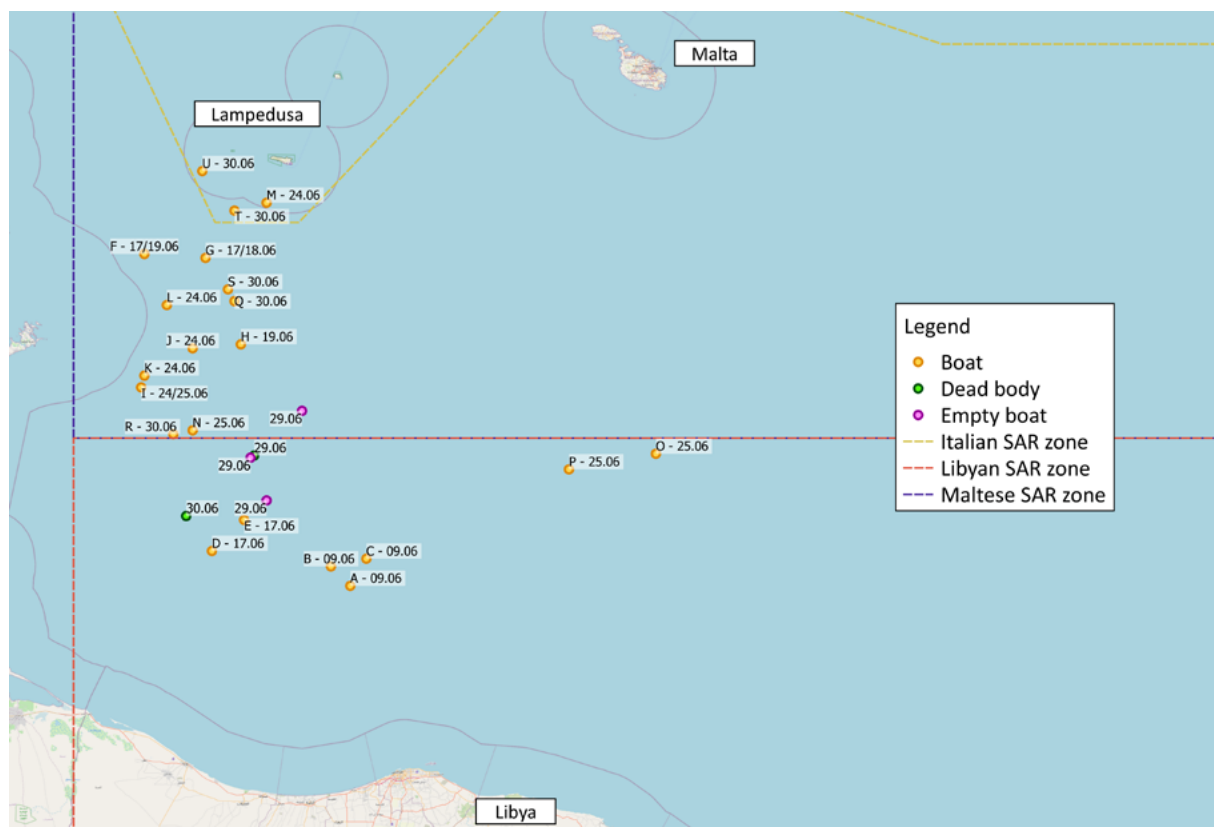


## Airborne Monthly Factsheet June 2020

This factsheet outlines a summary of distress cases witnessed by Airborne with *Moonbird* and *Seabird*.<sup>1</sup> In June 2020, we flew 14 missions, for 74 hours 01 minute. We spotted more than 953 persons in distress.

<sup>1</sup> Since 2017, together with the Swiss NGO *Humanitarian Pilots Initiative*, *Sea-Watch* monitors the Central Mediterranean with the airplanes *Moonbird* and, recently, *Seabird*.

### 1. Overview of the distress cases, empty boats and dead bodies spotted



#### Italian Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone

- 2 distress cases were rescued by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Italy
- The outcome of 1 distress case remains uncertain
- Estimated<sup>2</sup> number of persons in distress: more than 56

<sup>2</sup> These numbers are based upon the estimations of *Moonbird*'s crew, as well as numbers which the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone*, the UNHCR and IOM have provided to us.



## Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone

- 1 distress case was intercepted by the *Tunisian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Tunisia
- 2 distress cases arrived independently in Italy
- 1 distress case was rescued by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Italy
- 1 distress case was rescued by the vessel *Mare Jonio* operated by the NGO *Mediterranea Saving Humans* and disembarked in Italy
- 3 distress cases were rescued by the vessel *Ocean Viking* operated by the NGO *SOS MEDITERRANEE* and disembarked in Italy
- The outcome of 3 distress cases remains uncertain
- Estimated number of persons in distress: around 387

## Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone

- 7 distress cases were (likely) intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and disembarked in Libya
- Estimated number of persons in distress: around 510

<sup>3</sup> Due to a significant disparity between UNHCR, IOM and the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone's* estimations regarding numbers of people on board the boats, these numbers are based upon Moonbird crew estimations, representing an average.

## 2. Details and outcome of the distress cases

09.06, distress cases A, B and C, respectively around 90, 70 and 50 persons<sup>3</sup>: **intercepted and pulled back to Libya by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard***. *Moonbird* spotted 3 distress cases in the Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) region, which had been previously reported to the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone*. Few people were wearing life jackets and the boats were overloaded. The Libyan authorities were already aware of these cases, and the persons were eventually intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and disembarked in Libya.

10.06, **unresponsiveness of the Libyan authorities**. *Moonbird's* Air Liaison Officer was not able to inform the Libyan authorities that *Moonbird* was flying on this day: of the 9 possible numbers to reach the Libyan authorities, in 1 case the phone was switched off and in 3 cases the number did not work. In another 3 cases an exchange was not possible due to poor communication and in 2 cases due to a lack of English.

11.06, **unresponsiveness of the Libyan authorities**. *Moonbird's* Air Liaison Officer was not able to inform the Libyan authorities that



*Moonbird* was flying on this day: of the 9 possible numbers to reach the Libyan authorities, the phone was turned off in 1 case and in 3 cases the number did not work. An exchange was not possible due to a bad communication in 3 cases and due to a lack of English in 2 other cases.

17.06, distress case D, around 70 persons: **Frontex's involvement in a pull-back to Libya.** *Moonbird* spotted the interception of a boat in the Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. The *Frontex* airplane *Eagle1* was on-scene. The people on board were not wearing any life vests, and were intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and disembarked in Libya.

17.06, distress case E, around 90 persons: **unresponsiveness of the Libyan authorities.** *Moonbird's* Air Liaison Officer was not able to inform the Libyan authorities on the phone that people were in distress in the Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone: of the 9 possible numbers to call the Libyan authorities, in 5 cases the numbers did not work, the calls remained unanswered 3 times and in 1 case the line was busy. The people in distress were likely intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and brought back to Libya.

17.-19.06, distress case F, 25 persons: **unwillingness of the Italian and Maltese authorities to assist a distress case and delegation of the duty to rescue to the Tunisian Coast Guard.** June 17th: the people were first spotted in the Libyan and later in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. The Maltese authorities, as well as the Italian authorities, were informed via email several times about this case. *Moonbird's* crew was able to find the people again on June 19th in the Maltese SAR zone. On this day, *Airborne* called the Maltese authorities as the responsible Rescue Coordination Centre 5 times. On these occasions, either the operator said the duty officer was busy and refused to provide *Airborne* with information, or the operator directly hung up. The Italian authorities took information about the case but refused to engage in any rescue operation without being asked by the Maltese RCC to intervene. The Maltese and Italian authorities did not deploy any assets to rescue the persons. The people were eventually intercepted by the *Tunisian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Tunisia.

17.-18.06, distress case G, 49 persons: **unwillingness of the Italian and Maltese authorities to assist a distress case.** *Moonbird's* crew

spotted this case in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. The Maltese authorities repeatedly declared on the phone that they were “busy”, and gave assurances that RCC Malta would not “leave the case unattended”. *Moonbird* spotted the distress case again in the evening. *Frontex*’s aircraft *Eagle1* was also on-scene. During the next morning, June 18th, the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) declared that they did not have any further information on the case and refused to give any information. The people arrived independently in Lampedusa early on the morning of June 18th.

19.06, distress case H, 67 persons: **unwillingness of the Maltese authorities to assist a distress case.** *Moonbird*’s crew spotted the people in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. On this day, *Airborne* called the Maltese authorities 5 times. On these occasions, either the operator said the duty officer was busy, or the operator directly hung up. The people were rescued by the NGO vessel *Mare Jonio* operated by the NGO *Mediterranea - Saving Humans* in the late afternoon and disembarked in Italy.

24-25.06, distress cases I, J, K, L, M, respectively around 70 persons, around 15 persons, around 10 persons, around 6 persons, and an unknown number of persons: **5 distress cases in the Maltese and Italian Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zones in 1 day.** *Moonbird*’s crew spotted 5 distress cases within 2 missions in the Maltese and Italian Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. The people on board distress case I were rescued by the *Italian Coast Guard* during the early morning of the next day and disembarked in Italy. The people on board distress case J arrived independently in Lampedusa, Italy. The outcome of distress cases K and L remains uncertain. *Moonbird*’s crew also sighted the ongoing rescue of distress case M by the *Italian Coast Guard*.

25.06, distress case N, 67 persons: **lack of operative state rescue assets, joint efforts in spotting and rescuing persons in distress by the civil fleet.** *Moonbird* spotted the people in distress in the Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone and afterwards in the Maltese SAR zone. The boat was overcrowded. The people were rescued by the vessel *Ocean Viking* operated by the NGO *SOS MEDITERRANEE* and disembarked in Italy.



25.06, distress case O, around 70 persons: **an aircraft operated by the Armed Forces of Malta provides position of a distress case inside the Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone on the radio that can be overheard by every actor operating in the area.** *Moonbird's* crew overheard the position of the boat on the radio as well and was therefore able to fly to the distress case. The people were not wearing any life jackets and the boat was overloaded. Our aircraft had to leave the scene again due to other ongoing distress cases. The people were likely intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and pulled back to Libya.

25.06, distress case P, around 70 persons: **dangerous maneuvers of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* in an attempted interception.** The situation was extremely volatile as *Moonbird* arrived on-scene: in addition to the boat in distress, some persons were in the water and a large number of persons were already onboard the vessel of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*, presumably from previous interceptions. The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* engaged in dangerous maneuvers - navigating between the persons in the water, who were not wearing any life vests and were at high risk of drowning, and the persons in the boat in distress who were attempting to escape. When *Moonbird* left the scene because of another ongoing case, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* had not yet intercepted the boat in distress. The people were pulled back to Libya by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*.

A survivor of the incident later reached out to the initiative *Watch the Med - Alarm Phone*, speaking of 4 people who fell over board of the rubber boat when the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat hit theirs. The person further stated that only 2 people were recovered from the sea. We have to assume 2 people are missing.

29.06 and 30.06: **3 empty boats and 2 bodies, likely not retrieved during rescue operations to be buried with dignity on land.**

On 29.06, *Moonbird's* crew spotted 1 empty boat in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone, and 2 in the Libyan SAR zone. *Moonbird's* and *Seabird's* crews also spotted 2 bodies in the Libyan SAR zone: 1 near a half-deflated rubber boat, and another 1 on 30.06 near several life vests. *Airborne* was not able to reconstruct from which case(s) they came. The authorities were alerted but did not provide any further information.

30.06, distress case Q and R, respectively 47 persons and 16 persons: **lack of operative state rescue assets, joint efforts in spotting and rescuing persons in distress by the civil fleet.** *Seabird's* crew spotted both cases in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. The initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* was in contact with the people of distress case Q. When *Seabird's* crew spotted the boat, *Frontex's* airplane *Eagle1* was also on-scene. Only a few of the people on board were wearing life vests. Due to a lack of state rescue assets in the Mediterranean, the people were rescued by the vessel *Ocean Viking* operated by the NGO *SOS MEDITERRANEE* and disembarked in Italy.

30.06, distress case S and T, respectively around 15 persons and around 20 persons: **2 distress cases left unattended in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue zone.** *Seabird's* crew spotted both distress cases in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. The people in distress were not wearing life vests in either of the cases. The authorities were informed about the positions of the cases but did not provide any information as to whether they had launched a rescue operation. The outcome of both cases remains uncertain.

30.06, distress case U, 36 persons: **ongoing rescue by the Italian Coast Guard.** *Seabird's* crew spotted an ongoing rescue in Italian territorial waters by the *Italian Coast Guard*. The people were disembarked in Italy.

## These missions highlight once again:

- the deadly consequences of European migration policies
- the systematic non-assistance of European Member States and the delegation of rescue operations to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and *Tunisian Coast Guard*
- the participation of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex in the interceptions and pull-backs undertaken by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*
- the unjustified and systematic delays of European Member States to take action and save lives in their Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zones
- the need for NGO vessels in the Central Mediterranean in order to uphold the law and save human lives