



Scirocco
borderline-europe, Sicily –
Part 20/2022
Palermo, 29.11.2022



Scirocco borderline-europe, Sicily - Part 20/2022

Palermo, 29.11.2022

Scirocco [ʃiˈrɒkko-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

After the Italian government ignored requests for a safe harbour in Sicily from the civilian rescue ship Ocean Viking of SOS Méditerranée with 230 people on board, it was forced to dock in Toulon after an offer from the French government. This event led to a **dispute between the governments in Rome and Paris**. "If Italy insists on this position, there will be consequences. For our part, we have suspended the resettlement program for migrants from Italy and strengthened French-Italian border controls. Rome must be reminded of its duty to humanity," commented [French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna](#) on the tense situation. However, not only Italy refuses to accept people on board the Ocean Viking, but also France. Out of 230 people seeking protection, [123](#) were rejected after arriving in Toulon. A few days later, Italian President Sergio Mattarella and French President Emmanuel Macron resumed talks, calling for European initiatives and a [migration](#)

[summit at the level of foreign and interior ministers](#). Migrants and refugees suffer the most from the migration policies of both states, as they are exposed to **restrictive and anti-migration sentiment** in both countries.

Italian migration policy

In a [joint statement](#), the Mediterranean states of Cyprus, Malta, Greece and Italy drew attention to the overload of their reception systems, postulating that they would bear the greatest burden of migration movements in the Mediterranean region and that the implementation of voluntary redistribution mechanisms would not work. At the same time, they demanded that the work of non-governmental organizations in the Mediterranean region be restricted. **The Spanish government opposed this statement, seeing it as a violation of international law and a disregard for the law of the sea.**

The EU Commission has presented the Council with a [20-point EU action plan](#) to address the immediate and ongoing challenges along the central Mediterranean route, which arguably aligns with the goals of Italian Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi. This is an **attempt to manage migration** and [externalize European borders](#) through police cooperation with non-European third countries and increased cooperation among EU member states. During the meeting on 25/11/22, EU interior ministers reinforced the importance of the solidarity mechanism, which a number of EU countries, including Italy, agreed to in June. Under this mechanism, asylum seekers are

relocated to another EU country (than the one of entry). This distribution mechanism should lead to a fairer distribution in member states (see [here](#) and [here](#)). [Roberto Forin, Deputy Director of the Mixed Migration Centre](#) emphasized with regard to the ad hoc meeting that the current conflict of the European migration and border regime has been triggered by Italy's **harsh attitude towards migrants**: "Preventing rescue boats from docking in Italian ports and pressuring NGOs is nothing new. This is what Italy's former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini did in 2019 when he closed Italian waters to migrant rescue vessels," Forin continued. The concrete implementation of the 20-point EU action plan will likely be decided at a **follow-up meeting on December 8**.

[Well-known comedian Maurizio Crozza](#) now also intervened in the heated debates on the Italian migration regime, stressing that solidarity is not a crime. Crozza expressed solidarity with the former mayor of Riace, Mimmo Lucano, who was convicted for supporting refugees and migrants (see [here](#)). Crozza also explained that **in recent years more Italians have left the country than immigrated to Italy**: 5.2 million foreigners in Italy compared to 5.8 million Italians abroad.

Italian Health Care System

In a [survey commissioned by Amref](#), 49% of the Italians surveyed voted that **migrants should continue to enjoy free access to health care**, even if they do not have a residence permit. This is a right guaranteed by the National Health Service. Guglielmo Micucci, director of

Amref Health Africa-Italy, points out that Ebola and Covid-19 have taught us that health is a good that knows no borders and should therefore encourage us to work together.

Blocking the asylum application process

In Lombardy, people are more or less denied the right to apply for asylum due to **great difficulties in accessing the competent authorities, as well as very long waiting times**. A [number of associations](#) warn in an **appeal to all institutions and competent bodies in the region** that this is a serious violation of European and national rules on the recognition of refugee status. The signatories demand immediate structural and effective solutions to this bureaucratic blockade of the asylum system.

Reception situation in Sardinia

In Sardinia, [80% of all asylum applications have been rejected](#) this year. Overall, the Mediterranean island has thus taken only about 1% of all migrants distributed in Italy.

Numbers and statistics

According to a [poll conducted by the Euromedia Research polling institute](#), Giorgia Meloni's fascist party Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi) was confirmed with 28.5% approval. The voters' trust in the Fdi was based mainly on the political decisions of the Minister of the Interior, Matteo Piantedosi, more precisely on the restrictive and discriminatory management of landings on the Italian coasts. Overall, **54% of respondents agreed with the government's new migration policy**.

Situation of Refugees

With a **rejection letter ("foglio di via")** in hand, dozens of refugees are now on their way to leave Italy within a week. These are migrants who are not asylum seekers and who were housed in the [tent city in Roccella Jonica \(Reggio Calabria\)](#) before it was completely evacuated. Those affected must now either return to their country of origin or try to join their family members in other European countries. Many of them have fled from Afghanistan and are now trying to find protection in another country with a **minimum of information and support**. Among them is Mohammed, an Afghan journalist and reporter who fled from his home country. "We journalists in Afghanistan had to leave the country when the Taliban took the control," he explains, "that's why we are here. I want to go to Switzerland to continue my studies."

Humanitarian corridor

Through the first **humanitarian corridor for unaccompanied refugee minors**, 9 out of 35 Sudanese youths aged 16 and 17 - who fled the war in Darfur, Sudan - have so far been allowed to enter Italy from a refugee camp in Niger. The humanitarian corridor is supported by the [project "Pagella in tasca"](#) (engl. "Certificate in pocket") with the aim of giving children and young people who have fled conflict and poverty and have no family members to accompany them

the opportunity to study and realize their life's dream. In Italy, there is a residence permit for children between the ages of 15 and 17 that is never used, explains Elena Rozzi, coordinator of the Intersos project. Once the teenagers are then in foster care and in school, they can apply for asylum through the usual procedures. As part of the "Liberi di partire, liberi di restare" campaign, the project was funded by the Italian Bishops' Conference to the tune of 400,000 euros and is organized in collaboration between the humanitarian organization Intersos, the UNHCR and the "Fondazione Migrantes della Cei" (Italian Bishops' Conference). However, these so-called humanitarian corridors unfortunately only provide an opportunity for a vanishingly small number of people. The selection of people particularly worthy of protection, is in itself problematic, as it circumvents the fundamental right to freedom of movement, and presumes to be able to decide whether people are worthy of protection. The vast majority of asylum seekers thus remain exposed to a violent border regime.

Accommodation for refugees

The [Regional Council of Puglia](#) has decided to provide the municipalities of Ruvo di Puglia and Terlizzi with a total of 123,750 euros for the construction of a **shelter** that will house agricultural workers in the future. The project is to be implemented together with the

neighboring municipalities, volunteer associations and trade unions.

Italian-Slovenian border (Balkan route)

The number of migrants and refugees arriving via the so-called Balkan route from Southeastern Europe via Slovenia to Italy is currently very high. According to a [Frontex report](#), **the increase would be around 170% compared to the previous year 2021**, while on the Mediterranean route it would also be 42%.

Italian-Swiss border

On the Swiss side of the [border between Como \(Italy\) and Chiasso \(Switzerland\)](#), 33 migrants* were apprehended last week who were in transit to Germany. In the months of September and October, at least **2,200 and 2,400 people, respectively, attempted to cross this border** and were apprehended by the Swiss border authorities. Most of these people come from Afghanistan and Tunisia, while the number of those coming from Syria and Turkey is also increasing.

Italian-French border

Between [Ventimiglia in northern Italy and Menton-Garavan in France](#), there are currently extensive and **discriminatory train checks against migrants** trying to enter France. Among other things, the cell phones of the people concerned are taken away in order to avoid

documentation of these controls. On the trains there are also many **unaccompanied children and several pregnant women** who are sent back to Italy to avoid the newborns acquiring French citizenship - the [territorial principle \(ius soli\)](#) states that all children born in France with foreign parents who reach the age of 18 are automatically granted French citizenship, provided they have lived in France for at least five years and have their permanent residence on French territory at the time of naturalization.

And those who attempt to cross this border on foot have to survive the ["Passo della morte" \(Death Pass\)](#), a dirt road between Ventimiglia and Menton. During the **dangerous trek**, the migrants sleep on mattresses and warm themselves with pieces of wood given to them by the river. They dress in layers with what they can find because it is very cold. "Somehow you find food," Sem reports, "but you don't live just to eat. Life consists of much more, but here we touch the abyss." The little information about the pass and the crossing of the border is passed on verbally and accompanied by a "bon chance," good luck. Due to the **adverse conditions, the pass ends fatally for many migrants**. Others are picked up by the French border police and brought back to Italy.

The French government has decided [to close the open border crossing to Ventimiglia](#) and introduce permanent

border controls. The governor of Liguria, Giovanni Toti, speaks of a **"significant violation of the Schengen Agreement"** and the bishop of Ventimiglia, Antonio Suetta, also called the behavior of France "inhumane and unjust". Not only migrants and refugees suffer from the closure of the border, but also border commuters.

Find more information on the situation in Italy and previous issues of the [Scirocco](#) under "Projects" on our [homepage](#).

Contact

[borderline-europe](#)
Menschenrechte ohne Grenzen e.V.
<https://www.borderline-europe.de/>
italia@borderline-europe.de