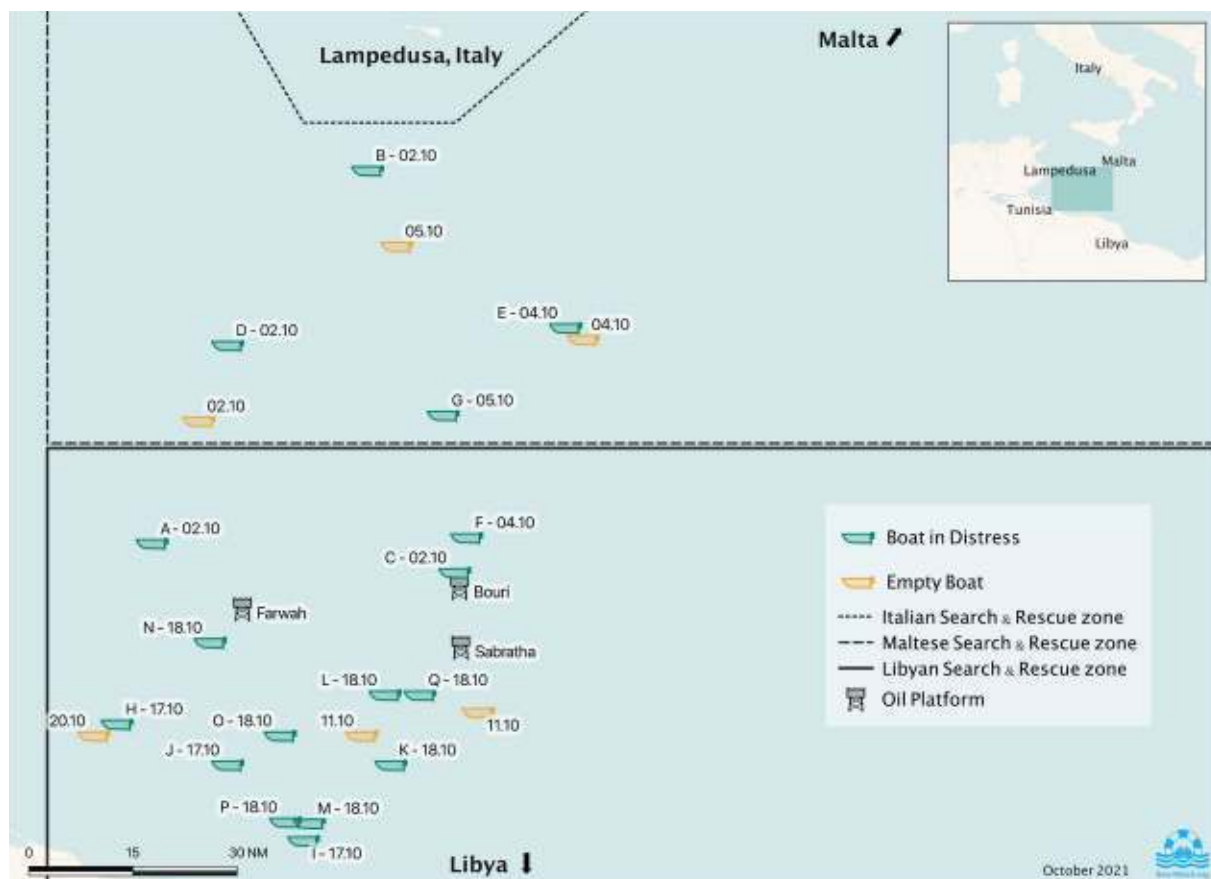


Airborne Monthly Factsheet October 2021

This factsheet outlines a summary of distress cases witnessed in October 2021 by Sea-Watch's Airborne crews with their aircraft *Sea-bird*. In October 2021 we conducted **9 operations**, with a total flight time of **55 hours and 09 minutes**. We spotted at least **892 persons in distress, aboard 17 different boats**.

¹ 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

- 2 boats in distress with around 135 persons arrived independently to Italy or were rescued by the Italian authorities and disembarked in Italy
- 1 boat in distress with around 50 persons was rescued by the *Armed Forces of Malta* and disembarked in Malta
- The outcome for 1 boat with around 15 persons remains unknown
- Estimated number² of persons in distress: 200

Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone

- 1 boat in distress with around 60 people arrived independently or was rescued by the Italian authorities and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy
- 1 boat in distress with around 70 people was rescued by the merchant vessel *Asso Ventinove* and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy
- 1 boat in distress with around 39 persons was rescued by *Nadir*³ and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy
- 4 boats in distress with around 180 people were intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and disembarked in Libya
- 4 boats in distress with 203 persons were rescued by the NGO vessel *Sea-Watch 3* and disembarked in Pozzallo, Italy
- The outcomes for 2 boats with around 140 persons remain unknown
- Estimated number of persons in distress: 692

² 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.

³ The vessel *Nadir* is operated by the NGO *RESQSHIP*.

2. Details and outcome of selected distress cases

On 02.10., *Seabird*'s crew spotted 4 boats in distress, with around 220 persons aboard. Two boats arrived independently or were rescued by the Italian authorities and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy. One boat was rescued by the merchant vessel *Asso Ventinove* and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy. The outcome for one boat remains unknown.

02.10., distress case C, with 70 persons: **Rescue operation by a merchant vessel, inactivity of Italian and Maltese Rescue Coordination Centres.**⁴ The people in distress were spotted in the Libyan SAR zone. The merchant vessel *Asso Ventinove*, flying the Italian flag, was monitoring the situation, apparently since at least one hour. The vessel launched a rescue operation, since the boat in distress had started to sink. Meanwhile, the people had called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone*, which alerted authorities and could match the boat with the one we monitored. The Italian *Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre* (MRCC) was called by our ground crew and declared “I will explain to you again: the position is in Libyan SAR (zone), so you don’t have to call me” and hung up, despite the fact that the vessel involved was flying the Italian flag. The related shipping company *Augusta Offshore S.p.A* was contacted via email stressing that the rescued persons needed to be brought to a safe place in Europe and that a return to Libya would constitute a violation of international law. Our ground crew informed the Italian MRCC about developments, where the MRCC refused to provide any information. The people were ultimately disembarked by an *Italian Coast Guard* patrol boat in Lampedusa.

4 Some footage is available here: youtu.be/zWw5pRJmFOM

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

04.10., distress case E, with around 50 persons: **Merchant vessel standing-by, delay to render assistance by authorities.** The people in distress had called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* on the previous day, which informed the authorities. The boat was spotted in the Maltese SAR zone adrift on 04.10. first by the NGO monitoring aircraft *Colibri 2*,⁴ and later by *Seabird*. The merchant vessel *Nour 2*, flying the Libyan flag, was observed beside the boat in distress, monitoring the situation. The merchant vessel *Anastasia Ruta*, flying the Italian flag, was also in the vicinity. According to the NGO aircraft *Colibri 2*, an Italian military aircraft was also on-scene and had an exchange with the merchant vessel *Anastasia Ruta*. More than two hours later, the situation was unchanged. On the radio, the Lampedusa port authorities informed *Seabird*’s crew that the rescue was coordinated by the Maltese authorities. Five hours after *Seabird*’s first sighting, the merchant vessel *Nour 2* confirmed that an *Armed Forces of Malta* patrol boat had rescued the people - and hence later disembarked them in Malta.

04.10., **Delegation of the duty to render assistance to the Libyan authorities by the Maltese authorities, clear example of cooperation with Joint Rescue Coordination Centre Tripoli, incapacity of the Libyan authorities to conduct a rescue operation.** When our ground crew called the Libyan authorities on the phone, they provided us with different positions of open cases. For the first position, the Libyan authorities confirmed that they were “unable to send out a patrol boat to search for the people due to ‘problems in the port’”, but due to the language barrier they were unable to specify the type of problems. A second position, near to the boundary with the Maltese SAR zone, could not be verified by *Seabird*’s crew. **The Libyan authorities confirmed to us over the phone that they had received the mentioned information about the open cases from the “Maltese Coast Guard”.** The outcomes for both boats remain unknown.

17.10., distress case I, with around 10 persons: **Use of a RHIB⁶ by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* for an interception.**

The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* deployed an approximately 10-meter-long RHIB, which they used to intercept the people in distress from a fiberglass boat. After all of the people were brought aboard the RHIB, they towed the boat with a rope. It was the first time that the monitoring aircraft *Seabird* had sighted this RHIB operated by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*. Other sources show this fast boat already operational in 2016 but also most recently in November 2021.

17.-18.10., distress cases J, K, M, P with respectively 54, 59, 63 and 27 persons: **Several rescue operations undertaken by the civil sea rescue vessel *Sea-Watch 3* with the support of monitoring aircraft *Seabird*.** Three of the four boats in distress were first spotted by *Seabird*’s crew and subsequently rescued by the NGO vessel *Sea-Watch 3*. The *Sea-Watch 3* sighted the people aboard distress case K shortly before *Seabird*’s crew. The rescues represent four of seven rescues of a total of 412 people conducted by the *Sea-Watch 3* between October 17th and 18th, 2021. The people were disembarked in Pozzallo, Italy on October 23-24, 2021.

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

7 Footage is available at: t.co/2PGLnyCilm

18.10., distress case N with around 60 persons on board: **Dangerous manoeuvres during an illegal interception by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.** When *Seabird's* crew arrived on-scene, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* was trying to intercept the people in distress, who had started their engine again. The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* acutely endangered the people on the wooden boat through dangerous manoeuvres - patrol boat PB634 repeatedly drove extremely close towards the wooden boat. Under the monitoring of *Seabird's* crew, the people on board tried to escape the illegal interception. However, they were subsequently pulled back to Libya.

In October, *Seabird's* crews spotted **6 empty boats**. The empty boat spotted on October 20th might have been the remains of a boat in distress which was already sighted by *Seabird* previously and was likely intercepted on October 18th. The outcomes for the other empty boats remain 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*, even in European SAR zones
- dangerous operational manoeuvres used by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*, which expose people in distress to acute dangers at sea
- delays to rescue operations or non-assistance of distress cases by merchant vessels, due to a failed politics of migration in Europe
- the need for NGO vessels in the Central Mediterranean Sea in order to uphold the law and save human lives