

1. Overview of boats in distress and empty boats spotted

Libyan Search and Rescue (SAR) zone

- 233 persons, on board 5 boats in distress, were rescued by 5 NGO vessels³ and disembarked in Italy
- The outcomes for around 205 persons, on board 3 boats in distress, remain unknown

Maltese Search and Rescue (SAR) zone

- 225 persons, on board 8 boats, were rescued by 4 NGO vessels⁴ and disembarked in Italy
- 532 persons, on board 7 boats in distress, were rescued by the Italian authorities or arrived independently to Lampedusa, Italy
- Around 40 persons, on board 1 boat in distress, were possibly rescued by the *Armed Forces of Malta* and disembarked in Malta
- The outcomes for 313 persons, on board 8 boats in distress, remain unknown

In October 2023, we must assume that the European Border and Coast Guard Agency *Frontex* was involved in the narratives for at least 468 persons, on board 5 boats sighted by *Seabird 2*. Of these, 1 boat sighted, carrying 63 persons, was rescued by the NGO vessel *Geo Barents*. 2 boats, with around 295 persons, were rescued by the Italian authorities or arrived independently to Italy. The outcomes for 2 boats in distress, 110 persons, remain unknown.

In October 2023, we sighted 49 empty boats. The outcomes for these boats remain unknown.

³ The persons in distress were rescued by the vessel *Louise Michel* (operated by a group of activists), the vessel *Aurora* (*Sea-Watch*), the vessel *Geo Barents* (*Médecins Sans Frontières*), the vessel *Mare Jonio* (*Mediterranea - Saving Humans*) and the vessel *Ocean Viking* (*SOS MEDITERRANEE*).

⁴ The persons in distress were rescued by the vessel *Life Support* (operated by the NGO *EMERGENCY*), the vessel *Aita Mari* (*Salvamento Marítimo Humanitario*), the vessel *Humanity 1* (*SOS Humanity*) and by the vessel *Ocean Viking* (*SOS MEDITERRANEE*).

2. Details and outcomes regarding selected boats in distress and empty boats

01.10., distress cases B and C, respectively around 40 and around 50 persons: **Maltese authorities rely on private vessels instead of launching a rescue operation, delaying a rescue operation for 2 days.**

On October 1st, the civilian hotline *Alarm Phone* was called by persons in distress (distress case B) and informed the authorities and NGOs. Based upon open sources, it is possible that an aircraft belonging to the Italian military authorities flew over the positions of these persons during the afternoon. Later, *Seabird 2's* crew were on scene with the persons in distress, where their boat was adrift in the eastern sector of the Maltese SAR zone. *Seabird 2's* crew sent out a mayday relay¹ over the radio. The merchant vessel *Atlantic Jade*, flying the Liberian flag, was in the vicinity but did not answer this message. After receiving information from *Seabird 2's* crew, the merchant vessel *Tanggung Palung*, flying the flag of Panama, then altered its course to the persons in distress. An unidentified source instructed the *Tanggung Palung* over the radio to coordinate with the *Maltese Rescue Coordination Centre* (RCC). The merchant vessel then reported to *Seabird 2* having been instructed by RCC Malta to “keep standby (...) until further instructions”. In the meantime, *Seabird 2's* crew discovered another boat in distress (distress case C) in the same area. *Sea-Watch's* ground crew unsuccessfully called the Maltese authorities regarding this boat - the ground crew was told that no officer was available, where the operator then hung up. An aircraft belonging to the *Armed Forces of Malta* arrived to the scene as *Seabird 2* was about to leave. *Seabird 2's* crew sighted distress case B again on October 2nd. A different merchant vessel, the *Traiguen*, flying the Liberian flag, was standing by at the scene as per RCC Malta instructions, but also informed *Seabird 2's* crews that the Maltese authorities had “advised (them) to not take any advice” from the aircraft. The merchant vessel *Darya Mira*, flying the flag of Hong Kong, was also informed about the situation by *Seabird 2's* crew, but reported being instructed by the Maltese authorities to “move away” from the distress case (B) and stand by. On that day, the ground crew twice tried to call the competent authorities of European member states - the Maltese authorities informed that no duty officers were available, whereas the Italian authorities referred to Malta and hung up immediately. In the evening, the *Darya Mira* informed having being “released” from SAR operations and that the RCC Malta would “handle the situation”. The persons aboard the boat in

⁵ A “mayday relay” is an emergency procedure that provides information about a boat in distress via maritime or aerial radio, requesting any asset in the vicinity to assist.



distress case B were probably rescued by the *Armed Forces of Malta* and disembarked on October 3rd in Malta, while the persons in distress case C were probably rescued by the Italian authorities.

It is the duty of a rescue coordination centre to coordinate the rescue of persons in distress in their SAR zone and ensure their disembarkation in a place of safety. Malta must cease its cynical behaviour and engage in rescue operations without delay, instead of ordering merchant vessels to standby, endangering the lives of persons in distress. The negligence and irresponsible transference of responsibilities between the Italian and Maltese authorities must stop!

⁶ See: x.com/seawatch_intl/status/1684904913543864321

⁷ More information on the unit and its acts: aljazeera.com/features/longform/2023/8/11/eastern-libya-militia-operates-illegal-pull-backs-in-mediterranean; amnesty.org/en/documents/mde19/6282/2022/en/; x.com/seawatch_intl/status/1689912151715037184

20.10., **The *Tareq Bin Zeyad* vessel, linked to Haftar's dangerous militia of the same name, possibly intercepts persons in distress in the Maltese (!) SAR zone and pulls them back to Libya.**

On October 19th, the civilian hotline *Alarm Phone* was called by persons in distress and immediately informed authorities. On October 20th, *Seabird 2's* crew looked for these persons but was unable to find them. *Seabird 2's* air and ground crews were however able to exchange with a merchant vessel, the *Nippon Princess*, flying the flag of Marshall Islands, which confirmed that the persons had been intercepted by the *Tareq Bin Zeyad* vessel, in the Maltese (!) SAR zone.

In 2023, at the time of the editorial deadline, around 588 persons on board 3 boats sighted by *Sea-Watch* were returned to Libya from the Maltese (!) SAR zone, involving the *Tareq Bin Zeyad* vessel. In one case, we also strongly assumed that *Frontex* was involved.⁶ The *Tareq Bin Zeyad* brigade is a militia linked to Haftar's son and is well known for committing crimes under international law.⁷

We demand that the Maltese authorities and any other European actors coordinate rescue operations and ensure related disembarkations in a place of safety, in compliance with international law. Libya is not a place of safety and the *Tareq Bin Zeyad* militia not a partner with which to coordinate search and rescue operations!

26.10., distress case AF, 18 persons: **Again civil society fills the gap left by the authorities of European member states and ensures a rescue compliant with international law.**

On October 25th in the late evening, the civilian hotline *Alarm phone* was called by persons in distress and informed the authorities. *Sea-bird 2's* crew sighted the persons in the Maltese SAR zone on October 26th in the morning. The merchant vessel *Pan Mutiara*, flying the flag of the Marshall Islands, was on scene and had been ordered by the Maltese RCC to “wait”. The shipmaster himself did not have any further information regarding the possible launch of a rescue operation. In the meantime, the NGO vessel *Ocean Viking* was heading towards the position of the persons in distress. In the end, due to the lack of deployment of rescue assets, the *Ocean Viking* had to fill the gap and rescue the 18 persons, relieving the merchant vessel from over 7 hours of being left alone at sea by the authorities of European member states.

NGOs save lives because states have deserted the central Mediterranean sea. Authorities of European member states must stop relying on merchant vessels and cease attempting to hinder NGO vessels at all costs - we urge the Maltese and Italian authorities to finally comply with the law and engage in search and rescue operations.