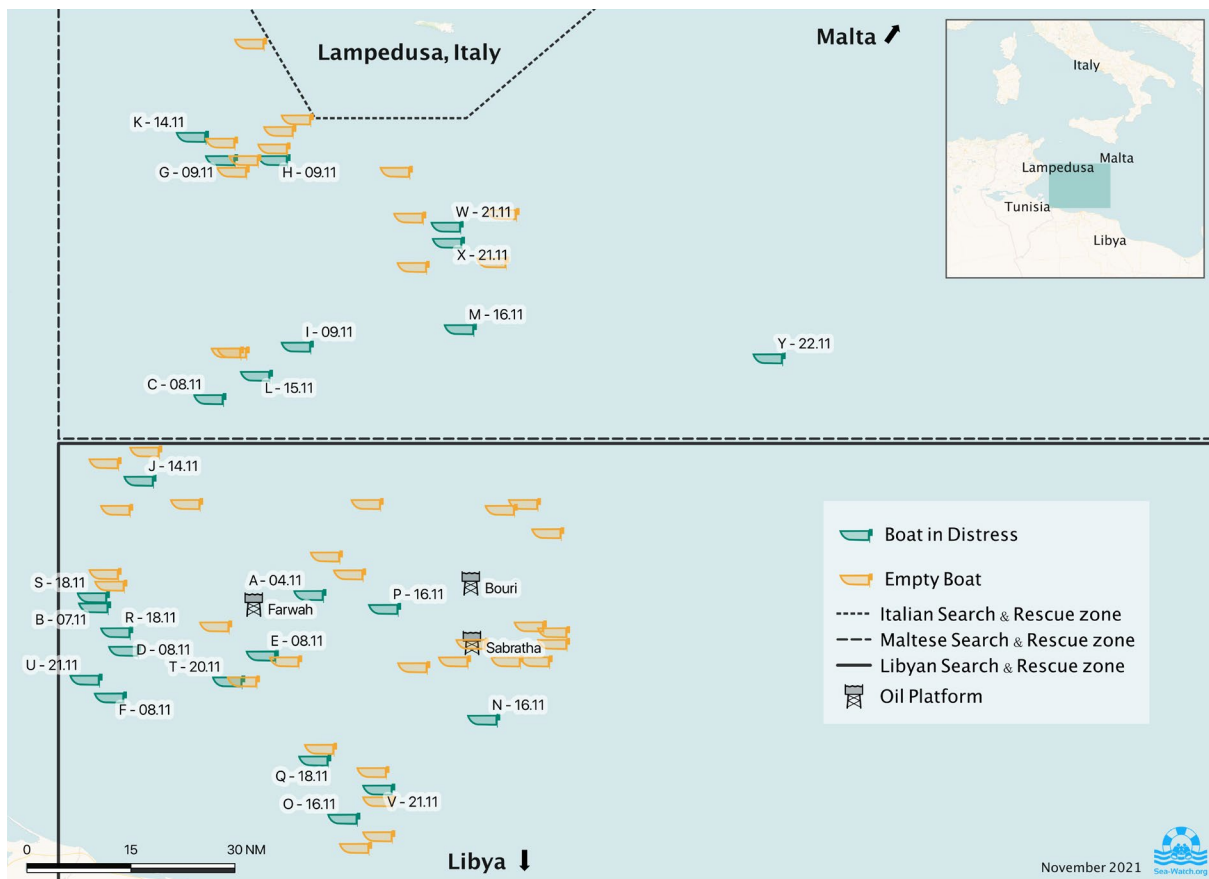


Airborne Monthly Factsheet November 2021

This factsheet outlines a summary of distress cases witnessed in November 2021 by *Sea-Watch's* Airborne crews with their aircraft *Seabird*.¹ In November 2021 we conducted **14 operations**, with a total flight time of **92 hours and 30 minutes**. We spotted at least **1.862 persons in distress aboard 25 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

- 4 boats in distress, with around 309 people, were rescued by the Italian authorities or arrived independently in Lampedusa, Italy
- 1 boat in distress, 25 people, was rescued by the NGO vessel *Geo Barents*² and disembarked in Messina, Italy
- The outcomes for 5 boats, 195 people, remain unknown
- Estimated³ number of persons in distress: 529

Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone

- 1 boat in distress, 69 people, was rescued by the NGO vessel *Ocean Viking*⁴ and disembarked in Augusta, Italy
- 3 boats in distress, 542 people, were rescued by the Italian authorities or arrived independently in Lampedusa, Italy
- 3 boats in distress, around 145 people, were intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and pulled back to Libya
- 1 boat in distress, 102 people, was rescued by the merchant vessel *Almisan* and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy
- 1 boat in distress, 99 persons, was rescued by the NGO vessel *Geo Barents* and disembarked in Messina, Italy
- 3 boats in distress, 276 people, were rescued by the NGO vessel *Sea-Watch 4*⁵ and disembarked in Augusta, Italy
- The outcomes for 3 boats in distress, around 100 people, remain unknown
- Estimated number of persons in distress: 1.333

² The *Geo Barents* is operated by *Médecins Sans Frontières*.

³ 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.

⁴ The *Ocean Viking* is operated by the NGO *SOS MEDITERRANEE*.

⁵ The *Sea-Watch 4* is operated by the NGO *Sea-Watch*.

2. Details and outcome of selected distress cases

04.11., distress case A, 69 persons: [Successful rescue operation by NGO vessel with the support of civil actors, civil society again fills the gap left by European Member States in the Central Mediterranean Sea](#). The people were spotted in the Libyan SAR zone by *Seabird's* crew. Only a few were wearing life vests, while several had tire rings around their bodies. The boat was overloaded. The Initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* was later called by the people and could match the boat with their call. Due to a lack of deployment of rescue assets by European Member States in the Central Mediterranean, the vessel *Ocean Viking* changed course towards the people. The people were successfully rescued in the evening by the NGO vessel and were disembarked on November 11th and 12th in Augusta, Italy.

07.11., distress case B, 384 persons: **Overloaded boat in distress, unresponsiveness of several merchant vessels on the radio and the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre Tripoli on the phone, so-called Libyan Coast Guard circling the people.** *Seabird's* crew spotted the people in the Libyan SAR zone. The boat was a double decker and the people were therefore in severe danger of capsizing. The merchant vessel *Vos Triton*, flying the flag of Gibraltar, and the oil platform *Farwah* were both unresponsive to *Seabird's* crew on the radio. The ground crew called the Libyan authorities on 13 different numbers. Nobody answered on 8 numbers. 3 numbers did not work. For 2 numbers, the persons could not speak English, and an exchange was impossible. The Italian and Maltese authorities were informed about the Libyan unresponsiveness via email. Two hours after *Seabird's* first sighting, the fishing vessel *El Hancha*, flying the Tunisian flag, and the merchant vessel *Deep Discoverer*, flying the flag of the Bahamas, were unresponsive to *Seabird's* calls on the radio. One hour later, the *Deep Discoverer* was in the vicinity and said it could not render assistance, since the vessel was "engaged in diving operations". The merchant vessel *Maridive 601*, flying the flag of Belize, was unresponsive to *Seabird's* calls. The *Deep Discoverer* then informed *Seabird's* crew that a *Tunisian Navy Officer* was on board and that therefore the merchant vessel would report the people in distress to the *Tunisian Navy*. One hour and 30 minutes later, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* were circling around the people with a patrol boat at the boundary to the Maltese SAR zone. In the evening, the people also called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone*, who were able to match the case with this boat. *Seabird's* crew were able to spot the people a further time in the Maltese SAR zone. Ultimately, the 384 persons arrived in Lampedusa, Italy.

On 08.11., *Seabird's* crew spotted 4 boats in distress, carrying around 140 persons.

08.11., distress case D, around 35 persons: **Non-assistance by the Italian and Maltese authorities, unknown outcome.** *Seabird's* crew spotted the people in the Libyan SAR zone on November 8th. The people were not wearing life vests. The Libyan, Maltese and Italian authorities were informed via email. Twenty-three hours after the first sighting, *Seabird's* crew spotted the people again on November 9th, in the Maltese SAR zone.



The Maltese and Italian authorities were informed again and reminded of their duty to coordinate the rescue of the people. The outcome of this case remains unknown.

⁶ The *Nadir* is operated by the NGO *RESQSHIP*.

08.11., distress case F, 5 persons: **Non-assistance of persons in distress in the Central Mediterranean Sea.** *Seabird's* crew spotted the people in the Libyan SAR zone. There were several fuel canisters and a few life-rings on the boat. The Libyan, Maltese and Italian authorities were informed via email. On November 9th, around 19 hours after the first sighting, the people were spotted again in the Maltese SAR zone. The outcome of this case remains unknown.

09.11., distress case H, 47 persons: **Merchant vessel left alone by authorities, shift of responsibilities between the Italian and Maltese authorities, delay in rendering assistance.** The people were first sighted by the NGO sailing boat *Nadir*,⁶ and afterwards by *Seabird's* crew, in the Maltese SAR zone. Almost three hours later, *Seabird's* crew sighted the people a second time. The merchant vessel *Kreta S*, flying the flag of Antigua and Barbuda, was in the vicinity and said on the radio that it would assist the people. Later, the merchant vessel informed *Seabird's* crew that the Italian *Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre* (MRCC) had referred to the Maltese *Rescue Coordination Centre* (RCC) and that the vessel should contact the Maltese authorities. Around 15 minutes later, an *Italian Coast Guard* patrol boat was observed by *Seabird's* crew heading towards the people. The people were rescued by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy.

15.11., distress case L, 25 persons: **Coordination and rescue by civil society actors, lack of state rescue capacity.** *Seabird's* crew spotted a boat in distress in the Maltese SAR zone with approximately 25 persons on board and informed the authorities as well as the civil rescue vessel *Geo Barents*, which was present in the area. According to *Médecins Sans Frontières*, the rescued people had already been adrift at sea for two days and could finally be rescued thanks to the coordination of civil society actors. The people were disembarked on 20.11. in Messina, Italy

16.11., distress case O, 99 persons and 10 dead bodies: **Joint rescue efforts by civil actors, 10 dead bodies recovered due to delay and lack of state intervention and rescue capacities, involvement of Frontex drone.** The people on board called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* which then informed the authorities. Afterwards, *Seabird's* crew spotted the wooden boat and informed the authorities. The civil rescue vessel *Geo Barents* was also in the area and sent out a mayday relay on behalf of the people in distress. The boat was listing strongly to one side and only a few people were wearing life jackets. The *Geo Barents* acknowledged the distress call and changed course towards the position. After having been able to take 99 persons safely on board, the crew had to recover 10 dead bodies from the lower deck of the wooden boat, who had died from suffocation.

According to its track, *Frontex's* drone had been orbiting the position of the boat between the sighting of *Seabird* and the rescue operation by *Geo Barents*.

18.-20.11., distress case R, 70 persons: **Non-assistance by authorities of a distress case for at least two days, Italian and Maltese RCCs uncooperative.** *Seabird's* crew spotted the boat first on the 18th of November in the Libyan SAR zone and informed the authorities. The people on board the boat in distress also called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* which also informed the authorities, updating them several times with new positions of the boat. In the meantime, the boat passed the boundary to the Maltese SAR zone. *Seabird's* crew were able to spot the boat again two days later on the 20th November, whereupon the crew sent out a mayday relay.⁷ After further phone calls between the ground crew and the Italian and Maltese RCCs, the authorities were not willing to provide any information about the two day old case. The boat was later rescued by the *Italian Coast Guard* and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy. Authorities had knowledge about the distress case for at least 2 days, did not send any rescue capacities and thus knowingly accepted the danger to the lives of the people on board.

⁷ 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.

21.11., distress case V, 73 persons: **Violence and dangerous manoeuvres by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* putting people on board at acute risk, rescue by a civil society actor.** The civil rescue vessel *Sea-Watch 4* spotted a boat in distress with two Libyan vessels close-by. Aircraft *Seabird* was also on scene monitoring the situation from the air, and saw the Libyan patrol boats attempt to intercept the rubber boat in distress. Both the vessel *PB656* of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* with intercepted people already on deck and the other Libyan patrol boat later stayed at a distance and did not intervene. The *Sea-Watch 4* was able to conduct a rescue operation and safely embark 73 persons. According to testimonies from the rescued persons on board the *Sea-Watch 4*, the Libyan vessels had fired into the water and put the people at acute risk.

22.11., distress case Y, 44 persons: **Non-assistance by a merchant vessel, RCC Malta not taking any steps to assist a boat in distress in the Maltese SAR zone.** *Seabird's* crew spotted a boat in distress with around 40 people on board in the Maltese SAR zone and informed the authorities. The engine of the boat was not working and the people were adrift. *Seabird's* crew sent out a mayday relay on behalf of the boat. The merchant vessel *Asso Ventinove*, flying the Italian flag, was in the vicinity and seemed to change its course towards the distress case. We also informed the merchant vessel's company *Augusta Offshore S.p.A.* about the situation and asked for an immediate intervention. The outcome for this boat in distress is unclear.

During November 2021, we must assume that *Frontex* was involved in **at least 3 distress cases** with its drone and aircraft. Two boats in distress were rescued by the Italian authorities and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy. One boat was rescued by the NGO vessel *Geo Barents* and disembarked in Messina, Italy.

During November 2021, *Seabird* and *Skybird's* crews spotted **43 empty boats**.⁸ On November 11th, one spotted empty boat was on fire in the Libyan SAR zone. Another empty boat was sighted on two occasions, on November 4th and 6th. Two empty boats match with rescue operations previously conducted by the NGO vessel *Sea-Eye 4*.⁹ One empty boat is the remains of distress case B which was disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy. The outcomes for the other 40 empty boats remain unknown.

8 One additional empty boat was spotted, however a position could not be documented.

9 The *Sea-Eye 4* is operated by the NGO *Sea-Eye*.

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
- the current non-assistance and involvement of merchant vessels with boats in distress at sea, due to the failed migration politics in Europe
- the unjustified and systematic delays of European Member States to fulfil their obligations to conduct and coordinate sea rescue in their Search-and-Rescue zones
- the need for NGO vessels in the Central Mediterranean Sea in order to uphold the law and save human lives