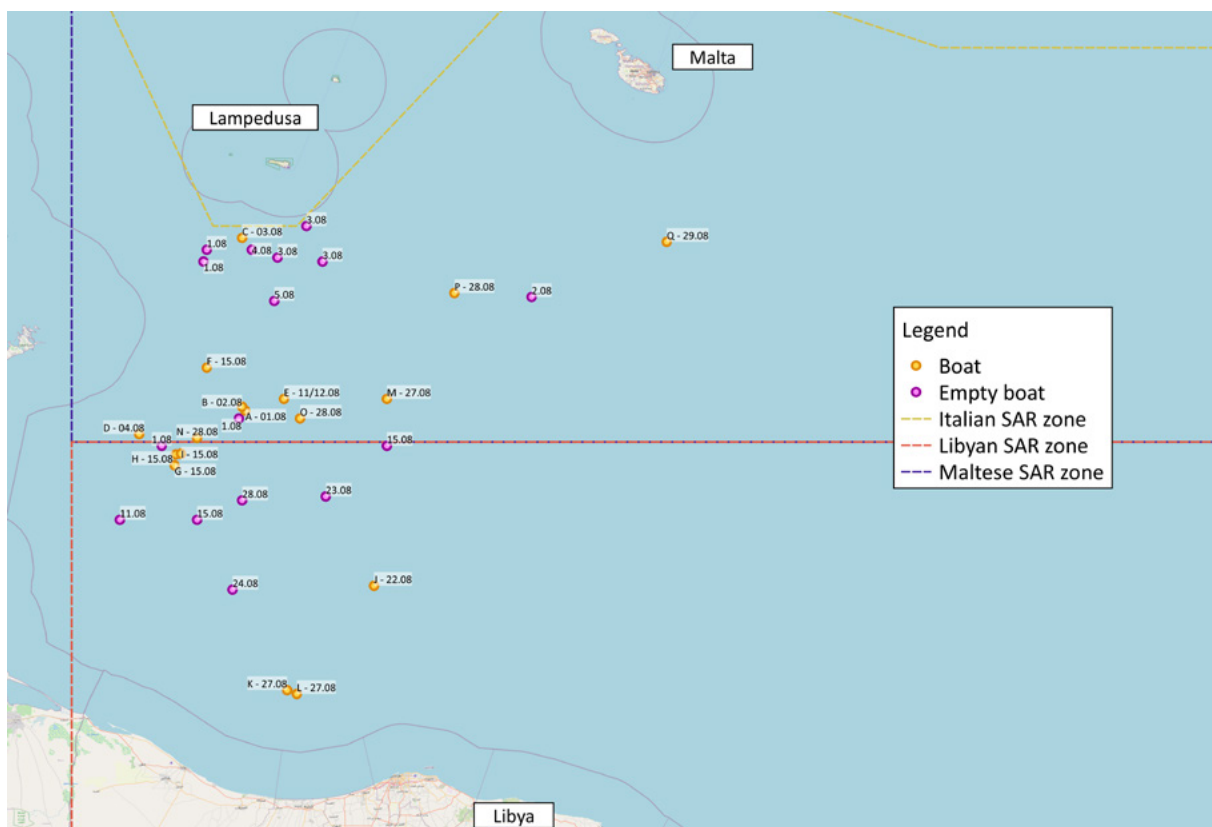


Airborne Monthly Factsheet August 2020

This factsheet outlines a summary of distress cases witnessed by *Sea-Watch's* Airborne with *Moonbird*.¹ In August 2020, we flew 18 missions, for 81 hours 43 minutes. We spotted more than 704 persons in distress.

¹ 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 and empty boats spotted



Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone

- 3 distress cases were rescued by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Italy
- 3 distress cases arrived presumably independently in Italy
- 1 distress case was rescued by the merchant vessel *Maersk Etienne*, not yet disembarked at the time of editorial deadline

- 1 distress case was rescued by the *Armed Forces of Malta* and disembarked in Malta
- 1 distress case was rescued by the rescue vessel *Louise Michel*, transferred to the *Italian Coast Guard* and the NGO vessel *Sea-Watch 4*² and disembarked in Italy
- 1 distress case was intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and disembarked in Libya
- The outcome of 1 distress case remain unknown
- Estimated³ number of persons in distress: around 530

Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone

- 1 distress case was rescued by the NGO vessel *Sea-Watch 4* and disembarked in Italy
- 1 distress case was rescued by the rescue vessel *Louise Michel*, transferred to the *Italian Coast Guard* and the NGO vessel *Sea-Watch 4*, and disembarked in Italy
- 1 distress case was intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and disembarked in Libya
- The outcome of 3 distress cases remains unknown
- Estimated number of persons in distress: around 174

2. Details and outcome of the distress cases

01.07, distress case A, 71 persons: **involvement of a merchant vessel, unresponsiveness and lack of cooperation of the Maltese authorities.** The initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* was called by the people on board and alerted the authorities. *Moonbird's* crew spotted the boat in distress in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone. The merchant vessel *Neverland*, flying the Italian flag, was already informed and changed its course. An *Armed Forces of Malta* patrol boat was spotted around 7 nautical miles (nm)⁴ from the distress case but remained unresponsive on the radio. In the early evening, the Air Liaison Officer (ALO) was unable to obtain confirmation from the Maltese authorities that a rescue had been conducted: the ALO tried to reach them but they did not answer. The captain of the *Neverland* kindly confirmed in the night that the people were rescued in the evening by the *Armed Forces of Malta* and were disembarked in Malta.

² The Sea-Watch 4 is operated by the NGO Sea-Watch with the medical support of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

³ 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.

⁴ "Nautical Miles" is the unit of measurement used at sea. 1 nautical mile is equal to 1,852 kilometers.



02.08, distress case B, 20 persons: **unresponsiveness of the Italian and Maltese authorities and non-assistance of a Maltese patrol boat in the Maltese SAR zone.** The initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* was called by the people on board and alerted the authorities in the morning. *Moonbird's* crew spotted the persons at noon. An *Armed Forces of Malta* patrol boat was only 6 nautical miles away but did not rescue, despite calls on the radio by *Moonbird's* crew to do so. The people likely arrived independently in Lampedusa, Italy, early the next morning.

03.08, distress case C, 26 persons: **upon disembarkation in Lampedusa, 1 rescued person died and another was suffering a serious health condition.** The initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* was called by the people on board and alerted the Italian and Maltese authorities. The boat in distress was later spotted 2 times by *Moonbird's* crew in the Maltese SAR zone. The people were rescued on the same day by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy. Upon disembarkation 1 rescued person died, another had convulsions.

04.08, distress case D, 27 persons: **longest standoff in SAR history, European authorities deny a port of safety for more than five weeks to a merchant vessel that complied with its duty to rescue.** The initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* was called by the people on board and alerted the authorities. *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people in the Maltese SAR zone with the offshore supply vessel *Maridive 601*, flying the Belizean flag, in the vicinity. The ship was however unresponsive on the radio. The chemical/oil tanker *Maersk Etienne*, flying the Danish flag, was 11 nm away from the boat and already heading to the position. The *Maersk Etienne* crew secured the boat and provided assistance but did not rescue at first. The persons in distress were successfully rescued by the *Maersk Etienne* in the evening. The vessel set its course to Malta, as Maltese authorities were aware of this case and had given instructions to the vessel. At the editorial deadline of this Factsheet, *Maersk Etienne* had waited for more than five weeks outside of Maltese territorial waters, the request for a port of disembarkation having been denied by Maltese and Tunisian authorities. A merchant vessel is not equipped, nor are the crew well enough trained to take care of people on board for such a long time. The people have been deprived of their fundamental rights for weeks, and 3 people even jumped overboard before being rescued by the crew. As of 09.09, the rescued people are still on board the vessel.

11.-12.08, distress case E, 25 persons: **the Armed Forces of Malta tampered with the engine of a boat but did not rescue the people in distress.** On 11.08, *Moonbird's* crew spotted people in a boat adrift in the Maltese SAR zone. None of these people were wearing life vests. On 12.08, when they were spotted again, some were wearing life vests. The general cargo vessel *PEMBA*, flying the flag of Antigua and Barbuda, was instructed by the *Maltese Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC)* to stay 5 nm away. An *Armed Forces of Malta* patrol boat in the vicinity had at this time launched a rigid inflatable boat (RHIB).⁵ *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people a second time on this day: at this point the RHIB had left the scene and the Maltese patrol boat was heading north. In the afternoon, when *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people a third time, they were all wearing life vests, and the RHIB of the *Armed Forces of Malta* was heading to the boat again. An *Italian Coast Guard* aircraft and *Moonbird's* crew witnessed how the *Armed Forces of Malta* tampered with the people's engine instead of rescuing them. The people of the boat were eventually moving towards Lampedusa. They were rescued in the evening by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy.

⁵ A rigid inflatable boat is a fast, lightweight, and stable boat usually used by the military for operations at sea.

15.08, distress case F, around 90 persons: **non-assistance by the Maltese authorities and feared interception by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.** *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people in the Maltese SAR zone without life vests. The Maltese authorities were informed and acknowledged the information, though denied providing further information as to whether they would launch a rescue operation. *Moonbird's* crew spotted a so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat near the Maltese SAR boundary, with around 15 persons on board from a previous interception, checking an empty boat and later likely looking for the boat from distress case F. The people were presumably rescued by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy. It appeared later that the people had also called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone*.

15.08, distress cases G, H, I, respectively 13, 11 and 14 persons: **unresponsiveness of the Libyan authorities.** *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people in distress in the Libyan SAR zone. The Air Liaison Officer was unable to alert the Libyan authorities: of the 9 possible numbers to reach the authorities, 6 were unresponsive, 1 number had an automatic response in Arabic, there was no connection for 1 number and for another number the phone was turned off. The outcomes of these cases remain unknown.

22.08, distress case J, 7 persons: **lack of state rescue assets and need for NGO vessels to rescue lives at sea.** The people were first spotted in the Libyan SAR zone by the rescue vessel *Louise Michel*, flying the German flag, and then by *Moonbird's* crew. The *Louise Michel* changed course and stabilized the situation. The authorities were informed but did not launch any rescue operations. Eventually, the NGO vessel *Sea-Watch 4*, flying the German flag, rescued the people. They were transferred to an Italian cruise ship for quarantine on 02.09.

On 23.08: **dead bodies recovered by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.** *Moonbird's* crew spotted 2 so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boats heading towards one another in the Libyan SAR zone. At the time of the first spotting, one boat had approximately 5 people on board, lying on top of one another. We assume that they were recovered bodies from a shipwreck. When *Moonbird's* crew spotted these patrol boats again, both boats were heading to Tripoli.

27.08, distress cases K, L, respectively around 40 persons, 89 persons: **delegation of the duty to render assistance to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and rescue initiatives of civil society.** *Moonbird's* crew spotted 2 boats in distress in the Libyan SAR zone. The authorities were informed. Later in the afternoon, *Moonbird's* crew spotted the ongoing interception of distress case K by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* which pulled the people back to Libya. The people of distress case L were attended by the *Louise Michel*, which secured the situation. After their mayday relay⁶ remained unresponded too, the *Louise Michel* took the 89 people on board. The *Italian Coast Guard* only transferred the most vulnerable persons onto one of their vessels on 29.08. All other persons were transferred on the same day to the NGO vessel *Sea-Watch 4*. They were transferred to an Italian cruise ship for quarantine on 02.09.

On the same day, *Moonbird's* crew spotted the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* burning a boat after having intercepted 24 persons.

27.08, distress case M, around 40 persons: **non-assistance by the European authorities concerning a distress case in the Maltese SAR zone.** *Moonbird's* crew spotted the boat in distress in the Maltese SAR zone in the early evening. The relevant Maltese as well as Italian authorities were informed. Neither authority launched a

⁶ A "mayday relay" is an emergency procedure which provides information about a boat in distress via maritime or aerial radio, requesting any asset in the vicinity to assist.



rescue operation, increasing the risk of lives being lost. The people arrived independently in Lampedusa, Italy.

28.08, distress case N, around 25 persons: **non-assistance by the Maltese authorities concerning a boat in distress in their SAR zone.** *Moonbird's* crew spotted the persons in the Maltese SAR zone. The Maltese authorities were informed via mail. On the phone, they stated that they had not launched any rescue operation because they were "too busy at the moment". The outcome of this case remains unclear.

28.08, distress case O, around 30 persons: **interception by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard in the Maltese SAR zone.** *Moonbird's* crew spotted a boat in distress in the Maltese SAR zone, and later its interception by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*. The Maltese authorities were alerted about the distress case and of its likely interception, but did not take any action to prevent the interception. The people were pulled back to Libya.

On the same day, *Moonbird's* crew spotted the end of an ongoing interception by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* in the Libyan SAR zone.

28.08, distress case P, 112 persons: **lack of European state rescue assets and need for NGO vessels.** *Moonbird's* crew spotted a boat in distress in the Maltese SAR zone. Due to its critical condition, *Moonbird's* crew sent out a mayday relay. The Italian, Maltese and German authorities were informed via mail, but were unresponsive on the phone. Neither the Italian nor the Maltese authorities launched rescue operations. The rescue vessel *Louise Michel* stabilized the situation, took several persons on board and recovered a body. According to testimonies from the rescued people, 4 people died from drowning. Since too many people were onboard the *Louise Michel* and life rafts needed to be used for the remaining rescued people, the situation was extremely unstable. For the safety of the persons, the *Louise Michel* could no longer navigate. An *Italian Coast Guard* patrol boat only accepted the most vulnerable among the rescued persons (and the body), and disembarked them in Lampedusa, Italy, on 29.08. The others were later transferred to the NGO vessel *Sea-Watch 4* and transferred again to an Italian cruise vessel for quarantine on 02.09.



29.08, distress case Q, 64 persons: [the Armed Forces of Malta likely handed out life vests but refused to rescue](#). The people in distress called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone*, which informed the authorities. *Moonbird's* crew spotted the boat twice. The first time, the people in distress were not wearing any life vests. An *Armed Forces of Malta* patrol boat was in the vicinity but remained unresponsive on the radio to the demands of *Moonbird's* crew that it rescue the people. The second time *Moonbird's* crew spotted the people in distress, the *Armed Forces of Malta* patrol boat had left, and all of the people aboard the boat in distress were wearing life vests. The Air Liaison Officer tried to reach out to the *Maltese Rescue Coordination Centre* unsuccessfully 3 times. The people arrived independently in Pachino, Italy on 30.08.

This month, *Moonbird's* crew also spotted 16 empty boats in the Libyan and Maltese SAR zones. Only 1 of them could be matched with a known boat, rescued by the NGO vessel *Sea-Watch 4* on 24.08.

These missions highlight once again:

- the deadly consequences of European migration and border policies
- the systematic non-assistance of European Member States and the delegation of rescue operations to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*, even in European SAR zones
- the involvement of merchant vessels in rescue operations due to the lack of a European sea rescue program
- the unjustified and systematic delays by European Member States in fulfilling their obligations to conduct and coordinate sea rescue in their SAR zones
- the need for NGO vessels in the Central Mediterranean in order to uphold the law and save human lives