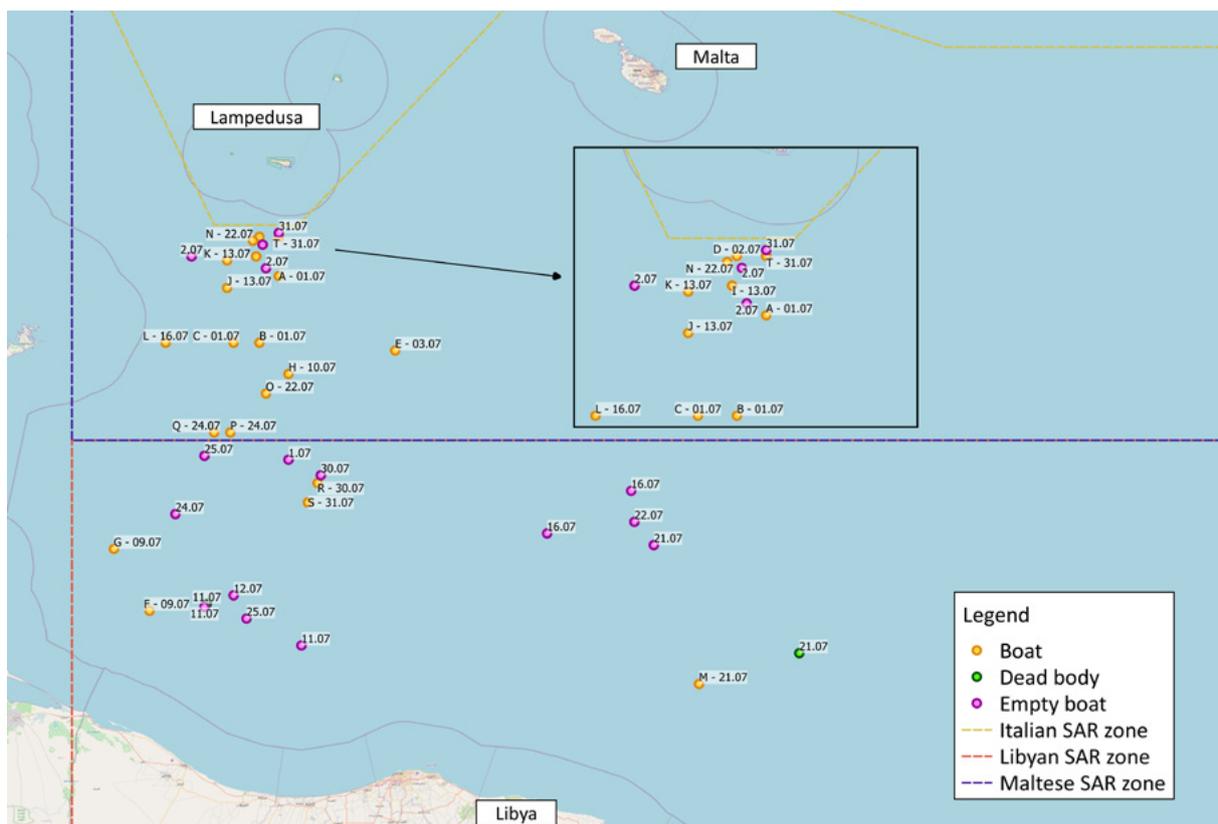


## Airborne Monthly Factsheet July 2020

This factsheet outlines a summary of distress cases witnessed by Airborne with *Moonbird* and *Seabird*.<sup>1</sup> In July 2020, we flew 19 missions, for 93 hours 18 minutes. We spotted more than 1.344 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



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

- 4 distress cases were rescued by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Italy
- 4 distress cases arrived presumably independently in Lampedusa, Italy

- 1 distress case was rescued by the merchant vessel *Talia*, transhipped to a Maltese patrol boat and disembarked in Malta
- 2 distress cases were rescued by the *Armed Forces of Malta* and disembarked in Malta
- 1 distress case was rescued by the merchant vessel *Cosmo* and disembarked in Italy
- 1 distress case was intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and disembarked in Libya
- The outcome of 2 distress cases remains uncertain
- Estimated<sup>2</sup> number of persons in distress: around 818

<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.

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

- 1 distress case was intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and disembarked in Libya
- 2 distress cases arrived independently in Lampedusa, Italy
- 1 distress case was rescued by the merchant vessel *Asso Ventinove* and disembarked in Italy
- 1 distress case was escorted into the port of Lampedusa by the *Italian Coast Guard* and the *Guardia di Finanza*
- Estimated<sup>2</sup> number of persons in distress: around 526

## 2. Details and outcome of the distress cases

01.07, distress cases A, B, C, respectively 49 persons, 5 persons and around 80 persons: **3 distress cases spotted in one day in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone.** *Seabird's* crew spotted 3 different boats in distress in the Maltese SAR zone. The initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* was called by the people aboard distress case A and alerted the authorities. None of the persons were wearing any life vests. The persons aboard distress case A were rescued by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Italy. The persons in distress case B presumably arrived independently in Lampedusa, Italy. The outcome of distress case C remains unclear.

02.07, distress case D, around 15 persons: **a fishing vessel was involved in a rescue operation in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone.** *Seabird's* crew spotted one distress case in the Maltese SAR zone. A fishing vessel had alerted the authorities and was standing by. None of the persons were wearing life vests. An *Italian Coast Guard* patrol boat was spotted on its way

to the distress case and presumably rescued the persons to be disembarked in Italy.

03.-07.07, distress case E, 52 persons: **European authorities denied a port of safety to a merchant vessel that complied with its duty to rescue.** The initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* alerted authorities about a distress case which was spotted in the morning by *Seabird's* crew in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. The livestock carrier *Talia*, flying the Lebanese flag, was the nearest and only ship in the vicinity and changed its course to monitor the distress case. Meanwhile, when the Air Liaison Officer called the Maltese Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC), they refused to take any information and hung up with the words "we don't speak with NGOs". In the evening, the Maltese RCC ordered the *Talia* to rescue the people and promised a transshipment of the rescued people onto an *Armed Forces of Malta* vessel. The Italian authorities denied entry into Italian territorial waters and instructed the vessel to sail to Malta. Later, the Maltese RCC initially refused the vessel entry to Maltese territorial waters, though eventually agreed to allow the merchant vessel to anchor in territorial waters on 04.07, so that it could seek shelter from high waves. Neither the Italian authorities nor the Maltese RCC accepted to declare themselves "competent authorities" for this rescue operation. Several rescued persons showed symptoms of sickness, and one person was even evacuated to Malta. After spending 5 days on the merchant vessel in inhumane and degrading conditions, though with the support of civil society and many other actors, the rescued people were finally transferred to a Maltese patrol boat and disembarked in Malta on the evening of 07.07.

09.07, distress cases F, G, respectively 80 and 268 persons: **highly overcrowded boats in distress in the Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone.** *Moonbird's* crew spotted 2 distress cases in the Libyan SAR zone. None of the persons were wearing life vests. One of the boats, carrying 268 persons on board, is the boat with the most people the crew has ever spotted during their reconnaissance flights at least since spring 2018. *Moonbird's* crew alerted the Libyan, Maltese and Italian authorities as well as the UNHCR. In both cases, the persons arrived independently in Lampedusa, Italy.

10.07, distress case H, 25 persons: **a rare example of a rescue operation in compliance with international law.** The people on

board the distress case called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone*, which alerted the authorities in the early morning. *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people in distress in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone later in the morning and decided to send out a mayday relay on the radio, requesting assistance from all vessels in the vicinity. A fisher vessel stood by around 1 nautical miles away from the boat in distress. Meanwhile, an officer of the Maltese Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) took the information from the Air Liaison Officer regarding the case and assured him that the RCC was working on this case. Half an hour later, a patrol boat belonging to the *Armed Forces of Malta* was approaching the boat. The people were rescued by the *Armed Forces of Malta* and disembarked in Malta.

12.07, **pullback by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard***: *Moonbird's* crew spotted a patrol boat of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* with around 80 persons on deck who had most likely been intercepted. The patrol boat eventually disembarked in Libya.

13.-14.07, distress case I, J, K, respectively 57, around 25 and around 10 persons: **3 distress cases in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone, lack of assistance by the *Italian Coast Guard* and a merchant vessel**. The persons in distress case I had called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* on the early morning of the 13.07, which alerted the authorities. *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people 3 times: at noon, the boat was adrift and a fisher vessel was on-scene. In the afternoon, the fisher vessel had left but the cargo vessel *Karewood Star*, flying the Bahamian flag, and a patrol boat belonging to the *Italian Coast Guard* were standing-by and not rescuing. 4 hours later, the cargo vessel was still standing by, but the *Italian Coast Guard* patrol boat had left. On none of the 3 boats in distress were the people wearing life vests. The people in distress case I were finally, after a high volume of media pressure, rescued on the 14.07 by the *Guardia Di Finanza* and disembarked in Italy. The outcome of distress case J remains uncertain. The people in distress case K arrived independently in Lampedusa, Italy.

14.07: **direct coordination between an aircraft and the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard***. *Moonbird's* crew overheard an aircraft calling several times the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat *Ras Jadar* on the radio, requesting them to "go north, go north, turn

360 [degrees]!". In another communication, the aircraft requested the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* to proceed "7 miles" more to the north, "follow follow", "go go". Later, the patrol boat asked "Are you with me?" which was confirmed by the aircraft stating "I'll stay with you, I'll stay with you, no problem, no problem!". We assume a Maltese aircraft was involved, judging from the accent and phrases used.

16.-17.07, distress case L, 63 persons: **unresponsiveness and delay to rescue by the Maltese authorities**. The persons aboard the distress case called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone*, which alerted the authorities. *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone at noon, without any life vests. The Maltese authorities were alerted by the Air Liaison Officer via phone and stated that they were taking all necessary actions to rescue the persons in distress. The *Armed Forces of Malta* did not rescue the persons until the morning of the next day. The people on board were disembarked in Malta.

21.07, distress case M, 131 persons: **unresponsiveness to a distress signal sent out on maritime VHF, pull-back to Libya**. *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people in the Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. The left tube started to deflate, while the people were not wearing any life vests and the boat was overloaded. *Moonbird's* crew sent out 3 mayday relays, requesting any vessels in the vicinity to render assistance. Nobody answered except a Libyan airplane which relayed the information to the Libyan "Air Traffic Control". The headquarters of the European military operation *Irimi* were informed. In the end, the people were likely intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and pulled back to Libya. It later appeared that the people had also called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* and that the people have been spotted by a drone belonging to the US military forces.

22.07, distress cases N, O, both respectively around 80 persons: **unattended distress cases in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone**. *Moonbird's* crew spotted 2 boats in distress in the Maltese SAR zone. Both boats were overcrowded and the people were not wearing any life vests. Both boats later matched with existing cases from the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone*. The people in both cases arrived independently in Lampedusa, Italy.



22.07: **the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* was involved in a distress case.** When *Moonbird's* Air Liaison Officer called the Libyan authorities to announce *Moonbird's* next flight, the Libyan authorities provided information on a distress case which they were intercepting in their Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone.

24.07, distress cases P, Q, respectively 108 and 72 persons: **rescue operation by a merchant vessel and interception in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone coordinated by the Maltese authorities.** In both cases, the people had called *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone*, which had alerted the authorities. When *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people in both cases, they were only 2 nautical miles away from one another. The oil/chemical tanker *Cosmo*, flying the Italian flag, was instructed by the Maltese Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) to monitor both cases. After several hours and a situation of severe danger due to the deflated tube, with people removing water from the boat with their hands, the people of distress case P were rescued by the merchant vessel and disembarked in Italy. However, the people of distress case Q were intercepted in the Maltese SAR zone by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and disembarked in Libya. During the interception, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* also demanded the *Cosmo* to transfer them the people of distress case P. This request was refused by the captain of the *Cosmo*.

30.-31.07, distress case R, 17 persons: **non-assistance of a distress case for 3 days, involvement of a merchant vessel in a rescue operation.** The people had called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* on the 28.07, which alerted the authorities about their distress. *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people in the Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone on the 30.07, with two merchant vessels on-scene: the *Bassilevousa*, flying the Greek flag, and the *Azeri Gas*, flying the Maltese flag. The Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) ordered both vessels to stay on scene but declared that the Libyan authorities were responsible for the coordination of the rescue. *Moonbird's* Air Liaison Officer called the Italian authorities 3 times: the first time the Duty Officer was busy, the second time the Duty Officer did not answer the phone and the third time the Duty Officer confirmed receiving the information on the case but denied any responsibility and referred to the so-called Libyan Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC). Both merchant vessels later left the scene. On the morning of the

31.07, the Italian MRCC reiterated on the phone that it was not in charge of the distress case and denied to have given any instructions to the merchant vessels. On the same day, *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people again, where some people were in the water. *Moonbird's* crew sent out a mayday relay, requesting any vessel in the vicinity to assist the persons in distress. When the Air Liaison Officer wanted to give any information, the Duty Officer of the Italian MRCC answered that he was busy and hung up. After more than 83 hours of non-assistance, the people were finally rescued on the 31.07 by the merchant vessel *Asso Ventinove*, flying the Italian flag, and disembarked in Italy.

31.07: distress case S, around 30 persons: **independent arrival in Italy, non-assistance of authorities and vessels in the Central Mediterranean.** *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people in the Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. After having rescued the people of distress case R, the merchant vessel *Asso Ventinove*, flying the Italian flag, was only around 2,5 nautical miles away from the people of distress case S. The people were at risk, not wearing any life jackets. The people were eventually escorted by the *Italian Coast Guard* and the *Guardia di Finanza* to the port of Lampedusa, Italy.

31.07: distress case T, 97 persons: **rescue operation close to Lampedusa.** *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people wearing life vests that appeared similar to those usually given out by the *Armed Forces of Malta*. A patrol boat belonging to the *Guardia di Finanza* was on stand-by, calling for a patrol boat belonging to the *Italian Coast Guard* on the radio. The people were eventually rescued by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Italy.

29.06, 02.07, 09.07, 11.07, 21.07: **2 dead bodies, likely not retrieved during rescue operations to be buried with dignity on land.** *Seabird* and *Moonbird's* crew spotted 2 dead bodies in the Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. One dead body was spotted near a half-deflated rubber boat 4 times - between 29.06 and 11.07 - in the Libyan SAR zone. The second dead body was spotted on 21.07. *Airborne* was not able to reconstruct from which boat(s) they came. The authorities were alerted but did not provide any further information, neither did they launch an operation to retrieve the bodies.



## SEA-RESCUE AT EUROPE'S BORDERS

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This month, *Searbird* and *Moonbird's* crew also spotted 16 empty boats in the Libyan and Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zones. Only 3 of them could be matched with boats that had been previously spotted by *Moonbird* and *Seabird*, the others remain unknown cases.

### 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*
- the involvement of merchant vessels in rescue operations due to the lack of a European sea rescue program
- the unjustified and systematic delays of European Member States to fulfill their obligation to conduct and coordinate sea rescue 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