



Scirocco
borderline-europe, Sicily –
Part 02/2023
Palermo, 31.01.2023



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

Political and social situation

The Italian right is currently experiencing a [fallout over the new decree law](#) that restricts the number of rescues of NGO ships. It had come into force on [2 January 2023](#) (we reported about it [here](#)). The right-wing Lega party had made proposals to extend the decree, but these rather concern the [Bossi-Fini Immigration Law](#) of 2002 and the security decrees issued later in this context. For example, the [Lega proposed](#) to delete the possibility of "special protection" for asylum seekers, the hurdle for family reunification should be raised and the length of stay in detention centres for deportees should be doubled. The corresponding amendments were declared inadmissible by two members of Forza Italia (FI) and Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi), which together with the Lega form the Italian government, as they had nothing to do with the NGO decree. The Lega's appeal against the inadmissibility was rejected by chairmen of the First and Ninth Committees of the Chamber of Deputies. Salvini, however, appears to remain calm and still hopes for some of his demands to be included in the "NGO decree" that is to become law on 2

February. And indeed, Interior Minister Piantedosi is making concessions...

European migration policy

On 26 January the Ministry of the Interior presented a new Italian proposal in Sweden that is meant to **speed up the deportation of undocumented migrants** to their country of origin under the fairly blatant title "[accompanied forced return](#)". At the same time, [Austria, the Netherlands and Belgium](#) had already announced in the so-called "Hague Non Paper" that they are not willing to change the Dublin Regulation, as Italy - being one of the first countries of entry for refugees - demands. On 9 and 10 February, these issues are to be discussed at the Council of Europe meeting. It is already clear that there will be no agreement that will improve the lives of refugees.



Photo: Trinity Moss, unplash

Bilateral agreements

In search of bilateral agreements on the **migration blockade** (see [here](#)), Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani met with [Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi](#) in Cairo. The two politicians negotiated Egyptian practices to prevent migration to Italy and to take back migrants who are deported from Italy. Italian government politicians also discussed such a bilateral agreement with [Tunisia](#). Italy was

prepared to [allow more \(qualified\) Tunisians to enter Italy legally](#) if Tunisia, in return, **secured its own borders better** and blocked unauthorised migration. At the same time, [Italian Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi](#) travelled to Ankara to present a [plan for the stability of Libya](#) and to sign another bilateral agreement (memorandum) on strengthening cooperation between the **Italian and Turkish border police**. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni also visited [Libya](#) on 28 January to sign agreements with a government that does not really exist. Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Ddeibah, recognised by the UN, and Fathi Bashaga, former interior minister under the Sarraj government in Tripoli and now head of the government in Tobruk, continue to fight for power. [Eight billion euros](#) are to go via the Italian oil and gas company ENI to the Libyan National Oil Company, which is under Dbeibah's control. In return, there is gas for Italy and certainly also agreements to prevent migration.



Contrada Imbriacola, Lampedusa

Hotspot system

The **miserable living conditions at the hotspot of Contrada Imbriacola** on Lampedusa have long been known. In the first week of January alone [3,000 people arrived on Lampedusa](#) - even though the

reception centre is already overcrowded and the municipality is financially and structurally overstretched. Despite the [death of a 30-year-old refugee](#) for whom any medical help had come too late, the Italian government is now discussing the **opening of further hotspots**, for example between [Trieste and Gorizia](#) along the so-called Balkan route. In such a hotspot, migrants and refugees may be accommodated for a maximum of one week while they wait to be transferred to other regions. Experience shows that this often does not work, especially when the hotspots are full.

Migration and work

Along with Germany and the UK, Italy is now also a major **country of immigration in Europe**. The [OECD report of 2021](#) stated that migrants "pay more in taxes than they receive in social benefits, health and education" and contribute to 9% of GDP with around 144 billion euros. Moreover, according to the report the employment rate of/among foreigners is at a similar level to that of people with Italian citizenship. The number of migrant entrepreneurs is increasing, as is the dependence of certain sectors on migrant workers, especially agriculture and care - the latter being particularly important in the context of an ageing Italian society. Against this background it becomes clear that Italy would "collapse abruptly, factories would close, construction sites would come to a standstill" if migrant workers and entrepreneurs were absent. Above all, however - and this should be emphasised again and again - stands the **right to freedom of movement, to a life in dignity and security and solidarity with people** who live and work under

catastrophic conditions for their bodies and psyches due to racist structures and the deadly consequences of European border politics. Only legal work contracts and adequate salaries can counteract this precarious situation.

Situation of Refugees

But at present, exploitation prevails in the labour market, especially in the agricultural sector. In the [ghetto of Borgo Mezzanone](#) in the Foggia region, **two people have once again died from the flue gas of a fire**. Their names were [Ibrahim and Rock Queen](#). To protect themselves from the cold, they had set up a makeshift cooker in their hut, which caught fire while they were sleeping. The [workers at Borgo Mezzanone](#) then **went on strike for over four hours** to demand the construction of housing, basic services and health care, as well as genuine inclusion in the local area. A fire also broke out in a [reception centre in Malgrate on Lake Como](#), where many families were staying. 54 people, including many children, could be evacuated; fortunately no one was injured.

The Balkan route

According to official counts by FRONTEX, around **45% of unauthorised arrivals in the EU in 2022 involved the Balkan route**, a 136% increase compared to the previous year. Most people taking this route come from [Syria, Afghanistan, Tunisia and Turkey](#). By comparison, the second most travelled route is the Central Mediterranean, also showing an increase of 51% compared to the previous year. After the pandemic-related low in 2020,

2022 was the [second consecutive](#) year with an increase in the number of arrivals to the EU. Yet we would like to recall that, [according to the UN](#), 103 million people are currently displaced worldwide and this number is increasing. Arrivals and entries in Italy are therefore comparatively low.



Photo: RiVolti ai Balcani

On the land route to Europe, which most people from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh take, the Italian city of Trieste represents a central point, because from here many migrants and refugees want to continue towards Germany, France and Northern Europe. [As Amnesty International warns in an appeal](#), **the Balkan route is a path marked by violence, torture, push backs and arbitrary restrictions** that endanger the rights of migrants and make many of them victims of illegal deportations. For a year now the accommodation situation in the north-eastern regions has been catastrophic (we reported continuously in [previous issues](#) of Scirocco). As a result of the refoulements ordered by Italy, **chain deportations** from Italy to Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina or Serbia occur again and again. These violate the right of access to the asylum procedure and to legal proceedings. It would therefore be necessary for the Italian

government to prevent such refolements. Yet instead government officials are flirting with legalising the **readmission of migrants and refugees between Italy and Slovenia** (we report about this [here](#)). The tragedy of the collective and chain refolement, which affected hundreds of people who within a few hours (...) found themselves back in Bosnia and Herzegovina and thus outside European territory, is by now well known," reads [a statement by the network RiVolti ai Balcani](#), which joins protests by lawyers and activists against abuses on the Balkan route. According to the Rome Court of Justice, **the deportations also violate the principle of non-refoulement**, Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and Article 4 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

On the other hand, there is the welcome news of a ruling by the First Civil Chamber of the Court of Ancona in mid-January: at the [request of a Pakistani man and with the support of the Embassy of Rights](#), a non-profit organisation based in Ancona, it condemned the long waiting times faced by undocumented migrants in Italy (we reported about this [here](#)). **The decision now obliges the prefecture and the police headquarters to find solutions for the reception of migrants in the city** and to formalise the receipt of an application for international protection within five days.

Ventimiglia

Despite the cold of winter the number of arrivals in Ventimiglia is high and national provision of **care and health services remains insufficient**. According to [Cristian Papini, director of Caritas](#)

[Ventimiglia](#), many families - consisting of mothers and children without men - as well as unaccompanied minors, are currently arriving from Côte d'Ivoire or Guinea. Papini is therefore calling for the opening of a new reception centre that can provide **medical, psychological and humanitarian assistance**. [Caritas](#) has also launched an appeal for donations of warm clothes and blankets and is asking for volunteers from the local population. On 18 January [ten young Pakistani migrants](#), who due to the impossibility of simply continuing their journey to France were forced to travel over a dangerous mountain pass and got caught in a snowstorm, were fortunately rescued. Cases like this show how **dangerous it is to cross Italian borders**, which are increasingly policed despite the Schengen Agreement.

In his recently published book "[Il gioco sporco](#)" journalist Valerio Nicolosi reports from the Balkans, Ukraine and the Mediterranean and denounces European migration policy and the use of refugees as an unacceptable weapon in wars.

Find more information on the situation in Italy and previous issues of the Scirocco under "Projects" on our homepage.

Contact

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