



Annual Review 2025

Summary

For ten years, civil search and rescue organisations have been taking on what is the responsibility of states in the Central Mediterranean: between 2015 and 2025, NGOs rescued more than 175,500 people from distress at sea. May 2025 marks SOS Humanity's 10th anniversary – with the ships Aquarius, Ocean Viking and Humanity 1, the organisation has rescued a total of 39,565 people from drowning until the end of 2025.

While 175,073 people reached Europe via the Mediterranean in 2024, this year the number decreased to 137,995 people (as of 14 December 2025). Although the number of registered deaths and missing persons in the Central Mediterranean had fallen to 1,190 (compared to the previous year), the death rate increased – the escape route became even more dangerous. Similarly, unlawful and violent returns by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard had risen to 25,764 in 2025, an increase of over 16 per cent compared to 2024. With the publication of the report 'Borders of (In-)humanity', SOS Humanity highlighted the dramatic consequences of Europe increasingly outsourcing border management to Libya and Tunisia, based on numerous testimonies from survivors, backed up by current facts and figures.

The escape route from Tunisia to Italy continued to establish itself in 2025, with a high number of unreported cases of boat accidents, forced repatriations and human rights violations by the Tunisian Coast Guard, which is co-financed by the EU. In response, SOS Humanity had acquired another rescue ship for the largely unnoticed sea area off Tunisia: the sailing ship Humanity 2 will be deployed as a rescue and monitoring vessel on this route from mid-2026.

Increased obstruction of search and rescue operations, escalation of violence

Since the introduction of the Piantedosi law in the beginning of 2023, the assignment of distant ports by the authorities in Italy have resulted in an unnecessary loss of 900 navigation days and an extra distance of tens of thousands of kilometers for the civil fleet. In 2025, Humanity 1 alone was affected by the assignment of distant ports of safety on 14 occasions. As a result, the vessel lost 140 additional navigations days combined with an extra distance of 24,745 kilometers. Furthermore, 12 rescue ships were detained, resulting in an additional loss of hundreds of days of operation. The increase in violence also affects the civil fleet as such. The attack on the Ocean Viking at the end of August, violence on those seeking protection and their boats, the tightening of detentions of rescue ships, most recently the Humanity 1 on 9 December after rescuing 85 people, are examples of this escalation.

Against this backdrop, the founding of the Justice Fleet alliance marks a turning point. Thirteen organisations, including SOS Humanity, are jointly suspending operational communication with the Libyan maritime authorities. This decision has been triggered by almost ten years of documented violence against refugees, illegal returns and arbitrary detentions, as well as direct attacks on rescue ships and boats carrying people seeking protection. The 'Justice Fleet' also makes it clear that the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and Libyan Rescue Coordination Centre are not legitimate actors in



search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, as confirmed by Italian court rulings in 2024 and 2025.

From January to early September 2025, a total of 12,192 people have been rescued from distress at sea by civil rescue ships, as many as in the entire previous year. Until the Humanity 1 got detained in Ortona on 9 December, for refusing to communicate with the Libyan authorities, SOS Humanity had rescued a total of 1,155 people in seven missions in 2025 and brought them to a place of safety. In January 2026, Humanity 1 and its experienced crew will resume their rescue missions.

Relevant Figures: An Overview

Figures from SOS Humanity

Ships operated by SOS Humanity	Rescue missions and transfers¹	Rescued	of whom minors
Humanity 1 (since 19.08.22)	84	4.934	1.407
Ocean Viking (2019-2021)	63	5.108	1.623
Aquarius (2016-2019)	239	29.523	6.636
Total	386	39.565	9.666

Official figures for the Mediterranean, unknown number of unreported cases (as of 07.12.2025, IOM, UNHCR)

	<u>Arrivals in Europe</u>		<u>Dead and missing</u>		<u>Pull-backs by the so called Libyan Coast Guard</u>	
	2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
Mediterranean	175.073	137.995	2.573	1.745	-	-
Central Mediterranean	66.475	63.714	1.536 (IOM) / 1.699 (IOM Libya)	1.190	21.762	25.764
Atlantic (Western African Route)	46.853	18.083	690 (IOM) / 4.808 (Caminando Fronteras)	270 (IOM)	-	-

¹ Transfer bedeutet, dass eine Übertragung von geretteten Personen zwischen zwei Schiffen stattfindet (z.B., weil ein Schiff besser ausgerüstet ist, um für die Überlebenden zu sorgen, als das andere.)



Chronology of events and political developments

January

- Events in the Central Mediterranean

Conclusion 2024: Pull-backs by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard: The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reports that in 2024, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard intercepted a total of 21,762 people in the Central Mediterranean and returned them to Libya. The EU-funded so-called Libyan Coast Guard systematically violates international law, in particular the principle of non-refoulement.

- Political developments and events

Human Rights Watch publishes World Report: The externalisation of the EU's migration and asylum policy worsens the situation for people fleeing along the EU's external borders. This deterrent policy serves as a basis for violence and illegal pushbacks.

Situation in Libya: An arrest warrant has been issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for Osama Elmasry Nijeem, head of the Libyan Criminal Investigation Department. Allegations: Crimes against humanity, war crimes, including murder, torture, rape and sexualised violence, committed in Libya since February 2015. The Italian government ignores the arrest warrant while Elmasry Nijeem is in Italy; the Italian secret service removes him out of the country.

Meloni's 'Albania model': The Italian government is once again attempting to bring people on the move from supposedly safe countries of origin to Albania for faster asylum procedures. In 2024, this project was blocked twice by Italian courts due to doubts about the safety of the countries of origin, e.g. Egypt and Bangladesh.

February

- Events in the Central Mediterranean

Rescue: In mission 17, the crew of Humanity 1 rescues in total 114 people in distress.

- Political developments and events

Meloni's 'Albania model' fails again: The Rome Court of Appeal rules that transferring asylum seekers from so-called safe countries of origin to Albania is inadmissible.

Syrian family sues Frontex: The family is suing Frontex before the European Court of Justice (ECJ), accusing the EU agency of violating the principle of non-refoulement by denying them the right to apply for asylum in the EU by transferring them to Turkey.



Detention of Sea-Watch 5 declared unlawful: A Roman court rules that the Italian authorities have failed to fulfil their obligation to provide evidence and justification – the burden of proof lies with the state.

- A decade of search and rescue: relevant events in the Mediterranean

Ombudsman's report on the Adriana shipwreck off Pylos published: Serious failures by Greek Coast Guard officers during the Adriana shipwreck in June 2023, which claimed over 600 lives, are revealed: The report accuses those responsible of failing to take adequate rescue measures despite the clear emergency situation, thereby endangering the lives of those on board the Adriana.

Remembering the victims of the Cutro shipwreck two years ago: Residents of Crotona (Calabria) are commemorating at least 94 people, including 35 minors, who drowned in the shipwreck off Cutro in 2023.

- Events, collaborations & publications by SOS Humanity

Exhibition Hello Italy: As part of the European Month of Photography in Berlin, the exhibition Hello Italy is being launched, featuring images by photographer Arez Ghaderi of the Humanity 1 mission in December 2022.

Political actions at the Berlinale: 'Humanity For All!': Actors protest against the shift to the right and promote humanity with the 'Humanity For All' scarf at the Berlin Film Festival, as shown by celebrities Meret Becker and Anna Thalbach on the red carpet at the opening.

Espionage in civil search and rescue: Luca Casarini, co-founder of the civil search and rescue organisation Mediterranea Saving Humans, was the victim of espionage by the *Paragon* software developed by an Israeli company, as were other civil society actors and journalists.

March

- Events in the Central Mediterranean

Rescue: In mission 18, the crew of Humanity 1 rescues 148 people in total.

32 people were stranded on the Miskar gas platform for four days: Only after an urgent appeal by SOS Humanity, UpRights and StraLi and intervention by the UN Human Rights Committee, the Maltese Coast Guard is instructed to fulfil its duty to rescue people in distress at sea for the first time.

- Political developments and events

Eritrean granted right to compensation: Italy's highest court of appeal rules in favour of an Eritrean man who was detained for ten days on an Italian Coast Guard ship in 2018,



when the then-Interior Minister, Matteo Salvini, refused to allow him to disembark in Catania, Sicily.

Detention of the Geo Barents was unlawful: The Civil Court of Salerno confirms the suspension of the detention of Geo Barents in August 2024. Back in September 2024, the same court recognises that the rescue by the crew of the Geo Barents was necessary and that detaining the ship would jeopardise the pursuit of humanitarian and international law objectives.

€2.2 million from Brussels for Libyan MRCC: Upon request, the EU Commission states that it has contributed €2.2 million to the establishment of the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Libya – an authority that, according to Italian courts, is not a legitimate actor in search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean.

- A decade of search and rescue: relevant events in the Mediterranean

Cutro trial begins: In Crotona (Calabria), the trial begins against officials of the Guardia di Finanza and the Italian Coast Guard, who are accused by the Crotona Public Prosecutor's Office of negligent conduct resulting in a shipwreck, multiple manslaughter and failure to render assistance. Numerous civil search and rescue organisations, including SOS Humanity, appear together as joint plaintiffs in the trial, demanding an immediate end to the criminalisation of people fleeing their countries and compliance with international law in the Mediterranean.

- Events, collaborations & publications by SOS Humanity

Exhibition Ready to Rescue: Opening of the photo exhibition 'Ready to Rescue. Search and Rescue operations in the Mediterranean' in the town hall of Angermünde, Uckermark, with photos from rescue operations of Humanity 1.

April

- Events in the Central Mediterranean

Rescue: In mission 19, the crew of Humanity 1 rescues in total 297 people.

- Political developments and events

Libya is a hotspot for human smuggling: A current study by the European Council on Foreign Relations examines Russia's influence on Libya and professional human smuggling, especially by militias in the east under Saddam Haftar.

One year of GEAS reform: Mirka Schäfer, political spokesperson for SOS Humanity, takes part in the European Public Policy Conference (EPPC) in Brussels in March 2025. In an interview, she criticises the GEAS reform passed by the EU Parliament in April 2024, which is due to come into force in June 2026.



- A decade of search and rescue: relevant events in the Mediterranean

3,500 children have died in the Central Mediterranean in 10 years: According to UNICEF, around 3,500 children have died or disappeared on the Central Mediterranean route since 2015. This equates to an average of one child per day.

May

- Events in the Central Mediterranean

Mass rescue operation: On 24 May, Alarm Phone reports two boats carrying approximately 200 people in distress off the coast of Libya. The Italian Coast Guard rescues 100 people and takes them to Lampedusa. The rescue of the remaining 113 people takes 48 hours and requires three ships. A merchant ship takes on 35 people, but takes them back to Libya, where the people are arrested. Another merchant ship rescues 26 people. The Ocean Viking rescues 53 people. Both ships have to take them to the distant port of Livorno.

- Political developments and events

Criminalisation of search and rescue: Italian Constitutional Court examines the constitutionality of sanctions against search and rescue organisations for the first time.

Italian Senate approves reform of the 'Albania model': The asylum centres built by Italy in Albania are converted into reception and return centres.

Pylos shipwreck: The military prosecutor's office in Piraeus (Greece) has initiated criminal proceedings against 17 members of the Greek Coast Guard. The captain and crew of the patrol boat are charged, among other things, with causing the shipwreck, dangerous interference with shipping and failure to render assistance.

Proceedings against the crew of the Mare Jonio and the NGO Mediterranea Saving Humans: For the first time, an NGO and the crew of its rescue ship are facing trial in Italy on charges of allegedly aiding illegal entry and seeking to make profit.

- Events, collaborations and publications by SOS Humanity

SOS Humanity and SOS Children's Villages worldwide at re:publica: Partner organisations SOS Humanity and SOS Children's Villages worldwide are appearing together at re:publica in Berlin to discuss the use of modern technologies in humanitarian work.

- A decade of search and rescue: relevant events in the Mediterranean

Press conference on the 10th anniversary of SOS Humanity: Ten years after its founding, SOS Humanity is holding a hybrid press conference entitled 'SOS Humanity: 10 years of search and rescue in the Mediterranean', featuring founder Captain Klaus Vogel, managing



Director Till Rummenhohl, political spokesperson and human rights observer Marie Michel, among others. [The press reports.](#)

Publication of 'Borders of (In-)humanity': To mark its 10th anniversary, SOS Humanity publishes the report 'Borders of (In)Humanity', which addresses the outsourcing of EU border management and illustrates the inhumane consequences with numerous eyewitness accounts, analyses and graphics.

June

- Detentions

Nadir (Resqship): detained for 20 days in Lampedusa.

Sea-Eye 5 (Sea-Eye): detained for 20 days in Pozzallo, Sicily.

- Political developments and events

German federal government cuts funding for civil search and rescue: The Foreign Office, under the new leadership of Johann Wadephul (CDU), stops funding civil search and rescue organisations. Following a decision by the Bundestag (2022), organisations such as SOS Humanity, SOS Mediterranee and Sea-Eye received a total of two million euros per year for search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean from 2023 onwards. [SOS Humanity strongly criticises this premature cancellation.](#)

Detention of Humanity 1 was unlawful: The Italian Court of Appeal in Catanzaro confirms that Humanity 1 was wrongfully detained for 20 days. At the time, the crew was accused of ignoring instructions from the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. The ruling also reaffirms that [the so-called Libyan Coast Guard is not a legitimate actor in the field of search and rescue in the Mediterranean.](#)

- A decade of search and rescue: relevant events in the Mediterranean

Joint press conference on 10 years of search and rescue: To mark the tenth anniversary of civil search and rescue in the Mediterranean, SOS Humanity, Sea-Watch, Sea-Eye and United4Rescue are holding a joint hybrid press conference entitled '[10 years of civil search and rescue – review, reality, future](#)'. Alarm Phone and Refugees in Libya are also represented with speakers.

July

- Detentions

Nadir (Resqship): detained in the port of Lampedusa for 20 days.

Aurora (Sea Watch): detained in Lampedusa for 20 days, released after 18 days by court order because the detention was unlawful.



Dakini (DAKINI SAR): detained in Lampedusa for 20 days, also released early.

- Events in the Central Mediterranean

Rescue: In July, the crew of Humanity 1 rescues a total of 138 people in distress at sea.

- Political developments and events:

EU finances human rights violations by Tunisia: As part of the migration deal, on 18 July the EU pledges around €100 million to Tunisia to prevent sea crossings to Europe – even though there are numerous documented cases of serious human rights violations by Tunisian forces, including ill-treatment during push-backs and abandonment in the desert.

Arrest of El Hishri in Germany – breakthrough in the prosecution of crimes under international law: The militia leader and senior prison official in Tripoli known as ‘El-Buti’ is arrested at Berlin-Brandenburg Airport on 16 July on the basis of an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Germany suspends humanitarian visa programme: Germany suspends its voluntary humanitarian visa programme on 27 July. In recent years, these humanitarian visas have been granted primarily to Afghans and Syrians.

- Events, collaborations & publications by SOS Humanity:

Joint statement: 32 organisations, including SOS Humanity, are calling for an immediate end to the Italian state's systematic obstruction of non-governmental search and rescue operations. Italy is consistently applying the Piantadosi law and other tightened regulations to detain civil rescue ships and make their operations more difficult.

August

- Detentions

Sea Bird 1 (Sea Watch): The surveillance aircraft is detained for 20 days.

Trotamar III (Compass Collective): Detained in Lampedusa. After two weeks, the detention is lifted.

Mediterranea (Mediterranea Saving Humans): Detained for 60 days in Trapani.

- Events in the Central Mediterranean

Rescue: In August, during the 21st mission, the crew of Humanity 1 rescues a total of 186 people in distress at sea in three rescue operations.

Escalation of violence: On 24 August, the Ocean Viking is attacked without warning by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, which opens fire with approximately 100 shots in



international waters. The ship and its equipment suffer considerable damage – none of the crew or those rescued are injured.

- Political developments and events:

GEAS implemented with far-reaching tightening of regulations: On 3 August, the German government presents the GEAS Amendment Act, thereby transposing the EU asylum reform into national law. Among other things, it provides for closed special accommodation, extensive curfews, expanded airport procedures, and new forms of asylum detention. Germany is thus creating systems that go beyond EU requirements, resulting in isolation and significant restrictions on access to protection.

September

- Detentions

Aurora (Sea-Watch): Detained in Pozzallo for 20 days.

Colobri 2 (Pilotes Volontaires): The surveillance aircraft is detained for 20 days.

- Events in the Central Mediterranean

Escalation of violence: 21 asylum seekers who landed in Lampedusa report that the Libyan authorities had fire shots during the crossing. The shooting began approximately 30 minutes after departure from Zahra, Libya.

- Political developments and events

Decline in asylum numbers in the EU: In the first half of 2025, asylum applications in the European Union fall by 23%. Germany records a decline of 43%. However, this is mostly due to fewer people from Syria seeking protection and a shift in refugee routes.

Tunisia is under intense international pressure due to serious human rights violations against migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. Human rights organisations continue to document pushbacks into the desert on the borders with Libya and Algeria, as well as state-sponsored violence. Tunisian and international lawyers are preparing various lawsuits to be brought before the International Criminal Court.

October

- Events in the Central Mediterranean

Rescue, fatalities: On 3 October, during the 22nd mission, Humanity 1 rescues 41 people from an unseaworthy rubber boat, with 7 others missing. The rescue took place under extreme conditions. Despite resuscitation efforts, one person dies on board and another collapses and does not survive the night. Humanity 1 disembarks 41 survivors and 2 dead at Empedocle, Sicily. On 9 October, the crew witnesses the forced return of people seeking



protection by the Libyan Coast Guard, who were the first on the distress case. On 10 October, Humanity 1 rescues another 45 people from a rubber boat in distress.

Shipwreck: In October, at least 40 people die when a boat sinks off the coast of Tunisia.

- Political events and developments

Italy-Libya Memorandum: With the renewal of the Memorandum, Italy plans to extend its financial, logistical and operational support to Libya. Humanitarian organisations warn that this policy reinforces an inhumane system that prevents people from fleeing and traps those seeking protection in a cruel cycle of violence and exploitation.

EU migration policy: Human rights lawyers report over 120 European officials to the International Criminal Court for possible crimes against humanity in the context of cooperation with Libya. Nevertheless, the EU continues to cooperate with Libya on migration policy.

AfD fails in attack on civil search and rescue: The party is attempting to remove municipal support for civil search and rescue in Constance district council (Germany). All other parties reject the motion.

- Events, collaborations & publications by SOS Humanity

Unaccompanied minors on the move: In an [online press conference on 21 October by SOS Humanity and SOS Children's Villages worldwide](#), the partner organisations explain the situation of unaccompanied children as victims of global refugee movements. SOS Humanity emphasises the distress of minors on the route across the Central Mediterranean. Over the past ten years, SOS Humanity has rescued 9,666 minors from distress at sea with three ships.

Documentary 'Where the Waves took her': The documentary by two young filmmakers about women on the move is shown for the first time at the International Film Festival in Hof. The documentary accompanies a volunteer midwife on a search and rescue mission with SOS Humanity in the Mediterranean.

November

- Detentions

Mediterranea (Mediterranea Saving Humans): Detained on 5 November for 60 days.

- Events in the Central Mediterranean

Rescues: During the 23rd mission, the crew of Humanity 1 rescues a total of 160 people in distress at sea in two operations.

- Political events and developments



German government supports Libyan militias: The German Bundestag decides to extend the mandate for the EU naval mission 'EUNAVFOR MED IRINI'. Despite massive criticism of its systematic and widely documented human rights violations, support and training for the so-called Libyan Coast Guard are no longer ruled out.

Tunisia: Amnesty International documents a significant increase in serious human rights violations against migrants and refugees in Tunisia, including deportations to desert areas, racially motivated- and sexual violence, and torture. Nevertheless, the EU continues to cooperate with Tunisia on migration policy and supports the authorities and the Coast Guard in capacity building.

EU cooperation with Libya: Despite years of documented violence, attacks on rescue ships and systematic human rights violations, the EU announces in November that it further expands its cooperation with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. The EU mission IRINI will play a more active role in developing Libyan structures.

Italy-Albania: On 13 November, Albania and Italy sign 16 new agreements, thereby reaffirming their cooperation on migration .

- Events, collaborations & publications by SOS Humanity

The new Justice Fleet alliance: For years, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard has been violating human rights. On 5 November, 13 search and rescue organisations, including SOS Humanity, form a new alliance and suspend operational communication with the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre in Libya.

The Humanity 2 is being converted: SOS Humanity's new sailing ship, the Humanity 2, arrives at the shipyard in Licata, Sicily, where it will be converted into a rescue and monitoring vessel for the Tunisian sea area where it will start operating as of early summer 2026.

Scenic reading Tatort Mittelmeer: On 23 November, well-known TV crime series investigators read testimonies of people rescued from distress at sea and members of the rescue crew to the audience in a sold-out Deutsches Theater Berlin. On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of SOS Humanity, SOS Humanity founder, captain Klaus Vogel presents his own witness report, honoured with standing ovations.

The detention of Humanity 1 was unlawful: The Italian Court of Appeal confirms once again that SOS Humanity acted in accordance with international law when carrying out a rescue. The Court of Crotone and an appeals court clarify that the so-called Libyan Coast Guard is not a legitimate search and rescue actor in the Mediterranean.

December

- Detentions



Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity): After disembarking the 85 people rescued in the port of Ortona, Humanity 1 is provisionally detained on 2 December. On 9 December, a detention order for 20 days is issued, combined with a fine of €10,000. The accusation: the captain had defied Italy's instructions to communicate with the Libyan authorities. Humanity 1 is the first ship of the new 'Justice Fleet' alliance which is detained for explicitly refusing to be complicit in systematic human rights violations by communicating with Libyan authorities. SOS Humanity is taking legal actions against the detention.

- Events in the Central Mediterranean

Escalation: EU-funded Libyan patrol boat fires shots near the rescue ship Louise Michel. The crew finds an empty rubber boat.

- Political events and developments

Tunisia: Tunisian opposition politician Hammami is arrested to serve a five-year prison sentence. Increasing repression in the country is not preventing the intensification of European cooperation with Tunisia, despite numerous documented human rights violations.

EU interior ministers agree on stricter measures: In future, asylum procedures at the EU's external borders will be handled in so-called return centres. At the same time, the third-country rule will be extended: Member states will be allowed to reject asylum applications if protection in a 'safe' third country is theoretically possible. A common list of safe countries of origin, including Tunisia, will be drawn up.

New regulations on safe countries of origin: On 5 December, the German Federal Parliament passes a new regulation allowing the federal government to classify countries such as Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria as 'safe countries of origin'. This is intended to speed up deportations.

- Events, collaborations & publications by SOS Humanity

Celebrity support for Donate Humanity: Under the claim '#SpendeMenschlichkeit' (Donate Humanity), numerous well-known celebrities from the worlds of art, culture and sport are supporting SOS Humanity's winter campaign. With their portraits in life jackets and video statements on the necessity of search and rescue in the Mediterranean, the actors Heike Makatsch, Bjarne Mädel, Meret Becker, Ulrike Folkerts and the band Milky Chance, among others, are calling for donations for SOS Humanity's new rescue ship, the sailing ship Humanity 2.