



Sea-Watch.org

Project Report

2021

Sea rescue at Europe's borders



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Photo: Fabian Meiber

#SafePassage

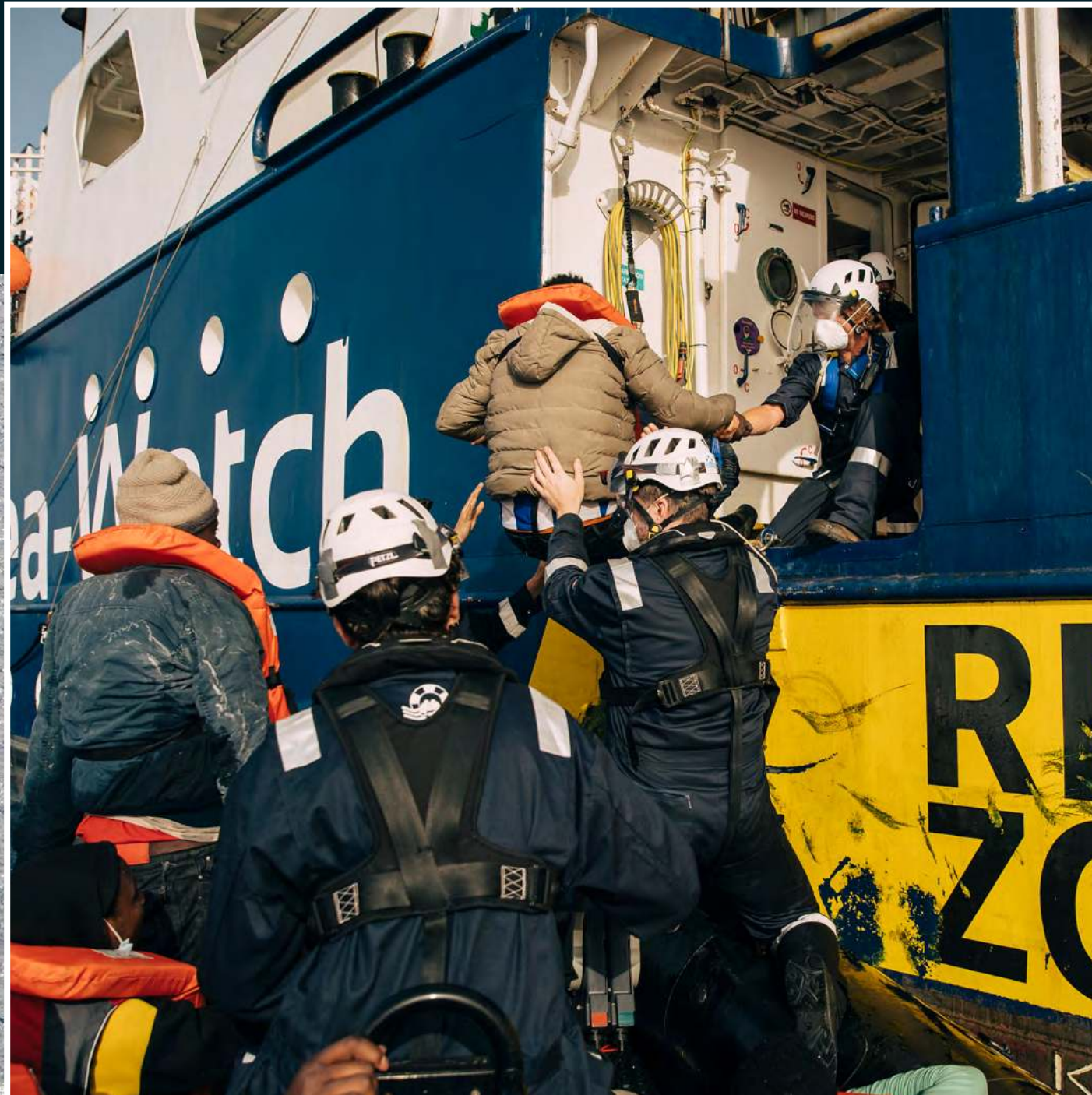
For legal escape routes, freedom of movement
and a Europe based on solidarity.



What does Sea-Watch do?

Sea-Watch e.V. is a non-profit initiative dedicated to the civilian rescue of refugees at sea. In the face of man-made catastrophe, Sea-Watch provides emergency aid where government agencies fail. At the same time, we demand and push for rescue by the responsible European institutions and publicly stand up for legal escape routes. Although we see ourselves exposed to increasing criminalization and repression by various European Union (EU) states, we are constantly developing new concepts for action and implementing new strategies. Sea-Watch is politically and religiously independent and financed by donations. Since 2015, Sea-Watch activists have been involved in the rescue of more than 40,000 people.

Civilian rescue at Europe's borders



04/29/2021: Crew members of Sea-Watch 4 help rescued people get on the rescue ship.

Photo: Fabian Melber

Our



The catastrophic conditions at Europe's external borders are knowingly accepted by politicians. Racist migration policies lead to the fact that thousands of people continue to drown while fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea. We make demands on the German government and the EU institutions within reach to respect the applicable law and to end the politically motivated dying in the Mediterranean Sea.

Safe and legal escape routes into the European Union, which means freedom of movement for all	Immediately end the support of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard by the EU and European governments
European sea rescue program	Decriminalization of flight and rescue at sea
Open ports without preconditions for landing	Self-determined reception of people in cities and communities of solidarity
Redistribution and the right to stay	Possibilities for merchant shipping to rescue and land in European ports
Hold Frontex and EUNAVFOR MED accountable for human rights violations	Abolition of all camps at the EU external borders and evacuation to European member states
Abolition of the border management agency Frontex	

Another - as in the case of the El Hiblu 3 - is to accuse them of terrorist activities and to threaten them with long prison sentences. **Flight is not a crime.**

We demand that, following their arrival in Europe, people can decide for themselves where they want to live. We also demand that the policies that restrict municipalities and cities from accepting refugees are removed, and that feasible, legal avenues are open to them. They must not be blocked from doing the right thing.

The inhumane camps at Europe's external borders, which serve as a deterrent, must be closed and all people must be accepted in European member states on the basis of their individual wishes.

demands 2021

A future without borders?

To end the deaths in the Mediterranean, we need **safe and legal escape routes to Europe**. We demand that all people have the opportunity to move legally and safely and decide where they want to live. We can only achieve this through **freedom of movement for all**.

We demand a comprehensive **sea rescue program financed and coordinated by the EU**. States must unconditionally fulfill their duty to rescue people in distress at sea. This must not be the task of civil society.

We demand that there are **no preconditions for the safe landing of people rescued at sea** in European ports. **All persons must be allowed to decide for themselves after arrival in which country they want to live and stay.** For this, the

first entry principle of the Dublin Regulation must be abolished.

Both the European border protection agency Frontex and the EU military mission EUNAVFOR MED Operation IRINI, under which the so-called Libyan Coast Guard is being technically and financially upgraded, are an integral part of an EU policy that focuses on isolation and migration prevention. **We consider Frontex to be unreformable and call for the abolition of the agency.** The mandate of Frontex and EUNAVFOR MED IRINI is not compatible with the abundance of international maritime and human rights conventions. **Those responsible for EUNAVFOR MED IRINI and Frontex must be held accountable for the human rights violations that occur on a daily basis.**

The EU's ever-expanding funding of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, and the bilateral agreements between Libya and European member states both aim to prevent migration to Europe and to circumvent internationally recognized human rights. **We call for the end of all programs that serve the purpose of externalizing European borders.**

Under international law, it is a duty to rescue people in distress at sea. As long as states do not fulfill this duty, civil society will fill the gap. It is our belief, therefore, that European states must no longer block and criminalize sea rescue, **and that no one should be criminalized for their flight.** A deterrent tactic of European states is to arbitrarily accuse people seeking protection of "aiding and abetting illegal entry".

The repressive blockades and criminalization imposed by European member states against civilian rescue teams have had the consequence of that merchant ships are not fulfilling their duties to rescue. **We demand that state actors pass on information about emergencies, without restriction, to merchant ships alongside an order to rescue and then bring the people ashore at a European port.**

Reviewing this year on the Mediterranean makes us angry and sad. At least **1,864 people are considered drowned or missing in 2021 when fleeing across the Mediterranean**. Together with the civilian fleet, we have tried to close this deadly rescue gap.

On the water

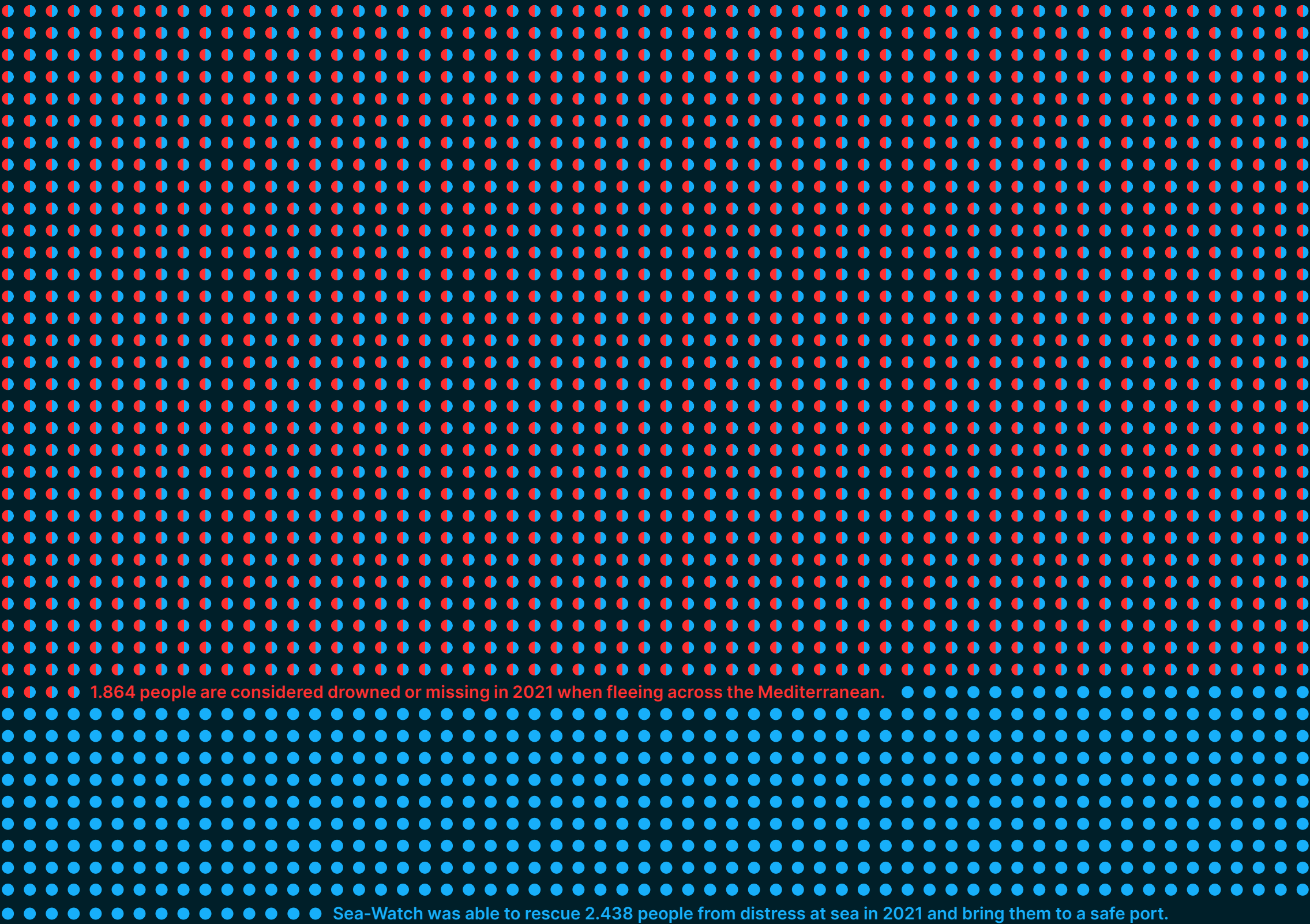
With our two rescue ships *Sea-Watch 3* and *Sea-Watch 4*, we were able to rescue **2,438 people from distress** at sea and bring them to a safe port in six demanding missions.

From the air

Our *Moonbird* and *Seabird* reconnaissance aircraft flew over **714 mission hours** in 2021. In the process, they spotted nearly **11,140 people in distress at sea** and documented numerous human rights abuses.

We continue to stand in full solidarity with people fleeing their homes and are giving our all from the air and sea to put an end to the deadly policies in the Mediterranean. The civilian fleet is a daily reminder to the EU that we are ready. We are ready to save!

2021 in numbers



Mission 1: Sea-Watch 3 February 19 - March 3, 2021 363 rescued persons in five rescues Safe port: Augusta, IT	Mission 2: Sea-Watch 4 April 23 – May 5, 2021 457 rescued persons in five rescues Safe port: Trapani, IT	Mission 3: Sea-Watch 3 July 21 - August 8, 2021 278 rescued persons in five rescues Safe port: Trapani, IT	Mission 4: Sea-Watch 3 October 10 - October 23, 2021 412 rescued persons in seven rescues Safe port: Pozzallo, IT	Mission 5: Sea-Watch 4 November 1 - November 28, 2021 482 rescued persons in seven rescues Safe port: Augusta, IT	Mission 6: Sea-Watch 3 December 20, 2021 - January 2, 2022 446 rescued persons in five rescues Safe port: Pozzallo, IT
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2015 must repeat itself!

For a new narrative in migration policy by Fabian Melber.

The video of the tarmac shows hundreds of people trying to reach an American military plane taking off; to escape a life of fear at the last moment. A second shot, a few minutes later: black dots detach from the airplane and plummet down toward the rooftops of Kabul. Rarely have the causes of the flight of refugees been so vivid, the despair so pointedly brought home. The situation in Afghanistan marks a high point in a never-ending crisis that has continued to define 2021.

Above all, the increase in climate-related natural disasters are projected to exacerbate global power and inequality structures, causing eruption of conflict in many places around the world. In a growing number of regions, people will no longer be able to find security.

Fabian Melber is part of Sea-Watch's media team. He is a photojournalist and holds the position of media coordinator on the ships, making him responsible for their photo coverage in the central Mediterranean. In this role, he has been monitoring the media representation of flight and migration in Germany and Europe since 2015.

The report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a thousand-page inventory of global climate research, conveys a worldwide dimension of the threat. To summarize; it identifies that our livelihoods are in worse shape than expected and that the situation is worsening faster than previously feared. Worldwide, the consequences can be experienced at close range. They are pushing people and entire countries to their limits. The catastrophic fires in Greece and Italy - the most important transit countries on the flight routes to Europe - are just one example.

The handling of these crises reveals deep rifts at the heart of politics today. The handling of the situation in Afghanistan made it clear that no one wants to take responsibility for even one more refugee than legally required. While the pandemic of the European summer of 2021 faded to a gradual background noise, what has remained the everyday reality for the people at the EU's external borders is that the universal right to life is politically negotiable.

The political structures are proving to be decidedly inflexible; grievances are being administered, not resolved with foresight. The necessary dialogues do not take place. Crises are met with resignation. Decision-makers position themselves as affected by pragmatic conditions.



At dawn off Lampedusa, a group of refugee youth seek shelter from the weather in the bow of Sea-Watch 4 as they wait for several days to be assigned a safe harbor. • Photo: Fabian Melber

The discourse on a progressive migration policy seemed to have come to a standstill in the election year 2021.

For years, almost the entire political spectrum used the rhetoric of isolationism, until the debate on asylum policy finally petered out in the search for the quietest possible procedure for deportations. The political strategies for dealing with the crises are limited to ignoring warnings, covering up failures and denying responsibility. The political canon of values of European governments is based on a denial of reality, the consequences of which are to be maneuvered out of sight.

The military isolation of Europe is being increasingly perfected, last gaps are being closed step by step. In 2021, research by SPIEGEL with numerous documents proves the EU's extensive knowledge of systematic human rights violations.

Human rights violations are committed by Frontex, covered up by responsible decision-makers in the EU and are thus supposed to escape jurisdiction.

At the same time, the agency's financial support has never been greater, and the expansion of its structures has never progressed so quickly.

The continued support of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard represents a policy of henchmanship, and by removing those who suffer and die from the field of vision of the European public. The opaque militias of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard are willing to use any means to effectively carry out their mandate to control migration in the central Mediterranean Sea. And they enjoy far-reaching backing in doing so.

The EU conceals a cruel practice through systematic concealment, looking the other way and shredding files.

Even though the policy of closed ports was not continued in 2021, numerous civilian rescue ships were moored in 2021. We too find ourselves in a daily operational routine where a completed mission may be followed by weeks of detention. For their work on behalf of refugees, many activists are facing European courts where they could face years of imprisonment or draconian fines. Using bureaucratic means as a pretext, every effort is made to evade responsibility under international law.

According to the UN, 82.4 million people were on the run at the end of 2020, more than ever before. The reasons are manifold and have never been as transparent as they are today. The causes are universal, and urgently need to be understood in their global totality.

In public political language there is an attempt to accustom the audience to the constraints of "realpolitik". It is unobjective and ideological to want to act out of pure humanity, out of solidarity. Civil society must fight to give these values new space and a voice.

The report of the IPCC carries a second central message: "Our crises are man made." Remembering this means no longer treating global ills as natural.

Whether it is Afghanistan or the climate crisis, it is civil society's pressure that is forcing governments to act.

The evacuations from Kabul teach us that a significant part of society understands the urgency of organized escape routes, and what is possible when the will is there. It is within the framework of a sustainable policy to seek solutions for legal, safe entry routes today.

With "2015 must not be repeated," then-chancellor candidate Armin Laschet formulated a reaction to the Taliban's seizure of power that is quickly applauded in Germany today. The date describes a time when hundreds of thousands found protection in Germany. And a moment of agreement that it is right to help people in need; that it is time to let those share in a security that is denied them by the most privileged.

Characterizing the year 2015 as a defeat, as with the German national narrative, is an indictment given that civil society effectively organized a response. The year also marked Sea-Watch's first deployment to the central Mediterranean.

Incriminating documents about pull-backs by Frontex are destroyed in the agency, rescue ships are confiscated, any observation at the borders of Europe is actively prevented. Still, hundreds of thousands of people are

forced to risk their lives in search of dignity and safety.

We are facing an abuse of power that is draining our strength. But it drives us, in all our disillusionment, to keep our eyes on the sensitive spots, and strengthens us in the knowledge that our eyes are indispensable at the external borders.



2015: The Sea-Watch 1 during a rescue, surrounded by life rafts and inflatable boats in the central Mediterranean. Photo by Fabian Melber

Frontex: Dystopian Reality



Since 2014, over 23,000 people have drowned trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Every single death is a direct result of Europe building a fortress around itself. The deaths are a result of a racist and colonialist worldview of Europe, which manifests itself in a deadly anti-migration agenda.

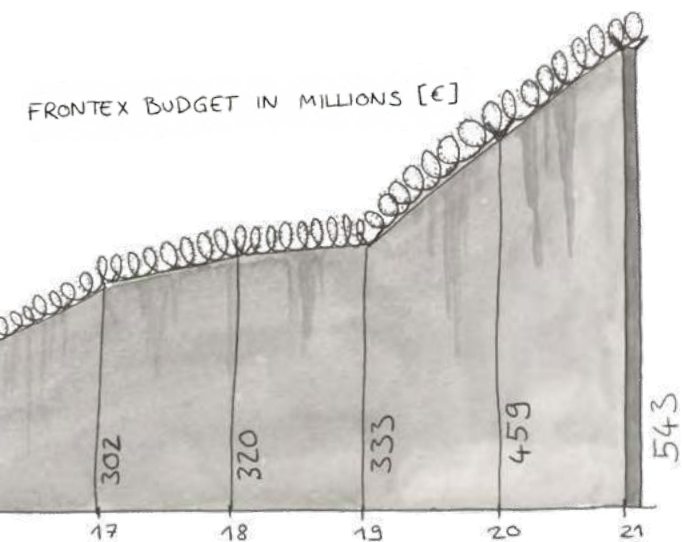
The key to the EU's total closure lies in the European Border and Coast Guard Agency: Frontex. This is tasked with preventing people on the run from reaching mainland Europe. With a budget of 5.6 billion euros and an increase in staff from 1,400 to 10,000 border guards by 2027, Frontex is the EU's fastest-growing agency.

Under Operation Triton, Frontex operated its own vessels in the central Mediterranean until 2018. Since the end of this operation, the agency has been relying on its aerial surveillance program - with a budget of several hundred million euros. A deliberate calculation, according to which Frontex is not even in a position to fulfill its duty under international law to rescue at sea. Instead of investing in the operation of its own ships, the EU is now providing money and equipment to Libyan militias, which are thus "enabled" to carry out sovereign sea rescue operations and are supposed to do the dirty work for the European border protection agency.

Numerous documents prove Frontex's systematic involvement in human rights violations. Yet Frontex's financial and political support and structural expansion is at an all-time high.

The effectiveness of the EU's isolation strategy can be easily illustrated by figures. In 2021, more people than ever before were dragged back to Libya during their dangerous flight across the Mediterranean.

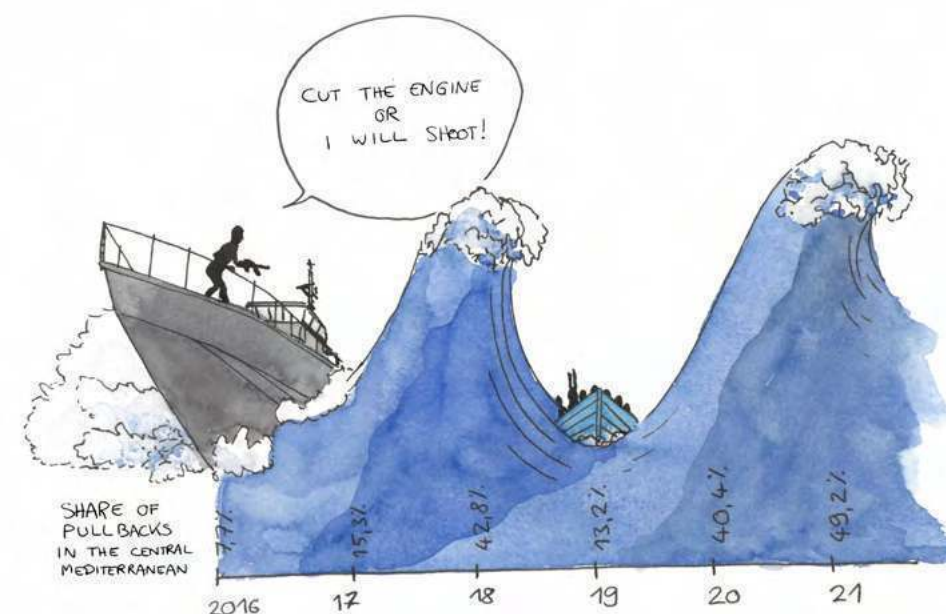
Frontex air surveillance: the billion-dollar business of migration defense



Libya is at war, and the country is categorically classified as unsafe by the United Nations and the European Commission. People are enslaved, tortured and killed in Libyan camps. Despite this, Frontex invests hundreds of millions of euros in surveillance technologies to pass information and data on boats in distress to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. Despite all lip service, Frontex has no interest in reconnaissance. On the contrary - Frontex's aerial surveillance makes pullbacks of fugitives to Libya possible in the first place.

Frontex deploys several aircraft under the names *Osprey* and *Eagle*, amongst others, to monitor the Mediterranean. In doing so, they assert their duty to inform the rescue coordination centers (RCCs) about sea emergencies.

To avoid this responsibility, a joint rescue center was unceremoniously created in Tripoli with European support, called the Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC). Communication between Frontex and the JRCC is very opaque. It is usually encrypted and without informing other ships in the immediate vicinity.



MRCC: Maritime Rescue Coordination Centers (MRCC) are internationally recognized institutions with the responsibility to coordinate distress calls within an area designated as their national search and rescue zone.

In addition, the so-called JRCC does not come close to meeting the official requirements of the Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) for a maritime rescue coordination center. Among other things, these state that it must be staffed 24/7 and have English-speaking personnel. Neither of these requirements apply to the rescue center in Libya.

SPIEGEL research also confirms that without Frontex's air operations, the JRCC would not be able to survey its stretch of coastline. Frontex officials even go so far as to pass on coordinates of escape boats directly to Libyan officers via WhatsApp. They are breaking the law, with the full backing of the EU.

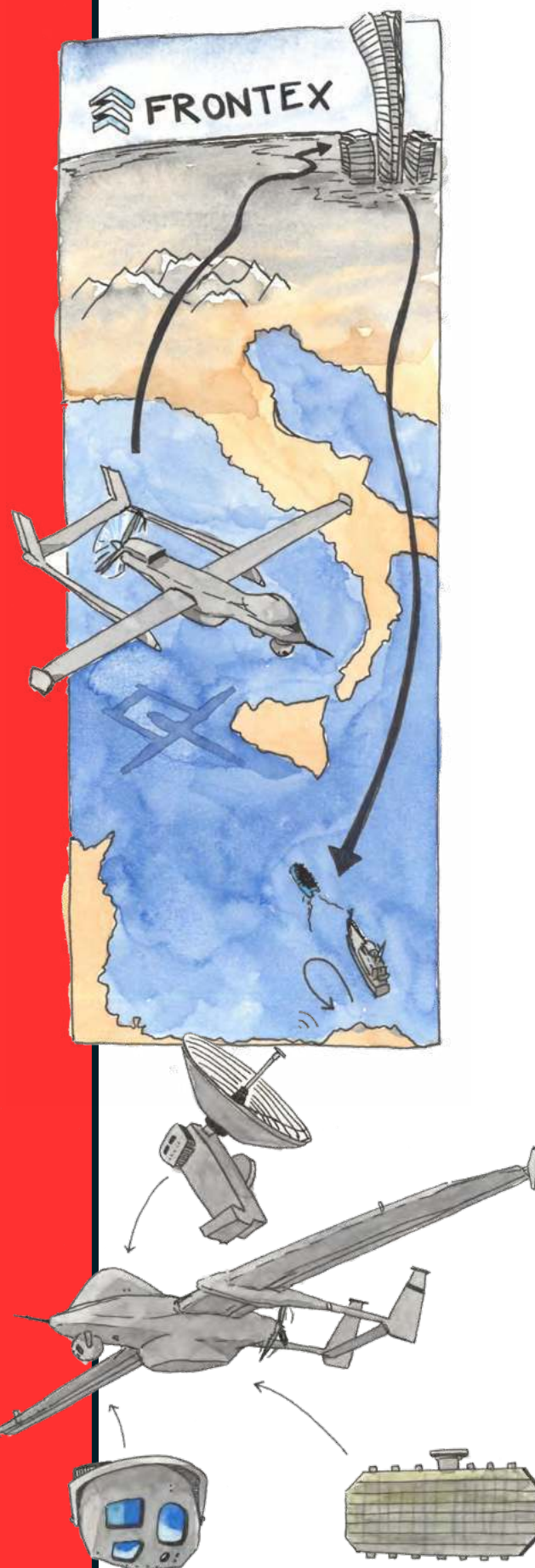
50 million euros for a drone: a symbol of the dehumanization of Europe

In spring 2021, Europe went one step further in the expansion of its ruthless border regime. Since May, a Heron 1 drone has been supplementing Frontex's "arsenal" over the central Mediterranean. Its task is to monitor the search area without interruption, at any time and during any weather conditions.

For this purpose, the drone is equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance technology. With a mission duration of well over 20 hours, its images are transmitted in real time to Frontex headquarters in Warsaw. Based on documentation from our own aerial reconnaissance, we must assume that the drone has already been involved in dozens of illegal returns.

50 million euros

With the money to buy the drone alone, we could buy 50 rescue ships like the *Sea-Watch 4*, buy over 100 aircraft like the *Seabird*, or finance our civilian aerial reconnaissance for about 50 years.



The drone carries an electro-optical camera, a thermal imaging camera and so-called daylight spotters. With the latter, it can track moving targets.

Upgrading Frontex's aerial surveillance and equipping Libyan actors has deadly consequences. This makes our aerial observations all the more important, as it is the only way we can document the inhumane actions of European authorities. This year, our aircrew witnessed the illegal cooperation between Frontex and the so-called Libyan Coast Guard several times.

April 2021: About 130 people drowned in shipwreck

In April 2021, Frontex spotted a boat in distress from an airplane. Instead of guiding nearby ships to the location of the people in distress, Frontex relied on the so-called Libyan Coast Guard to intercept the boat and bring the people back to Libya. But nothing happened. Neither the Libyan partners nor Frontex itself reacted. The rescue of 130 people was prevented, and their drowning was tolerated. When asked why the border agency did not do more to rescue these people, it replied in an email: *"It is also important to note that Frontex does not currently operate vessels in the Central Mediterranean."*

June 13, 2021: Breach of international law through the back door

A boat with about 90 people on board was in distress at sea, and was reported directly to the relevant authorities by the WatchTheMed – AlarmPhone initiative. From our *Seabird*, we were able to identify the drone circling the same position that AlarmPhone had also communicated to us. 20 minutes later we had to witness how the people were intercepted by a Libyan patrol boat in the Maltese SAR zone and forced back toward Libya. According to maritime law, Malta was responsible for rescuing the people; the so-called Libyan Coast Guard should carry no authority here.

What civilian sea rescue organizations have been emphasizing for years has been legally confirmed: **Repatriations to Libya are punishable!** This was also decided in a landmark judgment in October 2021 by a court in Naples, when the captain of the merchant ship *Asso28* was sentenced to one year in prison. After this captain had indeed rescued 101 people in distress at sea in July 2018, he then handed the people over to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. It is the first sentence of this magnitude which has been handed down in Europe.



Civilian aerial reconnaissance

Sea-Watch is not only active on the water, but also in the air. With our reconnaissance aircraft, we patrol over a large maritime area. We document human rights abuses and report emergencies to rescue coordination centers and ships within range. Since 2017, we have sighted hundreds of boats in distress and assisted in numerous rescues in over 480 reconnaissance missions.



From the air

On June 30, 2021, our Airborne crew witnessed a brutal attack by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard on a boat in distress. The case shows once again:

the EU is ready to use any means to prevent people from reaching the European mainland.



Violence and arbitrariness: not an isolated case in European border policy.

People fleeing across the Mediterranean are increasingly exposed to severe violence and appalling arbitrariness. Our ship and aircraft crews look back on a year full of difficult missions that have made the life-threatening consequences of European border policy visible.

On the next pages, we provide a glimpse into two challenging missions in the air and on the water.

Violence & arbitrariness From the air

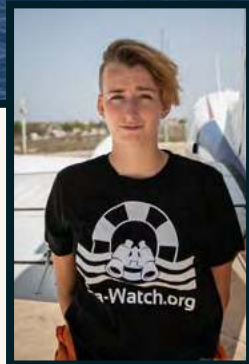


Photo: Milad Amin

Samira is part of Sea-Watch's Airborne team and was the mission leader of the reconnaissance flight on June 30. She recounts the incident.

What happened on June 30, 2021?

We were in the field when we learned of the position of a boat carrying 63 people. It was already in the Maltese SAR zone.

On the way there, we spotted the so-called Libyan Coast Guard approaching the boat at high speed. According to maritime law, Malta was responsible for the rescue of these people. However, it quickly became clear to us that what had long since become the rule was happening here: A patrol boat was illegally called in to intercept the people and tow them back to Libya.

What you then had to witness was harrowing. Can you summarize what happened?

With the arrival of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, a brutal hunt for the boat began that lasted over 1.5 hours. The Libyan officers shot at least twice in the di-

rection of the wooden boat, threw ropes in the direction of the engine, threw objects at the people in the boat, and tried to ram it several times.

It is a miracle that no one died in the process! By the time boats reach the Maltese SAR zone, they have been traveling for several days. People are exhausted and dehydrated. These maneuvers can kill people very easily. The resistance put up by the people on the boat was severely impressive. It was with great relief that we learned that the people were able to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa on their own.

Why is it so important that these events are documented?

The cooperation with Libya is a deal with the sole purpose of sealing off Europe. These events clearly show that the EU is willing to accept the loss of human lives

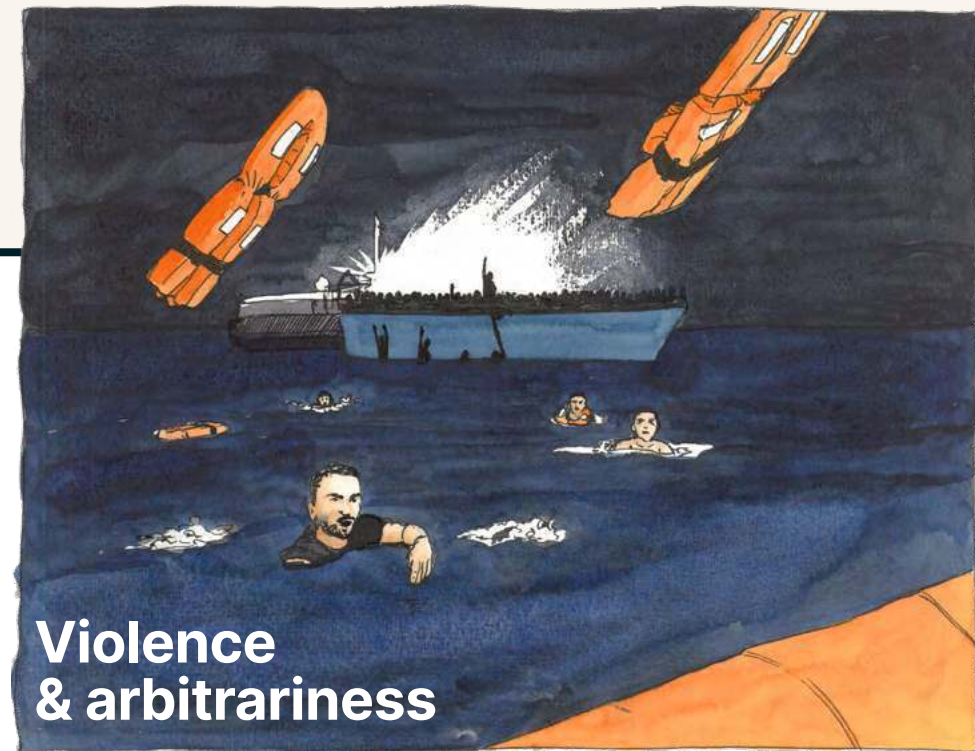
for this purpose. Documenting such incidents through our reconnaissance missions is essential to hold those responsible accountable and to bring such practices to light in the first place.

What must happen now?

These acts must have consequences! After the publication of our recordings, public prosecutors in Sicily have decided for the first time to bring charges against the so-called Libyan Coast Guard for "attempted shipwreck". We call on the EU to immediately end the cooperation with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

Why "so-called" Libyan Coast Guard?

The so-called Libyan Coast Guard consists of criminal and illegitimate groups that do not act on behalf of a functioning state structure that is based on respect for human rights, but on behalf of the EU and its member states and in their own interest to get money and equipment. We will not recognize the so-called Libyan Coast Guard as long as it breaks international law and puts in danger - or even kills - those people we are trying to protect and save.



Violence & arbitrariness

On the water

August 2021: Our crew looks back on one of the most difficult rescue missions of Sea-Watch 3. Anne (Operations Officer), Clarissa (Protection Officer) and Laura (Lifeboat Operator) give us an insight into the challenges and the course of the mission.

Why was this rescue mission so difficult?

Anne – We conducted five rescue missions and stabilized a sixth boat in distress. It was a mission with many difficult, challenging rescues. We were threatened several times by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard instead of being supported by the European Union authorities. In a situation where hundreds of people around us were in danger of their lives, we were left completely alone.

What was bothering you the most?

Laura – There is a big difference between talking about the EU letting people drown and being on the ground and seeing it with your own eyes. I'm a speedboat driver and I'm trained to save people from drowning in the water. It is insanely frustrating to realize that not all people can ever be saved. There are just too many boats in distress.

What was the biggest challenge for you during this mission?

Clarissa – Rescue operations are especially difficult when there are many people in the water and there is panic. We had to take care of many people with serious injuries. There were some who had to be medically evacuated due to their life-threatening condition. Among the people who remained on board, we also had numerous medical cases whose condition deteriorated rapidly during the time we had to wait for them to be assigned to a safe port. It was shocking how many people were completely traumatized by their experiences in Libya.



This is Anne, operations manager on the Sea-Watch 3. She coordinates all rescue operations from on board and ensures that everything runs smoothly between all teams and the back office on shore.



Laura drives one of our speedboats in rescue missions - a particularly critical moment of any rescue, where fast and level-headed action and good teamwork are essential.



Meet Clarissa. As a Protection Officer, she is responsible for identifying and documenting special protection needs of our guests on board.

In 2021, over 30,000 people crossing the Mediterranean have been intercepted by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and towed back to Libya. How do you deal with this knowledge?

Anne – It's different when you put faces and names to the numbers. They are not numbers, they are people who need help. We know about the conditions that exist in the Libyan camps. The country is a place where returning means being trapped once again in a cycle of abuse, torture and pain. During the time we were at sea, the Italian government even decided to renew its cooperation with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and to continue working with militias that massively violate human rights.

What do you demand from the relevant authorities and policy makers?

Laura – The European Union and the authorities must take responsibility. This means providing safe havens and rescue capacity, and not putting people in the hands of torturers. So we need the authorities, we need the EU to protect people's lives and not let them drown out here.

It's not numbers, it's people who need help.

Into the heads and hearts for a Europe of solidarity

The suffering at the EU's external borders is not a natural disaster, but the result of a lack of political will.

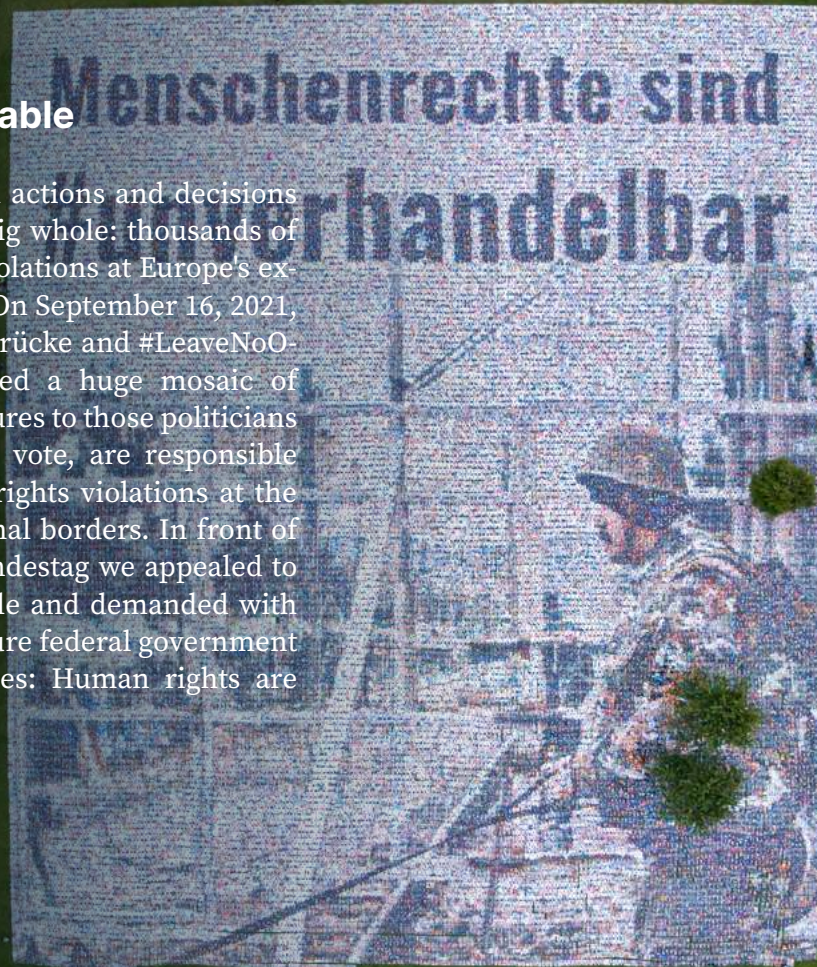
Therefore, an indispensable part of our work is to create a broad public awareness for the situation on the Mediterranean.

We accompany and document our missions and publish what is happening there in real time to draw civil society's attention to the politically driven and ongoing crisis on the Mediterranean and to hold accountable those who maintain the inhumane status quo.



#nonnegotiable

Many individual actions and decisions add up to one big whole: thousands of human rights violations at Europe's external borders. On September 16, 2021, Sea-Watch, Seebrücke and #LeaveNoOneBehind showed a huge mosaic of over 48,000 pictures to those politicians who, with their vote, are responsible for the human rights violations at the European external borders. In front of the German Bundestag we appealed to those responsible and demanded with this action a future federal government for which applies: Human rights are #nonnegotiable.



Ride4Rescue & Half Marathon

In different fundraising campaigns, our supporters showed great commitment and proved once again that they do not look away and that they clearly oppose the inhumane migration policy of the EU. At the Berlin Half Marathon and during our bike campaign Ride4Rescue, we collected a total of over 80,000 euros in donations.



#DefundFrontex

With #DefundFrontex, Sea-Watch and 21 other organizations are calling for the reallocation of Frontex's budget to build a government-led and funded, international civilian sea rescue program. We need to protect people, not borders.



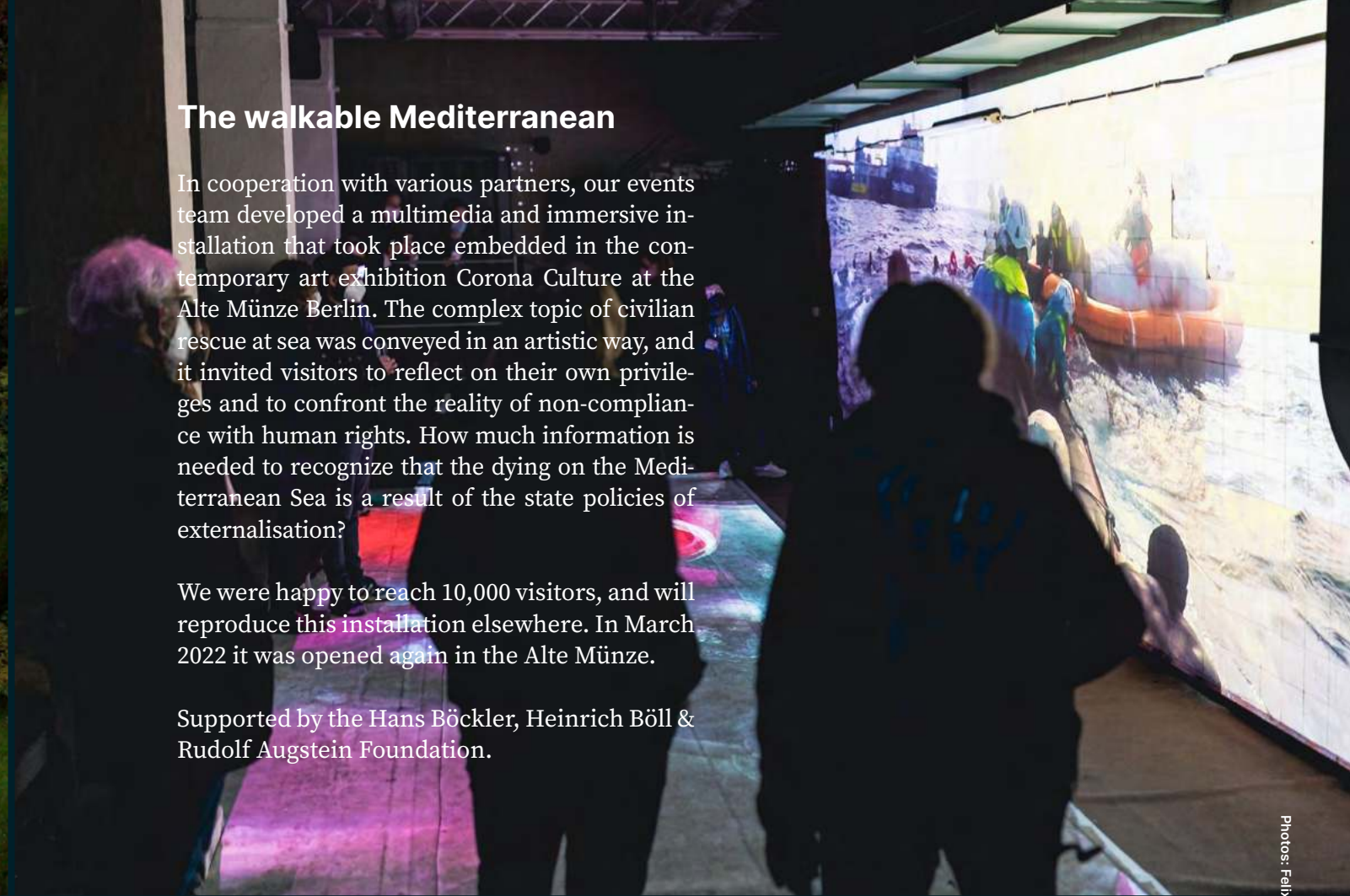
sea-watch.org/defundfrontex/ ➔

The walkable Mediterranean

In cooperation with various partners, our events team developed a multimedia and immersive installation that took place embedded in the contemporary art exhibition Corona Culture at the Alte Münze Berlin. The complex topic of civilian rescue at sea was conveyed in an artistic way, and it invited visitors to reflect on their own privileges and to confront the reality of non-compliance with human rights. How much information is needed to recognize that the dying on the Mediterranean Sea is a result of the state policies of externalisation?

We were happy to reach 10,000 visitors, and will reproduce this installation elsewhere. In March 2022 it was opened again in the Alte Münze.

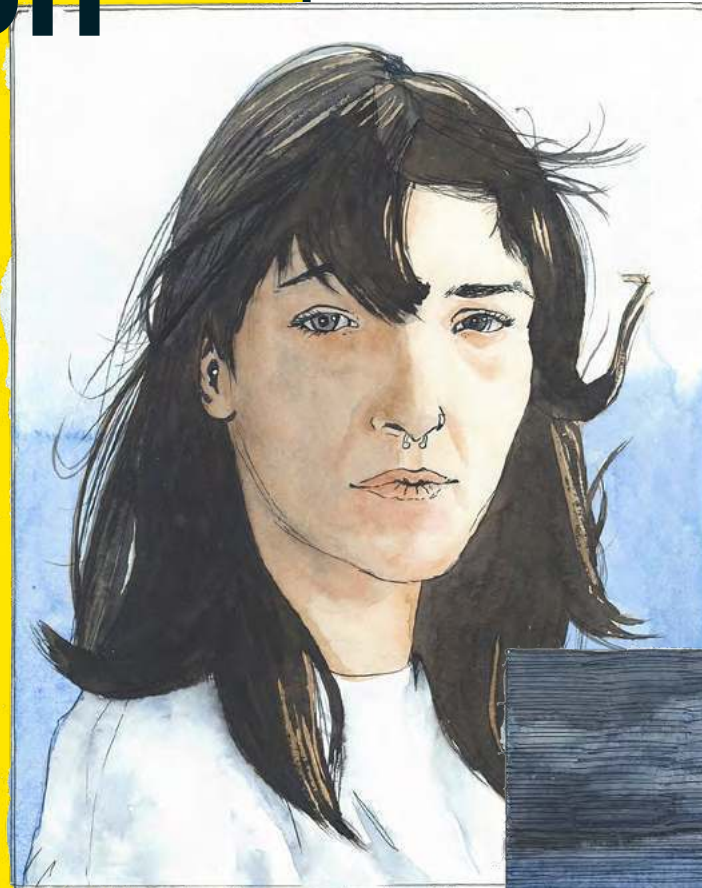
Supported by the Hans Böckler, Heinrich Böll & Rudolf Augstein Foundation.



Quo Vadis Frontex?

With the help of the cases documented by Airborne, Sea-Watch is able to indict the behavior of Frontex in the context of sea rescue in the central Mediterranean. As an expert on sea rescue in the central Mediterranean, Sea-Watch participated in the *Quo Vadis Frontex?* discussion event in Berlin on September 25, 2021. There, the current practices of Frontex were analyzed and the available forms of political, legal and practical civil resistance were shared so that the struggles against the border management agency might deepen. Based on the data collected, Sea-Watch reported mainly on the cooperation between Frontex and the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

Between criminalization and repression



People flee their homes for many different reasons. European politicians should not question these reasons, but ensure safe escape routes. However many people on the run experience the opposite: they are exposed to violence, pushed back, criminalized and confronted with absurd accusations. Their crime? The search for a better life.

The following pages describe how people on the run and those who advocate for them become targets of state authorities.

I am **Sarah Mardini** and I come from Syria. In 2015, my little sister Yusra and I had to leave our home country. We fled to Europe, at that time I was 20, my sister 17 years old.

It was pitch dark when we crossed the sea from Izmir on the overcrowded rubber dinghy toward Greece. At some point the engine stopped. Water entered the boat and people started to panic. Then someone suggested jumping into the water and pulling the boat. As a professional swimmer, it was clear to me that I had to help...

When you are in an inflatable boat, you don't have time to think. You just have to act.



... so I jumped into the water, grabbed the rope on the side of the boat and started pulling. Five minutes later, my sister jumped in after me. I think that was the most terrifying moment for me. I had come to terms with the fact that something could happen to me. But to my little sister? No one

should fear for the life of their own sister. She looked at me dead serious and said, "If you can do it, I can do it!" That was the point when I saw the reality very clearly in front of me: I have to be as strong as possible, that was our only way to survive.

The trip across the sea is just one of many terrible moments of our escape, of our leaving behind the home we grew up in. When we finally took the bus to Germany weeks later, tears came to my eyes. I cried because for the first time in a long time I felt like a human being, not a refugee. What I experienced made me want to go back to Lesbos to volunteer as a sea rescuer and translator.

Because no one should let other people drown in the sea - no matter how, no matter where.

I did my best to help the people who arrived there in the boats. In 2018, I and other helpers were arrested and charged with alleged human trafficking, membership in a criminal organization, money laundering and espionage. I served 107 days in prison.

We did not commit any illegal acts. We stood on the shore and distributed blankets and water to survivors. But apparently I am a "threat to national security" in Greece to this day. It is absurd how fugitives and activists are targeted by the authorities. How can it be that a person is arrested for helping others?

In 2021, I went back to sea as part of the Sea-Watch crew. I will never stop showing solidarity with people on the run! But solidarity doesn't just mean



going on a rescue mission. Solidarity means leaving our own comfort zone. And we have to stop asking people why they are fleeing their homes.

I'm tired of answering the question of why I left my home. I want to be able to live, sleep and eat without hearing bombs. This is my right.

If you want to stand up for people who are fleeing, look around your city. Find out what is going on. Think about how you can best support people. Listen to their stories. We want to be part of the solution and the discussion about what is happening to our future.

Between criminalization and repression



Since March 2019, the **#ElHiblu3** have been prosecuted in Malta for preventing a pushback to Libya. The charges against them are "terrorist activities", "wanton destruction", "seizure of the vessel".

The three teenagers, along with more than 100 other people, had attempted to flee Libya across the Mediterranean Sea. Directed by an EUNAVFOR MED aircraft, the crew of the merchant ship *El Hiblu 1* rescued the people, only to set course for Libya against all promises made to the people seeking protection. Having just escaped from the lawless space, the 108 rescued protested. Three young men mediated between the rescued and the ship's crew. Finally, an illegal pushback was prevented and the merchant ship set course for Malta.

Once there, the three mediators and translators were arrested: accused, among other things, of wanton destruction and various terrorist activities

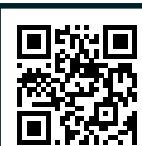
on nine counts, the young men have now been in limbo for years in a protracted trial of evidence that is anything but fair. If convicted the three, then 15-, 16- and 19-year-olds, face life in prison.

The #ElHiblu3 should be appreciated for their commitment, rather than be blamed. Their actions demand respect from all of us. Resisting an illegal pushback cannot be a crime. Resistance to the undermining of fundamental rights is justified not only ethically and morally, but also legally, and deserves not only our solidarity, but our recognition.

In October 2021, the "Free-ElHiblu3" campaign team, which has been in

place since 2019, will establish an independent commission of renowned representatives of legal, academic and activist sectors to advocate for the dropping of all charges in the unfair trial of the #ElHiblu3.

Free the #ElHiblu3.



elhiblu3.info →

twitter.com/ElHiblu3 →

instagram.com/ElHiblu3 →

In addition to ruthless policies of deterrence, state authorities are also finding administrative and civil remedies to prevent sea rescues in the central Mediterranean. One example is the so-called **port state control**.



Under a port state control, a destination port is permitted to survey and inspect vessels. If deficiencies are identified during the inspection, they must be rectified. Serious deficiencies result in detention of the ship.

In principle, such inspections are useful if they can ensure the safety of a ship. In the course of the last years, however, these port state controls have been increasingly misused for the politically motivated detention of civilian sea rescue ships.

Thus, in 2021 alone, these controls have led to a total of 296 days of detention for our ships. These blockades were justified with various deficiencies: expired milk products, too many life jackets on board, or a sewage system that was not designed for the number of possible rescued persons. At the same time, we had to watch idly as hundreds of people drowned in the Mediterranean.

Under the pretext of security, the rescue of people is deliberately prevented with flimsy justifications. But we

are not only morally in the right, our ships are safe and ready to save! With a network of solidary lawyers we also accept protracted legal disputes to counteract such absurd blockades.

At a time when the EU accuses sea rescuers and refugees, and civilian rescue ships are regularly blocked in European ports, one thing is clear: the deaths of thousands of people and the illegal repatriation of survivors to countries at war do not happen because of European inaction. They are the result, as predictable as they are deliberate, of a murderous border policy.

Thank you!

In 2021, with our ships we rescued over 2,400 people in distress. In 121 reconnaissance missions, we were able to document dozens of human rights violations with our aircraft and assist in numerous rescues. **Without our many volunteers, donors and supporting members, these missions on the water and in the air would not have been possible.**

What other ways can you support us?

- Create a fundraising campaign:



sea-watch.org/en/donate/fundraise/ ➔

- Order flyers, information material and / or donation boxes for your birthday party, wedding or family celebration!

Simply via eMail:
spenden@sea-watch.org

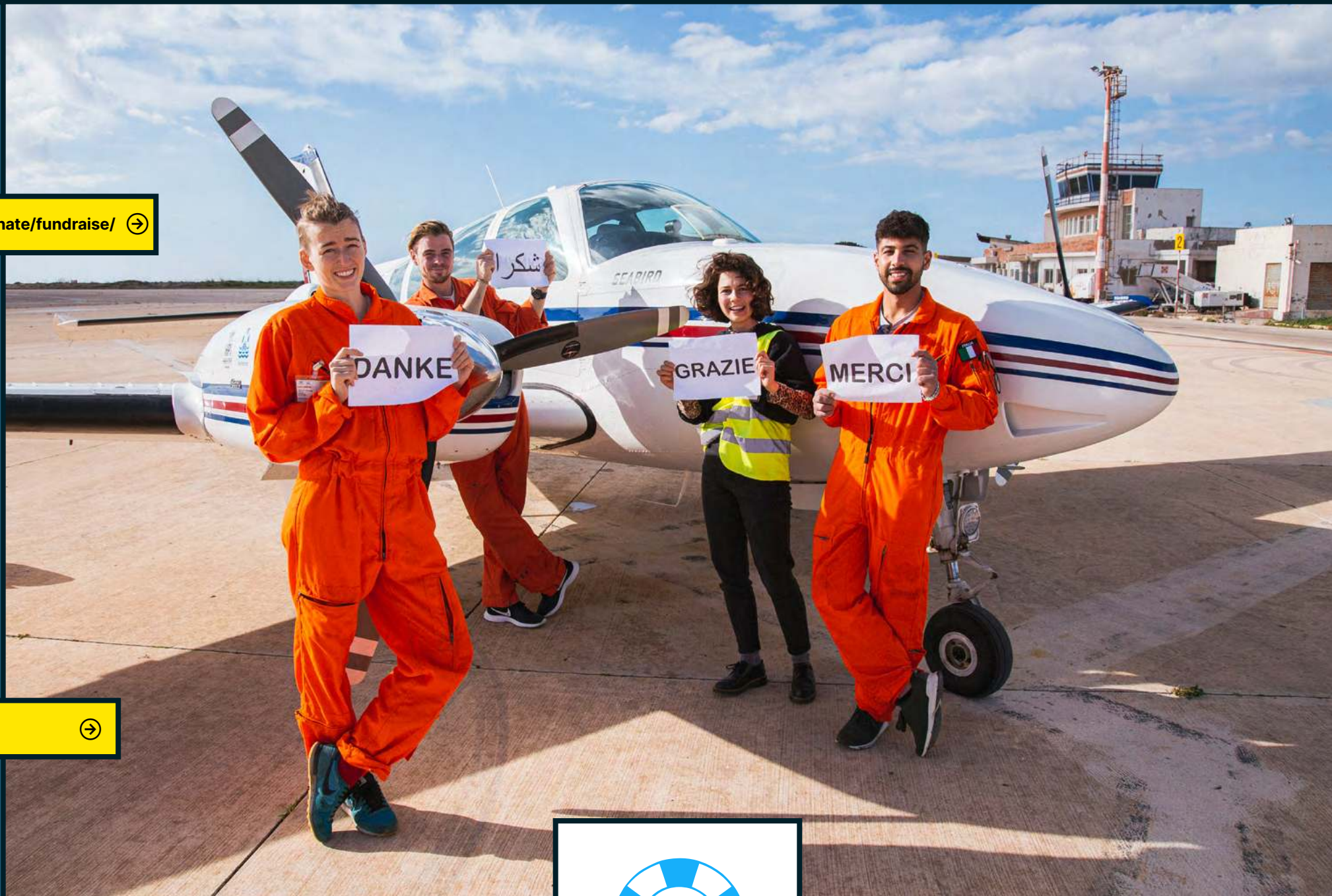
- Take a stand for human rights on the street with clothes for the civilian rescue at sea from our Sea-Watch-Shop:



shop.sea-watch.org ➔

- Network locally, go to demonstrations and stand up for a humane migration policy!

For example with a local sea bridge group.



Thank you for your time and energy, your power and financial support. Thank you for not looking away, but for standing clearly against the inhumane migration policy of the EU!

Solidarity with people on the run is more important than ever. In times of such inhumanities we have to resist all the more. We must denounce human rights violations and show solidarity with people on the run as well as those who stand up for their rights!

Let's make sure that the good aspects of 2015 are repeated, that we create a colorful and open Europe in which human rights are nonnegotiable.

If you also want to join us in opposing the deadly policy of letting people die, you can find more information here:

We say thank you - after an eventful year 2021, whose missions would not have been possible without your support.

Photo: Felix Weiß



sea-watch.org/en/donate/supporting-member/ ➔



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

February 2022: Our Sea-Watch 4 was able to save 129 people from drowning in two rescues. After our guests were able to disembark, the ship is being prepared again for the next mission. Thank you for making this possible!

Photo: Rebecca Rütten



Donate now

Our operations on the water and in the air are financed by donations. **In order to continue our work we depend on your support. Thank you very much!**

Donation account

IBAN: DE77 1002 0500 0002 0222 88
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Further donation possibilities:



sea-watch.org/en/donate/ ➔



Set a sign for human rights on the street!



Show your colors with clothes for civilian rescue at sea from our Sea-Watch Support Shop:

shop.sea-watch.org



WE PAY ATTENTION TO SUSTAINABILITY AND FAIR TRADE IN OUR PRODUCTION.
FURTHER INFORMATION AT: [STORE.SEA-WATCH.ORG](https://store.sea-watch.org)

