via sea in February 2025. Most of them (84%) arrived in Sicily - especially in Lampedusa. In addition, some other people arrived through the Ionic route, in Calabria (4%); most of these boats left from Turkey. In 77% of total cases, Borderline-Europe is able to demonstrate that the boats left from Libya, even though the numbers might be definitely higher. As for Tunisia, the departures of this month account for 1% of the total departures, in contrast with last year's data (10-15%). Following our counts, Italian authorities rescued 44% of the people who arrived in February, while NGOs' rescues account for 9% of the total number of people who arrived. Following Borderline-Europe, Frontex was involved in 23% of February's rescues.

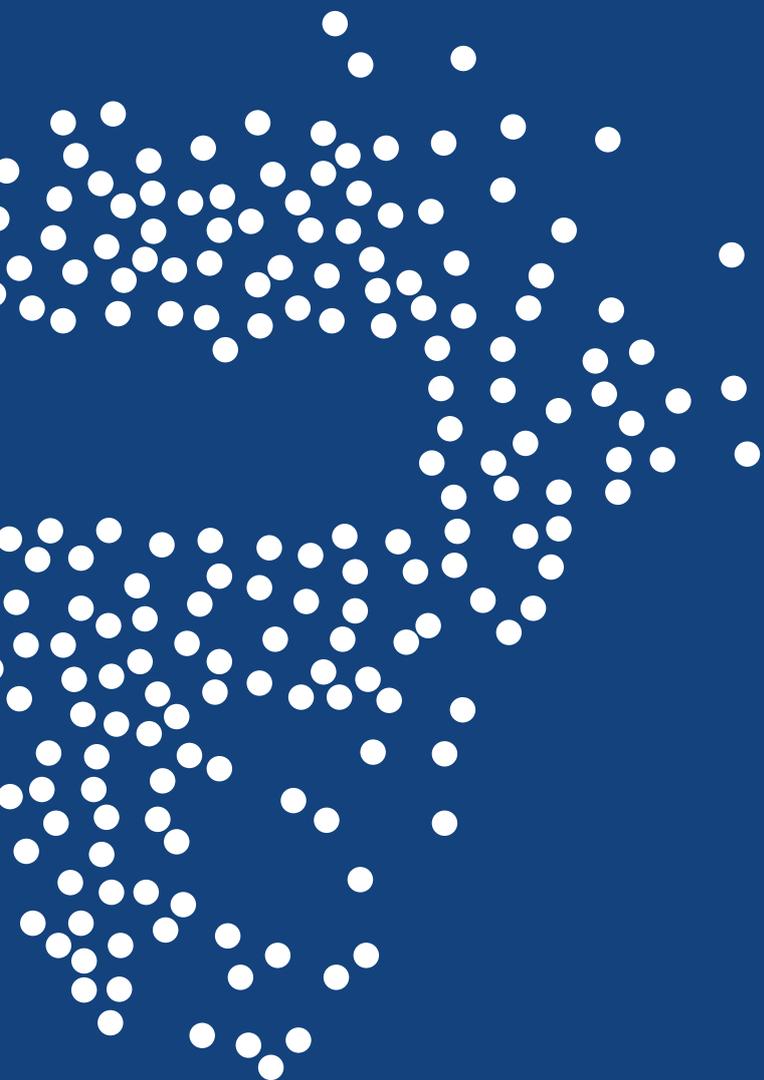
Moreover, 8% of the refugees reached Italian coastal waters (12

nautical miles from the coast) autonomously. As for 15% of the arrivals, no data were found about their rescue.

Following official data provided by the Italian Ministry of the Intern, in February 3.329 people arrived in Italy. We found similar numbers for this month's arrivals, but we would like to highlight that it's not possible to dive deep into the details of the data provided by the Ministry. In addition, in recent times it has become increasingly difficult to obtain accurate information on sea arrivals, as the work of journalists has become increasingly difficult.

We mustn't forget that behind these numbers there are people's fates, people who crossed dangerous paths to save their lives. Among this month's arrivals, there is a group of 130 people coming from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan who have been rescued by a fishing boat in a storm by Roccella Jonica's and Crotona's Italian Coast Guard. This difficult rescue operation lasted 14 hours and occurred 110 miles off the coast of Crotona with 6 meters-high waves and very strong wind. A merchant ship witnessed the operation. After the rescue, migrant people, among which were women, minors and a pregnant woman, were brought to the port of Crotona, underwent medical care and registered.

Some of the official measures after the arrival is the search of the so-called smugglers - people who are accused of smuggling, usually because it's said that they drove the boat. In the Crotona case, even two Afghan people were arrested as soon as they landed. They're accused of organizing the trip that brought 130 people to Crotona. Most of the time, the accusations are based on dubious evidence.



## Pushbacks

This month, we registered 1.680 pushbacks in the Central Mediterranean, where boats carrying refugees have been pushed back or returned to the North African coast. 1600 people were pushed back in Libya and 64 in Tunisia. Moreover, 16 people were intercepted by the Algerian Coast Guard in February and brought back to Algeria. These numbers are not sure, as the number of unreported cases is way higher. After these pushbacks, migrant people are often detained in working camps in precarious conditions, where violations of human rights are exerted on them, most of the time through violence.

The behaviour of the so-called Libyan and Tunisian Coast Guards violate international agreements. As an example, a boat that had already reached the Maltese SAR zone and was then under the Maltese responsibility area, was intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard and brought back to Libya, violating international law. Once they arrive there, refugees are threatened and mistreated. At the end of the month, we observed a similar behaviour exerted by the Tunisian Coast Guard, which intercepted a boat in distress with 64 people inside the maltese SAR zone and brought it to Tunisia anyways.

## Dead and missing

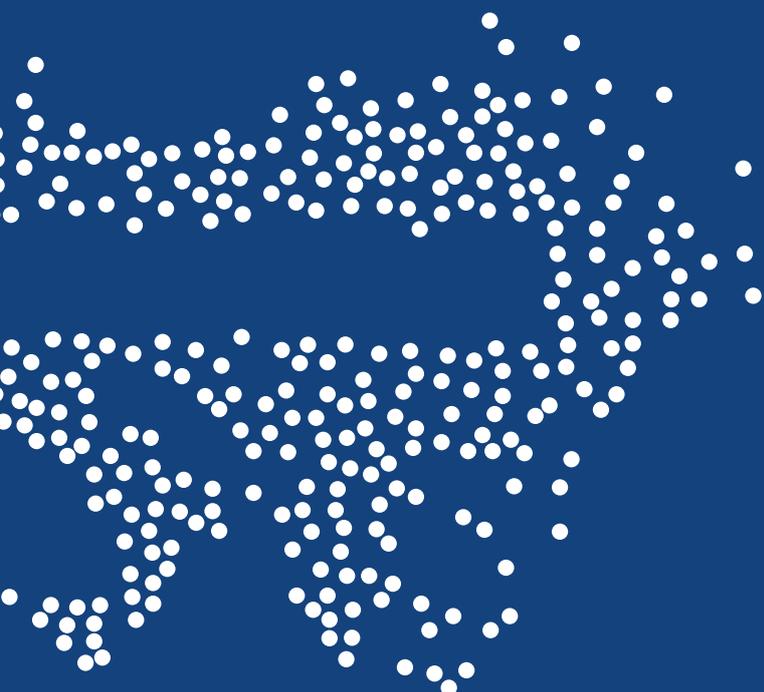
The number of dead and missing in the Central Mediterranean increases month by month. According to Borderline-Europe, 40 people died in the Mediterranean in February, while 10 are still considered missing. As for the fate of the other 116 people, it remains uncertain.

Mass graves in Libya: shocking discoveries and continued human rights violations

Two mass graves with an average of 50 bodies were recently found in the Southern Libyan desert. One of the graves, found in a farm in Kufra, contained 19 bodies. Another one, containing 30 bodies, was found after a raid in a migrant detention centre. The ones who survived said that up to 70 people may be buried there, some of them being killed before burial. The authorities freed 76 migrant people and arrested three suspects accused of kidnapping and torture.

These creepy findings highlight once again the systematic mistreatment migrant people face in Libya. Human rights organizations and the UN have been documenting such tortures, slavery, sexual violences and extortions for years. Those who have been repatriated to Libya after a failed crossing are particularly exposed to further human rights violations.

UE's and some of its members (as Italy and France) kept supporting Libya and this didn't help the condition of those looking for protection. Ten years after the most lethal shipwreck in the Mediterranean off Libyan coasts, migrant people keep being exposed to inhuman conditions, often caused by political actors who receive European fundings. UE recently reviewed fundings destined to Tunisia, following the report of repeated abuses perpetrated by security forces. In light of the new discoveries and after the criticisms received by the European Justice Court on the allocation of European funds to Libya, the EU should act also in this case. Instead of continuing to support questionable actors, the funds must be used to save lives and create safe escape routes from Libya.



## Civil resistance

In February 2025, 9% of the total rescues was carried out by NGOs. The “civil fleet”, the civil organization of sea rescues, saved a total of 322 people. This month a multiple rescue was carried out by Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée) in coordination with Italian authorities.

Generally, multiple rescues were prohibited by the Piantadosi Decree in 2023. The decree, issued under President Meloni, makes it a lot harder for NGOs to carry out their operations and imposes on them additional costs. The legislation obliges rescue ships to communicate every saving they carry out and then suddenly to set sail towards the port assigned by Italian authorities, which is often very far from the intervention area. This not only leads to significant delays of hours or even days in rescuing people in distress at sea, but also increases costs for organizations. As an example, Ocean Viking had to pay additional 1,3 millions in 2023/2024 due to such deviations, as shown in the report published by SOS Méditerranée. Another example of this obstructionist strategy is the fact that Ocean Viking was redirected towards the port of Livorno, while Humanity I was assigned to the port of Ravenna and, after a second saving, to the port of Civitavecchia. As can be seen, all these three ports are located in the North of Italy, far from the rescue zones in the Central Mediterranean.

For NGOs, it is clear that the systematic assignment of distant ports means that in many cases rescue missions are effectively prevented. Migrant people, already weak, need to bear additional inconveniences, while rescue ships are kept far from rescue zones for days and so are prevented from saving other people. This results in a deliberate emptying of the Mediterranean of rescue ships, a situation that causes an increase in the number of people left alone at sea. This kind of politics equals the criminalization of NGOs, as shown by the detention of Humanity I in December 2023, against which SOS Humanity filed a complaint, which was recently rejected by the Crotone Public Prosecutor Office.

Such restrictive measures issued by the Italian government are part of a strategy aimed at actively hindering humanitarian activities in the Mediterranean - despite the fact that rescue operations carried out by NGOs only represented 11% of the total rescues in Italy in 2023/24. To show solidarity against such criminalization, German NGOs like Sea-Eye and Sea-Watch launched this month a joint mission in the Mediterranean.

### **Spy scandal in Italy: government controls NGOs and journalists**

The Graphite scandal caused a stir in Italy during the last couple of weeks. Indeed, the spy software developed by the Israeli enterprise Paragon Solutions was apparently used by the Italian government to spy journalists and activists that work with migrants and fight for their rights through their smartphones. Among them, David Yambio, spokesperson of the NGO Refugees in Libya, and Luca Casarini, founder of the NGO Mediterranea Saving Humans. In addition, even the smartphone of Don Mattia Ferrari, a priest that collaborates with Mediterranea Saving Humans, was checked through Graphite. In recent weeks, news has been released that the Palermo Public Prosecutor's Office is conducting undercover investigations into Mediterranea Saving Humans, presumably from May 2024 and in order to justify the use of Graphite towards some of the NGO's members. Mediterranea Saving Humans is planning a legal action to clarify whether it is actually under investigation. According to Italian law, such measures can remain secret for a maximum of three months. Additionally, the political dimension of the affair is increasing. Even though such accusations were not confirmed yet, the link between political pressure and NGOs' monitoring clearly shows a growing criminalization of humanitarian organizations, while human rights' violations in Libya are being deliberately ignored.



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