

borderline-europe, Sicily

# SCIROCCO

*News from Italy*



Scirocco [ʃiˈrokko-Schirokko] is a hot, strong south-easterly wind that carries dust and sand across the Mediterranean to Sicily and northern Italy, often for just a few hours. This newsflash has been published every month since March 2021.

## New magazine

### “Lost lives, untold stories”

“What if you don't know if they're still alive? It's as if death is never complete.” - Wife of a missing person. People disappear on migration routes - without a trace, nameless, forgotten. Our new magazine “Lost lives, untold stories” makes visible what Europe often represses: Relatives who demand answers. Deaths that are not traced. Why is there no right to identification? Why doesn't every life count the same?



Read, share, speak out: “[Lost lives, untold stories](#)” (currently in German only)

## Political Situation

### EU: Common list of safe countries of origin

The European Commission has presented a first draft of a common EU list of safe countries of origin. The proposal must now be approved by the EU Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. The [draft](#) currently involves seven countries - including Egypt, Bangladesh and Tunisia. It is striking that several countries that were classified as safe by Italy in October 2024 - such as Albania, Algeria and Ghana - are not included. The inclusion of India, whose government has not ratified the Geneva Convention on Refugees, is viewed particularly critically.

It remains crucial on what criteria States can be classified as „safe countries“. Can countries be

considered safe, when certain groups such as women, minorities and LGBTQIA+ people are discriminated? Even the EU Commission states that “the classification as a safe country of origin [...] does not guarantee the safety of all nationals of this country”.

### Transfer of migrants to Albania: criticism on conditions and legal basis

On April 11, 40 migrants were transferred from various Italian detention centers (CPR) to Albania for the first time, where they are to await deportation in the converted facilities. The transfer is not only highly questionable in terms of human rights, but also completely inefficient, as returns still have to be carried out from Italy.

Two MPs from the Democratic Party (PD) observed the transfer on site on April 11. According to their [reports](#), the migrants were transferred without prior notice and remained tied up with cable ties throughout the journey. There were three attempts at self-harm within 24 hours, indicating the extremely [stressful conditions](#). The organization “Tavolo Asilo” has also [investigated](#) the conditions in the Albanian centers and sharply criticizes the prison-like conditions that prevail there. From transportation to accommodation, those affected are subjected to inhumane conditions.

In order to circumvent the blocking decisions of Italian courts, the Meloni government quickly converted the centers in Albania originally intended for accelerated asylum procedures at the border into deportation detention centers. However, this approach shows to be legally problematic. After a person had applied for asylum while in detention in Albania, they were returned to Italy because the legally required detention check was not carried out within 48 hours. In this case, the detention was not extended in Italy either. There were also procedural errors on the part of the responsible police authority in Bari. Although a [magistrate](#) in Rome confirmed all other detention orders on April 24, the same day also brought a ruling from the Court of Cassation: according to this ruling, the 48-hour time limit may be exceeded in exceptional cases, but this must remain proportionate - a transfer to Albania is unlikely to meet this criterion. This raises

the fundamental question of whether asylum applications can legally override detention pending deportation abroad.



Photo: The ship Mare Libra (center), with which the first transfer to Albania was carried out, in October 2024. © Marinaio56, CC BY-SA 4.0, via wikimedia commons

### Return program to Algeria, Tunisia and Libya

At the beginning of April, Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani [discussed](#) a new program for the voluntary return of migrants in a plenary session for Italian development cooperation. The core proposition is a 20 million euro [program](#) in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to enable the voluntary return of around 3,300 migrants from Algeria, Tunisia and Libya to their countries of origin. Migrants often only accept the deal because they have no other prospects in Italy. After a life-threatening journey to Europe, they have repeatedly encountered insurmountable hurdles here that have made it impossible for them to build a new life for themselves.

Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi also wants to strengthen cooperation between the two countries with a diplomatic [visit](#) to Egypt so that deportations to Egypt can continue to be carried out without any problems. However, a new study by the [Mixed Migration Centre](#) underlines once again why the European course on migration is short-sighted: although a restrictive migration policy could lead to lower immigration in the short term, in the long term it increases the risks for migrants, who will find other, albeit increasingly dangerous, ways to reach Europe. The measures taken only increase the political and financial costs for the EU. Deals with countries such as Libya, Egypt or Mauritania are

ethically questionable and hardly sustainable. While the Italian government celebrates the European course as its own political success, human rights are being undermined under the guise of efficiency.

### Italy: New “security decree” undermines the rights of migrants and civil society

On 4 April, the Italian government passed the so-called “security decree”, which had previously been discussed and widely criticized in the Senate. One of the few apparent easements in the decree concerns access to [SIM cards](#): migrants are now allowed to purchase these without a residence permit, [provided](#) they present an identity document - a minimal correction that was made under pressure from the President of the Republic. However, this minimal change does not conceal the overall repressive nature of the law. In future, anyone who does not follow instructions in reception facilities must expect to be prosecuted. Protest will be criminalized. At the same time, the period during which naturalized migrants can have their citizenship revoked for serious crimes has been extended to ten years - a direct attack on their security and sense of belonging. Pregnant or imprisoned mothers also remain in the spotlight: although detention comes in milder forms, this is only possible by judicial exception and only if the best interests of the child take precedence over the degree of force. The decree also massively encroaches on the freedom of assembly: New criminal offences criminalize protests of all kinds, ushering in an authoritarian course for the government. Road blockades [can](#) now be punished with up to six years in prison.

UN experts have expressed grave concerns about the “security decree” and warn: Italy is violating international law with the decree. The decree strengthens the police and military and provides them with more rights and state-funded legal protection for police officers who use force during an operation.

The “Decreto Sicurezza” represents an authoritarian shift in Italy's domestic policy. Formally sold as a compromise within the governing coalition - primarily to accommodate the right-wing Lega - it was rushed through without parliamentary debate and endangers the fundamental rights of all people in Italy.



## Situation of refugees

### Situation in the deportation prisons - Visit to CPR Trapani

The conditions in the Italian deportation centers have been under critical observation for some time. A [report](#) published in December last year by the Council of Europe's Committee against Torture criticized the prevailing conditions in CPRs - including the administration of psychotropic drugs via drinking water in the Potenza CPR, detention-like accommodation and violence against detainees. There are currently ten such centers across Italy with a total of 700 places, and the Meloni government is [planning to build more](#).

The CPR Milo is located on the outskirts of the Sicilian city of Trapani. The situation here has escalated dramatically in recent weeks, with some inmates on hunger strike and tumultuous situations in which barricades were erected and several people were arrested. One reason for this escalation is the desolate conditions under which the people in the CPR have to live. These were observed again on 31 March during a [visit](#) by Italian parliamentarian Giovanna Iacono (Partito Democratico) and were subsequently heavily criticized. Giovanna Iacono described the situation found there as "torture" and demanded the immediate closure of the CPRs. Iacono had to intervene as soon as she arrived to stop a young man from hurting himself. Others were trying to swallow plastic or had already injured themselves. A few days later, Ilaria Salis and Leoluca Orlando (both Members of the European Parliament) also visited the CPR in Milo, but Iacono's visit and her resounding criticism had apparently not persuaded the authorities to improve the situation: They too reported systematic violations of fundamental rights, unsafe conditions, abuse of power and a general state of neglect. They demanded the immediate closure of the CPR. One detainee [summed it up](#) in conversation with Iacono as follows: "It's better in prison".

### Detained and forgotten: Two deaths in the Italian migration system

Two [deaths](#) make it shockingly clear how dangerous the Italian system of detention and deportation is for migrants. Two men died after years of disregard, lack of medical care and structural racism - one in

prison, the other in a deportation center. Their only "offense" was being a migrant.

Habashy Rashed Hassan Arafa, an Egyptian migrant, arrived in Calabria in 2021 and was convicted of allegedly facilitating unauthorized entry to Italian territory. Without an interpreter and without an adequate defense, he spent years in Arghillà prison, where no one spoke his language. When he fell seriously ill with pancreatic cancer, he was only released when it was almost too late. Activists led by the former mayor of Riace, Mimmo Lucano, brought him to Riace, where he was able to say in his own language: "Now I can finally speak." But he died shortly afterwards. All he knew of Italy was prison.

The second case concerns [Wissem Ben Abdellatif](#), a 26-year-old man from Tunisia who was detained at the CPR Ponte Galeria near Rome in 2021 - allegedly for deportation. He was physically healthy when he was admitted. But when he left the camp, he was transferred to the psychiatric ward at San Camillo Hospital. There he died - shackled to a hospital bed - after 100 hours of agony following a cardiac arrest. The pre-trial proceedings for his death recently began in Rome.

Hassan and Wissem are representative of many people whose lives ended in a system that never saw them as human beings. Their stories call on us not to look away.



Photo by [Gerardo Ayala](#) on [Unsplash](#)

### **For a fair system: protest in Ancona against the slow processing of residence permits**

In Ancona, hundreds of people - including many migrants and supporters - [demonstrated](#) in Piazza del Papa at the weekend against the long waiting times for residence permits.

The core demands of the demonstration were: Residence permits for all and a faster, fairer administrative system. Although improvements have been promised, such as an increase in staff, the trade union organizations remain skeptical, and in three months they want to take to the streets again to check whether the promises have been kept. The mobilization for equal rights, quick procedures and humane treatment continues. Unfortunately, the situation in Ancona is by no means an isolated case.

Further information on the situation in Italy can be found under "Projects" on our [homepage](#), in previous issues of [Scirocco](#) and in our [spotlight "Cosmos Palermo"](#).



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### **Monitoring project with the Arci Porco Rosso:**

#### ***"Palermo and the crisis of homelessness: migrants on the street"***

In their [new article](#), our monitoring partner Arci Porco Rosso looks at the dramatic situation of homelessness among migrants. After an unusually cold winter in Sicily, the already dramatic housing shortage for migrants in Palermo is getting worse. While there is a lack of accommodation, people seeking help are increasingly being excluded - not least due to a new policy that prioritizes deportation over protection. The article sheds light on the background to this development: from a once supportive reception policy to a repressive approach under the new city government. It shows how bureaucracy, indifference and discrimination are leading to more and more people having to live on the streets without protection.

