

## Figures and facts - 10 Years of Civil Sea Rescue

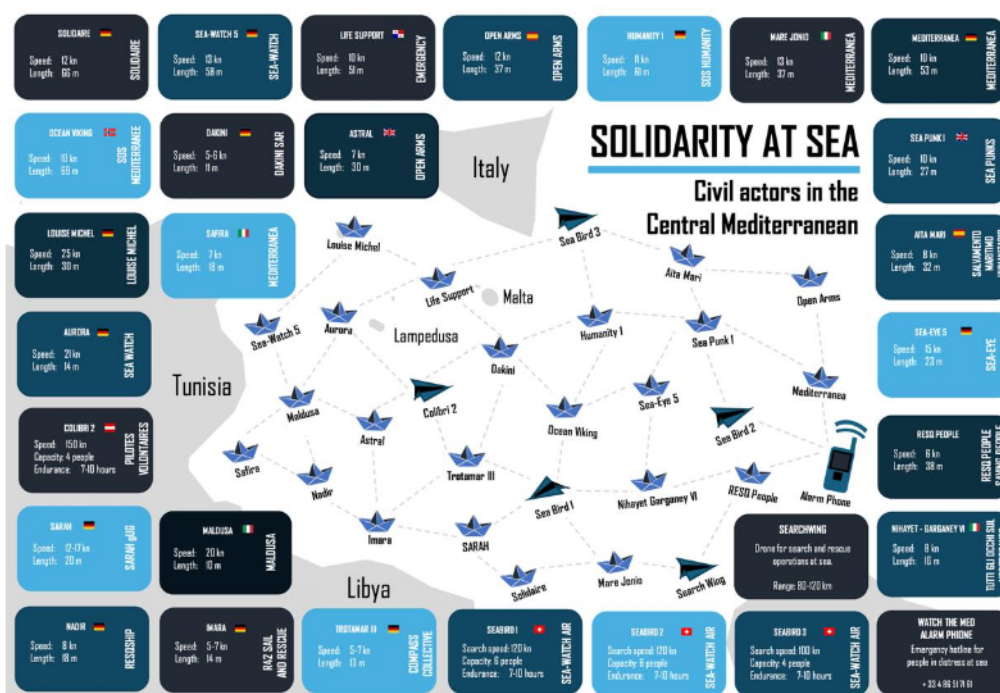
### The deadly escape route across the Mediterranean: 2015–2025

Europe's closed-door policy and deliberate disregard for its legal obligation to rescue people in distress at sea is causing the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean, one of the deadliest escape routes in the world.

- Since 2015, at least 28,932 people have died or disappeared while fleeing across the Mediterranean. The estimated number of unreported cases is high.
- More than 21,000 deaths have been recorded in the central Mediterranean. On average, **six people** have died or went missing every day. The number of unreported cases is high. **Of every 100 people** who reached Italy by boat, **at least three lost their lives**.
- **Since 2022, the death rate** in the central Mediterranean has been rising again, making the route increasingly deadly.
- According to estimates by the UN Children's Fund UNICEF, **around 3,500 children** have **died** or gone missing in the **last ten years** while attempting to reach Italy via the central Mediterranean. This equates to an average of **one child dead or missing every day**.

Sources: IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF

### The civil fleet



Source: Civil MRCC.

In May 2025, **15 rescue ships, 7 sailing ships and 4 aircraft** are deployed in the central Mediterranean, but they do not all operate at the same time, rather at different times.

**Watch the Med Alarm Phone** is a transnational network that has been operating a 24/7 emergency hotline for refugees in distress in the Mediterranean for over 10 years.

**Across Europe, 21** and in **Germany 10 non-governmental organizations** are active in sea rescue. There is **still a lack of rescue capacity** to cover the vast area of the central Mediterranean.

## Rescues by the civil fleet

Between 2015 and the first quarter of 2025, civil society sea rescue organizations **rescued more than 175,500 people from distress at sea** or were involved in their rescue. During the same period, **936,311** people reached Italy by sea.<sup>1</sup>

## State obstruction of the civil fleet

From 2017 onwards, search- and rescue operations were increasingly confronted with state harassment, obstruction, criminal prosecution and the seizure of their first ship.

- The far-right Italian Meloni government escalated its obstruction of the civil fleet **since 2023 by detaining 28 non-governmental rescue ships and systematically assigning distant ports** for the disembarkation of rescued persons.
- The resulting **unnecessary navigation for the civil fleet adds up to more than 761 lost days of operation**. This corresponds to **more than two years of continuous rescue operations** for one ship.<sup>2</sup>
- The **300,000 additional kilometers travelled** are equivalent to more than **seven trips around the world**.
- In total, the civil fleet lost more than 1,300 days of operation due to registrations and the allocation of distant **ports, which is equivalent to more than 3.5 years**.

**Background:** The laws passed by the Meloni government, the 'Piantedosi Decree' (since January 2023, Law No. 15/2023) and the 'Flussi Decree' (since December 2024, Law No. 145/2024), undermine international maritime law and severely restrict civil sea rescue operations. They contain targeted sanctions against NGOs, including the detention and seizure of rescue ships and aircraft and fines of up to €50,000.

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, figures updated on 18.06.2025

<sup>2</sup> Methodology: Lampedusa was designated as the reference port for smaller ships and Pozzallo for larger ships, as they are close to the rescue area and have sufficient capacity to accommodate such vessels. The additional kilometres and days resulting from the assignment of distant ports were calculated based on the distance to these reference ports. Taking into account the average speed of the ships, the additional time required to reach the distant ports was determined.

The so-called 'Piantedosi law' must be seen in the context of the Italian government's systematic practice of assigning non-governmental rescue ships to distant ports—sometimes up to 1,600 km or five days journey from the rescue location.

## Violent returns and human rights violations

A significant part of Europe's isolationist policy consists of the unlawful forced returns of people seeking protection by the so-called Libyan and Tunisian Coast Guards. In **Libya<sup>3</sup> and Tunisia<sup>4</sup>, migrants and refugees are exposed to serious human rights violations.**

Since 2015, **at least 336,057 people have been intercepted while fleeing** and forced back to Libya and Tunisia, with a **high number of unreported cases** expected.

From **2015 to 2025, the EU has provided the Tunisian and Libyan authorities** with around €242 million in funding for border control, including the so-called Libyan and Tunisian rescue coordination centers and coast guards<sup>5</sup>, thereby making itself complicit in human rights violations.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/libya/index>

<sup>4</sup> Tunisia: UN experts concerned over safety of migrants, refugees and victims of trafficking | OHCHR

<sup>5</sup> SOS Humanity: Borders of (In)Humanity - SOS Humanity

