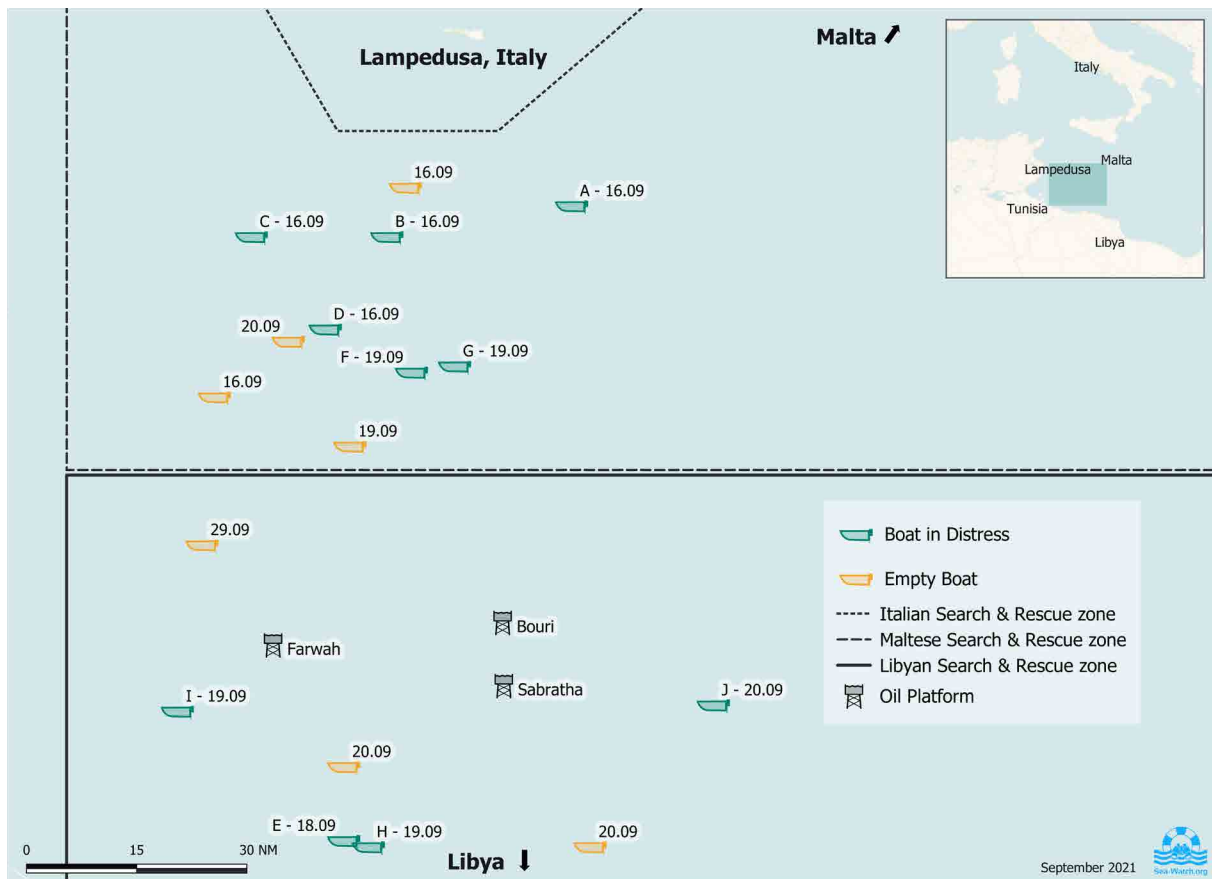


## Airborne Monthly Factsheet September 2021

This factsheet outlines a summary of the distress cases witnessed in September 2021 by *Sea-Watch's* Airborne crews with their two aircraft *Moonbird* and *Seabird*.<sup>1</sup> In September 2021 we conducted **11 operations**, with a total flight time of **66 hours and 46 minutes**. We spotted around **460 persons in distress aboard 10 different boats**.

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

### 1. Overview of boats in distress and empty boats spotted



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

- 4 boats, with around 240 persons, were rescued by the Italian authorities or arrived independently and disembarked in Italy
- 2 boats, with 71 persons, were rescued by the NGO vessel *Ocean Viking*<sup>2</sup> and disembarked on 25.09 in Augusta, Italy
- Estimated<sup>3</sup> number of persons in distress: 311

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

- 1 boat, with 25 persons, was rescued by the NGO vessel *Ocean Viking* and disembarked on 25.09 in Augusta, Italy
- 1 boat, with around 20 persons, was intercepted and pulled back to Libya by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*
- 1 boat, with 54 persons, was rescued by the NGO vessel *Geo Barents*<sup>4</sup> and disembarked on 29.09 in Augusta, Italy
- The outcome for 1 boat, with around 50 persons, remains unknown
- Estimated number of persons in distress: 149

<sup>2</sup> The vessel *Ocean Viking* is operated by the NGO *SOS MEDITERRANEE*.

<sup>3</sup> These numbers are based upon the estimations of *Moonbird* and *Seabird*'s crews, as well as numbers which the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone, Mediterranean Hope-FCEI*, the UNHCR and IOM have provided to us.

<sup>4</sup> The vessel *Geo Barents* is operated by the NGO *Médecins Sans Frontières*.

## 2. Details and outcome of selected distress cases

13.09., [Frontex likely coordinated an interception and pullback to Libya by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard](#). *Moonbird*'s ground crew observed the track of *Frontex*'s drone and noticed that it was orbiting in the Libyan SAR zone near the Maltese SAR boundary. Around one hour later, *Moonbird*'s crew found the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*'s patrol boat in the vicinity with around 200 persons on the deck, heading at full speed towards Tripoli. The people were hence likely pulled back to Libya. We must assume that again, *Frontex* coordinated an interception and consequent pullback to Libya.

On 16.09., *Seabird*'s crew spotted 4 boats in distress, with 240 persons on board. All of the people were either rescued by the Italian authorities or arrived independently in Lampedusa, Italy.

16.09., distress case A, 39 persons: [delay in rendering assistance to a boat in distress by authorities in the Maltese SAR zone, Frontex aircraft involved](#). In the morning, the people aboard a boat in distress called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone*, which informed the authorities and *Seabird*. One hour later, a *Frontex*

aircraft was likely on-scene in the Maltese SAR zone, according to the ground crew's observations. At noon, presumably 3 hours after *Frontex*, *Seabird's* crew arrived on scene. The engine of the boat seemed unstable. *Seabird's* crew immediately sent out a mayday relay<sup>5</sup> over the radio and informed the port authorities of Lampedusa. On the phone, the Italian authorities referred to the Maltese authorities and hung up on the ground crew. In the end, the people were rescued by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy.

19.09. distress case G, 58 persons: [successful rescue operation by NGO vessel with the support of civil actors, civil society again fills the gap left by authorities in the Central Mediterranean Sea.](#)

In the morning, the aircraft *Colibri 2*<sup>6</sup> spotted the people in distress in the Libyan SAR. *Colibri 2's* ground crew immediately alerted the authorities. In the afternoon, *Seabird's* crew spotted the people still unattended by authorities in the Maltese SAR zone, and immediately informed the authorities as well as the NGO vessels *Nadir*<sup>7</sup> and *Ocean Viking*. The *Nadir* was only 5 nautical miles (nm)<sup>8</sup> away, and changed course towards the people. Due to the lack of deployment of rescue assets by European Member States in the Central Mediterranean, the people had to be rescued by the NGO *Ocean Viking* and disembarked on 25.09 in Augusta, Italy.

19.09., distress case H, around 50 persons: [Frontex drone involved, non-assistance by a merchant vessel.](#) *Seabird's* crew spotted the people in the Libyan SAR zone and alerted the authorities. The tubes were inflated but low on the water. Shortly after *Seabird*, *Frontex's* drone was also on-scene, orbiting over the people. *Seabird's* crew called the merchant vessel *NS Corona*, flying the Liberian flag, which stated that they "cannot proceed to the position" since they had "dangerous cargo on board". The respective shipping company, *SCF Management Services Dubai*, was unresponsive via phone and email. The insurance company of the merchant vessel, *West of England*, was also informed but the responsible person was unresponsive on the phone. Almost 2 hours after *Seabird's* sighting, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* were observed heading towards the position of the people, around 33 nm away. *Seabird* sent out a mayday relay again at the end of the afternoon. The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* were then spotted again only 12 nm away from the people. A relative later called the

5 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.

6 The aircraft *Colibri 2* is operated by the NGO *Pilotes Volontaires*.

7 The vessel *Nadir* is operated by the NGO *RESQSHIP*.

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

initiative *Watch The Med - Alarmphone*, regarding a case which was matched with this boat. The outcome of this case is uncertain.

In September, **Frontex's drone and aircraft were involved with at least 3 boats in distress** - only 2 of which were sighted by *Moonbird* and *Seabird*. One was rescued by the Italian authorities and disembarked in Italy. One was intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and pulled back to Libya. The outcome for the third boat remains unknown.

In September, the crews of *Moonbird* and *Seabird* spotted **7 empty boats**, one of which was on fire in the Libyan SAR zone. Another was the result of a completed interception spotted by *Seabird* and the consequent pullback to Libya. The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* set this empty boat on fire as well. The outcomes for the other empty boats are unknown.

## These missions highlight once again:

- the deadly consequences of European migration and border policies
- the systematic non-assistance of European Member States and their delegation of rescue operations to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*
- the participation of European aircraft and *Frontex* in interceptions and pullbacks undertaken by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*
- the current non-assistance of merchant vessels due to the lack of a European rescue program
- the need for NGO vessels in the Central Mediterranean Sea in order to uphold the law and save human lives