



**MED REPORT**  
**MARCH 2025**

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# POLISH- BELARUSIAN BORDER VIOLENCE

THE SLOW AND INEXORABLE  
END OF A EUROPE FOUNDED ON  
HUMAN RIGHTS

On March 20, the Polish government officially suspended the right to apply for asylum at the border with Belarus, blocking any possibility of protection for those attempting to enter the country in search of safety. The measure not only violates the Geneva Refugee Convention, but also the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Yet Europe remains silent. A silence that becomes complicity, eroding fundamental principles and decreeing the end of humanity in an already dramatic context.

### **The erosion of the right to asylum, the authorization of refoulement**

The decision is the result of a strategy Poland has been pursuing for years. As early as 2021, as migrant arrivals from Belarus increased, the Polish government declared a state of emergency along the border and built a 186-kilometer wall to prevent passage. The idea of suspending the right to asylum had been under discussion for months, but it was formally approved by President Andrzej Duda on March 14 and made operational a few days later. The new measure stipulates that anyone who attempts to enter Poland illegally will automatically be rejected (thus illegally) without the possibility of filing an asylum claim, in violation of international norms.

According to official data, in the first seven days of the law's implementation, at least 12 asylum applications were rejected without any evaluation. The Polish measure not only violates the Geneva Refugee Convention, but also the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

### **Poland: asylum officially suspended at the border with Belarus**

The Polish government has officially suspended the right to apply for asylum at the border with Belarus, blocking any possibility of protection for those attempting to enter the country in search of safety. The measure, which went into effect on March 20, effectively sanctions the criminalization of migration and represents a dramatic step backward in the protection of human rights in Europe, which some states are nonetheless watching with emulation interest.

### **The Polish-Belarusian border: violence, rape and despair in the forests**

The situation on the Polish-Belarusian border is dramatic. Thousands of migrants fleeing wars, dictatorships, and humanitarian crises find themselves trapped in a no-man's land, forced to wander for weeks in icy forests without food or water. Many are violently pushed back by Polish border guards, who use pepper spray, batons and dogs to prevent entry.

Testimonies collected by aid organizations tell of brutal violence. A 32-year-old Syrian refugee reported to Doctors Without Borders that he was beaten with sticks and left shoeless in the snow. Recent cases of sexual abuse of migrant women and of minors separated from their families and forced to survive as soles in the extreme cold have been documented.

In 2023, at least 50 deaths were recorded in the forested area between Poland and Belarus,

but the real number could be much higher. Rescue teams regularly find bodies of migrants who have died of hypothermia or starvation. Some, however, die of starvation because they become trapped in the swampy area. Otherwise, some bodies are never recovered, swallowed by the forest. Meanwhile, there was discussion in Poland about how the migration phenomenon was ruining the area's tourist season.

### **Poland's justification and the position of the European Union.**

The Polish government claims the measure is necessary to protect national security and to counter the so-called "hybrid war" by Belarus, which is accused of orchestrating the migration crisis to destabilize Europe. Since 2021, in fact, Alexander Lukashenko's regime has been accused of facilitating the entry of migrants into EU territory, pushing them to the borders of Poland, Lithuania and Latvia in response to European sanctions against Minsk following the elections.

Other European countries are following Poland's lead. Finland has announced that it will extend the suspension of asylum rights along its border with Russia until 2026, turning away asylum seekers without examining their applications, again justifying it by Russia's "instrumentalization of migration." This narrative, however, justifies the suspension of such a basic human right as the right to seek asylum. Finland is also a signatory to the Geneva Refugee Convention and should abide by the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits sending people back to places where they might suffer persecution or inhumane treatment.

Lithuania and Latvia are also considering similar measures. Lithuania has already approved a plan to physically reinforce border barriers in the marshy and forested areas separating the country from Belarus and Russia to prevent people on the move from crossing.

Lithuania has also been at the center of numerous illegal rejections, with people left stranded in the "no man's land" between the two borders, exposed to cold, hunger and violence from border guards. Latvia, for its part, follows the same logic; according to ECRE data, more than 4,000 people have been illegally turned back at the Latvian border in recent months, without the possibility of applying for protection.

Although Brussels has expressed "concern" about the Polish decision, it has not taken any concrete measures to counter it. The European Commission has merely stressed that each member state has the right to manage its own borders, but has avoided openly condemning the violation of the right to asylum. A silence that amounts to complicity in the erosion of fundamental EU principles, and the end of humanity in an already dramatic context.

Europe is abandoning its fundamental principles, turning the right to asylum into a privilege instead of a guaranteed right. This is not only an attack against migrant people, but against the very idea of a Europe based on human rights. It is now clear and evident, in fact, how Europe privileges rejections, the building of walls, the absence of legal avenues and the strengthening of voluntary and forced returns.

Instead, the Polish law should be revoked and the right to apply for asylum should be restored in accordance with international conventions. Humanitarian corridors should be established to ensure that migrant people are not forced to risk their lives crossing forests, swamps and rivers. And finally, the criminalization of civil society and activists working to save lives must end: access to the Polish border area is all but impossible, leaving it in a gray area with no possibility of humanitarian assistance, monitoring and support for people on the move.

If today we accept that the right to asylum is suspended in Poland, tomorrow it could happen all over Europe.



# A BORDER STORY: TAPACHULA

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA CEGNA

Andrea Cegna is a freelance journalist, creator of the “Il Finestrino” on Substack and about to make a documentary entitled “Mexico 2025”, which can be supported through a crowdfunding campaign on “Produzioni dal basso”. In “Una storia di frontiera: Tapachula” (= A Border Story: Tapachula), his documentary, he talks about Tapachula, which is a border city between Mexico and Guatemala, historically considered a crucial place for migratory movements in the region.

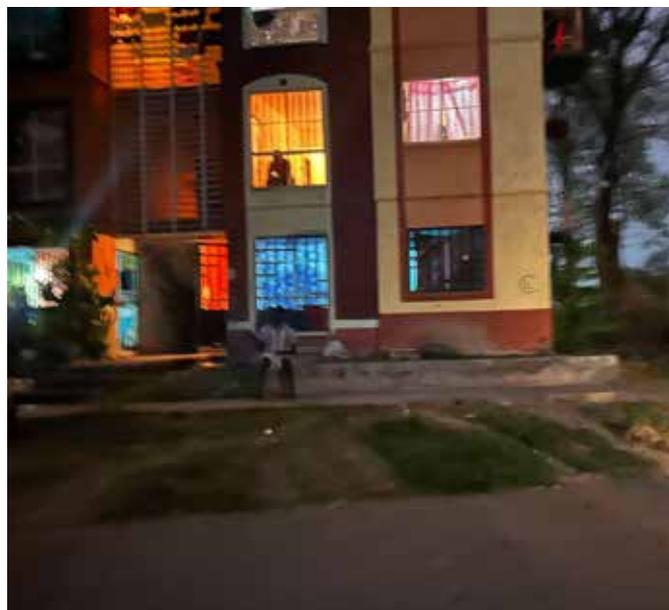
in fact, the city has emptied. Restaurants and shops remain deserted, the houses are empty. This increases the concerns of the local population, who now find themselves without an important source of income.

Given the limited possibilities of entering the United States, only two options remain for thousands of people trying to reach the United States. Many return to their countries of origin, Mexico having never been the true destination of the journey. Others, however, especially those from Cuba or African countries, are trying to diversify their routes, experimenting with new crossings and new routes to reach the United States. Migrant people no longer pass through Tapachula and other large cities in the area, preferring other informal crossings where they can search for coyotes. The composition of migrant people groups has also changed in recent months: smaller groups have taken the place of the historic caravans, made up of thousands of people.

Andrea Cegna tells us that, in general, a sense of “mistrust and defeat” reigns among the migrant population due to having to live with the certainty of not being able to enter the United States. In fact, from November 2024 until January 2025, the lines in front of the offices of the National Institute of Migration or of Comar (Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid) were very long, precisely because migrants were trying to obtain the necessary documents to reach the north of the country in a regular manner.

### **Tapachula, the largest border city between Mexico and Guatemala**

Tapachula has been, in recent years, the largest border city between Mexico and Guatemala, hosting tens of thousands of migrant people headed to the United States. As time went by, the city has been shaped around migratory phenomena. In the 1960s, for example, a large influx of Chinese immigrants meant that today Tapachula is populated by Chinese shops and restaurants. Over time, a real economy linked to migration has developed, reaching a balance also thanks to the economic opportunities that migratory flows have brought to the local population. However, the migration routes towards the United States have been redrawn in recent months, especially as a consequence of the radical decisions of the President of the United States Donald Trump, among which we can mention the increase in deportations and the suspension of the CBP-One application. But to which are added the complicity of the governments of the transit countries and in general the support for these approaches from the states of the world. In the last two months,





In Mexico, Cegna adds, the policies of recent years have done nothing but “exacerbate the conflict between the poor”. The approach to migration management by previous governments has been mainly violent, with frequent charges and beatings with truncheons. In recent times, however, the government has implemented several policies, including the possibility of requesting a temporary permit and support for repatriation projects in the countries of origin, trying to give greater emphasis to the individual and his migratory history rather than to the unity that was formed with the caravans.

However, the hatred by the local population towards migrant people has increased, since it is in the presence of the migrant population that the causes of the poor services in the territory are identified - says Gisela Centeno, who works in the migration sector and analyses its complexities and problems. The inefficiency of the health system is attributed to the attempts of migrants to access it, without considering the fact that the deficiencies are structural and the absence of the State is chronic. Tapachula has become the most expensive city in Mexico to live in, given the speculation on the cost of rents and restaurants made possible by the constant presence of migrant people, and the working population has to face very high costs for rents, taxes, and basic necessities.

All of these are aspects that contribute to increasing the perception that the dissatisfaction and difficulties of the local population are caused by the presence of migrant people.

It is precisely in these “political voids that war is created between people”, says Cegna. And it is precisely government policies and political inclinations that shape migratory flows in the regions: the relative openings of the Biden government towards Venezuelan people, which were part of a perspective of criticism and opposition towards President Maduro and which had lead thousands of people to try and enter the United States, have now been cancelled by the decisions of the Trump government.

All this has not stopped migrant people, who continue to try and cross the border, in a migration that “has not stopped, but has only moved and become invisible”, the journalist concludes.

# 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.

**Cape Verde, March 7th**

A drifting boat with 14 people on board was found south of Cape Verde with no survivors.

**Bangladesh, March 13th**

176 Bengali nationals were repatriated to Bangladesh through IOM's voluntary repatriation program. However, some sources report that 106 of them were in Tajoura prison and were deported back to their country against their will.

**European Union, March 3rd**

The European Commission is considering proposing new EU directives that would more stringently require member states to expel asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected.

**Malta, March 13th**

Some documents from an EU military operation that leaked to the press state that Malta "refuses" to participate in rescue missions in its SAR area of jurisdiction.

**European Union, March 28th**

The European Court of Justice issued a sentence stating that just being potentially exposed to a family feud in another country is not sufficient reason to be granted asylum in Europe. However, the sentence is likely to clash with others from the same Court on similar cases.

**Chebba, March 3rd**

64 people - sailed from Libya on a stranded and subsequently capsized boat - were rescued by Tunisian authorities, who brought them to the port of Chebba.

**Civil Fleet, March 4th**

Aurora (Sea-Watch) rescued 32 people trapped for four days on the Miskar oil platform and disembarked them in Lampedusa.

**Oinousses, March 5th**

The Greek Coast Guard pushed back to Turkey an endangered boat intercepted off the island of Oinousses.

**Crete, March 11th**

50 people were rescued by the Greek Coast Guard south of Crete.

**Port Said, March 12th**

About 42 people were intercepted by the merchant ship Ector off Egypt and pushed back to Port Said.

**Libya, March 13th**

A boat drifting off the coast of Libya was intercepted by the so-called Libyan coast guard and people were pushed back to Libya.

**Civil Fleet, March 17th**

Life Support (Emergency) rescued 35 people who sailed from Sabratha on a boat in distress in the Libyan SAR zone and disembarked them in the port of La Spezia.

**Capo Greco, March 17th**

A boat carrying about 23 people sank off Cape Greco, Cyprus. Exact numbers of dead, missing and survivors are not known.



### **Civil Fleet, March 18th**

In a joint operation with Nadir (ResQShip), Aurora rescued 26 people and disembarked them in Lampedusa.

### **Tunisia, March 18th**

During a night with several departures from the Tunisian coast, at least one boat sank, causing 18 deaths. Tunisian authorities reported rescuing 612 people.

### **Lampedusa, March 19th**

In a shipwreck off the coast of Lampedusa, 6 people died and about 40 are missing. The Italian Coast Guard rescued 10 survivors.

### **Civil Fleet, March 25th**

Thanks to Seabird (Sea-Watch) air support and Alarm Phone alerts, Aurora assisted 85 people on a boat in distress until the arrival of the Italian Coast Guard, which embarked them and transferred them to Lampedusa.

### **Civil Fleet, March 25th**

In a joint operation with Nadir (ResQShip), Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity) rescued 60 people and landed them in Porto Empedocle.

### **Rome, March 7th**

The Court of Cassation in Rome ruled that the Italian state must pay compensation to a group of migrant people who, after being rescued in 2018, were detained aboard the Coast Guard ship Diciotti for about 10 days on the orders of then Interior Minister Salvini.

### **Milan, March 13th**

The Milan Tribunal accused of fraud Martinina SRL, the company that runs the city's CPR, where there were several protests by detainees and cases of violence by law enforcement officers.

### **Rome, March 20th**

Abdul Ghani Al-Kikli, a well-known Tripoli militia leader accused of torture, enforced disappearances and murder by the International Criminal Court, was in Italy, but the Meloni government did not arrest him.

### **Rome, March 21st**

Following the Rome Tribunal's sentence condemning Italy for cooperating in June 2021 with the so-called Libyan coast guard in the refoulement of a boat operated by the merchant ship Vos Triton, Adam, a 29-year-old Sudanese victim of the refoulement, arrived in Italy on a scheduled flight thanks to this sentence.

### **Rome, March 26th**

Some Mediterraneo Saving Humans activists were spied on by Italian intelligence with Paragon Graphite military software because they were considered a "danger to national security" at the request of the Meloni government after authorization from the General Attorney Amato.





**REPORT**

**BORDERLINE EUROPE**

**NEWS FROM THE CENTRAL  
MEDITERRANEAN**

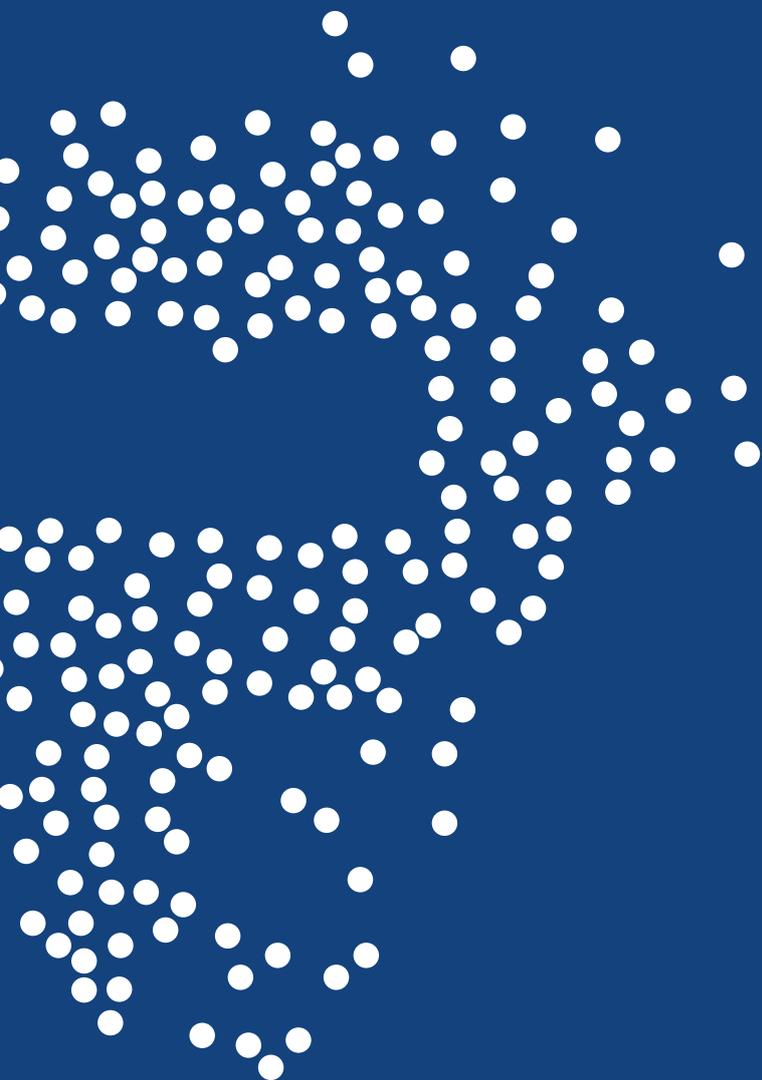
## Arrivals

According to Borderline-Europe's calculations, 2,845 people reached Italy by sea in March 2025. Most people on the move (93%) arrived in Sicily - especially in Lampedusa. Moreover, there were also still some arrivals in Calabria through the Ionian route (4,9%); in these cases, most watercrafts departed from Turkey. Overall, Borderline-Europe can prove that for about 72% of the arrivals, the watercrafts departed from Libya, but the true percentage is probably much higher. The departures from Tunisia were a total of 4% this month, with a slight increase from last month (1%). According to our calculations, Italian authorities rescued about 57% of those who arrived, while in 5 cases ONG vessels provided first aid. 20,5% of the rescues were made by ONG vessels.

According to Borderline-Europe's data, Frontex was involved in approximately 5% of the rescue in February. 15,5% of refugee people reached Italian coastal waters independently (12 nautical miles from the coast) without being intercepted or rescued. No rescue information was available for 2% of arrivals.

According to official data from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, 2,407 people arrived in Italy in March. We confirm similar numbers for this month's arrivals, but we would like to point out that it is not possible to gain access to the background of the numbers the Ministry of the Interior released. Besides, lately it has become more and more difficult to gain accurate information on arrivals by sea. The work of journalists is becoming increasingly difficult, as shown by the journalists of the daily newspaper *Dire* ongoing strike on March 22nd, who have not been paid for two months.

We can't forget that there are fates behind these numbers: people who have crossed a route often risking their lives. On March 7th, at least 46 people lost their lives during a naval accident off the coast of Lampedusa. Six bodies were recovered and 40 people are still missing. Only ten survivors from Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Mali and Guinea were rescued. They said they remained on the seashore for five days without the Italian authorities responding to their requests for help. This episode clearly shows how the Italian authorities are partially responsible for the deaths in the Mediterranean.



## Pushbacks

This month we recorded 1,400 interceptions in the central Mediterranean, in which the watercrafts bringing refugees were pushed or brought back to the North-African coast. 756 people were pulled back to Libya and 644 to Tunisia. These numbers are not guaranteed, because the number of unreported cases is much higher. On March 17th, the Tunisian National Guard announced that they had “saved” more than 600 people trying to cross the Mediterranean and pushed them back to Tunisia. 18 bodies were also retrieved. After these push-backs, migrant people are often held in detention centers in precarious conditions. Human rights violations are regularly documented in these detention centers.

### **Malta refuses to carry out rescue operations in its own SAR zone**

Leaked documents reveal how Malta systemically refuses to carry out rescue operations in its designated Search and Rescue (SAR) zone. An internal note from the EU naval operation Iriini explicitly states “Malta never answers and refuses to follow these operations”. This is a damning assignment from an official EU military source and is similar to reports from NGOs that receive no response to their distress calls or emails from the Maltese authorities. While Malta rescued 92 people between January and October of last year, 12,399 people were rescued from the Italian Coast Guard. The so-called Libyan coast guard gathered 8,179 people and NGOs’ vessels rescued 8,271 people. As Malta’s Times states, these numbers indicate a deliberate strategy: if Malta does not react, the issue will be transferred to others. Malta is consciously deciding to let people die in the Mediterranean.

## Dead and missing

The number of dead and missing people in the central Mediterranean increases each month. According to Borderline-Europe’s data, 31 people lost their lives during the breakaway in March and 41 people are still missing solely counting this month. Other 60 people’s fate is still uncertain. In this case the number of unreported cases is likely much higher, as well.

According to IOM, 2024 was the deadliest year for migrant people since records began: last year at least 8,938 people died on migratory routes.

The identification of shipwreck victims in the Mediterranean and the grief of those affected remain key issues in the context of migration. This is the topic of the latest Borderline-Europe publication, “Streiflicht Italien: Verlorene Leben, unerzählte Geschichten” (= “Glimpse of Italy: lost lives, untold stories”).

### **Routes towards Europe: Libya and Tunisia**

#### **Doubtful collaborations: a militia leader in Rome**

The close collaboration between Italy and Libya on migration policy is increasingly criticized. The visit of the controversial Libyan militia leader Abdul Ghani Al-Kikli to Rome has once again raised questions about Italy’s support for Libyan actors. Al-Kikli is known for his role in the detention and mistreatment of migrant people in Libyan prisons. His presence in Italy demonstrates the problematic collaboration between Rome and actors directly linked to human rights violations. Since the signing of the memorandum in 2017, Italy has provided Libya with financial and material support to control migration, also in collaboration with militias. Therefore Italy’s shared responsibility for abuses in Libyan detention centers can no longer be denied.

## **Cooperation with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard: illegal practice?**

The cooperation with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard is peculiarly problematic. Italy finances their operations to carry out the so-called push-backs, during which migrant people are intercepted on open sea and pushed back to Libya. Although the so-called Libyan Coast Guard intercepted more people in 2024 than ever before, often in international or Maltese waters, the number of crossing to Europe continued to increase. This calls into question the effectiveness of the European and Italian strategy. Recently, however, in an important precedent, the Rome court declared the systematic practice of the Italian maritime rescue coordination center to be unlawful, since despite its resources and knowledge, it fails to rescue migrants in distress at sea and leaves them to the Libyan authorities. However Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi still defended the close collaboration with Libya in the Senate, arguing that it should prevent dangerous crossings and strengthen search and rescue operations in accordance with international law. Nonetheless, critics accuse him of shifting Italy's responsibility for people seeking protection onto Libya, thus supporting a system that blatantly violates human rights.

## **Human trafficking between Tunisia and Libya: EU funds criticized**

The current report "State Trafficking - Expulsion and Sale of Migrants from Tunisia and Libya" also documented state-sponsored human trafficking between Tunisia and Libya. The report presented to the European Parliament, shows that migrants are systematically expelled from Tunisia and sold at the Libyan border, using vehicles financed by European funds. The Tunisian government denied the accusations, but the publication stirred an international sensation. The revelations have intensified criticisms of Europe's migration policy, which increasingly focuses on isolation without paying sufficient attention to respecting human rights standards.

## **Escalation of violence against migrant people in North Africa: Libya and Tunisia criticized**

Between March 12th and 16th, massive attacks against people of color, including migrants and locals, took place in western Libya. Militias, security forces and civilians have carried out coordinated raids, arresting hundreds of people, evicting them from their homes and destroying their property. At least two people were killed. In cities such as Tripoli, Sabrata and Janzour, numerous migrants have been arrested or handed over directly to militias. The Libyan government is also fueling violence with hate speech and pursuing the goal of expelling all people of color from Libya. It also calls on the United Nations to provide greater support for the "voluntary return" of migrant people to their countries of origin, an approach that is often criticized as forced deportation.

The situation of migrant people is also worsening in Tunisia. With the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the government is increasingly pushing for their "voluntary return". Human rights organizations such as the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) report increasing violence and discrimination against migrant people from Sub-Saharan Africa. In the city of Sfax in particular, around 30,000 people live in precarious conditions in makeshift camps, often in olive groves. There are increasing reports of abuse by the Tunisian police, as well as reports of migrant people being handed over to Libyan human traffickers. Journalists criticize the lack of transparency and poor information on the situation of refugees in Tunisia.

## Civil resistance

In March, 2025, 20,5% of all the rescues were carried out by NGOs. The “civil fleet”, the civil rescue at sea, was able to save a total of 509 people. This month there was a multiple rescue, carried out by Sea-Eye 4 (NGO Sea-Eye), which managed to save 122 people in four consecutive rescues.

A rescue mission, carried out on an oil rig in international waters, has received particular media attention. In early March, the rescue vessel Aurora (NGO Sea-Watch) rescued 32 people who had left Libya and were stranded on the Tunisian oil platform Miskar. According to Alarm Phone, among them there were four women and two children, and one person died. The rescue by Sea-Watch was preceded by several days of inaction by the Maltese and Italian authorities, despite human rights organizations having drawn their attention to the situation and asked for an intervention. During this time, people reported the lack of water, food and shelter and the harsh conditions on the platform, where they could not be properly assisted. In the meantime, there was talk of an evacuation by the Tunisian coast guard, which in certain circumstances could have been a push-back. In this context, a Sea-Watch spokesperson denounced the “calculated failure of European States” and stressed the importance of civilian rescue at sea in the Mediterranean. The rescue was supported by Sea-Watch’s aerial reconnaissance.

In April, another aircraft will be added to its fleet: Seabird 3, jointly operated with the Humanitarian Pilots Initiative and United4Rescue, will be deployed in both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, in the Canary Island area. This measure is intended to ensure that the Seabird fleet remains operational in the event that one of the reconnaissance aircraft is confiscated (under the Flow Decree).

## Cutro case update: progress in legal proceedings

Two years after the shipwreck of Curto, with at least 94 dead and numerous missing people, the trial continues. Six officers of the Italian Coast Guard and the Italian Finance Police (Guardia di Finanza) are on trial for negligently causing the shipwreck. In addition to the relatives of the victims and survivors, including two Pakistanis already convicted of aiding illegal entry, several maritime rescue organizations appear as co-defendants, including Sea-Watch, SOS MEDITERRANEE, SOS Humanity, Mediterranea Saving Humans, EMERGENCY and Louise Michel. They see the incident as the result of a systematic failure by the authorities and are calling for a full investigation involving higher-level authorities as well. The organizations have been documenting cases of failure to provide assistance in the Mediterranean for years and are calling for political and official responsibility for avoidable deaths to no longer go unpunished. The trial could be a crucial step against the failure of the State in sea rescue.



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