



Sea-Watch.org

Project Report

2022

Sea Rescue at Europe's Borders



Photo: Chris Grodotzki

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Photo: Chris Godotzki

#SafePassage

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



Sea-Watch

Who We Are and What We Do

Sea-Watch e.V. was initiated at the end of 2014 by a group of volunteers who could no longer stand idly by and witness the humanitarian catastrophe unfold in the Mediterranean. Yearly, thousands of people drown while fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea. Their causes of death: no safe escape routes, and a European Union, which is increasingly sealing itself off and leaving people at its gates to their fate.

Thus, for around eight years, we have been operating in the Mediterranean, rescuing people from drowning where government entities fail. At the same time, we demand and push for rescue operations by responsible European institutions and take a stand for legal escape routes.

In addition to acute civil sea rescue, we document human rights violations and publicize the humanitarian situation in the Central Mediterranean. Thereby, we influence the sociopolitical discourse and ensure that demands for radical change are heard.

Sea-Watch is politically and religiously independent and financed by donations. Since it was founded, Sea-Watch activists have been involved in rescuing more than 45,000 people. For us, it is clear: As long as people are drowning at Europe's external borders, we will continue to act.



For the right to go
For the right to come
For the right to stay
For solidarity without borders
For everyone

Our

The catastrophic conditions at Europe's external borders are created and knowingly accepted by political decision-makers. A racist migration policy continues to lead to the drowning of thousands of people while fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea. We make demands on the European Union, its member states, and institutions, which, if implemented, would put an end to the current practice of leaving people to die.

Safe and legal escape routes into the European Union, which means freedom of movement for all	Hold Frontex and the EU military operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI accountable for human rights violations in the Mediterranean Sea / Abolition of the border management agency Frontex
An immediate end to EU and EU Member State support for the so-called Libyan Coast Guard	A European search and rescue program
The right to stay	Decriminalization of flight and rescue at sea
Enablement and support for merchant ships to rescue and dock at European ports	Abolition of all camps at the (externalized) EU external borders

Demands 2022

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 without obstacles and decide where they want to live. We can only achieve this through freedom of movement for all.

Furthermore, we demand a non-military, comprehensive **sea rescue program, financed and coordinated by the EU**. States must unconditionally fulfill their duty to rescue people in distress at sea.

Both the funding and the expansion of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard by the EU as well as bilateral agreements between Libya and European member states aim to prevent migration to Europe and to circumvent internationally

recognized human rights. **We call for the end of all programs and agreements that serve the purpose of outsourcing European borders and responsibilities.**

After arriving at a safe harbor in Europe, all persons must be allowed to **decide for themselves in which country they want to stay**. The first entry principle of the Dublin Regulation must be abolished.

Both the European border management agency Frontex and the EU military operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI, under which the capacities of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard are being expanded, are an integral part of an EU policy that focuses on isolation and migration prevention. Frontex enables the so-called Libyan Coast Guard to carry out regular illegal pull-

backs, in which people are intercepted at sea and returned to Libya, by passing on exclusive information, which they have come by through aerial surveillance. **We consider Frontex to be unreformable and demand the dissolution of the agency. Those responsible for the daily human rights violations must be held accountable.** The mandates of Frontex and EUNAVFOR MED IRINI are incompatible with international maritime and human rights conventions.

No one should be criminalized for fleeing. The deterrent tactics of European states, including arbitrarily criminalizing people seeking protection for allegedly "aiding and abetting illegal entry" or - as in the case of El Hiblu 3 - accusing them of carrying out terrorist activities and threatening them with long prison sentences, must stop. **Fleeing is not a crime.**

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. European states must therefore no longer block sea rescue, by applying politically motivated and restrictive decrees, for example, as is currently the case in Italy and is planned in Germany.

The **inhumane camps at Europe's (externalized) external borders**, which serve as a deterrent, **must be closed**, and all **people must be admitted** on the basis of their individual wishes or **granted a safe and legal onward journey**.

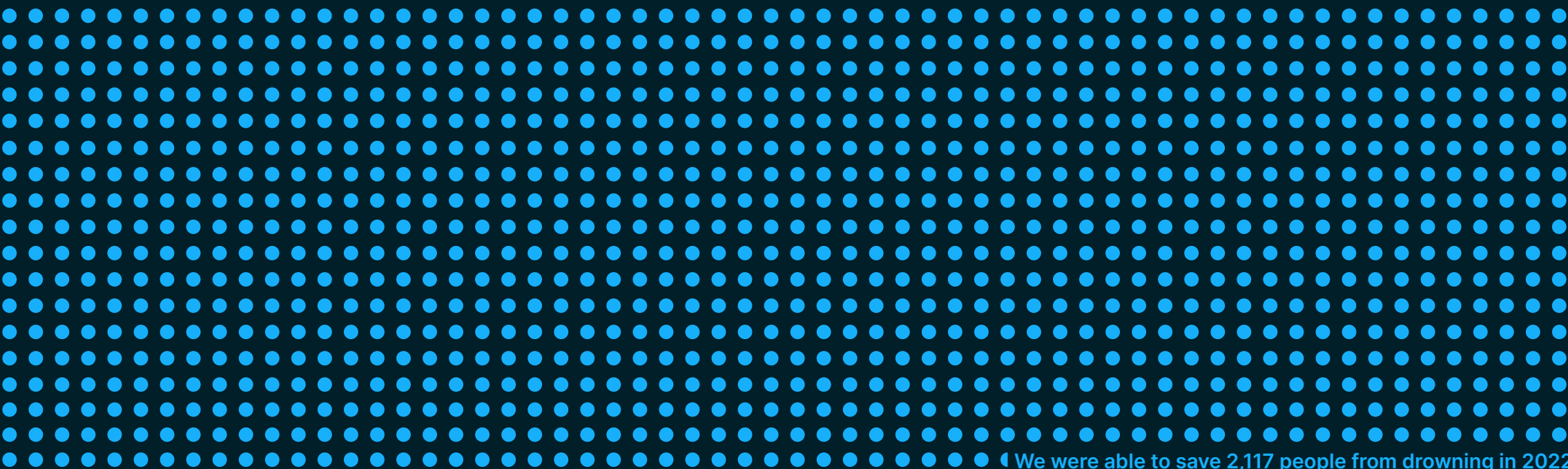
The repressive attempts of European Union member states to block and criminalize civilian sea rescue and the unlawful instructions given by the maritime emergency centers have the consequence that merchant ships often do not fulfill their duty to rescue. **Information about emergencies at sea must be passed on without restriction by state actors to merchant ships — with the order to rescue and bring the people ashore at a European port.** Merchant ships that comply with their duty to rescue must be given full operational support by state actors. Nonetheless, **European coastguards must not outsource their duty to rescue people at sea to merchant vessels**, which are usually inadequately trained and equipped for rescuing people in distress at sea.

In 2022, an average of six people drowned in the Mediterranean Sea every day. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) counts a total of at least 2,406 people who died in 2022 while fleeing across the Mediterranean. But these figures are incomplete: Missing are those, whose bodies did not wash up on North African shores. Missing are those, whose deaths were not witnessed. Missing are those, who died in Italian hospitals after arriving. The number of unreported cases is far higher than the officially recorded figures.

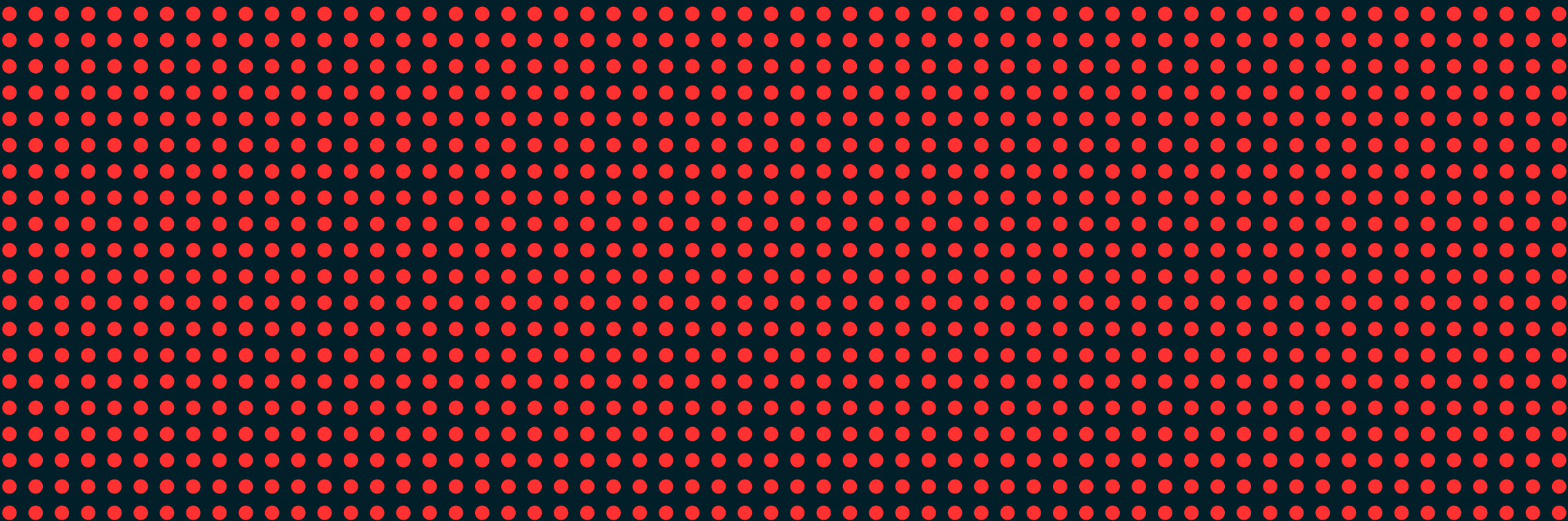
Behind these figures are lives that could have been saved. But even in 2022, civilian sea rescue and our educational work were blocked and criminalized.

Despite the worrying political developments in Italy, together we have been able to save lives and achieve political successes. With our rescue ships *Sea-Watch 3*, *Sea-Watch 4*, and *AURORA*, we were able to save 2,117 people from drowning in eight operations and bring them to safe harbors. Our reconnaissance aircraft flew over 450 hours last year. The crew on board these aircraft was able to spot **134 boats with 5,248 people in distress at sea** and document countless human rights violations.

2022 in Numbers



◀ We were able to save 2,117 people from drowning in 2022 and bring them to safe ports.



● ● ● At least 2,406 people died fleeing across the Mediterranean in 2022.

Operation 1: Sea-Watch 4 February 12 th - 26 th 2022 129 people rescued in 2 rescues Safe port: Porto Empedocle	Operation 2: Sea-Watch 3 March 28 th - April 16 th 2022 211 people rescued in 5 rescues Safe port: Trapani	Operation 3: Sea-Watch 4 April 23 rd - May 17 th 2022 145 people rescued in 2 rescues Safe port: Augusta	Operation 4: Sea-Watch 3 May 24 th - June 11 th 2022 356 people rescued in 6 rescues Safe port: Pozzallo	Operation 5: AURORA May 29 th 2022 85 people rescued in one rescue Safe port: Lampedusa	Operation 6: Sea-Watch 4 June 16 th - 28 th 2022 319 people rescued in 4 rescues Safe port: Porto Empedocle	Operation 7: Sea-Watch 3 July 18 th - 30 th 2022 444 people rescued in 5 rescues Safe port: Taranto	Operation 8: Sea-Watch 3 September 5 th - 18 th 2022 428 people rescued in 10 rescues Safe port: Reggio Calabria
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Eight Years in the Mediterranean Sea — Mission Failed?

By Chris Grodotzki

Towards the end of 2014, Italy suspended its search and rescue program Mare Nostrum. The reason for this (and thus the reason that we founded our association) was the refusal of Germany and other EU countries to contribute to the program. Last year, ironically, it was the German government that announced that it would support civilian sea rescue with a few million euros. Meanwhile, the new Italian government hinders our work with decrees that are becoming more and more abstruse. This is an example of how the tides have turned many times in the past eight years. And each change worsened the plight of the people on the boats in the Mediterranean. Therefore, it is a questionable success for us, when we set sail with a new ship, in order to rescue people on the move. Our founding ideals, #SafePassage, and ending the deaths in the Mediterranean seem further away today than ever before.

But an annual report is also a place to be honest and accountable. First and foremost, it is a place to report on

the amount of donations we raised and what we were able to achieve with them. Here, we can luckily report positive things: Of course, donations declined during the war and crisis-ridden year of 2022. Nevertheless, we were not only able to continue the complex rescue operations with our *Sea-Watch 3* and the two search planes *Seabird 1* and *Seabird 2* without restrictions. We were also able to operate with the new, fast *AURORA* lifeboat, buy the *Sea-Watch 5*, and provide our friends from SOS Humanity with a ship and the necessary start-up funding for their operation.

The *Sea-Watch 4*, now called *Humanity 1*, has shown that solidarity does not have to be an empty phrase: In civilian sea rescue we put our values into practice. During its first three operations - after receiving a fresh coat of paint and with a new crew - the ship already rescued 854 people from distress at sea and brought them to a safe European port.

Chris Grodotzki takes photos, writes, and speaks; originally in the climate movement, then as a freelance journalist, and subsequently for Sea-Watch. From 2018 to 2022 he was part of the media team and the association. He currently works on a freelance basis and more artistically on the history of civilian sea rescue.



45,000 and counting

Since 2015, we have been able to save more than 45,000 people on their dangerous journey across the Mediterranean. Every single one of them is a success that should also be accounted for. Some literally had to be pulled out of the water and saved from immediately drowning. A few might have made it on their own, with a lot of luck and good weather, on fiberglass boats, with GPS navigation equipment, and carrying a small supply of water. Most were somewhere huddled together on cheap inflatable boats, without food or nautical knowledge, exhausted and seasick — *at the mercy of the waves*. For the sea knows no mercy.

The sea also knows no malice. It is still politicians, bureaucrats, and the so-called security authorities, who are responsible for at least 2,406 people losing the race against the waves. Over 52,000 were forcefully pulled back to the country from which they had just fled. We found 2,117 people and accompanied them across the sea. In numerical comparison, a vanishing number. However, in human terms, a lot of lives, love, suffering, and laughter: There was, for example, the poet from Homs who, after being rescued by *Sea-Watch 3*, wrote about how even the sea could not extinguish the fire in his heart. There was Hamy, the intensive care nurse from Aleppo, who helped our medical team place IVs when several people collapsed in an ecstasy of joy when it was announced that we had been assigned a safe port. And there was the Libyan harbor master who did not want to be named, because he was ashamed of being on a boat heading north together with his family.

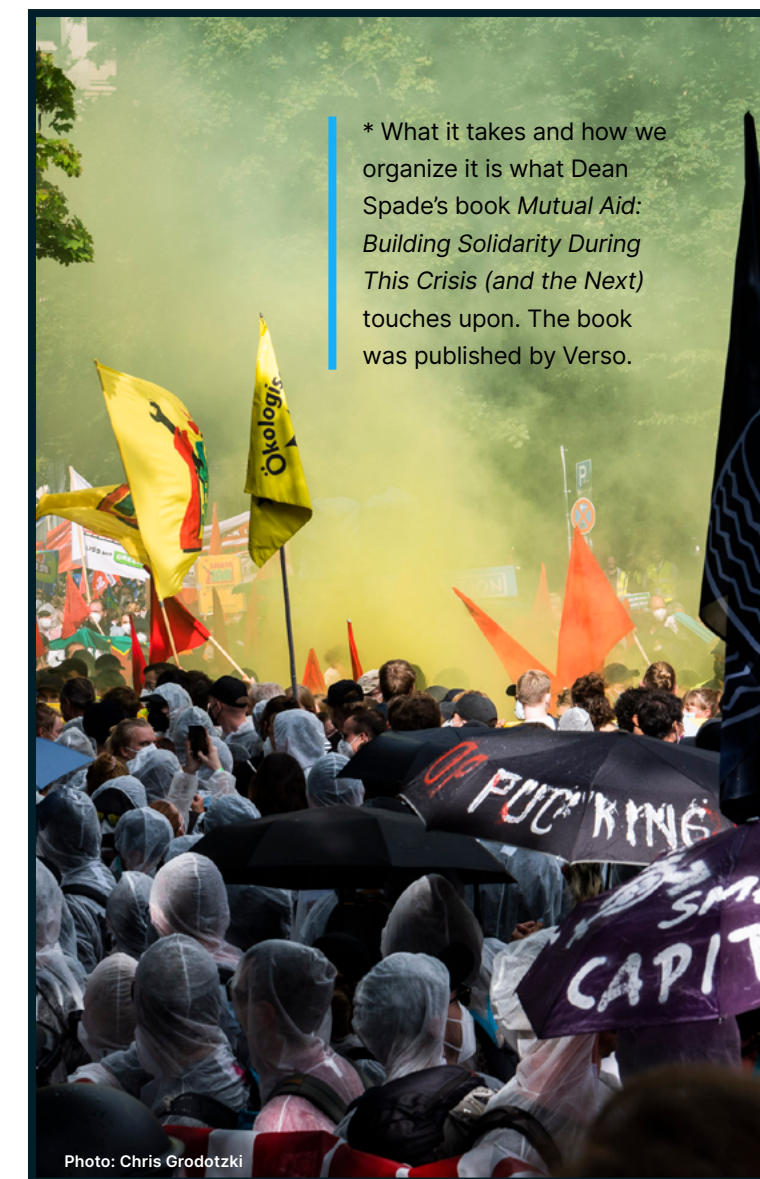
Setting sail for solidarity

Those, who look at the Mediterranean in numbers — in arrival figures, death figures, ships, planes, and migration flows - end up thinking like the bureaucrats of the border regimes. We, too, are always in danger of falling into this trap, of losing ourselves in tables and figures. Years of rescue operations and the withdrawal of state operatives have made better infrastructure and bigger ships essential. These need more professional crews and administration. More employees mean less burnout activism on the one hand and conflicts of interest and contract negotiations on the other. All this must not distract us from what we set out to do: support people on the move and fight the state-capitalist structures, which constantly reproduce misery.

Sea-Watch cannot provide the solution and stop all deaths in the Mediterranean — we have been preaching this since 2015. Sea rescue is a band-aid that sometimes obscures the gaping wound. If we want to overcome the never-ending crisis - and survive the future catastrophes that are already rolling towards us - then we need a society that is committed to solidarity. Such social change will not be brought about by small groups of paid or volunteer “rescuers”. It comes about when many people recognize their common interest in living (or surviving) in dignity, and accordingly act collectively.

We will continue to save people from drowning. Every single one of them is worth the effort, which is made possible by your donations. But to transform Fortress Europe into a place of solidarity and human community, it takes more than one ships, two planes, and a few dozen humanitarian workers.* **It needs all of us.**

* What it takes and how we organize it is what Dean Spade's book *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)* touches upon. The book was published by Verso.





Operation Sea-Watch 3

March & April 2022

In 2022, we continued to witness how the lack of government rescue capacities costs lives. After a difficult rescue operation, several medical evacuations, and a long wait to be assigned a safe port, we brought 211 rescued people ashore in Trapani, Italy on April 16th. Phil and Ruby were part of the crew of this difficult operation and told us about their experiences.



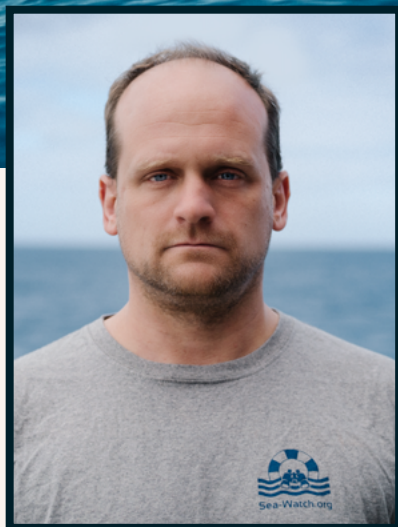
On the Water

Since the end of October 2022, the Italian right-wing populist Giorgia Meloni, head of the post-fascist party Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) has been Prime Minister of Italy. Together with the Forza Italia around ex-premier Silvio Berlusconi († 12.06.2023) and the Lega around ex-interior minister Matteo Salvini, a post-fascist alliance of Mussolini nostalgics and politicians who have dedicated themselves to the fight against migration is ruling Italy. With new laws, this government is trying to keep civilian sea rescue ships away from their area of operation. These are absurd moves, which will make our search and rescue operations even more risky in the future. They are already complex and challenging enough without the new laws.

Photo: Michél Kekulé

On the Water

Photo: Michél Kekulé



Why was this Sea-Watch 3 operation so challenging?

Phil – We really experienced every conceivable bad scenario that could possibly exist. In the beginning, we cruised the area for several days and couldn't find a single boat. Then, on April 9th, our crew received a Mayday call about a sinking boat. When our speedboats arrived, a ship of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard was already on the scene. The situation was chaotic and out of control. The rubber dinghy had sunk, and dozens of people were struggling to survive in the water. The survivors on board our ship later told us that they had seen their relatives drown. Our crew also had to testify that some people died.

When you think back, what was the most difficult moment of the operation for you?

Ruby – The night we found the sunken boat, a young woman came to the hospital and told me that her brother had drowned next to her. That was the worst moment for me because I knew there was nothing I could do or say to ease the pain.

I was worried about how we could deal with the psychological trauma of the people on board, and whether they would get the psychological help they needed. It is unfair that this woman of my age is facing so many threats in life, while I - born into privilege - live in safety and prosperity.

Phil – I can still remember the dramatic rescue on April 9th, when our crew already had their hands full, looking after the severely traumatized people on board. The situation was already tense when we received information about another boat in distress. A short time later, we initiated another rescue. The rapid succession of rescue operations was quite overwhelming.



Photo: Michél Kekulé

Photo: Michél Kekulé

The assignment of a safe port took six days, despite having 211 guests on board and the situation being difficult. What thoughts accompanied you during this time?

Ruby – My thoughts have been the same for years: Why do people actively hinder saving people? The politicians in Italy and the EU are people with children, families, dreams, and fears. Why do they prevent other people from having a better life? That is cold-hearted, racist, inhumane, lacks solidarity, and leaves me stunned.

Phil – Ships would never have to wait so long for a safe harbor if those rescued on board were not people fleeing from African countries or the Middle East. We have seen these obvious injustices countless times. It makes me angry every time our guests are subjected to this harassment.

Ruby is an anesthesiologist. Since 2015, she has been on eight rescue operations and is responsible for the medical treatment of rescued persons on board.

25 Additional Knots for the Civil Fleet

Since May 2022 our new lifeboat *AURORA* has been in service. She is a British 14-meter Trent-class lifeboat that has been specially converted for use in the Mediterranean. She can reach a top speed of 25 knots and is one of the fastest vessels in the civilian search and rescue fleet in the Central Mediterranean.

Speed can make the difference between life and death because every maritime emergency is a race against time. Thanks to her speed, the *AURORA* can intervene quickly and thus challenges the deadly status quo, which leaves people at the European borders to drown.

On the night of May 30th, during her first operation, the crew of six rescued 85 people from distress at sea together with the sailing ship *NADIR*. When the crew of the *NADIR* arrived to stabilize the situation, water was already entering the rubber dinghy. Shortly afterward, the rescue ship *AURORA* arrived and began to evacuate the people. All the people were safely brought on board and given basic care. Although the European authorities were aware of the maritime emergency, a Frontex drone merely circled over the boat. They did not initiate a rescue.

Photo: Giacomo Zorzi





In the Air

Since 2017, Sea-Watch has also been operating in the air. With our reconnaissance aircraft *Seabird 1* and *Seabird 2*, we cover a large sea area, documenting human rights violations and reporting emergencies to rescue coordination centers and ships within range. Since 2017, in over 600 reconnaissance operations, we have detected hundreds of boats in distress and assisted in numerous rescues.

The year 2022 has once again shown how indispensable our civilian aerial reconnaissance work is. Despite months of being blocked from flying, our crew could carry out 83 operations.



Photo: David Lohmüller

In the Air



Corpses floating in the water, burning escape boats, wild chases, violent repatriations. Or just a floating piece of clothing indicating an unwitnessed disaster. In over five years of civilian aerial reconnaissance, our crew has seen and documented horrific things. These are images that should deprive Europe of sleep. Instead of providing rescue capacities, however, the EU passes on its legal responsibilities and conceals and supports the cruel practices of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

The EU is violently carrying out migration defense in the Central Mediterranean and thus breaking international law on a daily basis. This is only possible by closely cooperating with the EU border protection agency Frontex. Without their air surveillance, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard would not be able to monitor its own coastline.

Photo: Black Forest Collective

In 2022, some of our operations were lifesaving, while others were essential for documenting illegal actions by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, as the following cases show.

“Leave Libyan territory, or we will fire missiles at you!”

On the morning of October 25th, we received information about a boat in distress with about 70 people on board. When our aircrew spotted the boat in the afternoon, it was already in the Maltese search and rescue zone. Less than an hour later, we witnessed that the so-called Libyan Coastguard's patrol boat *Fezzan* was on course to the boat in distress. We then documented the illegal repatriation from the Maltese territorial sea.

When all the people were on board the so-called Libyan Coast Guard's ship, our crew received a message on the radio: "Leave Libyan territory!" After reminding them that we were in Maltese territory, the threat became clearer: **"Leave Libyan territory, otherwise we will fire missiles at you!"** After this violent threat, their ship sailed away towards Libya.



Why "the so-called Libyan Coast Guard"?

The so-called Libyan Coast Guard is partly made up of criminal and illegitimate groups, that are not acting on behalf of a functioning state structure based on respect for human rights. The different actors that make up the so-called Libyan Coast Guard act on behalf of the EU and its member states on the one hand and in their own interests on the other hand. They receive funding and equipment from the EU and its member states. 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, who we are trying to protect and save.

The human trafficking business

On October 8th, the crew of our reconnaissance aircraft *Seabird* spotted a light blue boat with about 50 people on board in the Central Mediterranean. The number and markings on the hull of the boat were clearly visible. From the air, we observed how one of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard's patrol boats intercepted the fleeing people. Illegal repatriation took place right in front of our eyes - all the people were taken back to Libya. Instead of setting fire to the boat - a common practice - the so-called Libyan Coast Guard tested the boat extensively and took it for a spin. On October 11th, three days later, our *Seabird* crew discovered the same boat again. The number on the boat's hull made it easy to identify, however, this time, there were different people on board. We have to assume that they took the empty boat back to Libya so that it could be reused.

This was not the first time that we have found evidence of cooperation with smugglers. Pullbacks by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard are now also taking place in European SAR zones. Despite systematic human rights violations, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard is Europe's partner of choice. With interceptions and illegal pullbacks, it systematically prevents people from fleeing to Europe. We demand an immediate stop to this cooperation!

Photo: David Lohmüller



Our partner **Humanitarian Pilots Initiative (HPI)** is a Swiss initiative of dedicated pilots, who use their skills for humanitarian purposes. The combination of our crew's know-how and their expertise in aviation has significantly increased the efficiency of civil air reconnaissance since 2017.

“Every day that we can fly is a reason for me to rejoice!”

During our operations, Emily is responsible for the coordination from the ground, as well as for the follow-up of all sighted cases.



Emily is the civilian air reconnaissance operations manager for Sea-Watch. Over the past year, she and her team faced harassment from the Libyan aviation authorities. For more than ten months, our planes could not enter the so-called Libyan Search and Rescue (SAR) zone.

What prevented you from flying into the so-called Libyan SAR zone?

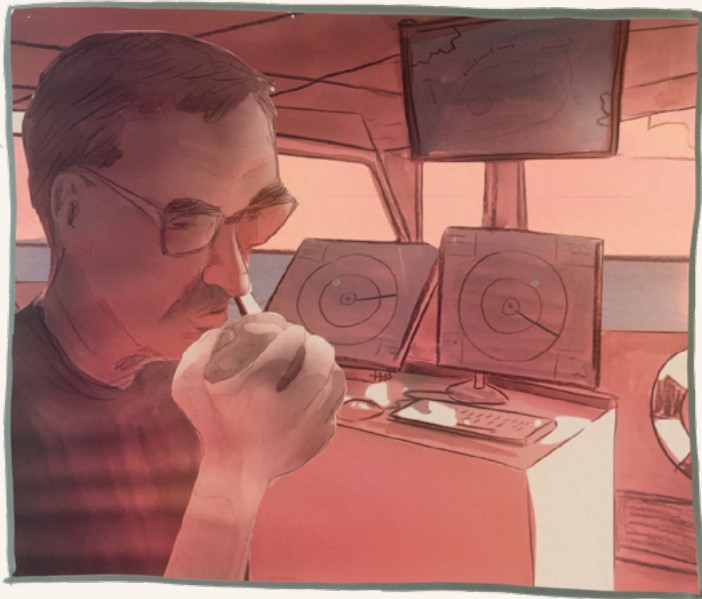
Our operations over the so-called Libyan SAR zone came to an abrupt halt on March 5th. We were already in Libyan airspace when we received a message from a Libyan air traffic controller that we needed permission to enter. Despite our mistrust - after all, the so-called Libyan SAR zone is international airspace and far away from Libyan territory - we could not take any risks. People who show solidarity with refugees and help them are taken to court all over Europe. Hence, we had to be cautious, as the potential legal consequences for our crew and pilots were completely unclear. We tried to shed light on this very complex matter in various ways. The official process took a very long time. It was several months later that we finally received confirmation from the relevant authorities that we did not need such a permit.

How did the first operation after the blockade go?

On January 24th, 2023, we were able to enter the so-called Libyan SAR zone again for the first time without any problems. A heavy weight was lifted off our shoulders! We were able to sight several boats in distress and assist in rescue operations. I was really relieved. Every day that we can fly is a reason for me to rejoice!

What did the blockade mean for the situation in the Mediterranean?

This blockade was never about a lack of authorization. It was an attempt to stop us from raising awareness. In 2022, more than 2,400 people drowned on the Central Mediterranean route. Over 24,000 people were intercepted by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and taken back to Libya. Because of the ten-month blockade of our aerial reconnaissance work, many of these human rights violations remained unseen, undocumented, and thus without political or criminal consequences.



Pullback

Adrian is a photographer and was a crewmember aboard the Sea-Watch 3, working as a media coordinator. During one rescue operation he witnessed a brutal pullback of refugees, committed by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. Today he tells us about the incident, while similar events continue to take place almost every day on the waters of the central Mediterranean.

We are on the Sea-Watch 3, around us are the deadly expanses of the central Mediterranean. Over 24,000 people have lost their lives in these waters since 2014. There have been no state rescue ships here for years.

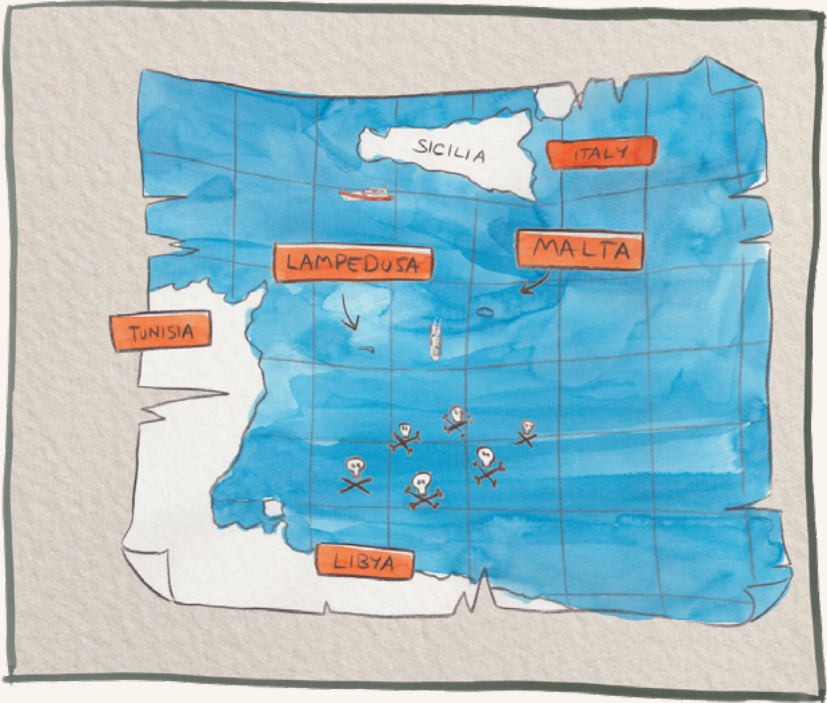
A military drone from the European Border and Coast Guard agency Frontex patrols above the clouds. Equipped with a thermal imaging camera, it regularly watches refugees drown. On this evening, as on others, we recognize its flight track and follow it - because it seems to be circling above a boat in distress.

As we approach, we realize that the so-called Libyan Coast Guard has already been informed. It is also clear that they will reach the boat in distress before us. Our captain reacts immediately:

"Libyan Coast Guard vessel, this is Sea-Watch 3. **The boat you are heading for is in the Maltese search and rescue zone. A repatriation from here to Libya is an international offense!**"

The Libyan ship's response: static on the radio.

We get the speedboats ready immediately. We pack the first aid backpack and a hundred life jackets. We flick on our headlamps and in the next moment we are jetting across the water at 25 knots.



As we near the boat in distress, as we had feared, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard is already there. There is chaos. Several people in the water are struggling against the waves, and we hear panicked screams. We throw life vests into the darkness and pull one person after another out of the water ...

We are able to rescue 33 people. **Ten more people, however, are taken back to Libya that night by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. Illegally abducted by militia financed by EU states including Germany.** Abducted to a country where they are kidnapped on the streets, tortured and raped in camps.





On Land

In order to stop the deaths at Europe's borders, there must be a political response. We see ourselves as political actors, who not only work at sea and in the air but also on land, using activism as well as political and legal instruments in our struggle to radically change policy.

We bring the 33 rescued people back to the mother ship. But the relief of being able to take these people safely on board is overshadowed by the anger and despair which comes at the thought of the people for whom our arrival was too late.

What we saw was not an isolated incident, but the daily reality of the European promise of closure. Over 24,000 refugees have already been forcibly returned to Libya in 2022. Over 24,000 people forced back into a cycle of fear, violence and death.

Adrian's story makes us realize again that human rights, international law and the Refugee Convention are actively disrespected. War is being waged against people in search of safety, and thousands of these people are paying with their lives. This is what we mean when we say - Europe's external borders kill.



Photo: Schwebewerk

Our Advocacy Department is responsible for the strategic and political direction of Sea-Watch. Members of the department lobby at a German, European, and international level. By communicating with decision-makers, civil society organizations, and intergovernmental organizations, we try to influence political processes. Our advocacy work ensures that there are political and legal consequences for the human rights violations that we document at the European external border in the Central Mediterranean.

Frontex

In 2022, at the European level, we focused on a central actor of European segregation: Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. Human Rights Watch and Border Forensics come to the following conclusions in a report from December 2022, which is based on our documentation, among other sources. The repatriations to Libya of those fleeing, which are carried out by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard in violation of international law, are largely made possible by Frontex.¹ Frontex is jointly responsible for the crimes in Libya. Even under the new director Hans Leijtens the situation remains unchanged: Frontex preaches transparency, yet works like a Secret Service. Frontex is legally obliged to disclose its operations - and yet the border protection agency systematically denies access to information.

Without transparency, we cannot hold Frontex accountable. This creates a breeding ground for impunity and abuse. Together with the German organization FragDenStaat (which literally means “ask the state”), we, therefore, challenged Frontex before the European Court (EC).

Due to its systematic involvement in human rights violations, Frontex must suspend its operations in the Central Mediterranean according to Art. 46 of the Frontex Regulation. For us, there is one clear solution: Frontex must be abolished, and the budget must be used to set up a civil sea rescue program.²



sea-watch.org/en/sea-watch-takes-frontex-to-court/ ➔

No crime without criminals

Together with the European Center for Constitutional Human Rights (ECCHR), we filed a criminal complaint with the International Criminal Court against European, Italian, and Maltese decision-makers. The systematic interception of people fleeing in the Central Mediterranean and their subsequent return to Libya constitutes a crime against humanity. We were able to provide the evidence

with the documentation from our aerial reconnaissance airplanes. We thereby demonstrate: The crimes in the Mediterranean do not happen anonymously - they are planned and carried out at the desks of people in various government agencies - by people with names, titles, responsibilities, and powers.



sea-watch.org/en/no-crime-without-criminals-2/ ➔

Ship Safety Ordinance - breaking with the coalition agreement

At the German level, the Ministry of Transportation is currently planning to obstruct smaller ships in the civilian fleet by threatening to make certificates compulsory - a clear and deliberate breach of the coalition agreement, which states that "civilian rescue at sea must not be hindered." ³ For the majority of civilian sea rescue ships under the German flag, this regulation will mean that they will

have to limit or end their life-saving work. In the departmental vote, which will take place at the beginning of the summer of 2023, it must be made clear: The federal government cannot align itself with the neo-fascist Italian government, that prioritizes sealing off their country over human rights and obstructs search and rescue operations, by means of a new regulation at the German federal level.



"We will neither stop publicizing the inhumane practices at the European external borders nor holding European decision-makers accountable for them!"

– Sophie Scheytt, member of the association and former Head of Advocacy at Sea-Watch.

¹ www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/14/frontex-delivers-cruelty-skies.

² By 2027, the EU will have spent 5.6 billion euros on Frontex's work without spending a single euro on saving lives. Research by Sea-Watch and FragDenStaat has shown that even a small part of this year's operational Frontex budget would be enough to implement a comprehensive civilian search and rescue program. More information can be found at sea-watch.org/en/defundfrontex-for-a-state-funded-civil-sea-rescue-program/

³ Coalition agreement, page 1: https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/974430/1990812/1f42_2c60505b6a88f8f3b3b5b8720bd4/2021-12-10-koav2021-data.pdf?download=1

On Land Legal Work

With a network of lawyers, who volunteer with us as an act of solidarity, we also accept lengthy legal disputes, in order to counteract right-wing agitation or absurd blockades. Our legal team offers a broad range of expertise in various fields to support our projects on land, in the air, or on the ground.

A court case against the right-wing political party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)

On multiple occasions, hatred and agitation from right-wing groups flared up against civilians participating in search and rescue operations. This was the case in the spring of 2020, when a racist post, embellished with a photo of Sea-Watch as well as our logo, was posted on a Facebook page of the Thuringia branch of the AfD.

Using hate speech, the AfD attempted to present a distorted and false image of civilian sea rescue. Individual

Sea-Watch activists were verbally attacked, and our work was discredited. We are convinced that such smear campaigns must have consequences. Therefore, we took legal action against the post. We were able to obtain an injunction against the AfD and file a lawsuit. The post had to be taken off the online platforms. The Berlin Regional Court finally rejected the objections of the AfD Thuringia in a court order on April 12th, 2022 and thereby confirmed the interim injunction. The AfD had to pay a fine of €1,000.

Decision of the European Court of Justice

For months, the *Sea-Watch 3* and the *Sea-Watch 4* were detained due to arbitrary port state controls. In the summer of 2020, we filed a lawsuit against these detentions. In its ruling at the beginning of August 2022, the European Court of Justice found that rescuing those in distress at sea is a duty and that in the future, port state controls shall not be used arbitrarily against NGOs to detain ships and prevent them from carrying out their work.

In concrete terms, this means that Italy must not demand imaginary certifications that do not exist under the German flag. Nor is the number of people rescued a reason for detention. Port state controls may continue to take place,

but only on a scheduled basis or with a valid reason. The ruling provides legal certainty for NGOs and is a victory for us. Nevertheless, Italy continues to attempt to obstruct search and rescue operations and uses safety concerns for the crew and the rescued people aboard as an argument to support this.

For eight years, we have been criminalized and attacked by European states. For eight years, we have proven in innumerable court cases that we are acting in accordance with the law. We will continue to take legal action because no human life should be put in danger by arbitrary, politically motivated blockade strategies.

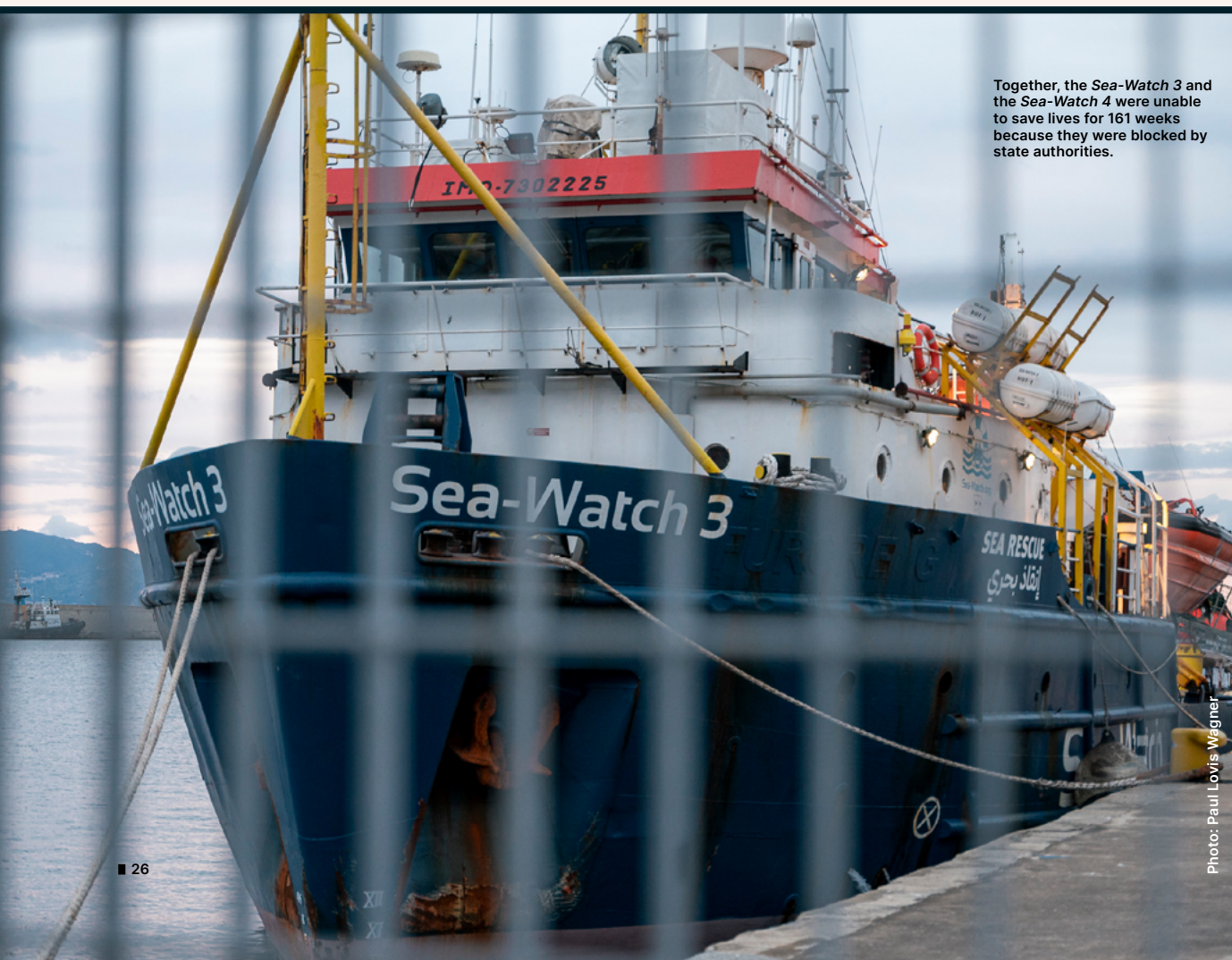
On Land Events and Campaigns

An essential part of our work is to draw attention to the situation in the Central Mediterranean. In 2022, this was a challenge. With various event formats, creative projects, and major fundraising campaigns, we were, nevertheless, able to reach many people. The support, the commitment, and also the willingness to donate is the reason why we can continue to work for people on the move.

No One is Coming Except the Waves

A scenic reading of stories about peoples' experiences when fleeing across the Central Mediterranean: Why are government and commercial ships in close proximity to emergencies at sea and yet fail to rescue those in distress? Why are people left alone?

After one and a half years of writing, conception, and planning, the reading premiered in June 2022. It is based on radio transmissions and logbook entries of civilian organizations in contact with state authorities, enriched with music and poetry by people who have processed their own experiences of migration and racism through art. The performance is scheduled to take place in further German cities throughout 2023.



Podcast “Grenzerfahrung”

What is the importance of civilian sea rescue for our society? What is our motivation, and what is behind the work of Sea-Watch? In the podcast “Grenzerfahrung” (border experience), our media team introduces 12 co-hosts and experts, who cover the following topics, which are all in some way related to Sea-Watch’s work, in six episodes: political public relations, anger, gender issues, fleeing experiences, racism, and the criminalization of civilian sea rescue. Sometimes the podcasts are serious, at other times they integrate humor. The podcast is only available in German and can be found on popular Podcast streaming platforms.



Run for Rescue – From Berlin to Hamburg

More than 350 runners participated in the Berlin and Hamburg half-marathons as part of the Sea-Watch running teams. Individually fundraising, each runner collected donations while simultaneously raising awareness about the situation in the Central Mediterranean. A total of €165,000 were collected – we were overwhelmed by the success of the campaign.



Photo: Sophie Tichonenko



erTrinkwasser

The *erTrinkwasser* (lit. drowning water) Christmas campaign was created in cooperation with Gud.berlin. It is a painful parody of a system that pays more attention to usability and glossy products than to human lives. The fictitious product, *erTrinkwasser* - made in Europe, draws attention to the inhumane situation in the Central Mediterranean. The campaign could be seen on more than 3,500 posters in various cities, among others in Berlin and Hamburg. In this way, we were able to increase our visibility in big cities enormously in December.

Christening of the Sea-Watch 5 – From Hamburg to the Mediterranean Sea

With a new rescue ship - the *Sea-Watch 5* - we are opening a new chapter regarding solidarity with people on the move. From November 2nd to 7th, the *Sea-Watch 5* anchored at the Überseebrücke, a landmark covered bridge in the port of Hamburg. For four days, we opened the doors of the ship and welcomed almost 4,000 guests. We offered events and guided tours of the ship for activists, visitors, artists, the ship's godparents, and our alliance partners, amongst others.

On Thursday, the organizations Women in Exile, Refugees in Libya, and Lampedusa in Hamburg duly christened the new ship and welcomed her

into the civilian fleet. We wish the *Sea-Watch 5* a hand's breadth of water under her keel during all of her operations, in solidarity with all people on the move, from Hamburg to the Mediterranean!

These were days full of experiences, which showed how beautiful Hamburg can be, even in November. Thousands of visitors arrived on the weekend, including numerous activists and supporters. With a packed program - the scenic reading and the premiere of the short film *Seabird* - the days flew by. The highlights on Saturday were the concerts by Pöbel MC, Malonda, Savvy, and Rüveyda. Together, we sent

a clear anti-fascist message from the ship to the city.

We were overwhelmed by the number of visitors, coming to express their encouragement and support. We were able to provide insights into our crew's work, and - most importantly - introduce the ship to the public in a way never done before. We will continue to fight for the right to life, but this is only possible if we do it together with all of you!

Income and Expenditure Overview 2022

In 2022, we collected **€ 11,249,547.18**. The total expenditure was **€ 13,328,931.18**. As a non-profit organization, we are committed to keep our administrative costs as low as possible. In 2022, 83,53% of our expenses went to projects in accordance with our statutes. They were used for the operation of our rescue ships *Sea-Watch 3*, *Sea-Watch 4* and *AURORA*, for our civilian aerial reconnaissance operations, for project support, media and political public relations work and as well as for the support of rescue operations of other sea rescue organizations. 16,47% of our expenditure went into the non-operational area — including organizational coordination, fundraising, IT and finance.

For every euro spent on donation management and advertising we have taken in € 11,30 in donations.

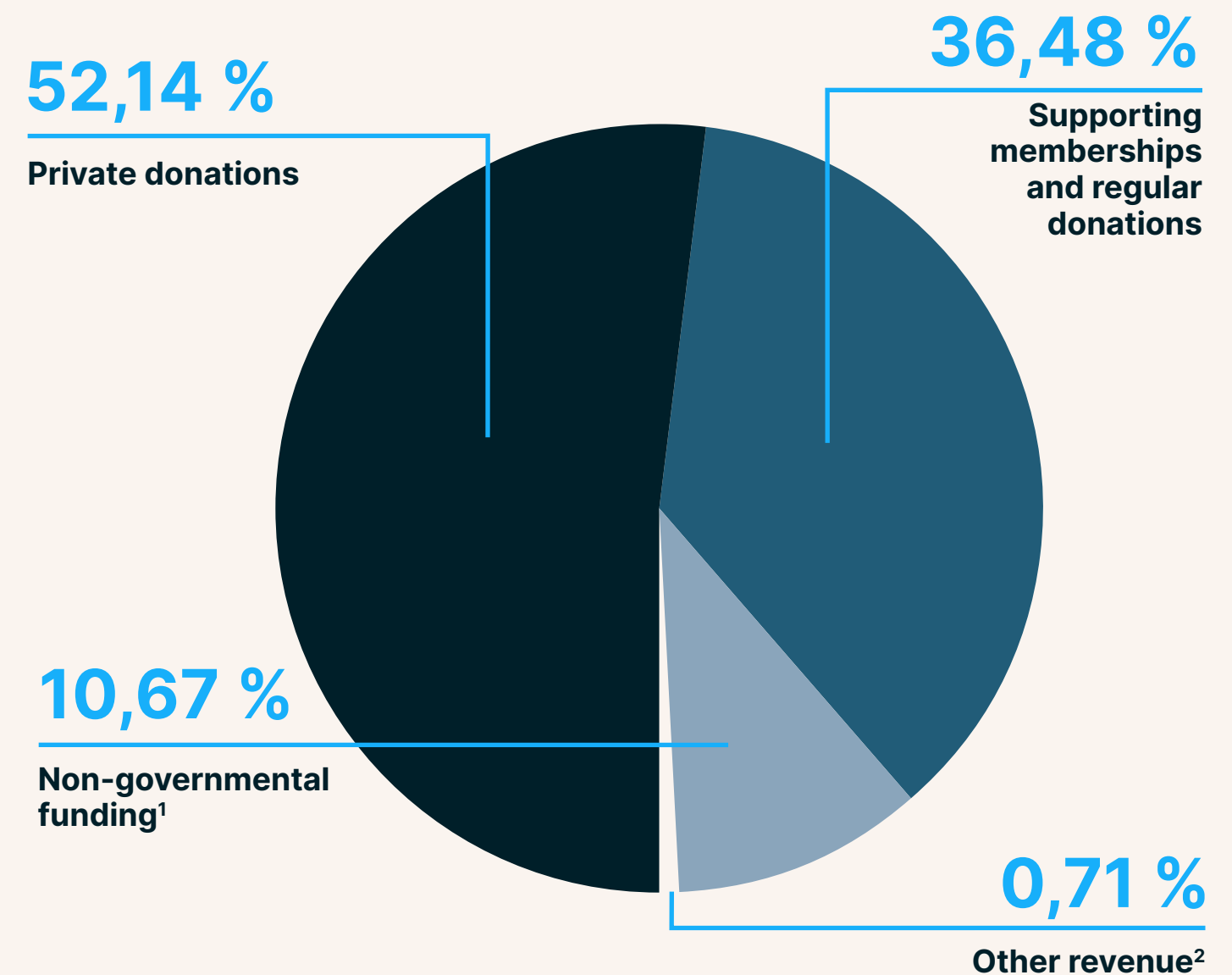
Revenue Overview 2022

€ 11,249,547.18

Total revenue

€ 105,343.12

Profit from sale of merchandise



¹ Non-governmental funding:

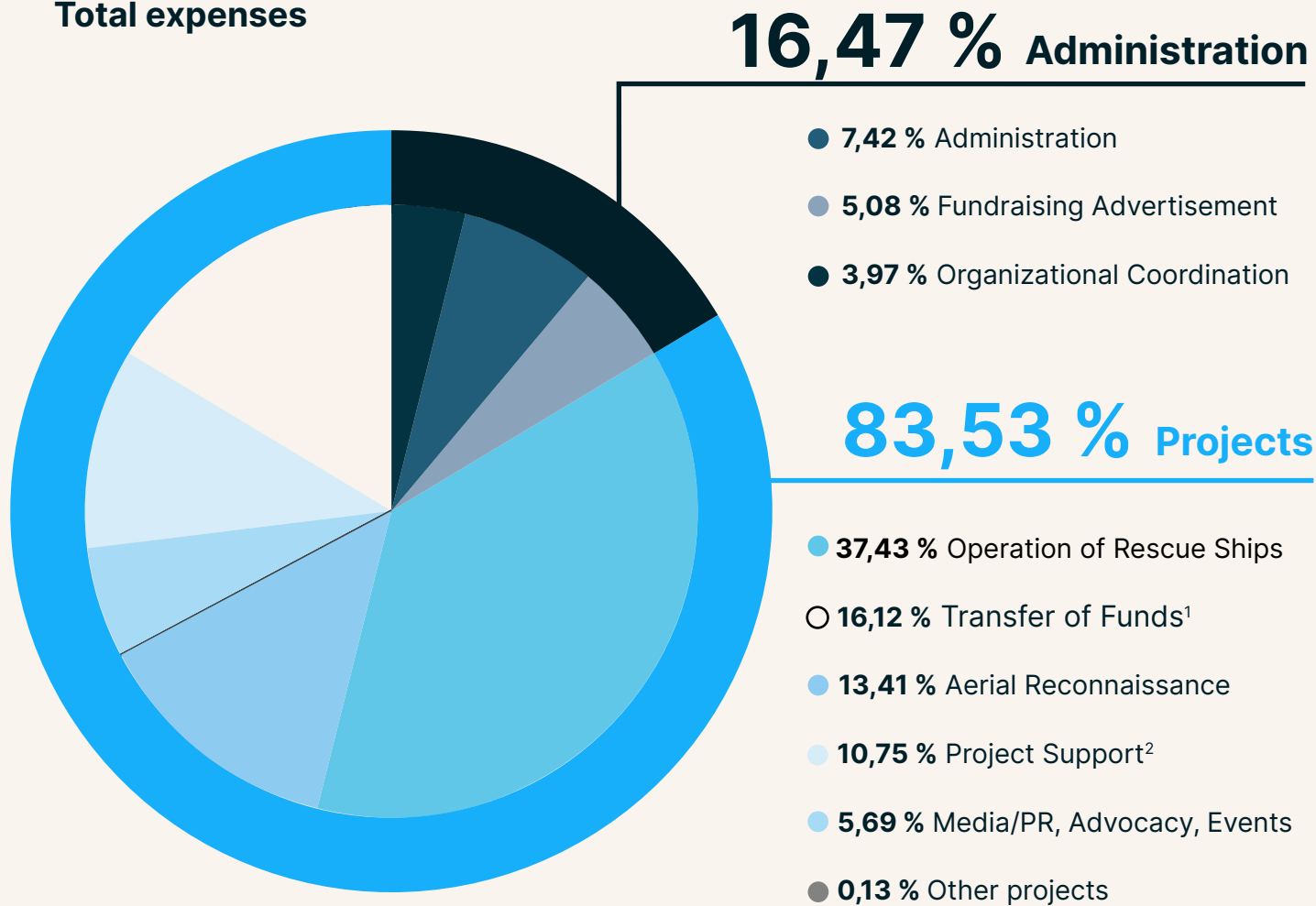
Postcode Lotterie Deutschland (1.000.000 €),
Gemeinsam Retten e.V. (200.000 €)

² Other revenue:

Revenue from monetary sanctions from criminal proceedings and reimbursements by health insurance funds from AAG

Expenses Overview 2022

€ 13,328,931.18
Total expenses



¹ Transfer of Funds:

While Europe continues to let people drown in the central Mediterranean and actively prevents civilian rescuers from rescuing people, we respond with boundless solidarity. We are pleased that we were able to support other civilian rescue organizations in 2022.

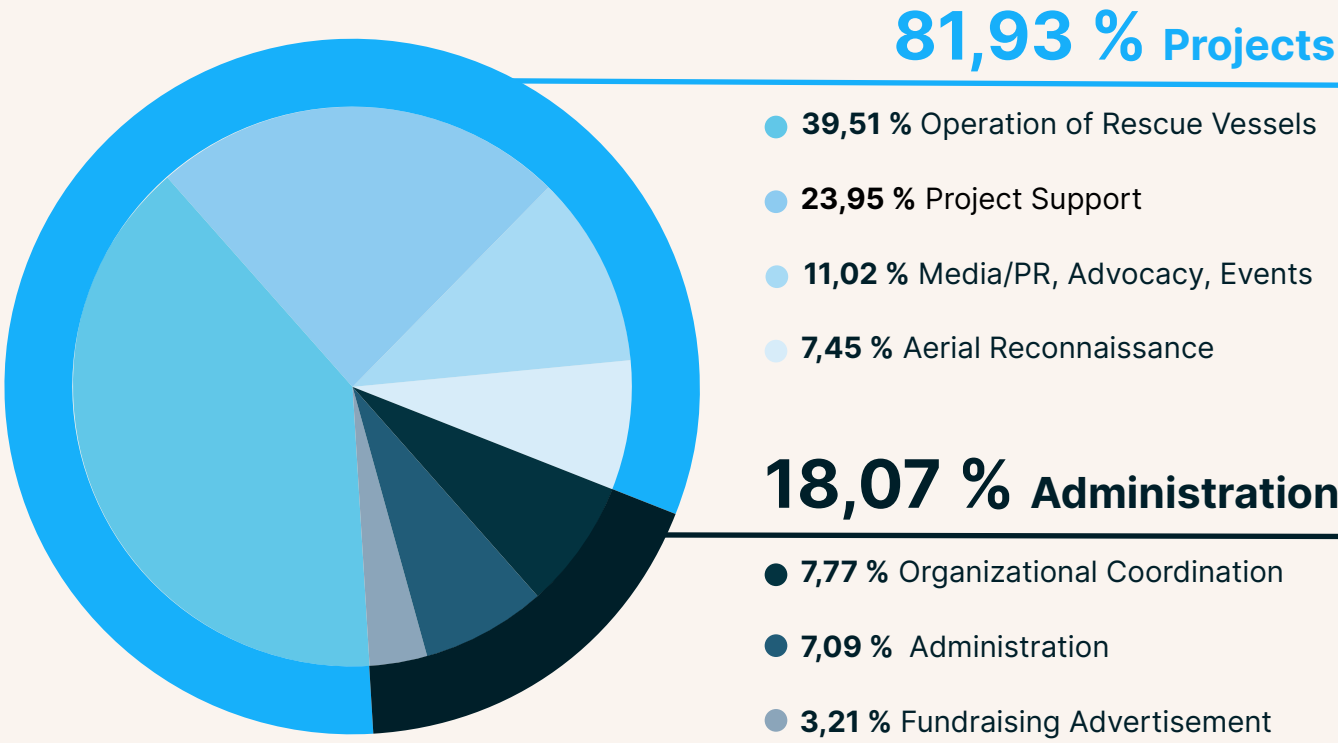
² Project Support:

Different structures on land support and accompany our rescue operations on the water and in the air, and are thus essential for their implementation. These include the legal team, the supervision team, ship management & logistics, the crewing team, operational coordination and our Italian team.

Information about the organizations and projects we have supported can be found on page 39.

Cost Breakdown Personnel Costs

€ 5,265,351.21
Personnel Costs



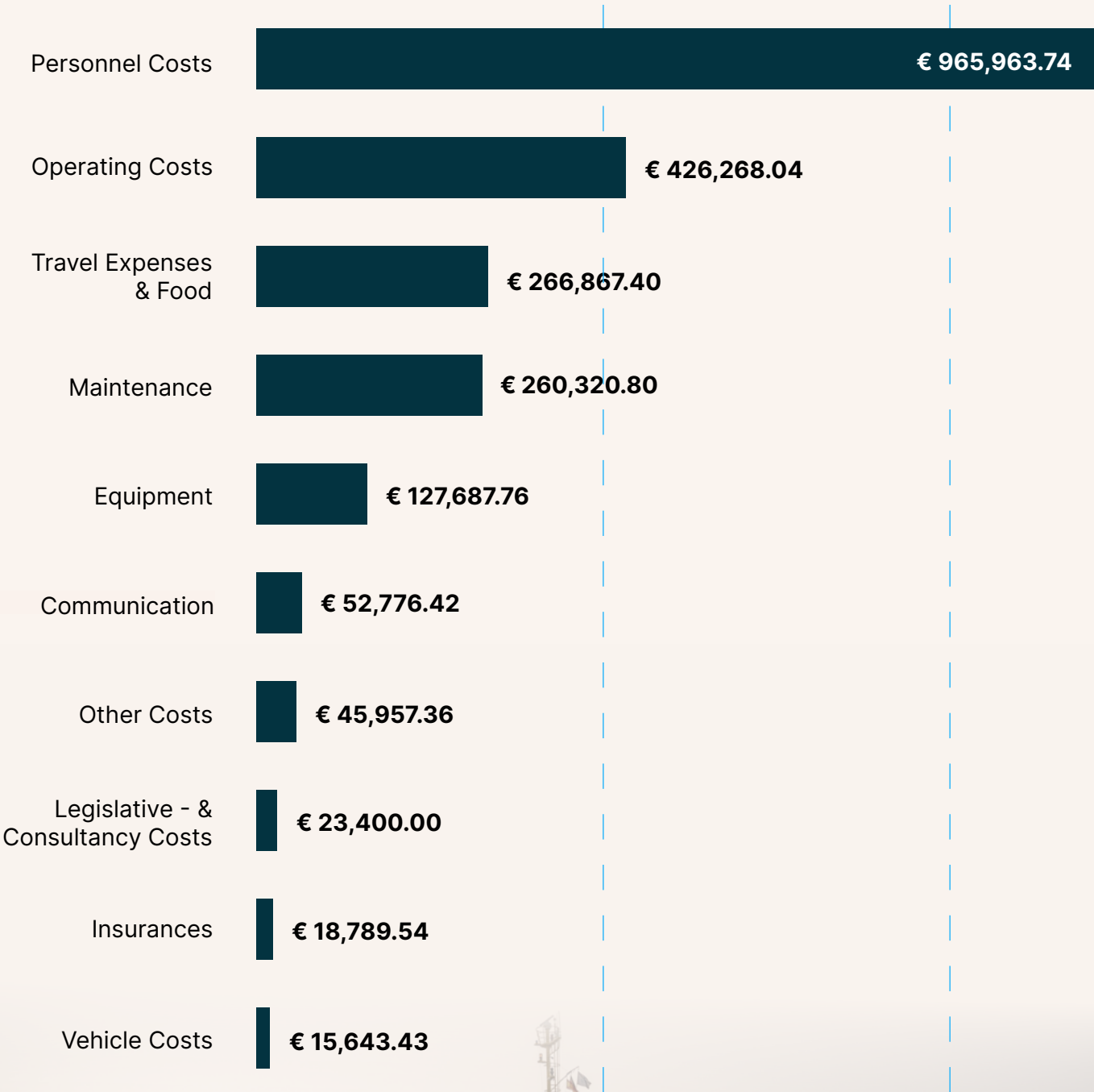
Why such high personnel costs on our ships?

Some positions on our ships (e.g. officers, electricians and engineers) have to be filled all year round- even in port. This is prescribed by the German flag. This continuity can only be guaranteed by paid, permanent position.

Additionally, it is not always possible to find volunteer activists for some positions. On the *Sea-Watch 3* and *Sea-Watch 4*, there were 42 permanent employees on average in 2022.



Cost Breakdown Sea-Watch 3



January 1st – December 31st 2022
Total expenses: € 2,203,674.49



Photo: Tim Wagner

Cost Breakdown Sea-Watch 4



January 1st – December 31st 2022
Total expenses: € 1,987,201.44

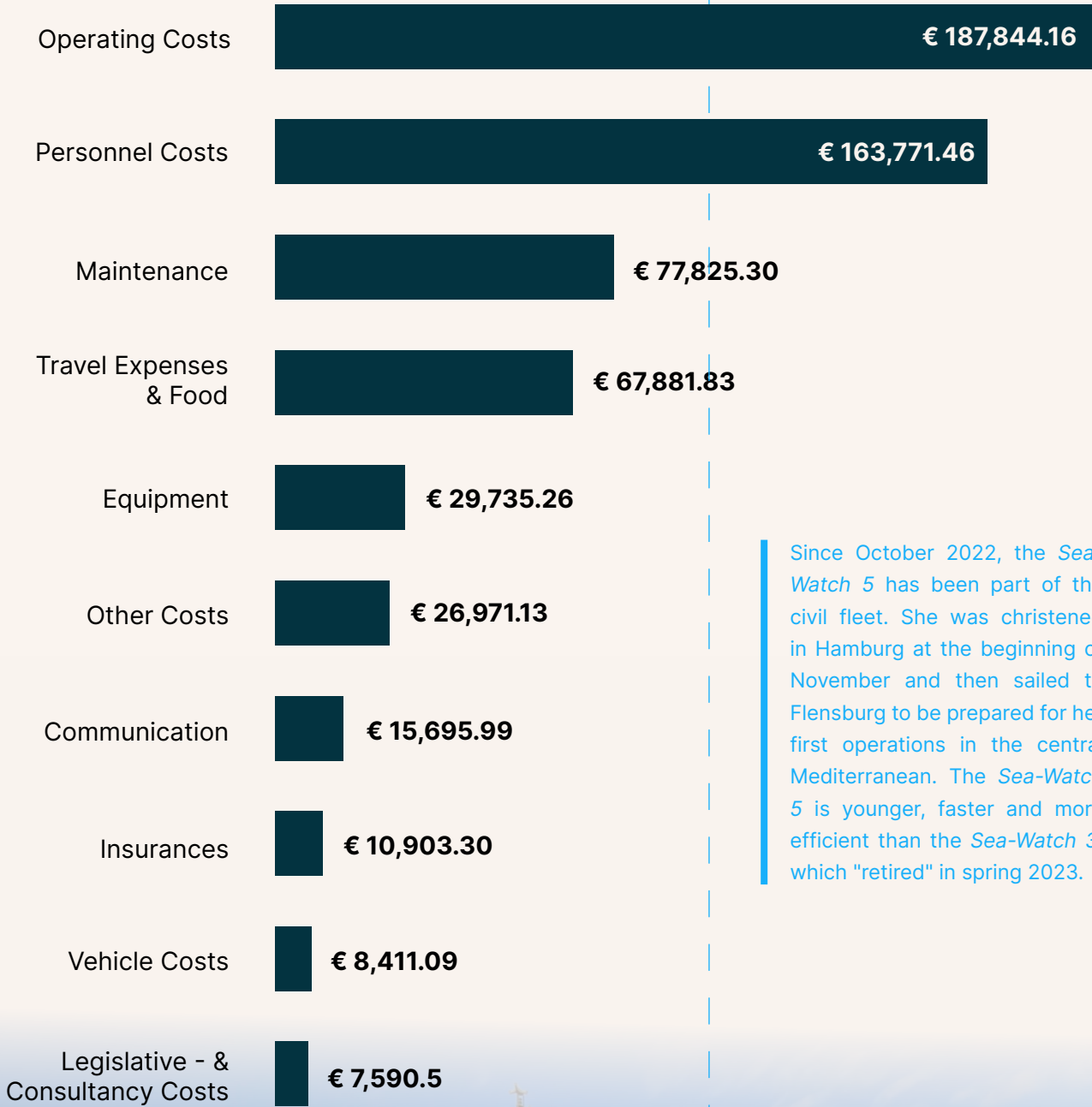


Photo: Fabian Melber

Cost Breakdown

Sea-Watch 5

Purchase Price of the Sea-Watch 5: € 4,460,000
The purchase of the ship was made possible by a loan and a crowd invest campaign by GLS Bank.



Since October 2022, the Sea-Watch 5 has been part of the civil fleet. She was christened in Hamburg at the beginning of November and then sailed to Flensburg to be prepared for her first operations in the central Mediterranean. The Sea-Watch 5 is younger, faster and more efficient than the Sea-Watch 3, which "retired" in spring 2023.

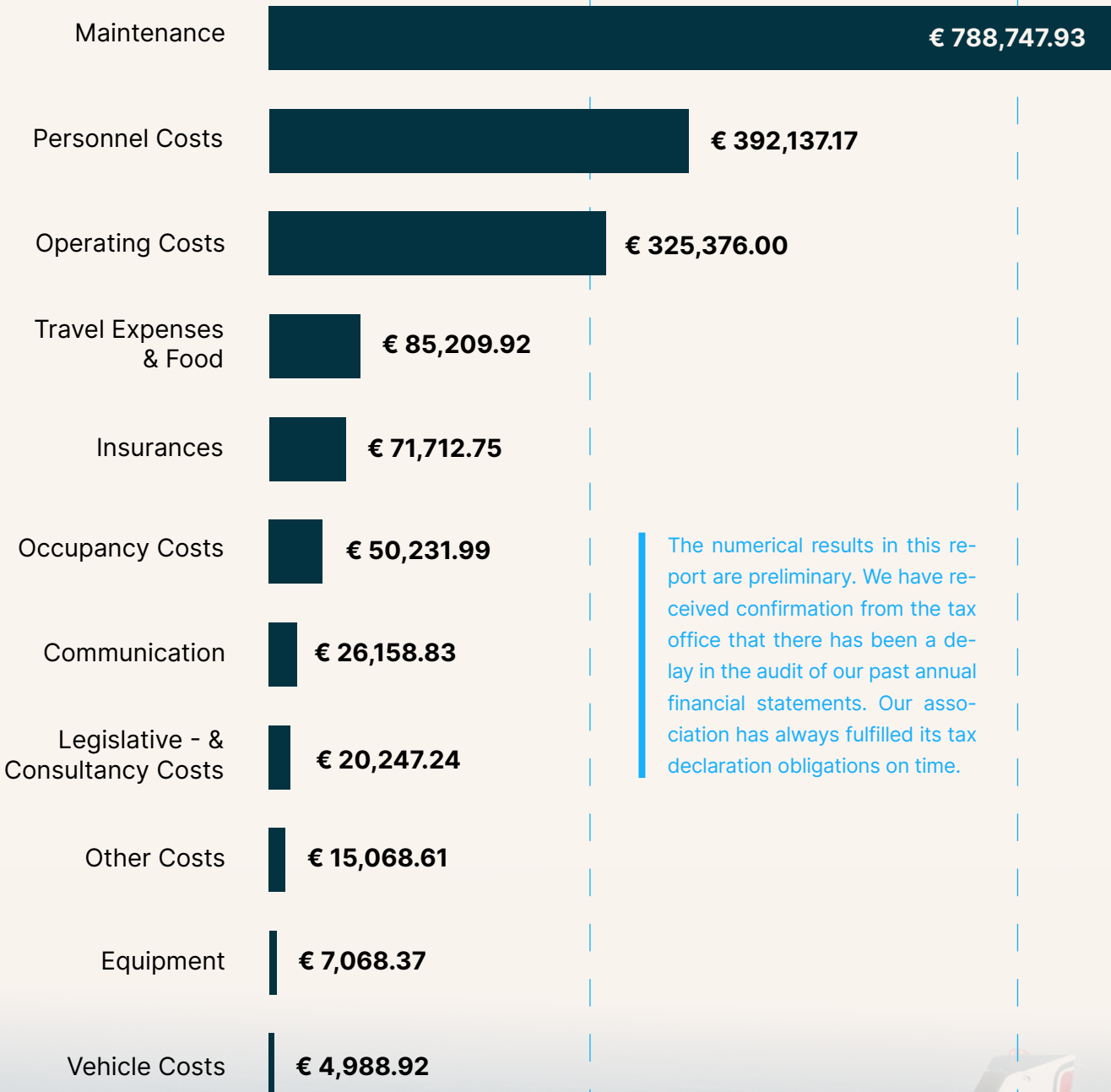
January 1st – December 31st 2022
Total expenses: € 596,630.02



Photo: Fabian Melber

Cost Breakdown

Airborne & Reconnaissance Aircraft



The numerical results in this report are preliminary. We have received confirmation from the tax office that there has been a delay in the audit of our past annual financial statements. Our association has always fulfilled its tax declaration obligations on time.

January 1st – December 31st 2022
Total expenses: € 1,786,947.73



Photo: Black Forest Collective

Practical Solidarity in Times of Crisis

In 2015, it all started with a sailing cutter. In 2022, we operate two large ships, one small ship, and two reconnaissance aircraft. The walls of the European Union are getting higher, and the strategies to block civilian sea rescue are more and more sophisticated and abstruse. Increasing criminalization and repression are forcing us to constantly expand and develop new strategies for action. More and more human and financial resources are needed for normal operational deployment in the Central Mediterranean.

In addition, the crisis year 2022 has severely shaken the financial situation of all civilian sea rescue organizations. Our donation income slumped by 6,8% compared to the previous year. We are grateful and happy for the continued solidarity of our supporting members and donors, who stand by us even in difficult times. Thanks to them, we were able to buy the *Sea-Watch 5*. In addition, the new rescue ship *AURORA* and our second reconnaissance aircraft *Seabird 2* had their first operations at the beginning of 2022.

Numerous committed donors have enabled us to take decisive steps in our operational strategy in 2022. However, this financial support was also particularly important because it enabled us to support and promote the work of other civilian search and rescue organizations.

Why we pass on funds to other organizations

Only a strong civil alliance can defy the lack of rescue capacities of EU states at the European external borders. That is why we are part of the civil fleet and support other organizations with money and know-how. Together, we build a strong foundation for civilian sea rescue and protect ourselves from criminalization attempts. We also maximize rescue capacities in the Central Mediterranean - because we need as many ships out there as possible. It may sound unoriginal, but in the case of civilian search and rescue, it is true: **Only together we are strong.**

- With the handover of the alliance ship *Sea-Watch 4* and a financial injection of € 1,009,000 we have succeeded in getting the newly formed search and rescue organization [SOS Humanity](#) up and running. By the end of the year, they had rescued 854 people.

- We supported the [Safe Passage Foundation](#) with a grant of € 500,000. The foundation supports organizations and projects that are committed to legal escape routes and safe havens and oppose the criminalization of flight and migration.

- We supported the Greek human rights organization [Equal Rights Beyond Borders](#) with € 45,000. It supports people on the move who are victims of criminalization allegations with legal means.

In addition to funding for other SAR organizations, this expenditure item also includes the passing on of sums of money to cooperation partners with whom we implement joint projects:

- Search and Rescue Relief (€ 228,000) and Eos Shipping gUG (€ 344,000): Together with the British organization SARRelief, we initiated the *AURORA* project. SARRelief provided support in particular in the technical implementation of the project, while the *AURORA* was managed and operated by Eos. More information can be found here: sea-watch.org/mission/aurora



THANK YOU

We cannot say it often enough!

What Are Other Ways to Support Us?

Start a fundraising campaign



sea-watch.org/en/donate/fundraise/ ➔

Publicly take a stand for human rights with clothes from our Sea-Watch shop:



shop.sea-watch.org/?lang=eng ➔

Receive resources or organize an event: contact us at spenden@sea-watch.org!



We say thank you - after an eventful year in 2022, which would not have been possible without your support.

Photo: Stella Meyer



We would like to thank each and every one of you for doing your part in the Sea-Watch project. Whether as a donor, a supporting member, an activist, or an initiative - without you, our work would not be possible. Thank you for your donations, your volunteer work, your time and energy, your encouragement, and being loud! 2022 was not an easy year - but with your help, we were able to face the challenges and achieve great milestones.

A special thank you also goes out to our partners at Unite4Rescue, to the Deutsche Postcode Lotterie for their support, and to the GLS Bank for their help in purchasing *Sea-Watch 5*.

If you, too, would like to become a supporting member and stand up with us against the deadly policy of letting people die, you will find further information here:

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



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Why don't we list 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 you for your understanding!

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: DE63 4306 0967 1239 7690 03

BIC: GENODEM1GLS • GLS Gemeinschaftsbank

Further possibilities to donate:



sea-watch.org/en/donate/ ➔



Photo: Paul Lovis Wagner



Take a public stand for human rights!



Show your colors for civilian sea
rescue with clothes from our
Sea-Watch support shop:

shop.sea-watch.org/?lang=eng ➔



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

Donation account

IBAN: DE63 4306 0967 1239 7690 03

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sea-watch.org/en/

