



# Annual review 2024

## Summary

In 2024, the Mediterranean remains one of the deadliest migration routes in the world. **More than 1,600 people have died or gone missing in the Central Mediterranean alone.** This summer, the number of people who have died in the Mediterranean since 2014 exceeded 30,000. Many shipwrecks remain unnoticed, and the number of unreported cases is high.

In 2024, SOS Humanity carried out seven search and rescue missions. The crew of the rescue ship **Humanity 1 rescued 1,822 people** from distress at sea and brought them to places of safety. In total, the **civil fleet rescued 12,143 people from 234 boats in distress** at sea between Malta, Libya and Tunisia (*until 3 December, source: Civil MRCC*).

In 2024, the humanitarian crisis in the Central Mediterranean was further exacerbated by political measures. Under pressure from far-right and populist parties, the EU further expanded its cooperation with third countries such as Libya and Tunisia in order to keep people on the move away from Europe by outsourcing border management – despite countless documented human rights violations by their agents. **Almost 21,000 people seeking protection were intercepted by the EU-funded Libyan Coast Guard**, unlawfully returned to Libya and imprisoned there under conditions that the United Nations fact-finding mission classified as crimes against humanity. Their number increased by over 20% compared to the previous year.

Italy further escalated its obstruction of civil search and rescue in 2024. Rescue **vessels were blocked for a total of 323 days by 13 unlawful detentions under the ‘Piantedosi Law’** and kept out of the rescue area by being assigned to far-away ports in northern or eastern Italy. As a result, in 2024, rescue ships covered a total of 117,000 additional kilometres and **lost 293 days of operational time.**

The Italian government also implemented an agreement with Albania and brought 19 people rescued at sea to a newly built reception centre in Albania, 1,000 kilometres away. Their **claim for asylum was to be examined for the first time outside the EU** in a fast-track procedure, under Italian jurisdiction. However, the competent court in Italy suspended the detention and referred the decision to the European Court of Justice. All 19 people were brought to Italy and the approximately 650-million-euro agreement is currently not being implemented. In December, Italy passed the new ‘Flussi-Law,’ which tightens the obstruction of non-governmental search and rescue. The measures include the **confiscation of ships** after multiple arrests and a **ban on civilian reconnaissance aircraft.** Search and rescue NGOs are warning that more people will die in the Mediterranean in 2025.

On land, SOS Humanity has campaigned for a more humane migration policy. They collected **over 137,000 signatures on a petition** against the planned criminalisation of search and rescue in Germany and were partially successful. SOS Humanity published **the report ‘Humanity Overboard’**, in which SOS Humanity documented legal breaches and human rights violations. In court in Italy, SOS Humanity not only achieved the release of its detained ship, but also a judicial declaration that the Libyan rescue coordination centre and the **so-called Libyan Coast Guard are not legitimate actors** in search and rescue. The legal basis for the sanctioning of NGO-rescue ships



is now under scrutiny by the Italian Constitutional Court: after the court in Brindisi suspended the detention of the Ocean Viking, the judge referred the question of the constitutionality of the 'Piantedosi law' to the Italian Constitutional Court. SOS Humanity, as an organisation affected by the law, has submitted an intervention to the court.

Despite political headwinds, in 2024, civil society as a whole continued to advocate for and finance search and rescue at sea, which is binding under international law. SOS Humanity received more donations in the past year than in 2023, mainly from stable and new **partnerships with primarily humanitarian non-governmental organisations**. The NGO expanded their activities on land, including press and public relations activity in Italy and increased legal work. **The civil fleet is growing and search and rescue organisations worked even more closely together in 2024**. They jointly filed lawsuits and published political statements, as well as an elaborated proposal for a long-demanded EU search and rescue programme in the Mediterranean Sea.



## Relevant Figures: An Overview

### Numbers SOS Humanity

Vessels operated by SOS Humanity	Rescue Operations and Transfers <sup>1</sup>	Survivors	Minors (among those)
Humanity 1 (since 19.08.22)	63	3.778	1,155
Ocean Viking (2019-2021)	63	5.108	1.629
Aquarius (2016-2019)	239	29.523	6.502
<b>Total</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>38.409</b>	<b>9.286</b>

### Official Numbers Central Mediterranean, Real Numbers Unknown (Status 11.12.2024, IOM)

	Arrivals in Europe		Dead and Missing		Pull-backs by so-called Libyan Coast Guard	
	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
<b>Mediterranean</b>	270,180	175,073	3,041	2,050	-	-
<b>Central Med</b>	157,651	63,417	2,498	1,536	17,190	20,894
<b>Atlantic (Western African Route)</b>	39,910	39,713	550	690 (IOM) / 4,808 (Ca-Minando Fronteras)	-	-

<sup>1</sup> Transfer stands for 'transshipment' and means that a transfer of rescued persons takes place between two ships (e.g. because one ship is better equipped to care for the survivors than the other). In this case, it means that our rescue ship takes on people rescued from distress at sea from another ship.



## Chronology of events and political developments

### January

- Detentions:

**Open Arms detained (20 days):** The rescue ship Open Arms (Open Arms) is detained in the port of Crotona, Italy, on the basis of the 'Piantadosi Law' for not following the instructions of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

- SOS Humanity events, collaborations and publications:

**Amendment of the Repatriation Improvement Act:** By presenting the petition with 137,000 signatures to the German Federal Parliament during the protest action 'No imprisonment for solidarity with people on the move' on 18 January, SOS Humanity successfully campaigned against the planned criminalisation of search and rescue. As a result of pressure from civil society, the law was passed in a watered-down form in 2024.

### February

- Detentions:

**Ocean Viking detained (for 20 days, released after 13 days):** The Ocean Viking (SOS Mediterranee) is detained on the basis of false information provided by the crew of a Libyan patrol boat and on the basis of the 'Piantadosi Law'. The crew had previously rescued 261 people in international waters off the Libyan coast. After 13 days, the Italian court in Brindisi provisionally lifted the detention order. A final ruling is still pending. In October, the judge referred the case to the Italian Constitutional Court to examine the constitutionality of the 'Piantadosi Law'.

- Political developments and events:

**EU-Egypt Agreement:** The EU concludes a multi-million pact with Egypt, which is also aimed at preventing people on the move from entering the EU. There is criticism of the fact that, as part of the closed-door policy of the EU, agreements are being concluded with states that structurally violate human rights.

**Greece proven responsible for Pylos shipwreck:** A Frontex report confirms Greece's responsibility for the shipwreck off Pylos in June 2023, in which more than 600 people died. Greek authorities had not taken any rescue measures for over 15 hours, although they were obliged to do so under international law.

- Events on the Central Mediterranean:

**Leaks of Frontex Chats:** Frontex's Human Rights Officer admits that the agency is aware of human rights violations by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and advocates that the position of distress cases at sea be increasingly communicated to NGO ships in the vicinity in the future.

- Debates and political events in Italy:

**Italy-Albania Agreement:** On 15 and 22 February, the Italy-Albania protocol is confirmed by both sides. The agreement stipulates that those rescued at sea are to be brought to Albania, around 1,000



kilometres away, to undergo fast-track asylum procedures under Italian law and under detention conditions in newly built Albanian reception centres.

**Libya is not a safe place:** Italy's [Supreme Court](#) classifies the handover of those rescued at sea to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard as a criminal offense. The reason: Libya cannot be considered a safe place for the survivors to disembark.

- SOS Humanity events, collaborations and publications:

**Review 2023: One year of search and rescue lost:** SOS Humanity publishes an [interactive map](#) and data on Italy's [systematic obstruction](#) of civil search and rescue through distant port assignments, which receives widespread press coverage. In 2023, rescue ships lost 374 days during which they could not be in the rescue area and had to travel an additional 150,000 kilometers to reach the assigned distant ports.

**Hand in Hand Alliance:** With over 1,300 organisations, SOS Humanity has declared its support for the alliance's "Together Hand in Hand" [statement](#). On February 3, SOS Humanity was represented at a [large demonstration](#) by the alliance in front of the Parliamentary Building in Berlin to defend democracy and human rights against right-wing ideologies and populism.

## March

- Detentions:

**Four detentions:** Italy escalates the obstruction of non-governmental search and rescue with more and longer [illegal detentions](#) of ships. The Humanity 1 [is detained for 20 days](#), but released after 14 days following an urgent appeal in court. The so-called Libyan Coast Guard had intervened in a rescue operation by force of arms, but instead of holding the Libyan authorities responsible, Humanity 1 is detained. [The Sea-Watch 5](#), also detained, is released after 19 days following an urgent appeal. The [Geo Barents](#) (Doctors without Borders) is detained for 20 days as well. Authorities impose a 60-day blockade for the first time, affecting the [Sea-Eye 4](#).

- Political developments and events:

**Setback for the Rwanda Plan:** British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak signed a migration pact with Rwanda. Asylum procedures were to be outsourced to the East African country in order to prevent people from crossing the English Channel. However, the British [House of Lords](#) now confirms that this pact violates international law.

- Events on the Central Mediterranean:

**EU-funded Libyan patrol boat threatens people in distress at sea and rescue crew:** On March 2, the crew of the Humanity 1 is able to rescue a total of 77 people from three boats in distress at sea, despite the [violent and unlawful intervention of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard](#). Numerous people end up in the water by the intervention of the armed men, who fire a shot into the water. According to the survivors, at least one person drowns and numerous people are forced back to Libya. The patrol boat in question was financed by the EU and delivered to Libya by Italy the year before.

- Events, cooperations & publications of SOS Humanity:



**Joint day of action #FreeTheFleet:** On 22 March, several search and rescue NGOs organise a protest in Berlin against the detention of their rescue ships under the claim: 'Human rights do not end at the Mediterranean Sea!'

## April

- Detentions:

**Mare Jonio detained** (20 days): After the so-called Libyan Coast Guard fired shots during a rescue operation, the rescue ship Mare Jonio (Mediterranea) is detained.

- Political developments and events

**GEAS reform adopted:** A new EU migration pact is adopted in April. Human rights organisations criticise the continuation of the migration policy, which has led to an increase in human rights violations over the past ten years and undermined the European asylum system. Shortly before the vote, SOS Humanity and 160 other organisations appeal to members of the European Parliament in an open letter to vote against it.

**Charges against former Frontex head Leggeri:** Human rights organisations have filed a criminal complaint against ex-Frontex boss Leggeri with possible crimes against humanity due to his responsibility in push-backs of people seeking protection.

**Proceedings against the IUVENTA crew dropped:** The trial against the crew of the IUVENTA in Italy, which has been ongoing since 2017, is suspended. The defendant Sascha Girke said that the proceedings were part of a "public defamation campaign against civilian sea rescue" to legitimise the crackdown on the civilian rescue fleet.

- Events on the Central Mediterranean:

**Shipwreck:** 45 people die in a shipwreck in international waters off Tunisia.

- Events, cooperations & publications of SOS Humanity:

**Film screening:** SOS Humanity organises in cooperation with borderline europe a special screening of the film drama IO CAPITANO in Berlin. The screening in the sold-out cinema is followed by a panel discussion with SOS Humanity CEO Till Rummenhohl and Eric Mbiakeu who fled across the Mediterranean, moderated by Hadnet Tesfai.

## May

- Political developments and events:

**European election campaign dominated by closed-door policy:** Tightening the situation for those seeking asylum in Europe is the main topic of the election campaign in EU countries. In a position paper, SOS Humanity calls on the candidates and the elected parliament to advocate for an urgently needed change towards a migration policy based on human rights.

**Protest camps in front of UN headquarters in Tunisia:** Activists in Tunisia are protesting against the consequences of the European closed-door policy. More and more people on the move are stuck in Tunisia for months or years without an asylum system or protection. Human rights violations against migrants have increased sharply since 2023, causing more departures across the Mediterranean.



**Criticism of Frontex:** Media in Germany are increasingly criticising Frontex due to new push-back allegations. Internal investigations at Frontex have brought to light the involvement of employees of the Standing Corps, a prestige object of the EU Commission, in illegal push-backs.

## June

- Detentions:

**Successful lawsuit:** SOS Humanity's lawsuit against the detention of Humanity 1 on March 4, 2024 is successful. The Civil Court in Crotona rules that the detention was unlawful. The court also states that the Libyan Rescue Coordination Center and the so-called Libyan Coast Guard cannot be considered legitimate search and rescue actors in the Mediterranean.

- Events on the Central Mediterranean:

**Tunisian Search and Rescue zone:** Tunisia is establishing its own search and rescue zone with the support of the EU and Italy. Critics point out that this represents a further instrument of by Europe sealing off the EU in violation of human rights, such as the pull-backs of refugees - instead of serving to protect lives at sea.

**Cargo ship pull-back:** On June 18, 60 people are rescued from distress at sea by the cargo ship Mardive Zohr 1. The so-called Libyan Coast Guard then forces the survivors onto their patrol boat. They are unlawfully forced back to Libya.

- Events, cooperations & publications by SOS Humanity:

**Humanity overboard:** To mark World Refugee Day, SOS Humanity publishes the report "Humanity Overboard" with analyses of the ongoing humanitarian emergency in the Mediterranean. The report is based on operational data, witness accounts of survivors and the evaluation of a survey conducted on board the rescue ship Humanity 1.

**100 boats - 100 million people:** On World Refugee Day, SOS Humanity is represented at the AWO's "100 boats - 100 million people" campaign in Berlin's Lustgarten with a speech by board member and migration researcher Laura Gorriahn. She was previously on board Humanity 1 as a human rights observer for a rescue mission at sea.

## July

- Detentions:

**Louise Michel detained** (20 days): The rescue ship Louise Michel is detained in the port of Lampedusa for 20 days.

- Political developments and events:

**MoU between EU and Tunisia:** Since the conclusion of the EU-Tunisia pact, there has been a significant increase in pull-backs by the Tunisian Coast Guard.

- Events on the Central Mediterranean:

**Rescues:** Within one day, the crew of Humanity 1 rescues a total of 291 people from three boats in distress at sea.

- Events, cooperations & publications of SOS-Humanity:



**Open letter:** 309 organisations address the Chancellor and the regional Prime Ministers in an [Open Letter](#) against the outsourcing of asylum procedures to countries outside the EU.

**Complaint to the EU Commission:** In July 2023, five organisations - SOS Humanity, the Association for Legal Studies on Immigration (ASGI), EMERGENCY, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Oxfam Italy - submit five separate complaints about the “Piantedosi Law” and the Italian authorities' practice of systematically assigning distant ports for the disembarkation of people rescued from distress at sea. Since then, the European Commission has not fulfilled its obligation to review the Italian law within 12 months. The NGOs criticise this in a [press release](#), one year after the complaint was filed.

**Publication of study:** SOS Humanity contributes to a [study of the Expert Council on NGO Law of the Council of Europe](#) with data on the obstruction of non-governmental search and rescue and is represented with an input at the publication event in Strasbourg.

## August

- Detentions:

**Geo Barents** (60 days, released after 17 days): Italian authorities detain the Geo Barents [for 60 days](#) (MSF) based on false claims from the so-called Libyan Coast Guard .

- Events on the Central Mediterranean:

**Selective disembarkation:** After four rescues, the crew of the Humanity 1 is ordered to [select the 270 rescued people on board](#). The Italian Coast Guard picks up 70 particularly vulnerable survivors and brings them ashore. SOS Humanity criticises the fact that the remaining 199 vulnerable survivors have to endure the long journey to Genoa in north Italy in the heat on deck unnecessarily and against the law.

## September

- Detentions:

**Escalation:** Italy intensifies the detention of rescue vessels. The [Sea-Watch 5](#) is detained for 20 days, the Geo Barents for 60 days. An Italian court declares one of the two detentions of the [Geo Barents](#) unlawful, but a second detention continues for 60 days.

- Political developments and events:

**Human rights violations in Tunisia:** [Tunisia is deporting](#) refugees without water or food to the desert at the border with Libya and Algeria. In September, at least 29 people went missing after being abandoned in the desert by Tunisian security authorities.

- Events on the Central Mediterranean:

**Shipwreck:** 64 people die in a [shipwreck](#) off the Tunisian coast. Only four people survive.

- Events, cooperations & publications by SOS Humanity:

**Open Ship:** As part of its “Open Ship” event in the Sicilian port of Syracuse, Humanity 1 is being visited by more than 500 people, tourists and locals. SOS Humanity hosts a [panel discussion](#) on the current humanitarian and political situation in the Central Mediterranean with Sandro Gallinelli,



retired admiral of the Italian Coast Guard, Chiara Denaro, legal expert on migration, and Mirka Schäfer, political spokesperson for SOS Humanity.

**Protecting people instead of criminalising them:** 15 organisations, including SOS Humanity, issue a joint statement calling on German Federal Interior Minister Nancy Faeser to finally put an end to the criminalisation of flight and solidarity.

## October

- Detentions:

**Mare Jonio:** The Mare Jonio is again detained for 20 days on the base of the Piantedosi-law.

- Events on the Central Mediterranean

**Armed actors:** Rescues are increasingly obstructed and threatened by armed actors in the Central Mediterranean. They endanger civil rescue crews and people fleeing through risky maneuvers and are usually heavily armed.

- Debates and political events in Italy:

**“Piantedosi Law” unconstitutional?** The judge at the court in Brindisi refers the case of the detention of the Ocean Viking in February to the Italian Constitutional Court. The “Piantedosi Law” on which the detention is based is to be examined for constitutionality. As an NGO similarly affected by the ‘Piantedosi Law’, SOS Humanity will be submitting an intervention to the Constitutional Court in December and present the pending court proceedings to challenge the detention of the Humanity 1 in Crotona in December 2023. SOS Humanity is requesting a review of the constitutionality of the law on which the detention is based. Since the introduction of the ‘Piantedosi Decree’ in January 2023 (later converted into a law), a **total of 26 detentions of NGO rescue vessels have been imposed, summing up to 640 days**.

**New reception camps in Albania:** For the first time, twelve people rescued at sea are being brought to reception centres in Albania on the Italian military ship Libra under the Italy-Albania Protocol. A court in Rome rules that their countries of origin (including Bangladesh and Egypt) cannot be entirely considered ‘safe’, and thus does not confirm the detention of the men. The people seeking protection are brought from Albania to Italy and transported unnecessarily and costly around 2,000 kilometres back and forth. SOS Humanity criticises that the agreement between Italy and Albania violates international law and risks further undermining the fundamental rights of refugees.

- Events, cooperations & publications of SOS Humanity:

**Tunisia is not a safe place:** 63 non-governmental organisations publish a joint statement explaining why Tunisia is not a safe place for people rescued at sea.

## November

- Events on the Central Mediterranean:

**Tunisian Coast Guard endangers 80 people:** 52 people reportedly die when the Tunisian Coast Guard rams their boat in distress. 23 survivors are later brought to Sfax by a Tunisian fisherman. SOS Humanity criticises the fact that the EU is complicit in human rights crimes such as this by funding the Tunisian Coast Guard.



- Debates and political events in Italy:

**Italy-Albania deal halted again:** After seven more people rescued at sea have been brought to Albania on the Italian military ship *Libra*, [a court in Rome](#) suspends the judgement on their detention and refers the case to the European Court of Justice - with the question of whether the countries of origin Egypt and Bangladesh can be comprehensively classified as 'safe'.

- Events, cooperations & publications by SOS Humanity:

**SOS SESSIONS:** Under the claim #TogetherForRescue, artists are performing at the charity concert on [November 14, 2024](#) in Berlin's Metropol for search and rescue at sea. Over 700 people learn more about the life-saving work of SOS Humanity and support their work with their ticket.

**Joint appeal on asylum rights:** Over 40 humanitarian and human rights organisations call on EU Member States and the European Commission to [protect human rights and the global refugee protection system](#).

**Mare Solidale:** SOS Humanity joins Sea-Watch's call for an EU search and rescue programme for the Central Mediterranean. [Mare Solidale](#) is a concrete proposal to implement a search and rescue programme in line with human rights, based on the lessons learned from the previous Italian SAR operation Mare Nostrum.

## December

- Events on the Central Mediterranean:
- **Rescue:** Humanity 1 rescues 347 people from distress at sea in three missions and a total of [six singular rescues](#) in November and early December and takes them to three different places of safety. During the last rescue, some of the people in distress are in critical condition after two days in bad weather on an unseaworthy wooden boat. Numerous empty boats bear evidence of many pull-backs, presumably by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. Debates and political events in Italy:

**“Flussi Law”:** The Italian government passes [a new law to further criminalise and obstruct the work of search and rescue organisations](#). Under the new law, ships can be seized after multiple detentions. In addition, the activities of civilian reconnaissance aircraft are targeted, as flight bans can be imposed.

- Other political events:

**Change of power in Syria:** After years of civil war, the rule of the long-standing president Assad in Syria has come to an end. With over 23 per cent of all those rescued from distress at sea in the Central Mediterranean in 2024, Syria was the main country of origin of the survivors on board Humanity 1. The years of war and the extent of political persecution under the Assad regime forced millions of people to flee and also required search and rescue programmes in the Mediterranean. The crew recorded testimonials from the 427 survivors from Syria on board Humanity 1, [including women](#).

- Events, cooperations & publications by SOS Humanity:

**Scenic reading Tatort Mittelmeer:** On December 1, the charity event [Tatort Mittelmeer](#) takes place at the sold-out main theater in Düsseldorf. At the event, starring prominent actors from the German



television crime series Tatort and Polizeiruf 110, reports from survivors and rescuers are read to the audience. The pianist Aeham Ahmad, who himself once fled across the Mediterranean, performs musical interludes.

**Position paper on externalisation:** To mark Human Rights Day, SOS Humanity publishes the position paper “Rescue people instead of outsourcing refugee protection to third countries - end the EU's externalisation policy!”. SOS Humanity criticises the fact that the outsourcing of border controls and responsibility for asylum to non-EU countries is a central component of the European closed-door policy and costs Europe's taxpayers a total of 327.7 million euros (from 2026 - 2027). The result: thousands of deaths and suffering at the EU's external border in the Central Mediterranean.