



# Civil Sea Rescue at Europe's Borders

Project Report 2020



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#### INTRODUCTION

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# #SafePassage

For legal routes, a Europe of solidarity and freedom of movement for all.





# Our assignment

Sea-Watch is actively committed to ensuring that no one has to die at Europe's deadly sea border. We are a non-profit organization that conducts civil Search and Rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean Sea. In the presence of the humanitarian crisis, **Sea-Watch provides emergency relief capacities, demands and advocates for a coordinated European rescue mission, and calls for legal escape routes.** Despite increasing criminalization and repression by various European states, we are responding by continuously developing new action plans and implementing new strategies to remain actively involved in Mediterranean Search and Rescue operations. **Sea-Watch is a politically and religiously independent organization, which is solely financed by donations.**

# Mission & Vision

## Rescue lives

Since 2015, Sea-Watch activists have been involved in rescuing over 38,000 people. Our volunteers act quickly and professionally to respond to distress cases at sea. Every single life we rescue is a sign of humanity.

## Initiate the turning point

Sea-Watch is a civil society initiative that sends out a clear sign of humanity. During times of increasing racist agitation in Germany and other European states, we support everyone who stands up for a more diverse, more humane Europe and a political solution according to our demanded #SafePassage.

## Generate awareness

Any humanitarian catastrophe has a personal and a political side. Therefore, we aim to raise awareness of the lives and fates of refugees who cross the sea. We also highlight the human rights violations that are being committed by European navy ships and commercial vessels. We witness and document how military and commercial ships ignore emergency calls regularly, all while EU member states wait for the so-called Libyan Coast Guard to pull back refugees - more than 9,000 in 2019 alone.





# “Europe has grown used to pictures of sinking rubber boats and people drowning at sea. We cannot!”

Johannes Bayer has been Head of Mission on Sea-Watch rescue ships and is currently chairman of the board of Sea-Watch e.V. He talks about his experience as a sea rescuer.

## ON MISSION:

During the past five years, we witnessed our very own personal nightmare in the Mediterranean Sea. While we fulfilled the obligation of every seafarer, which is to rescue people in distress, my colleagues and I have been constantly risking our own lives and personal freedom.

During the winter, we pulled hyperthermic children out of the water and took care of distraught parents on board, all while we were freezing, wet, and in shock ourselves. I will never forget the grief-stricken cries of a man when he realized his brother was not among the rescued. How do you comfort someone when you are unable to put it into words?

We were able to save many lives, but sometimes, we arrived too late to provide assistance. From the air, we've helplessly watched people drown again and again, only able to document the naval ships and commercial vessels that lie just beyond the horizon. They know that lives were in danger, but all too often they refuse to act. Inside the cockpit of the *Moonbird*, we cried tears of anger and desperation.



For days, we traced the European coast with a dead child's body inside a refrigerator on board. The child was one of the very few people that were able to be buried with dignity, unlike thousands of others that simply slipped unnoticed beneath the waves.

High waves and cold winds in the winter, or unbearable heat during the summer regularly causes seasickness and sleepless nights. The stories from our guests on board detail the realities of their experiences and the cruelties they have endured, which are far beyond what I can imagine, still today. Their will to survive seems to burst with strength, courage, and hope.

I am ashamed of the fact that for our guests on board who are seeking safety, these long odysseys without a safe harbor will remain their first memory of Europe. I am sick of hearing hostile, anti-migrant propaganda and especially those comments that deny the existence of a humanitarian catastrophe in the Central Mediterranean. We do not have a refugee crisis. We have a crisis of solidarity.

## MY LESSON LEARNED:

We must fight together for the Europe that we would like to live in. The thought of not being able to help people in distress and with them drowning our human rights is unbearable for me. All over Europe, people are arguing about migration policies, while people are dying at sea. We will continue to go to sea and save people from drowning.



# On the Water

## Sea-Watch 3

We founded Sea-Watch five years ago to raise awareness of the dire situation at sea, in the hope it would end the state of emergency in the Mediterranean. Yet sadly, every year we are forced to reckon with the unwillingness of the European Union to stop the humanitarian crisis occurring at the world's deadliest border.

In the summer of 2017 developments in the Central Mediterranean made it clear that we could no longer rely on the European member states to meet their obligations to sea rescue. In response we bought *Sea-Watch 3* to take on those obligations and we were forced to take the rescued to the nearest port of safety ourselves. These transfers caused substantial delays - and were not the only deliberate obstacles that were put in front of our work. By the summer of 2018, civil rescue ships were blocked in ports and the Italian policy of refusing port access to rescue ships began. Within this changing political climate, prolonged stand-offs at sea emerged.

Our mission is not designed to compensate for those political games. These increasingly common stand-offs with EU member state officials push our guests and crew mentally and physically to the very limit. For days, sometimes for weeks on end, we are left waiting in visible sight of Europe's safe harbors; drained, hopeless, and deserted. A few miles away, European politicians refuse to take on their legal responsibility of providing safe harbor to those rescued and on board our ships.

*Sea-Watch 3* is not a cruise ship and she is not meant to hold people for weeks on end. But that is exactly what we are charged with now. The purpose of which is, allegedly, to ensure the safety on ships. However, in reality, this decree is a cynical regulatory change that made it impossible for the *Sea-Watch 3* to sail under the Dutch flag any longer.

We are not able to express how cynical this regulatory change is, as the same politicians that refuse to provide a safe harbor to people in distress are simultaneously punishing rescue ships for not being able to bring these same people ashore.

**There is no reason why people should wait at sea for weeks, let alone drown in the Central Mediterranean Sea - unless that is politically intended.**

Doubts have been raised about the safety of civil rescue ships. The state alternative: let people drown. Until today, blockades are practised in this way: rescue ships are being held for ostensible reasons and kept from leaving port, hence kept from rescuing. As a result, we have to watch as known distress cases at sea are left to themselves or subjected to illegal pullbacks by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

But we won't give up. Despite all these adversities, we are constantly fighting to deploy our ships and airplanes until no one has to drown as they try to flee across the Mediterranean.

*Sea-Watch 3* patrols the Central Mediterranean Sea north of Libya and is actively searching for boats in distress in international waters. Despite the long and dangerous passage, mostly small and unsuitable boats like rubber dinghies are being used in the attempted crossings. As soon as we reach the Search and Rescue Zone, we begin methodically searching for boats in distress. We use binoculars, radar, and other technical support, like specially developed high-definition camera systems in our search efforts. Every boat that we see is immediately reported to the responsible Maritime Rescue Coordination Center and we then start the appropriate rescue measures.



Photo: Tim Wagner



Photo: Tim Wagner



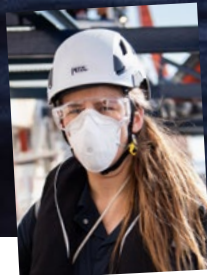
# On the water

## Sea-Watch 4

At 60 meters in length, **Sea-Watch 4** is bigger than our *Sea-Watch 3* and offers more space for a larger crew, increased energy efficiency and lower deployment costs. We have introduced new positions onboard with which we can master new and old challenges. Furthermore, the ship offers enough space for a secure, short-term shelter where we can take care of our guests. Inside the new hospital on board, we can tend to medical emergencies, while the recovery area provides additional shelter for women and children.

**“Sea-Watch 4 is the response of the European civil society to the deadly policy of the EU.** Despite all obstacles and logistical challenges, over a hundred activists from all over Europe worked relentlessly for months to get the *Sea-Watch 4* ready for its mission. To know that it is now where it is supposed to be is all the more meaningful for us.”

Rebecca • Activist & guest coordinator onboard *Sea-Watch 4*



## How it all began

On February 20th 2020 we christened the former research ship, Poseidon, with her new name, *Sea-Watch 4*.



The acquisition of the ship was made possible through donations by the coalition, United4Rescue,

which had been started by the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) in 2019. There are now over 550 organizations involved in this coalition. They are clearly supporting this project with their central claim: “You don’t let people drown. Full stop.”

We are excited and encouraged by the strong support from civil society through this coalition. This new ship allows us to increase our presence in the Search and Rescue Zone along the world’s deadliest border.

Sea-Watch is responsible for the operation of this new ship, which sails under the German flag. In 2020, the medical staff supporting our crew on mission is provided by Doctors Without Borders. They are another partner in the fight against the violent politics of letting people die along Europe’s most southern border.

## The first mission

In March 2020, *Sea-Watch 4* was transferred to the shipyard in Burriana, Spain. Initially the work on the vessel progressed nicely, but eventually, the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with our plans, mostly as travel restrictions for our crew members and supply shortages for necessary materials hampered our efforts. As a health precaution, many activists had to leave early, while the remaining crew continued to organize daily tasks onboard. Slowly but steadily, we progressed with the overall project of getting the new ship ready to sail. When the preventive

measures were loosened in May, we managed to finish the work in strict accordance with hygiene procedures to prevent a potential outbreak of COVID-19. In August, *Sea-Watch 4* set sail on its first mission. She was the first civil rescue ship in the Central Mediterranean after 6 weeks of absence of civil rescue capacities. We managed to securely accommodate over 350 people onboard following multiple rescue operations. It took 12 days after the first rescue for us to be assigned a safe harbor.



Unfortunately, being involved in civil sea rescue in the Mediterranean often means witnessing senseless and preventable death. But there are also moments of hope.

Sea-Watch was involved in saving over 38,000 lives during the past 5 years.

Junior is one of them.

A mother is fleeing with her children from the Ivory Coast. She is making the journey northbound. It is roughly 5,000 km from the West African country to the coast of Libya - the first life-endangering leg of the journey.

In Libya, where the civil war is still ongoing, Junior is separated from his mother and his sister. Without alternatives, they have to continue on their search for security.



They are fortunate that during their escape through the Mediterranean Sea their boat is discovered by the *Ocean Viking*; the civil rescue ship of SOS Méditerranée. By the end of January 2020, the five-year-old Princesse and her mother have reached Italy - they are in Europe.

Junior stays behind in Libya ...



... and survives. In June 2020, he attempts the dangerous passage across the Mediterranean Sea together with another fleeing mother. He is risking his life to escape the hell of Libya, where refugees are exposed to violence and severe human rights violations - where even fleeing children are not protected from abuse.

#### THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA IS THE WORLD'S DEADLIEST BORDER.

A border that has become a blind spot on the world's map as people look away and allow the inhumane politics of European states to persist. A border where Libyan militias with European support, prevent people like Junior and his family from reaching Europe.



**Junior manages to get across the Mediterranean Sea.** On June 17th 2020 the crew of *Sea-Watch 3* notices the small, overcrowded boat. An Italian journalist, who was onboard the *Ocean Viking* when Princesse and her mother were saved and who knows about the desperate search of Junior, is in touch with Sea-Watch. Hope is sparked and pictures bring confirmation: The lost child has survived and is now safe on board the *Sea-Watch 3*.



Following their arrival in port, the family was able to reunite. Even if we will never forget the tears of happiness from this family, they are not able to hide the fact that we should not have found Junior alone on the Mediterranean Sea. Europe must stop its inhumane politics.

In light of the overwhelming cruelty that is happening on a daily basis in the Mediterranean Sea, Junior's story offers a glimpse of hope.

#### ONE THING HAS TO BE SAID

What is happening on the Mediterranean Sea is racism. This racism costs thousands of lives each year. Together we are fighting for humane migration policies, safe passage, and the freedom of movement for everyone.



# AIN'T NO BORDER HIGH ENOUGH

[Sea-Watch.org](https://seawatch.org)





# In the air

## Moonbird

Since spring 2017, we have been operating a civil observation aircraft, a Cirrus SR22 - our **Moonbird** - in cooperation with the Swiss Humanitarian Pilot Initiative (HPI). We can cover a maritime area of about 16,000 km<sup>2</sup> with a crew of 3-4 people during a six-hour mission.



## We look closely where Europe's politicians are looking away – letting people die in the Mediterranean Sea

Painful images of people drowning, bodies washed up along the Libyan coast, or corpses that Tunisian fishermen are extracting as macabre “by-catch” from their fishing nets - images that are accompanying our crew in the air. Also this June, a person, lifeless, jammed in the half-drowned remains of a rubber dinghy, which was supposed to take him and many others away from the war into a safe life. A human being, abandoned, left undignified at sea. We don't know if the corpse was left behind during a rescue mission or - worse - if it is the only remaining evidence of other deaths. Incidents like this make it clear: Europe has let its values, human rights, drown at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea together with these people. A structural, profound racism and the refusal to find a political solution is to blame. If this had happened in the North or Baltic Sea, there would have been a fleet of rescue ships dispatched to ensure people would at least receive dignified funerals. But in the Mediterranean Sea, nothing was being done for two weeks. Again and again, our crews spot corpses that EU authorities don't want to retrieve or identify.

**“People are dying trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea because Europe has built a fortress around it.**

When dead bodies are not even being retrieved and relatives are left uninformed, therefore not able to grieve, then this shows that the last bit of dignity of the EU has drowned together with the people in the Mediterranean Sea.“

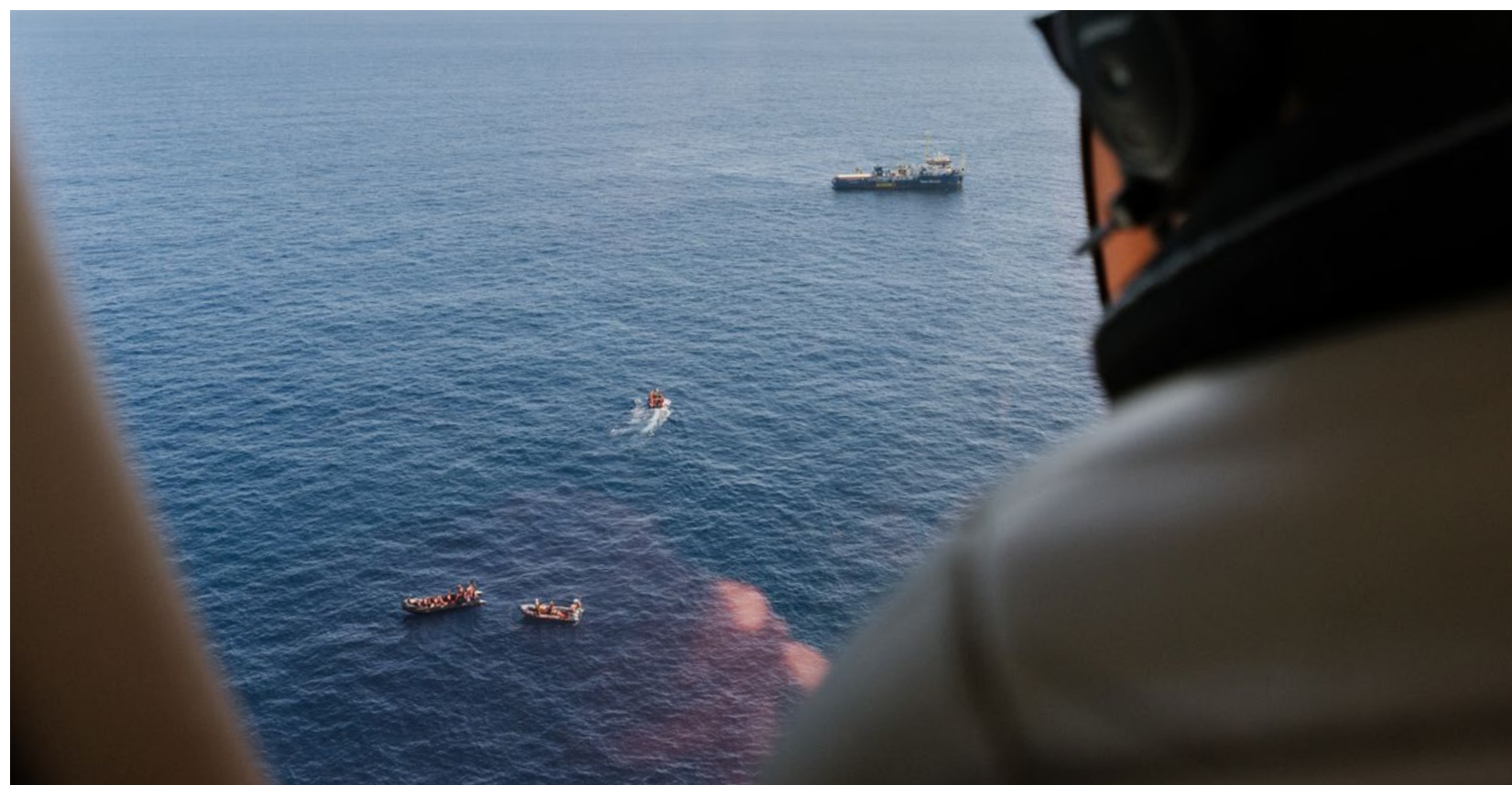
Neeske • Head of Mission at Airborne Operations



## Our civil eye: Moonbird

Regularly civil rescue ships are being detained on flimsy charges. There is still no coordinated governmental initiative to rescue refugees in distress at sea. Even when rescue ships are on duty, the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centers or reconnaissance planes of Frontex, the European Union Border and Coast Guard Agency, rarely share distress case coordinates with civil rescue crews. Therefore, the aerial monitoring of the sea and the observations of human rights abuses conducted by our civil eye in the air become increasingly essential. The European Union prevents any attempt at escape with the help of their henchmen, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. Instead of ensuring that rescue operations are being conducted promptly and that those rescued are

taken to a safe harbor, they are taken back to the illegal camps in Libya, a country devastated by civil war. Regularly, our airborne crews witness this violation of international law. Our observations from the reconnaissance missions of our airplane are continually documented as they play an important role in holding governments responsible for the failure to render assistance and highlights the ongoing abuse of human rights. This documentation also gives a voice to those that lost their lives during the passage or that were taken back to Libya.





# In the air

## Seabird

### Because the Mediterranean Sea cannot become a blind spot

Due to regular maintenance work, our airplane *Moonbird* is periodically grounded. While our civil rescue ships are also being held in port, this means no one is able to witness what is happening at sea. But the Mediterranean cannot become a blind spot for human rights, where people in search of freedom and security are lost to the waves or trapped in a circle of violence and misery. To avoid these interruptions, we acquired an additional airplane, *Seabird*, in spring 2020.

Routinely, we are witnessing known emergencies at sea being ignored as boats are watched inactively by European vessels before rescue operations occur - often waiting until the so-called Libyan Coast Guard returns the people to Libya. The extended flight time allows us to monitor, document and publicize these events in order to apply pressure on the responsible authorities and hold them accountable for their negligence.

The twin-engine high-performance aircraft (Beechcraft Baron 58) has room for 5-6 crew onboard. We can cover an area twice as big as the *Moonbird* during our 7.5-hour missions: about 27,000 km<sup>2</sup> – an area as big as Brandenburg.



“How do we deal with people being abducted or drowning in front of our eyes? The answer that I found for me personally: As voluntary activists, we are limited in our possibilities and are using these tools the best we can. Therefore, this doesn’t cause me sleepless nights.

**Governments are deliberately not fulfilling their duty to save people in distress, despite the fact that they can prevent the misery and crime that we are seeing.**

This is what makes me despair. It is a shame that they are not doing anything. And this is what causes me sleepless nights!”

Omar • Pilot of *Moonbird* and *Seabird*

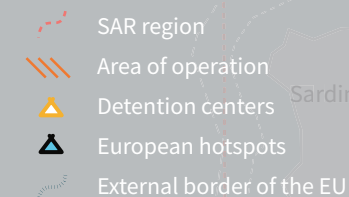


HUMANITARIAN PILOTS INITIATIVE

Our operational partner, **Humanitarian Pilots Initiative (HPI)**, is a Swiss initiative of engaged pilots that are using their skills for humanitarian causes. Since 2017, our combined efforts have been increasing our efficiency in civil aerial reconnaissance and allows us to document human rights abuses at sea.



## Key



SAR Search-and-Rescue  
(M)RCC (Maritime) Rescue  
Coordination Center

ITALY

### European Union

Relocation of arrivals to EU member states happens on an ad-hoc basis. The lack of a predictable distribution mechanism often results in months-long delays at the expense of those who are seeking protection. Governments promise relocations that never happen.

The EU supports the so-called Libyan Coast Guard with millions of Euros, training and ships.

Sea-Watch supports medical projects on Lesbos and urges governmental institutions to act (p. 25-26).

### Aegean Sea:

The EU tries to close off borders, e.g. Greece builds floating fences and pushes boats back into Turkish territorial waters. By late summer 2020, around 40,000 people are living in absolutely inhumane conditions on the Greek islands.

### Frontex & EUNAVFOR Med

Both missions are mainly operated with aircraft. The new naval operation IRINI is intended to enforce an arms embargo on Libya and is obliged to head east if "refugee boats" are spotted.

### MRCC Rome & RCC Malta

- Ignoring emergency calls
- Coordinating illegal pushbacks with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard

### Merchant Vessels (p. 25)

Due to the delay and associated economic impacts on their company, ships stay away from escape routes to avoid rescues.

Sea-Watch operates in the Central Mediterranean Sea with two rescue vessels (p. 8-11) and two reconnaissance aircraft (p. 16-19).

### So-called Libyan Coast Guard & Navy

- Employing militias
- Do not speak English
- Difficult to reach

Carrying out illegal pullbacks of refugees, independently as well as under European coordination.



## Deaths 2019

1,262 people lost their lives trying to cross the Central Mediterranean Sea in 2019, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The number of unreported cases is much higher.

**19.01.–21.01.** | More than 170 people drown off the Libyan coast.

**04.07.** | 85 people depart from Libya, a leak makes their boat sink. One survivor later dies in a hospital, 17 bodies are washed ashore, others remain missing.

**25.07.** | The Alarmphone receives several emergency calls, at least one boat capsizes with 250 people on board. 67 bodies are recovered, at least 138 people are missing after several shipwrecks.

**12.08.** | Man in critical condition is evacuated from a rubber boat by helicopter. The only survivor had started 11 days earlier, with 14 other people. One body is recovered.

**27.08.** | Boat sinks off the Libyan coast. Approximately 40 people are missing.

**07.10.** | Boat capsizes off the coast of Lampedusa, 22 of 50 people are rescued. 13 female bodies are found, eight children are missing.

**23.11.** | Boat capsizes offshore Lampedusa. 20 people are missing, five bodies are recovered.

### Tunisia, Algeria:

They cannot provide a port of safety as there is no asylum system and LGBTQ refugees suffer from discrimination.

### Libya:

- Ongoing civil war
- No unitary state
- Violation of International Human Rights

People in detention centers suffer from torture, rape and slavery. There is no access to medical care.

100 KM



# Legal foundations of our work

Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority .

[Article 1, paragraph 1, Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany].

Sea rescue is not only a moral obligation but also a legal obligation according to international maritime and human rights law. This obligation is established in law through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) as well as in national legislation.

[Article 98 (1), United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea; Article 33 (1); Chapter V, annex of SOLAS, §2 (1), Regulation about security at sea].

Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution

[Article 14 (1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights].

Non-Refoulement is a fundamental principle that forbids returning, surrendering or sending back asylum seekers to a country in which they would be in likely danger of inhuman treatment, torture or persecution. This principle is recognized in customary law as well as being reflected in various international treaties.

[e.g. Article 3, the Convention Against Torture; Article 19 (2), European Charter of Fundamental Rights; and Article 33, Geneva Conventions on Refugees].

Collective expulsion of aliens is prohibited

[Article 4 of Protocol No. 4 to the European Convention on Human Rights].

No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

[Article 3, European Convention on Human Rights].

## Obligation to rescue at sea

Sea rescue is not only a moral obligation but also an integral part of international maritime and human rights law. According to international maritime law, every captain is obliged to rescue people in distress and take them to a safe harbor. Failure to comply with these laws can lead to criminal prosecution.

## The right to escape

Sea-Watch strongly voices the demand of the right to escape. The number of people fleeing from war, conflicts or prosecution has never been higher than what we are seeing today. According to the UNHCR (July 2020), there were an estimated 79.5 million displaced people worldwide as a result of political, economic or environmental instability in their home countries. The overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 resulted in a devastating civil war in Libya that is still ongoing. While the security situation is not only endangering locals, the conflict represents a danger for the whole region. The current situation is aggravated by non-existent governmental structures and reinforced by the tyranny of various warring militias. There is no national asylum system in Libya and access for international organizations is made increasingly difficult. Government officials or other paramilitary groups often intercept foreigners and take them to detention facilities. The conditions in the detention facilities are alarming and reports of severe human rights abuses like torture, exploitation and human trafficking are on the rise. As there remains no legal option to flee to Europe, coupled with the increas-



Photo: Tim Wagner



ing closure of the overland routes, people are increasingly left with the dangerous sea passage for escape.

#### **The Non-Refoulement principle & why we are not taking people to North Africa**

Establishing a safe port of disembarkation following rescue operations at sea is not a decision made by the captain. Rather, it is the responsibility of the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center in charge of the Search and Rescue Zone in which the rescue occurs to allocate a safe harbor for the ship. The Non-Refoulement principle forbids returning, surrendering or sending back asylum seekers to a country in which they would be in likely danger of inhumane treatment, torture or persecution. This applies to the countries of departure in North Africa. In Libya, people on the run are in danger of abuse, rape and torture. The internment in detention camps has been described as unacceptable and inhumane by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Amnesty International on multiple occasions. In Tunisia, there is currently no national asylum system. Therefore, repatriation to Libya or Tunisia breaks both international human rights and maritime law, as neither state can legally offer a safe harbor. This means our captains could be liable to face prosecution if they were to return rescued people to either state.

#### **Why do people flee across the Mediterranean?**

“No one puts their children on a boat unless the water is safer than the land.” – These words by the Somali refugee poet, Warsan Shire,

send a clear signal: There are various reasons for people to get on a boat and risk a potentially deadly sea passage. Often, people on the move are in a severe emergency situation, fleeing from war and prosecution, poverty and misery.

In recent years, multiple studies have shown a fluctuation in the number of attempts people take to cross the Mediterranean Sea. There are numerous reasons for this variation. On the one hand, weather conditions play an important role in the ability to depart Libyan shores. On the other hand, people on the run are subjected to the arbitrariness of traffickers within Libya. Often people on the run are abused, blackmailed or sold as slave laborers or prostitutes until they have “earned” enough for the passage. Continually, idle discussions about cause and effect are taking place. The fact remains that civil sea rescue emerged as an emergency reaction to catastrophic shipwrecks and mass drowning in the Mediterranean. Those tragic accidents happened after governmental rescue missions were stopped.

During the last year, the number of arrivals to European shores have declined in comparison to previous years. The EU cooperation with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, which is financed and equipped by the EU, leads to a growing number of people being illegally returned to the war-torn country. While in 2018, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) counted 24,855 people that reached Europe via the Central Mediterranean Sea, in 2019, this number had dropped to 14,874 people. At the same time, the death rate of those having to risk

a passage rose from 2.88% in 2018 to 4.78% in 2019. Looking at actual numbers of arrivals the death rate has even risen to 7.82% in 2019, meaning 1 in 13 people who cross the Mediterranean die at sea. The difference is caused by those that were intercepted and taken back to Libya - according to the UNHCR 6,027 people were forced back into the circle of rape and violence up until July this year. An increase in refugees via the Mediterranean Sea in relation to Non-governmental organization (NGO) activities cannot be determined. One thing remains absolutely clear: Fewer rescue ships on the Mediterranean means a larger number of people risking the sea passage will drown.

**Please visit our website for more relevant information: :**  
[sea-watch.org/en/about/faq](http://sea-watch.org/en/about/faq)

# We have space

#LeaveNoOneBehind



**“Together with activists from Sea-Watch, Seebrücke, LeaveNoOneBehind and Campact we have placed 13,000 chairs in front of the Bundestag. One chair for every person who was accommodated in Camp Moria on Lesbos at that time. Our message to politicians: We have space. All camps at the external borders must be evacuated.”**

Doreen • Spokesperson Advocacy



# Political Public Relations / Advocacy

Civil sea rescue is increasingly embroiled in a political power game between the European Union and its member states, even though the security and protection of refugees should be the main focus. On a national and European level, we tirelessly demand the creation of safe and legal escape routes to Europe and an EU funded sea rescue program. Instead, civil sea rescue has been filling this deadly gap for years and is increasingly confronted with the denial of safe harbors, illegitimate detention of our rescue ships and prosecution of our activists, while the humanitarian space is continually shrinking.

People arriving in Europe via the Central Mediterranean or Aegean Seas are often stuck for months or years in overcrowded camps, so-called hotspots, with inhospitable living conditions. We demand to allow people to continue their journey. We also demand a quick and fair distribution across the EU to afford them a chance of self-determined life.

## Federal state admission programs

The creation of federal state admission programs in Germany according to §23 Section 1, Residence Act plays an important political role. We ask all German federal states to leverage their legal jurisdiction to take in vulnerable people on humanitarian grounds. This is especially important while the German federal government evades its humanitarian responsibility. With the help of the Moria Monitor, we have highlighted the catastrophic conditions in the camps on the Greek islands through a large advocacy campaign and asked EU member states for action on relocation. In June 2020, Thuringia and Berlin accepted those state admissions. However, the German Federal Minister of the Interior, Seehofer, denied his approval. It is now up to the federal states that are willing to take in refugees to take legal action.

But this can only be the beginning. More federal states need to make use of their legal jurisdiction and fight to be able to welcome people in the more than 170 cities and municipalities that are willing to take in refugees.



## Support for merchant shipping

During the missions with our civil reconnaissance aircraft, we regularly witness commercial vessels in close proximity to boats in distress. As stand-offs following sea rescue operations are also aimed at commercial vessels, the denial of access to a safe harbor means long and costly delays for shipping companies. These increasingly common delays to disembarkation have meant that commercial vessels now often ignore their duty to rescue as they abandon people in distress at sea.

To support captains and shipping companies and to encourage them to stand firm against the inhumane European migration politics, we offer regular operational support to commercial vessels involved in rescue operations. This includes access to our network of lawyers as well as political and psychological support. In September 2020, we published a Rescue Kit which includes information to support captains and crews of commercial vessels involved in rescuing boats in distress.

“For five days Malta didn’t perform their duties. Civil society, NGOs and solicitors had to increase pressure to find a solution. **Captains of commercial vessels should not feel discouraged to save people’s lives, no matter where. They should not be intimidated by the pressure of EU coordination centers and they can be reassured to receive an enormous amount of support to get the people off board as quickly as possible.**”

Captain Mohammad • He and the crew of the commercial vessel, Talia, saved 52 people in distress on Friday, 3rd July 2020.



**The commercial vessel, Etienne,** saved 27 people in distress on 4 August 2020. For 5 weeks, Malta denied them access to a port of safety. This means the Etienne broke a sad record: the longest stand-off in the history of Search and Rescue activities in the Mediterranean Sea.



# The Mediterranean concerns us all

**What is happening in the Mediterranean Sea is not a natural disaster but an issue of political will.** Therefore, our aim has always been to make visible the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean Sea.

Which is why we are called Sea-Watch and not Sea-Rescue. We monitor the sea, documenting and publishing our missions in real-time to show what is taking place along the external borders of the EU. Our work intends to open the eyes of civil society to see the politically manufactured and continuing crisis in the Mediterranean. We also work to hold our political leaders accountable for their role in preserving this inhumane status quo.



Photo: Fabian Jung

At numerous events we deal with diverse topics such as flight and feminism, as in our series of events "The Mediterranean and Us" at the silent green Kulturquartier Berlin.

Events

People on the run that are forced to take on the dangerous route to Europe are hit especially hard by the criminalization of escape. We support the #ElHiblu3, three teenagers, who managed to prevent themselves and 105 fellow migrants being taken back to Libya - and they are now facing criminal charges in Malta.

Further information:  
elhiblu3.info/

**“We managed to escape the tyrannical and inhumane treatment in Libya to find life in Malta.”**

#ElHiblu3



During the stand-off near the Italian coast, press and international politicians come on board. However, our guests are not allowed to leave the ship. Asked for her opinion about Salvini's hateful comments, captain Carola Rackete answers: **“I have to take care of 43 guests and 22 crew members. He needs to queue up if he wants something from me.”**

#SeaWatch3 #FreeCarolaRackete

People from the Moria refugee camp and activists are demonstrating together, using a hologram-demo, **calling for the immediate evacuation of the inhumane camps in Greece.**

#LeaveNoOneBehind



Photo: Philip Eichler

The photo exhibition, **SW5Y**, documents the beginning of the organization Sea-Watch, the development and professionalization, through to the criminalization of civil sea rescue in a rapidly shrinking humanitarian space.

#SW5Y



Photo: Lennart Diesen

❤️ **LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND!**



# FORTRESS EUROPE

**2013 | Mare Nostrum (it.: Our Sea)**  
The Italian sea rescue operation, which started on October 18, 2013, ends after only one year and is not extended due to lack of support from other EU states. Mare Nostrum saved the lives of over 150,000 people.

**10/2014 | TRITON (gr.: God of the Seas)**  
The Frontex mission TRITON replaces Mare Nostrum. With a smaller area of operation and drastically reduced capacities, the main focus shifts to border security instead of sea rescue.

**MARCH | EU-TURKEY DEAL**  
Asylum and repatriation agreements are altered to make it more difficult to obtain asylum while also attempting to control the movement of refugees.

**APRIL | Armed Libyan militias**  
threaten and board the *Sea-Watch 2*.

**AUGUST | SHOTS ON THE BRIDGE**  
At least 13 shots are fired at the civilian rescue ship *Bourbon Argos* (Doctors Without Borders). The crew is hiding in the 'safe room' when armed men of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard come on board.

**OCTOBER | The so-called Libyan Coast Guard**  
boards an overcrowded rubber boat located 14.5 nautical miles off the coast of Libya. The migrants are beaten with sticks and the Sea-Watch crew is prevented from distributing life jackets.

**JANUARY | STATE OF LIBYAN CAMPS**  
*Die Welt* publishes quotes from a wire report by the German Embassy in Niger on the state of refugee camps in Libya. The diplomats report on "very serious, systematic human rights violations in Libya" and describe "concentration camp-like conditions in so-called private prisons".

**JULY | Italy demands Code of Conduct**  
for civil sea rescue vessels. The proposal is illegal in some parts because it replaces international law. One section aims to give Italy the right to close the ports if NGO ships refuse to sign the Code of Conduct.

**AUGUST | IUVENTA**  
Only two days after Jugend Rettet refuses to sign the Code of Conduct, their ship, the *IUVENTA*, is confiscated in Italy for alleged cooperation with smugglers.

**JULY | SAR REGION LIBYA**  
Attempt to establish a 72 nautical mile Libyan search and rescue region. In **DECEMBER** Libya revokes the application to the IOM. According to the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue, a coordinating control center must guarantee complete coverage of the area (be operational 24 hours a day, speak English and be able to provide sufficient rescue equipment). Libya cannot provide this.

**JUNE | MATTEO SALVINI**  
The neo-fascist and anti-immigration politician becomes Interior Minister of Italy. On twitter, he announces the closure of Italian ports for ships with rescued migrants on board.

**JULY | 200,000 people** sign a petition to the German Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas: Stop the dying in the Mediterranean Sea!

**JULY | THE SEEBRÜCKE ('SEA BRIDGE') MOVEMENT** is formed and turns the streets of Germany orange.

**AUGUST | The Sicilian Public Prosecutor's Office** initiates investigations against the Minister of the Interior on charges of illegal imprisonment, deprivation of liberty and the abuse of authority. As a result, Salvini orders the rescued passengers to disembark from the Italian Coast Guard ship, Diciotti.

**OCTOBER | WE'LL COME UNITED** gets 35,000 people onto the streets of Hamburg: They march for sea rescue and protest against the shift to the right, against racism, xenophobia and forced deportations.

**OCTOBER | The EU Parliament** nominates sea rescue NGOs for the *Sakharov Prize for Human Rights*, but does not take this as an opportunity to launch a state or joint sea rescue mission.

**MARCH | ITALY**  
The Senate votes against lifting Salvini's immunity, thus preventing legal proceedings against him.

**APRIL | OPERATION SOPHIA** ends its naval operation and is limited to aerial reconnaissance in the Central Mediterranean. Leaving the operation practically unable to rescue.

**APRIL | EASTER APPEAL**  
211 members of the Bundestag call on the government to do more for people fleeing in the Mediterranean.

**MAY | EL HIBLU 3**  
The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights calls on the Maltese authorities to drop the charges against three teenagers. They were arrested after a tanker rescued and, following an unsuccessful pushback attempt to Libya, disembarked them in Malta.

**JULY | SEEBRÜCKE ('SEA BRIDGE')**  
More than 50,000 people march on the streets in over 100 cities and communities across Europe: for a world in which flight and migration are human rights and sea rescue a matter of course.

**OCTOBER | Malta** supports the illegal pullbacks of 50 refugees from their own SAR region by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

**MARCH | LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND (LNOB)**  
On the Greek islands, over 40,000 people live in detention camps without sanitary facilities. The LNOB movement demands the immediate evacuation of the camps because of the enormous threat of a COVID-19 outbreak and becomes a fast-growing international solidarity movement.

**MARCH | OPERATION IRINI (gr.: peace)**  
replaces *Sophia*. *IRINI*'s core task is the monitoring and implementation of the UN arms embargo against Libya, which is engaged in civil war. Operation *IRINI*'s ships are obliged to leave the region as soon as refugee boats are in vicinity.

**APRIL | Italy, Malta and subsequently Libya declare their ports unsafe** under the health emergency caused by COVID-19.

**JULY | BAN ON ADMISSION**  
German Minister of the Interior Seehofer denies the state of Berlin the right to receive refugees from Moria. This is the first decision of this nature in Germany.

**AUGUST | First case of COVID-19 in Moria**  
becomes public despite months of campaign work by various politicians and NGOs demanding the immediate evacuation of Camp Moria on Lesbos.

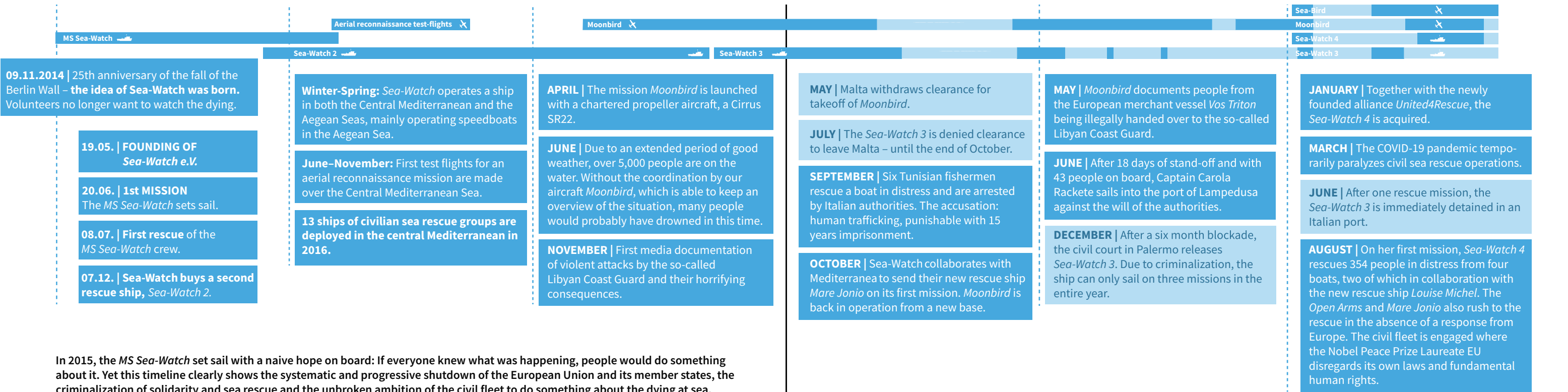
**SEPTEMBER | Moria camp burns down**  
after a Covid-19 induced lockdown. The EU/Greek government builds a new camp next to a mined military training area.

State Sea Rescue

Civil society movement

Civil sea rescue

Criminalization of civil sea rescue







# Thank you!

From the bottom of our hearts, we would like to thank all of our supporters!

Without you, we would be nothing. We would not be able to do our work without the activists, donors and supporting members. Thanks to you, since 2015 we have been involved in the rescue of over 38,000 lives. Thank you for your time and energy, your strength, financial support, and mostly, for your commitment of not letting the Mediterranean Sea become a zone where human rights don't apply.

We experienced a big wave of solidarity in 2019. We were moved by this compassion alongside the strong support and backing of the

civil society. With the help of this support, we were able to extend our mission in the fight against the inhumane politics of the European Union. While they are trying their utmost to continue to prevent civil sea rescue, Sea-Watch was able to extend their fleet. Without this generous financial backing, the operation of a second ship, the *Sea-Watch 4*, and the purchase of a second airplane, the *Sea-bird*, would not have been possible.

In 2019, we were faced with high operating costs to maintain our missions from the air and at sea. Our land crew has been working tirelessly to

support our mission. Operational divisions within the organization like our legal, advocacy, media, crewing, airborne, ship management, supervision team and the medical department have all worked relentlessly to ensure that *Sea-Watch 3* and *Moon-bird* are on mission as often as possible. The administrative divisions like finance, IT, fundraising, organizational coordination and the events team have contributed greatly to supporting the smooth operation of the organization.

If you would like to know more about our revenue and expenses in

the year 2019, please have a look at our financial report.

## Our future rescue missions also depend solely on donations

We continue to face new challenges that require financial resources. Delays due to COVID-19 or new costs associated with the ever-progressing criminalization of sea rescue are a few examples of new challenges we are confronted with. Our supporting members provide reassurance and stability during these uncertain times that enable us to plan our next mission.

**If you would like to become a supporting member and join together in our fight against the deadly politics of letting people die at sea, you can find more information here:**

[sea-watch.org/spenden/foerdermitglied/](https://sea-watch.org/spenden/foerdermitglied/)





“As a consultant for our supporting members, I am the main point of contact for a growing group of benefactors. Sea rescue is very elaborate and therefore costly. **Thanks to our donors and currently over 11,000 active supporting members, we are able to counter the increasingly isolationist policy of the EU.**”

Max • Fundraising

“**It is important for us to always stand up against racism and discrimination.** Even during the COVID-19 pandemic we are not stopping. We will keep taking society onboard with plenty of new event formats.”

Stefanie • Events



“**Several times we thought: ‘That’s it with Sea-Watch.’ But every time we have found another way to keep going.** There are

plenty of volunteers, for example, shipyard workers, to help us get the ships ready for the missions. At the same time, we wish that none of this was necessary.”

Welf • Ship management

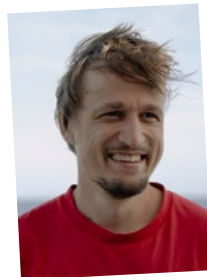
“To see us grow and become more stable, despite increasing hostility and discrimination is almost thrilling. **More and more people are visibly taking a position against Europe’s racist isolationist policy and this is the support we need from civil society for our work.** For almost three years, I have been actively supporting the civil sea rescue and I’m in the lucky position to love my job and possess a diverse skill set and expertise. Even though my main focus is on the creation of visual materials, I’m supporting the work wherever I’m needed - public and media relations, logistics or within a mission, it doesn’t matter to me”

Jelka • Activist



“As guest coordinator onboard our ships, I take care of our guests so that they can have a little break from their long and dangerous journey. Often there is a fear of not having done enough and not being able to bring all rescued people to a safe harbor. **So this is what I demand: a save place and freedom for all!**”

Lorenz • Guest coordinator



# Humans of Sea-Watch

Without the support of our activists, volunteers and employees in various divisions, our mission would not be feasible. Since 2015, our diverse team has been growing. At sea and in the air, in the shipyard or in the office – there are many people working together behind the scenes who represent a motivated and engaged network of supporters. We are committed to facing all challenges that arise until the day when we are hopefully no longer needed. We would like to introduce you to some of the members of our team.

“The Mediterranean Sea is part of my home. I realized that right there, a humanitarian catastrophe is taking place, when I found an Arabic-English dictionary, which must have belonged to a drowned person, at the beach. **It is our responsibility to shape our future: A future of equality and diversity!**”

Giorgia • Team Italy



“On duty, I meet many people and listen to their stories. **I met people who tried to cross three or four times and were always taken back to Libyan prison camps, becoming more sick and vulnerable every time. This needs to change!**”

Carolin • Medic



“We in the advocacy team see ourselves as the voice of civil society in an aggravated political context. Politics have changed a lot over the last five years. We are showing the decision-makers: **We are here, we see you, and we will not let you get away with it!**”

Marie • Political public relations (Advocacy)



“As an organization coordinator, it is my task to keep our growing team running smoothly. The overwhelming determination and courage of the diverse and wonderful people getting involved at Sea-Watch amazes me most. **Only together we are able to generate the energy and inspiration we need to not give up!**”

Caroline • Organization coordinator

“It is our task to watch the situation in the Mediterranean Sea, point out human rights abuses and at least give a voice to those people drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. **But we are not able to do this on our own!**”

Felix • Airborne



“It touches me to see how many people are volunteering for Sea-Watch. However, for the future, **I hope that sea rescue in this dimension will no longer be necessary.**

That we are letting people in through safe and legal channels in order to prevent traumatization.”

Nora • Supervision



# Humans of Sea-Watch

“The consequences associated with the criminalization of Search and Rescue missions are obvious: fewer ships in the Mediterranean Sea means more lives are in danger at sea. **I joined Sea-Watch because the work defends fundamental human rights.**”

Jesse • Solicitor



“We are taking care of the financials at this organization. At Sea-Watch we can contribute to a really meaningful movement. **We demand safe escape routes and an end to the criminalization of civil sea rescue.**”

Fatima + Mathias • Finance



“**Sea-Watch depends on the commitment of people. It is impressive how much support we also get for our work behind the scenes.**

Next to the optimization of administrative and Human Ressources (HR) processes, it is my task to coordinate the requests for support, to ensure a smooth "taking onboard" and therefore enhance engagement.”

Theresa • Organization and HR coordinator



“The fights against sexism and racism have the same goal: equality. For me, it is the same revolt against injustice and cruelty. As an activist on board, I show solidarity with those that are assaulted most and deprived of their rights.

**No person should die at sea, because they were born on another continent. Equally, no person should be exposed to sexual violence, because she was born a woman.”**

Claire • Activist



“Due to Europe continuing its isolationist policy and letting people drown in the Mediterranean Sea, civil society activists are filling this gap.

**It is part of my task to make our demand for a #safepassage heard; to give a voice to the refugees and to hold the European actors accountable for their actions in the Mediterranean Sea.”**

Mattea • Media



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#### Legal address

Sea-Watch e.V., c/o DKA-Anwälte  
Immanuelkirchstr. 3-4, 10405 Berlin

**V.i.S.d.P.:** Marlene Lippmann (Head of Fundraising)

#### Layout & typesetting

Joshua Krüger (Layout & title)  
Jelka Kretschmar (Infographic & Timeline) | [jelkajelka.com](mailto:jelkajelka.com)

**Editor:** Adam Fazackerley

**Illustrations:** Adrian Pourviseh

#### Photographers

Chris Grodotzki, Felix Weiss, Tim Wagner, Lennart Diesen,  
Agaata Szymanska-Medina, Erik Marquardt, Johanna Pohl,  
Lisa Hoffmann, Philipp Eichler, Fabian Jung, Oliver Kulikowski

#### Vorstand

Johannes Bayer (Chairman of the Association)  
Joshua Krüger (Vice chairman of the association)  
Klaus Stramm (Treasurer)

#### Contact details

General Inquiries: [info@sea-watch.org](mailto:info@sea-watch.org)  
Press & Media: [presse@sea-watch.org](mailto:presse@sea-watch.org)  
Donors: [spenden@sea-watch.org](mailto:spenden@sea-watch.org)  
Supporting members: [seawatchverein@sea-watch.org](mailto:seawatchverein@sea-watch.org)  
Board:: [vorstand@sea-watch.org](mailto:vorstand@sea-watch.org)

**Why no telephone numbers?** As an association in the field of migration and flight, we are constantly exposed to hate and agitation. In order to protect activists and employees, we only give out phone numbers after consultation. We ask for your understanding!

## Donate now

Our Sea Watch missions are funded by donations.  
To continue our work, **we depend on your donation.**  
Thank you very much!

#### Donation account

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ACCOUNT OWNER: Sea-Watch e.V.

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[sea-watch.org/en/donate](https://sea-watch.org/en/donate)

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More than 20,000 people have paid with their lives for the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean over the last six years - thousands are missing.

The full extent of the humanitarian disaster in the Mediterranean is unlikely to be known. A tragedy is unfolding on Europe's borders which tells a very different story about what Nobel Peace Prize winner Europe stands for.

We cannot allow the fate of these people to become mere statistics. Words are worthless if they are not followed by actions. Something has to change, and it needs all of us!

With your help, we will continue to fight so that no one else has to drown trying to escape across the Mediterranean. Your donation or supporting membership enables us to continue to save lives and to fight for safe and legal escape routes.

**A human life is priceless, sea rescue is not!**

**Help us help, donate now:  
[sea-watch.org/en/donate](https://sea-watch.org/en/donate)**

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