



Press Kit SOS Humanity 2025



The crew distributes life jackets to people in distress on unseaworthy, overcrowded boats. Photo: Judith Buethe / SOS Humanity

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Ten Years of Search and Rescue

More than 25,000 deaths in the Central Mediterranean since 2014 show that there has been and still is a lack of rescue ships in that area. Ten years after SOS Humanity was founded, the Central Mediterranean Sea is still one of the deadliest migration routes in the world. In 2021, the search and rescue organisation SOS Humanity, founded in 2015 in Berlin as SOS Mediterranean Germany, thus decided to strengthen the rescue capacities in the Central Mediterranean with another rescue ship. In January 2022, the German branch of the organisation separated from the European network it had founded and started working independently under the name SOS Humanity. With the rescue vessel Humanity 1 and eight years of experience, the organisation continued saving lives as of August 2022. Until the end of 2024, a total of 3.778 people were rescued with Humanity 1 and brought to a place of safety. After not even three years of operation, the rescue vessel Humanity 1 and the activities of the organisation SOS Humanity on land have become crucial to the civil fleet and the civil movement for more humanity at sea. *See also: [Annual Review of SAR events 2024](#).*

More Humanity at Sea!

For nearly ten years, SOS Humanity has been rescuing people in distress at sea, providing professional care and support to survivors on board their rescue ship, all the while documenting their fates. “As SOS Humanity, we defined four goals of our work,” says Laura Gorriahn, the chair of the organisation’s board. “To rescue, protect, inform and change. In addition to rescuing people in distress at sea and providing care onboard our vessel, we want to increase public awareness of the situation in the Mediterranean, document abuses and legal violations, and ultimately drive change in European migration policy. In 2025, our tenth anniversary, we will stand up against the growing dehumanisation of people on the move and call for more humanity at sea.”

SOS Humanity’s work depends on social engagement. Volunteer groups get involved on land, and professional volunteers lend their skills to us on board. SOS Humanity is a member of the German Donations Council and is financed primarily through individual donations and the support of largely humanitarian organisations. There are also some public contributions from municipalities and the German Foreign Office in 2023 and 2024. They all help to ensure that people in need of protection can be rescued at sea, regardless of their origin, ethnicity, or political convictions. The rescue ship Humanity 1 is one of the ships supported by the United4Rescue alliance, initiated by the Protestant Church in Germany.

The History of SOS Humanity

With the founding of the original organisation SOS Mediterranean on 4 May 2015 in Berlin, German captain and historian Klaus Vogel and a group of supporters wanted to help put an end to the deaths in the Mediterranean: more than 3,000 people died over the year 2015 on the Central Mediterranean route due to the lack of state-run rescue ships. From early 2016 until the end of 2021, the European search and rescue association SOS Mediterranean, with branches in Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland, was able to save 34,631 people from drowning, first with the Aquarius, then with the Ocean Viking, and bring them to safety.

Conditions for NGO-Ships in the Mediterranean

Soon after Humanity 1 started operating in August 2022, a new, far-right Italian government led by Giorgia Meloni was elected and intensified the obstruction of the activities of non-governmental search and rescue organisations. Since December 2022, the Italian authorities have been assigning rescue ships, including Humanity 1, a place of safety immediately after the first rescue – but in almost all cases, these ports were unnecessarily far away from the position of the rescue, usually between 1,000 and 1,600 km. On 21 April 2023, SOS Humanity filed a lawsuit in the civil court in Rome against the systematic assignment of distant ports by the Italian authorities. The court's decision is still pending.

In January 2023, the 'Piantedosi Decree' was signed. Based on this decree, later converted into a law, NGO rescue ships are instructed to proceed to the assigned port immediately, thereby contradicting the duty to rescue other boats in distress and decreasing the presence of rescue ships at sea. In the event of non-compliance, i.e. deviating from their course to rescue other people in urgent distress at sea, rescue ships are usually detained for 20 days. In case of repetition, ships are detained for 60 days up to the permanent seizure of the vessel. In December 2023, the Italian authorities imposed a detention on Humanity 1 based entirely on false allegations. On 13 February 2025, the Court of Crotone rejected SOS Humanity's appeal, but the organisation appealed the decision. Another detention was imposed in March 2024. The civil court in Crotone, Italy, ruled in June 2024 that the detention of the Humanity 1 ship was unlawful and that the Libyan Rescue Coordination Centre and the so-called Libyan Coast Guard cannot be considered legitimate search and rescue actors. Over the year 2024, the obstruction of non-governmental SAR activities further intensified. E.g., punishments of 60 days of detention were imposed three times on rescue vessels. Also, the new 'Flussi Law', issued at the end of 2024, further intensifies obstruction of rescue vessels and reconnaissance aircraft with a high risk of permanent seizure.

In addition, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard has been more active in pull-backs of people fleeing across the Mediterranean, with 21,762 people having been illegally forced back to Libya in 2024, compared to over 17,000 in 2023. Dangerous and violent interferences by these actors with rescues performed by rescue ships have also increased.

(Official documents regarding our two detentions and the court cases are published [here](#). See also the more detailed chapter below: Obstruction of Non-Governmental Search and Rescue at Sea.)

Our Rescue Ship Humanity 1



Humanity 1 on its way to the search & rescue area. Photo: Maria Giulia Trombini / SOS Humanity

The Ship

- Former German research vessel “Poseidon” (home port: Kiel in northern Germany) operated as a search and rescue ship for Sea-Watch (as Sea-Watch 4 and one of the United4Rescue alliance ships) from 2020 to 2022. Thanks to its size and equipment, it is suitable for the rescue and medical care of large numbers of people.
- Year of construction: 1976
- Length: 60.8 m // width: 11.4 m // weight: 1,460 t
- Maximum speed: 10 knots (fuel consumption: 6,000 l/day)
- Ship owner: SOS Humanity gGmbH
- Flag state: Germany

Crew

- In total, 28 people in the following teams:
- Ship operation: 12 people in the marine crew
- Search and rescue operations: 7 people in the rescue team
- Care of survivors: 6 people in the care & medical team
- Communications & documentation: 3 people

Equipment

- Technical equipment: 2 high-speed boats (“RHIBs”), 2 radars on the mast

- Lifesaving equipment: 620 life jackets available for rescue operations, another 500 on board for emergencies, as well as life rafts and other rescue equipment for mass rescues
- Kitchen: Spacious cooking area for the cook on board to prepare large amounts of fresh vegan food. Storage rooms and walk-in fridges for food storage

Accommodation & Supplies

- Space for hundreds of survivors
- 29 beds for the crew and 1 journalist
- Survivors are accommodated on three decks
- Shelter for women and children with bunk beds for more than 12 women with their children, separate shower and sink
- Covered, weather-protected and heatable area on deck for the men's accommodation
- Gynaecological chair and mobile ultrasound probe, assorted equipment for examinations by the midwife in a protected area only accessible to women
- Clinic with two stretchers, 2 mobile defibrillators and one fixed which can be used for electrocardiograms (ECGs), ventilators with oxygen cylinders, surgical instruments, etc.
- Sanitary facilities: 7 multi-use sanitary cabins (combined shower and toilet), including one exclusively for women and one on the upper deck. Additional external shower near the entrance available for rapid cleaning, in case of skin burns from the gasoline/salt-water mixture found on board the boats in distress.

Crew and Operation

In early 2022, SOS Humanity established its own new operations department. A crewing hires both volunteers and crew members, a total of 28 crew for each mission at sea. In 2025, SOS Humanity has 26 permanent crew members, 2 for each position, who take turns. In addition to the 13 permanent members on each crew, there are around 5 short-term employees. The remaining 10 crew members are volunteers who are usually only on board for one mission.

To involve civil society not only through donations but also on board, key positions for ship and rescue operations, such as the captain, the first and second officers, and the search and rescue coordinator (SARCo), are permanently employed. Other professionals who can more easily be found in civil society are working as volunteers, for example, our medical doctor, paramedic, midwives, and human right observers.

Diversity: Crew on Board

Introduced as a new position in August 2022 is the human rights observer, who documents legal violations at sea. Their voluntary work helps to better inform the public about the situation of people on the move and human rights violations in the Mediterranean. They collect and analyse essential data on distress cases and evidence on incidences.

Another position introduced with Humanity 1 is the mental health expert on board. This position was created to take better care of the survivors, who are often suffering due to their experiences during their journey and especially in Libyan detention camps. Experience from the missions since 2022 has shown is a high demand for psychological consultations by survivors on board. The crewing team works hard to ensure the greatest possible diversity which means bringing together

people from a wide range of countries, continents, and backgrounds, as well as a high proportion of women in the crew. In August 2023, for the first time, Humanity 1 departed with a predominantly female crew. One of the two speedboats were operated by an all-female crew. The working language on board is English. On Humanity 1, all meals are vegan and prepared fresh every day by the cook, with the help of crew members. Crew and survivors eat the same meals.

Migration Route: Central Mediterranean

Every year, the European migration policy causes thousands of avoidable deaths. Such a deadly policy is particularly evident in the Central Mediterranean: in 2024, at least 1,700 people died between Libya, Tunisia, Italy and Malta while fleeing in unseaworthy boats to seek protection in Europe¹. The number of unreported cases is far higher. Since the Italian search and rescue operation 'Mare Nostrum' was suspended at the end of October 2014, no European state-led search and rescue programme has been existing in the Central Mediterranean. While EU states have evaded their responsibilities, civil society actors such as SOS Humanity have filled this gap as best as possible since 2015.

Duty to Rescue and Respect Human Rights

International maritime law enshrined the duty to assist people in distress at sea. All people must be rescued, regardless of origin, status, religion, or gender.² All vessels in the vicinity of an emergency at sea have to rescue people in distress, provided that they are able to do so. Coastal states are obliged to coordinate rescue at sea. However, SOS Humanity repeatedly witnesses state actors circumventing their obligations under international law and systematically ignoring human rights. Contrary to their obligations under international law, state rescue coordination centres ignore distress calls and often do not alert NGO rescue ships of emergencies. They hereby delay rescues and put human lives at risk. Until June 2018, Italy had taken over the coordination of maritime emergencies in the Central Mediterranean. Since an EU-supported Libyan search and rescue region was established, coordinating rescue operations in the most southern part of the Central Mediterranean has officially been the responsibility of the Libyan authorities. SOS Humanity has been witnessing for years that Libyan actors are not performing according to international law. In 2024, Italian courts have stated that these actors cannot be considered legitimate SAR entities. In June 2024, a Tunisian search and rescue region was established under EU support, replicating the Libyan model and leading to more human rights violations.

Externalisation of Border Management

Since 2017, the EU and individual Member States have supported the so-called Libyan Coast Guard by providing training and equipment. For this purpose, the EU provided 57 million Euros from the

¹ [Mediterranean | Missing Migrants Project \(iom.int\)](#), 01.02.2025

² Relevant provisions of international maritime law:

- Obligation to rescue at sea for all shipmasters (SOLAS 1974, SAR 1979, UNCLOS 1982).
- The duty of rescue at sea applies irrespective of nationality, status or circumstances (SOLAS 1974).
- States have the responsibility to coordinate maritime emergencies (SOLAS 1974)
- Those rescued are to be disembarked as soon as possible to a "place of safety" (SOLAS 1974, IMO 2004)

Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) by the end of 2021.³ The support with additional millions of Euros is still ongoing despite massive human rights violations. Thus, while circumventing its international obligations, the EU finances explicitly the interception of refugee boats in international waters and the illegal and forcible return (“pull-backs”) of refugees to Libya. Most refugees and migrants are indefinitely detained in detention centres in Libya.⁴ Torture and rape are systematically used as a means of intimidation, punishment, humiliation, or exploitation. The final report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission in 2023 found that these human rights violations amount to crimes against humanity and showed that state authorities, such as the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, are also involved.⁵ In 2024, at least 21,762 people were intercepted and pulled back to Libya, where they face arbitrary detention, forced labour, systematic torture, abuse, death, or other inhumane treatment. In addition, since 2016, there have been repeated incidents in international waters of vessels posing as Libyan Coast Guard, which have severely endangered the safety of refugees and civil rescuers.⁶

In June 2024, a new Tunisian search and rescue region was established, following an EU-Tunisia deal in 2023, promising a transfer of 150 million euros to the country - despite massive human rights violations.

Italy, based on an agreement with Albania, built reception centers in Albania where protection seekers are to be transferred to for their asylum procedures which are intended to be processed on Albanian territory under Italian law. SOS Humanity strongly criticises Italy’s detention of people seeking protection on Albanian territory without judicial examination, which is profoundly inhumane and violates their fundamental rights.

More on the Externalisation policy: [SOS Humanity’s Position Paper “Rescue Refugees Instead of Outsourcing Protection to Third Countries”](#) and on the [Italy-Albania protocol](#).

Obstruction of Non-Governmental Search and Rescue at Sea

Since 2016, non-governmental rescuers have repeatedly been criminalised and their lifesaving work at sea increasingly obstructed.

The far-right political alliance under neo-fascist leader Giorgia Meloni, which has been in power in Italy since autumn 2022, instructs NGO ships to head for a port immediately after the first rescue. A decree issued in January 2023, which has since been converted into law (“Piantadosi Law”), prohibits any delay. In 2023, additional rescues of nearby boats in distress after these first rescues – as required by maritime law – were punished in numerous cases by detentions of NGO ships combined with fines.⁷ **This penalty of detaining rescue ships based on this “Piantadosi Law” was imposed 13 times in 2023 and 13 times in 2024.** As a result, NGO ships were detained in port for a total of 261 days in 2023 and 323 days in 2024 instead of being able to sail and rescue lives. Many of the more than 4,200 people who drowned in the Central Mediterranean in those two years could probably have been rescued without these blockages.

In addition, since January 2023, the Italian authorities have **adopted the practice of assigning ports to NGO rescue ships for the disembarkation of survivors, which are far away in the**

³ [European Parliament - Parliamentary Request | Answer for question E-000027/21](#)

⁴ [Info Migrants: Human rights commissioner urges Malta to do more to protect migrants](#)

⁷ [OHCHR | Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya](#)

⁶ [Libyan coast guard fired shots over rescue ship, migrants, NGOs say - InfoMigrants](#)

⁷ OFFICIAL GAZETTE OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC, 02.03.2023; press release SAR-Organisations

north of Italy. It takes ships three to five days to travel up there and the same amount of time for the return. During this unnecessary long journey, vulnerable survivors' health is at risk, and ships are kept away from the search and rescue area, while people in distress get no assistance. **In 2023 and 2024, NGO rescue ships lost 670 extra travelling days, mounting to 270,000 extra kilometres** – this was a lot of time, energy, and additional costs that could have been invested in the urgently needed search and rescue in the Central Mediterranean.

Because of this unnecessary additional burden which violates the rights of those seeking protection, SOS Humanity filed a **lawsuit against this practice of distant ports in April 2023** (decision still pending). In addition, the additional fuel consumption for the long journeys places a financial burden on NGOs. In July 2023, five leading non-governmental organisations and SOS Humanity submitted five separate complaints about Italian Decree Law 1/20232 and the practice by Italian authorities of systematically assigning distant ports for disembarking survivors rescued at sea, arguing that the Decree Law and the distant-port practice are not in line with EU member states' obligations under European and international maritime law and human rights law. The European Commission has failed in its duty to assess the complaint within one year.

Another particularly alarming development is the Senate's approval of Decree Law 145/2024, also known as the 'Flows Decree', which allows for a "provisional detention" of up to 10 days and increases the risk of a permanent seizure of rescue ships. It also foresees sanctions such as flight bans for civilian reconnaissance aircraft by Italy, even though airborne support is crucial to rescue boats in distress.

More on the practice of assigning distant ports in our position paper: "No Delay in the Disembarkation of Survivors!". More on the Flows Decree in the joint statement by SAR NGOs of 4 Dec. 2024.

Our Demands

As a rescue organisation, SOS Humanity strives for a world where nobody must drown while fleeing and everyone is treated with dignity. To end the deaths in the Mediterranean, the EU and its member states must stick to their fundamental values and resolutely stand up for compliance with international obligations and humanitarian principles in the Mediterranean.

SOS Humanity Calls on the German Federal Government to

- be committed to search and rescue at sea as a humanitarian and legal duty
- support non-governmental search and rescue in the Mediterranean
- use its influence at the EU level to ensure compliance with applicable maritime and human rights law in the Mediterranean and advocate for an effective, EU-funded and coordinated search and rescue programme
- ensure that humanitarian aid at the EU's external borders and sea rescue in the Mediterranean are not subject to criminal prosecution in Germany and the EU
- be committed to the safety of rescue ships sailing under the German flag in the Mediterranean
- end all cooperation and participation of German institutions in border control and search and rescue projects with Tunisia and Libya that lead to human rights violations of refugees

- ensures that the human and fundamental right to asylum is guaranteed in Germany and the EU within an EU asylum system that safeguards the rights and dignity of those seeking protection

SOS Humanity Demands to the EU and its Member States:

- Compliance with applicable international law in the Central Mediterranean, including:
 - the duty to render assistance
 - effective state-led coordination of search and rescue by coastal states of the EU
 - prompt assignment of a place of safety in the EU for persons rescued at sea which can be reached quickly
- An EU-led search and rescue programme in the Central Mediterranean
- An end to the criminalisation of refugees and humanitarian helpers
- An end to the obstruction and criminalisation of the work of search and rescue NGOs
- An end to cooperation with Libya and Tunisia on search and rescue, including to stop the funding for the training and equipment of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and Tunisian Coast Guard.
- An end to externalisation of EU-border management to third countries which violate human rights and the rights of refugees.

On our website, you can find [more about our demands](#) and our detailed position paper on the issue of [Compliance with international maritime and refugee law in the Central Mediterranean!](#)

QUOTATIONS AND STATEMENTS

Till Rummenhohl, General Director of SOS Humanity:

"Since the start of our search and rescue operations with Humanity 1 end of August 2022, the politically caused humanitarian catastrophe in the Mediterranean has become even worse. Desperate people continue to flee arbitrary imprisonment, exploitation and violence in Libya and more recently also Tunisia via the dangerous Mediterranean route. However, instead of ensuring safe migration routes and finally setting up a state-run European search and rescue programme, the EU is investing millions of taxpayers' money in Libya and Tunisia to externalise border management - regardless of the shocking human rights violations in those countries. Although it costs the lives of children, women and men, rescue operations by NGOs are increasingly obstructed by EU Member States like Italy. Humanitarian ships are regularly detained and unnecessarily kept away from the Central Mediterranean rescue region by assigning distant ports for survivors. This is inhumane, as 4.6 persons drowned per day in 2024 on this deadly migration route. Despite all the challenges and the political pressure, the civil rescue fleet is growing. Despite the shrinking humanitarian space, SOS Humanity will continue its lifesaving work at sea and advocate for refugees' rights on land. It is our vision that no one has to drown while fleeing and that everyone is treated with dignity."

Klaus Vogel, Captain and Historian, Founder of the Organisation:

"The fact that the humanitarian situation for refugees in the Mediterranean continues to be so catastrophic ten years after the founding of SOS Humanity shocks me deeply. Almost 1,700 people died in the Central Mediterranean in 2024. These people could have been rescued. The intended political ignorance is an incredible scandal. Many things have worsened since 2015. We must not accept that civil rescuers are now criminalised and their rescue missions blocked and obstructed. As long as people on the move are in danger of their lives, we as civil society must actively stand up for these people and make the states fulfil their responsibility. As a captain, I want to remind Europe: saving lives is a duty!"

Heike Makatsch, Actress, Ambassador for SOS Humanity:

"For me, humanity means the opposite of 'survival of the fittest'. Humanity recognises the equal value in every human being. We are all one and should not let our brothers and sisters drown in the sea on their perilous journey."

Daniel Strässer, Actor, Supporter of SOS Humanity:

"Humanity means recognising people as people and not as a nameless crowd of refugees. Humanity means giving these people a face, a name and a voice."

Hadnet Tesfai, Journalist & Presenter, 'Godmother' of the Humanity 1:

"As someone with a personal flight story, I am very moved by the fate of the people seeking a way to reach Europe via the Mediterranean. I know their dreams and understand what they leave behind, as well as what they go through on the way. Europe is not only abandoning these people from a humanitarian perspective, but is also circumventing international law, if not indeed violating it. I am happy and grateful for every organisation which fills this gap."

Quotes From Survivors

Fidaa, (name changed) from Syria, rescued by the crew of Humanity 1 in July 2024

"When the Libyan Coast Guard arrived, they started beating all the young men. Three of them jumped into the sea due to the severe beating they endured. The Libyan Coast Guard left them to die before our eyes, even cursing them as they drowned, saying to each other, 'Let them die; it's easier for us and for them'."

Mohamed (name changed), from Bangladesh, rescued by the crew of Humanity 1 in March 2024

"There are people dying in prison [in Libya]. They are dying of hunger, of sickness, of getting rotten. We had no water to take a shower and no clothes. But if anybody asks for medicine, they come with guns and they hit you. Sometimes in the face, on the chest, and they start beating you from one side to the other. They also hit us with water pipes, which are very strong. When they hit us on the head, the water pipe sometimes broke. They even hit the children very hard. This has really happened."

Celine (name changed), from Ivory Coast, rescued by the crew of Humanity 1 in July 2023

"In Tunisia, they chase away Black people. They hit Black people. There is violence. I was taken out of the house with my little baby. I had no place to go, no place to sleep. The young people in

Tunisia, they attack you, they take your phone, your money. They took the little money I had, they took out knives, they wanted to grab me. They took stones to throw at us. "

Buba (name changed), 18 years old, from The Gambia, rescued by the crew of Humanity 1 in October 2022

"I was aware of how dangerous it is to cross the sea, but you know, it's better to die in the Mediterranean than to die on land in Libya. Because there, you are valued less. If you die in the Mediterranean, your body will sink perhaps. But if you die as a foreigner in Libya, no one knows where your dead body is. They will take it and who knows whether they throw it away. So, it's better you die in a place that everybody knows than in Libya, where even your dead body is not safe."

Statements by Crew Members

Camilla, Communications Coordinator on Board:

"People are dying right on our European borders and I have the means to help them. Why should I do anything else? For me as a human being, helping each other and standing up against human rights violations in the Mediterranean is simply the right thing to do."

Rocco, Search and Rescue Coordinator:

"What initially brought me to search and rescue were the media reports: I saw how many people were dying in the Mediterranean Sea. I asked myself why – and why this was happening in the Mediterranean. So I decided to engage in search and rescue to save as many people as possible. My desire is to bear witness and share my first-hand knowledge of the human rights situation at sea with European citizens. I am proud and happy to be part of the SOS Humanity team, saving lives at sea!"

Maria, doctor:

" I am a doctor and in the Central Mediterranean there is a war going on against people crammed into drifting boats. In this sea people disappear, swallowed by the waves every day, there are constant shipwrecks that we know nothing about because we don't see the bodies. In my work, access to quality medical care is a basic human right. Full stop. Human beings are rescued and treated. Doctors must do this."

Nico, RHIB (fast rescue boat) driver:

"I have to keep a professional distance from everything in the RHIB in order to act, but the cries of the children in the middle of the sea, that hits you in your heart. "

You can find more testimonies of survivors and stories by our team [here](#).

Press contact SOS Humanity:

For interviews with crew members/staff, statements, background information on the organisation or the situation on the Mediterranean, photos and video footage or similar content, please contact:

For German and international media: Petra Krischok or Wasil Schauseil, press@sos-humanity.org, +49 176 552 506 54

For Italian media: Flore Murard, stampa@sos-humanity.org, + 49 176 87731615, +39 348 52 68 700

More information also at: [Our mission - SOS HUMANITY \(sos-humanity.org\)](https://www.sos-humanity.org/en/our-mission)

**Please note: We have one place reserved onboard Humanity 1
for journalists.**

Please contact our Press Team for more information!