



Sea-Watch.org

Project Report

2023

Sea Rescue at Europe's Borders



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Photo: Sea-Watch

#SafePassage

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



Sea-Watch

Who We Are and What We Do

Sea-Watch was initiated at the end of 2014 by a group of volunteers no longer able to witness the humanitarian catastrophe unfold in the Mediterranean whilst standing idly by. Yearly, thousands of people drown while fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea. The cause of death: no safe escape routes, sealed by a European Union (EU) increasingly leaving people to their fate outside its gates. For more than nine years, we have been operating on the world's deadliest border, rescuing people where government entities fail. Concurrently, we are demanding and pushing for rescue operations from the responsible European institutions, and are publicly advocating for legal escape routes and freedom of movement.

In addition to acute civil sea rescue; we document human rights violations, and publicize the humanitarian situation in the Central Mediterranean. Our civilian aerial reconnaissance program is indispensable in this pursuit; we have a fleet of aircraft devoted to this activity. This enables us to influence the sociopolitical discourse, and to ensure that demands for radical change are heard. We also promote cooperation and exchange with other sea rescue organizations, and strengthen solidarity networks.

Our vision is of a world in which borders, racism, injustice and inequality are overcome and all people can live and move freely and safely in a self-determined way. For us, solidarity without borders means supporting all people in their struggles for this vision. Sea-Watch is politically and religiously independent and is financed by donations. For us, one thing is clear: as long as people are drowning at Europe's external borders, we will continue to act.



Photo: Maria Giulia Trombini

For the right to leave.
For the right to arrive.
For the right to stay.
For the right to freedom of movement.

Our Demands

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 to the EU, its institutions, and member states. If implemented, they would bring an end to the institutionalized dereliction of duty that is abandoning people to die.

Safe and legal escape routes into the EU	A civilian, non-military, state-funded, and coordinated European sea rescue program
Hold EU institutions, EU member states, and EU agencies accountable for the violence at the (externalized) EU external borders	The dissolution of the border protection agency Frontex
An immediate end to all policies, funding, and programs of the EU and its member states that aim to control and prevent migration (including cooperation with the so-called Libyan and Tunisian coastguards)	The decriminalization of flight and of sea rescue
	The dissolution of all camps at the (externalized) EU external borders
	Freedom of movement for all, the right to leave, arrive and stay

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** - this is the only way to put a lasting end to the deaths in the Mediterranean.

We call for a non-military, comprehensive **sea rescue program funded and coordinated by the EU**. Member States must unconditionally fulfill their duty to rescue people in distress at sea.

After arriving at a safe port in Europe, all persons must be allowed to **decide for themselves in which country they want to stay**.

The European border and coast guard agency Frontex is an integral part of an EU policy that focuses on isolation and migration prevention. Frontex enables the pullback practice of the so-called Libyan coastguard through aerial surveillance and mostly exclusive information transfer; this is a practice that intercepts people at sea and forces them back to Libya. We consider Frontex to be unreformable and call for the dissolution of the agency. Those responsible for the daily human rights violations must be held accountable. Frontex's mandate is incompatible with international maritime and human rights conventions.

The EU and its member states support violent militias and state structures in Libya and Tunisia that are involved in human rights violations and the repression of civil society. **We call for an end to all programs and agreements with these actors, as they aim to control and prevent migration.**

No one should be criminalized for fleeing their own country. The deterrent tactics of European states to arbitrarily criminalize people seeking protection for allegedly "aiding and abetting illegal entry" must stop. Flight is not a crime - we demand freedom for the *El Hiblu 3* and all other people on the move who are arrested for political reasons!

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 try to fill this gap. European states must therefore no longer hinder civilian sea rescue, be it through politically motivated and restrictive laws in Italy or through the so-called "Repatriation Improvement Act" in Germany.

The inhumane camps at Europe's (externalized) external borders, which serve as a de-

terrent, must be closed. All people must be admitted on the basis of their individual wishes. They must be granted a **safe and legal onward journey**.

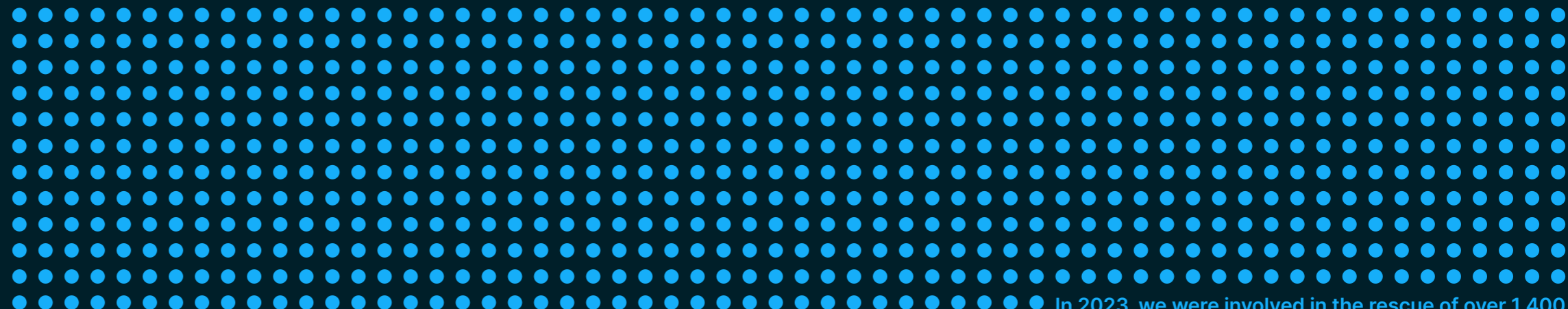
The attempts of EU member states to block and criminalize civilian sea rescue are repressive, and the instructions given by the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centers often have the unlawful consequence of merchant vessels ignoring their legal duty to rescue. **State actors are required to pass on information about emergencies at sea to merchant vessels - without restriction. They are also required to provide either; an order to rescue and bring ashore to a European port, or to stabilize the boats in distress until European coast guards are on site, depending on operational possibilities.** Merchant vessels that comply with their duty to rescue must be given full operational support by state actors. **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.

2023 in Numbers

2023 was the deadliest year on the Mediterranean Sea since 2017. According to the International Organization for Migration, at least 3,100 people died while fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea.

Despite these worrying developments, we were able to save lives and record political successes together. With our rescue ships *AURORA* and *Sea-Watch 5*, we were involved in the rescue of over 1,400 people in eight operations. Our Seabird reconnaissance aircraft flew over 965 hours last year and was deployed 161 times. The crew discovered 311 boats with over 16,000 people in distress at sea, and documented countless human rights violations.

At the same time, 14 ships from the civilian fleet were detained for a total of 280 days due to an Italian decree that prevents the rescue of people in distress at sea. Due to this intentional disruption of civilian rescue ships in the Central Mediterranean, we have made the operational decision to head for distant Italian ports, meaning our civilian fleet traveled an additional 150,500 kilometers in 2023.¹ This robs us of financial resources and time, actively threatening the well-being of the guests on board and of the lives of people in flight. In addition, the EU's cooperation with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard has been further expanded; over 17,000 people were intercepted in 2023 and unlawfully pulled back to Libya.²



In 2023, we were involved in the rescue of over 1,400 people.



At least 3,100 people died fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea in 2023.

¹ sos-humanity.org/en/press/analysis-of-distant-ports

² x.com/IOM_Libya/status/1795111325439250729

Operation 1: AURORA 31.05.–18.06.2023 39 people rescued in 1 rescue Safe port: Trapani	Operation 2: AURORA 04.–31.07.2023 527 people rescued in 14 rescues Safe port: Trapani	Operation 3: AURORA 04.–27.08.2023 134 people rescued in 3 rescues Safe ports: Pozzallo and Lampedusa	Operation 4: AURORA 01.–27.09.2023 124 people rescued in 3 rescues Safe ports: Catania and Pozzallo	Operation 5: AURORA 25.09.–18.10.2023 197 people rescued in 3 rescues Safe ports: Trapani and Pozzallo	Operation 6: AURORA 15.10.–10.11.2023 113 people rescued in 2 rescues Safe port: Pozzallo	Operation 7: AURORA 10.11.–09.12.2023 154 people rescued in 3 rescues Safe port: Lampedusa	Operation 8: Sea-Watch 5 07.12.2023–04.01.2024 119 people rescued in 2 rescues Safe port: Marina di Carrara
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Lurching to the Right Time to Turn the Tide!

“Remigration”, “citizenship withdrawal”, a “model state” in North Africa to which millions of people could be “moved” - in January 2024, Correctiv’s research roused German civil society from the slumber of political disenchantment. Then one bang after another. Politicians are attacked on the streets. The German chic chants “foreigners out” loudly and unconcernedly on Sylt. What is going on in Germany right now?

Anyone who tried to support people on the move in 2023 were hardly surprised - nor were people with a migration background living in Germany. When you talk to them, they tell you about the xenophobic climate that has been intensifying for years. They talk about institutionalized and everyday racism that they encounter when visiting the authorities, or simply going shopping.

Both Correctiv’s research and the video from Sylt have drawn our attention to only the tip of the iceberg. But there is an even more worrying development lurking beneath the surface; “We must finally deport people on a

large scale.” At first glance, this sounds like *Alternative für Deutschland*, but is actually a quote from our Social Democratic Chancellor Olaf Scholz from October 2023. The sad truth is that mass deportation fantasies have become mainstream; questioning human rights or the right to asylum has become socially acceptable.

Looking back on the past year, migration policy developments cannot be described as anything but a multilateral attack on people on the move and on those who show solidarity with them. Whether the reform of the Common European Asylum System, the so-called “Return Improvement Act”, or the Italian Piantedosi Decree; the EU and its member states have expanded their wall of inhumanity at the EU’s external borders in 2023. The death toll in the Mediterranean, which in 2023 was at its highest level since 2017, speaks for itself.

For us in civilian sea rescue, 2023 meant having to head for ports thousands of kilometers away, arbitrary decrees from authorities with cryptic and impossible re-



Photo: Tessa Kraan

"Whether in Hanau, Halle or in the Mediterranean - now is the time to come together, network, raise our voices and take action. Against the shift to the right and for safe and legal escape routes. Against racism and for tolerance and openness."

Vera, Board member



"Sea rescue is not a crime!"
Photo: Adrian Pourviseh

quirements. Nevertheless, we were present. We have documented countless human rights violations from the air to evidence the actions of the murderous EU border regime. We were able to send our ship *Sea-Watch 5* - together with our *AURORA* - on its first operation, further strengthening our civil fleet.

We have been present in the Central Mediterranean for over nine years. Under arbitrarily changing conditions - usually without any justification or sense - we are defending ourselves against EU states that want to see us fail. It sounds dramatic. But it is. What a success that we are still saving people from drowning, despite all of the politically motivated harassment! The fact that at the beginning of 2024 millions of people in Germany have taken to the streets against the right-wing shift. What a glimmer of hope that new alliances are currently emerging in many places!

Right-wing ideas are not harmless drivel, but potentially life-threatening. That is why it is no longer enough to fight against the further spread of right-wing ideas. Instead, we need to reverse the trend: questioning human rights and wantonly letting fellow human beings die must become taboos again! **We must reclaim what belongs to us: all people are born free and with equal dignity and equal rights.** Article 1 of human rights must apply regardless of skin color and origin - in Germany, in the rest of the EU and at Europe's external borders!

In 2024 we will continue to fight for the vision that has kept us coming back to the Mediterranean since 2015. Why have we not lost heart after all the hard years and all the setbacks? Because we are supported by a broad civil society alliance: our donors and supporting members, the hundreds of volunteers, our employees, our partners in civilian sea rescue and beyond - together they are Sea-Watch and the vision behind this project. Without them, everything we have achieved in 2023 would not have been possible. Whether in Hanau, Halle or in the Mediterranean - now is the time to come together, network, raise our voices and take action. **Against the shift to the right and for safe and legal escape routes. Against racism and for tolerance and openness.**

Thank you for standing by our side!

Vera



On the Water

Since 2015, Sea-Watch has been part of the civilian fleet that is rescuing people from drowning. The civilian fleet attempts to fill a deadly gap knowingly created by European states. To this day, nothing has changed in our motivation: no human being fleeing across the Mediterranean in search of a better life should die in the process!

In 2023, more people died in the Mediterranean than at any time since 2017: over 3,100 people lost their lives. We must assume that the number of unreported cases is far higher. All of these people could have been saved if European countries had fulfilled their duty to rescue people at sea and implemented safe and legal escape routes. But such figures no longer seem to shock. In the same year, German and Italian politicians passed laws to criminalize and hinder civilian sea rescue. ➔

On the Water



Photo: Oliver Kulikowski

From Flensburg to the Mediterranean

Welding, drilling, painting, expanding, swearing, and celebrating took place in Flensburg in 2023. Thanks to a crew of 300 volunteers and shipyard workers, the *Sea-Watch 5* was built: a new rescue ship to strengthen the civilian fleet on the world's deadliest border. The time in the shipyard was full of challenges. Countless logistical decisions had to be made, technical challenges mastered and duties such as fire drills completed. At the same time, we always kept our main goal in mind: to offer the rescued people the greatest level of safety and comfort possible. The war in Ukraine had an impact on our conversion work, and we had to adapt our schedule to the supply bottlenecks for spare parts. When we were able to set sail for the Mediterranean in October 2023, there was great relief among everyone involved.

During the first operation in December, 119 people were rescued from distress at sea in two rescues and brought safely ashore 1,150 kilometers away in Marina di Carrara. Dan and Isa were part of the crew and talk here about the first rescues of the *Sea-Watch 5*.

It is December 24, shortly before nightfall. The crew was informed by the Alarm Phone organization about a boat in distress. What were your next steps?

Dan – While the lifeboat crew drove to the first boat in distress, I prepared for the arrival of the rescued people: I have to make sure that all people get on board safely via the ladder, the deck area is clear and the accommodation structure on the rear deck

is stable. While our guest care team takes care of the people on board, my checklist starts all over again: Is the launching of the lifeboats working? Is there a general order on deck? And so on. Because as long as we are in the search and rescue zone, we have to be ready to rescue.

Isa – As the second rescue lasted until the middle of the night, the first guests were already asleep when we got the last people on board. We provided everyone with what they nee-

ded most at the time: in winter, these are blankets, warm clothing and heating lamps.

Which moment do you remember the most?

Isa – Arriving at the port is often overwhelming for our guests and the crew. There is always a large police presence at the pier. When we arrived, we turned on the music and danced together on board until all the guests were allowed to leave the ship.

I will never forget that moment. It was a powerful feeling to see all those police officers with their serious faces and just dance and say: we will not be intimidated by you!

And how did the ship perform on its first rescue?

Dan – Our plans have paid off and we now have our largest and fastest rescue ship to date in the Central Mediterranean. One noticeable advantage is the number of crew mem-

bers on board: whereas the crew on *Sea-Watch 3* consisted of 22 people, we now have 31. A larger crew also means a better distribution of work, fewer overloads, and fewer people exceeding their own limits.

Isa – We can cook rice for 400 people in one cooking aisle and have a self-service tea station, which is fantastic! Also, the recreation room - a room where women and children can stay - is much bigger than on previous Sea-Watch ships. Of course, the fight for safe and legal escape routes is not over when the people are on board with us, or even when they arrive in Italy, but at least they have made it safely across the Mediterranean Sea!



Dan is responsible for safety on deck and helps to introduce new crew members to life on the ship. Photo: Sandra Singh



Isa ensures that the welfare of our guests is the top priority for their short time on board. Photo: Stella Meyer

Those Who Block Ships Let People Drown

August 18, 2023

On Friday afternoon, the crew of the *AURO-RA* rescued 72 people from distress at sea. At the time, the rescue ship was almost 110 kilometers from the Italian island of Lampedusa. According to international law, the nearest safe port must be assigned in order to bring people rescued from distress at sea safely ashore. However, on the basis of the **Piantadosi Decree**, entry to Lampedusa was expressly prohibited. Instead, the Italian authorities assigned the crew to the port of Trapani in Sicily, around 425 kilometers away.



Photo: Tian Stoehr



August 19, 2023

After more than 24 hours, the water supplies ran out, the temperature on board reached 46 °C and the people were acutely dehydrated. The crew repeatedly told the authorities that there would not be enough fuel to reach Trapani. In the meantime, the crew was even ordered to head for a port in Tunisia: a clear violation of international law, as Tunisia is neither a safe port nor a safe country of origin (more on this on page 24). Under threat of legal consequences, entry into the port of Lampedusa was finally granted.

August 20, 2023

While Italy knowingly put the lives of the people on board the *AURORA* at risk, we are the ones who are facing harsh consequences: The detention of the *AURORA* for 20 days and a fine between 2,000 and 10,000 euros.

Piantedosi Decree

The Piantedosi Decree, adopted in January 2023, contains a number of regulations for civilian rescue ships that violate international law, hinder our rescue operations and lead to more deaths in the Mediterranean. At times, civilian rescue ships are ordered by the Italian government to head for an Italian port immediately after a rescue, even if there are other sea rescue cases in the vicinity. The strategic allocation of distant ports for bringing rescued people ashore is intended to keep rescue ships out of the search and rescue zone for as long as possible. An alleged breach of the decree leads to twenty-day detentions and even confiscation of the ship, as well as a fine of up to 50,000 euros. In 2023, our rescue ship *AURORA* was detained twice on flimsy grounds. A total of 14 ships from the civilian fleet were detained in 2023. That is 280 days that we should have been operational. We are fighting back against this rigged game and have lodged an appeal against the detentions.

In the Air

Since 2017, Sea-Watch has also been operating in the air. Together with our partner Humanitarian Pilots Initiative (HPI), we report emergencies in the Mediterranean to rescue coordination centers and document human rights violations. In 2023, we carried out 161 operations with our two *Seabird* aircraft and sighted over 16,000 people in distress at sea. On some days, we were involved in successful rescues. On other days, we witnessed illegal pullbacks, or even witnessed people being abandoned to their fate and drowning despite our efforts.

And so, with the landing on Lampedusa, our crew is also returning to reality. As long as the EU allows people to drown while fleeing and illegally abducts them back in cooperation with criminal actors, civil society must continue to keep a watchful eye over the Central Mediterranean!



In the Air

"Tariq Ben Zeyad, Tariq Ben Zeyad, I have a position for you"

Photo: Tian Stoehr

On the afternoon of July 26, 2023, we recorded the conspicuous maneuver of a Frontex aircraft. It changed course and circled a coordinate within the Maltese search and rescue zone several times - an indication that the aircraft had possibly spotted a boat in distress. However, when our reconnaissance aircraft Seabird arrived on the scene, we could only witness an illegal pullback to Libya from the air. We also experienced a similar situation on August 2, 2023, when we heard this radio message from a Maltese military pilot: "Tariq Ben Zeyad, Tariq Ben Zeyad, I have a position for you." This maritime emergency also involved an illegal pullback by a Libyan ship.

Those responsible? The eastern Libyan militia Tariq Ben Zeyad, or TBZ for short, has been active in the Mediterranean since May 2023. It has been accused of murder, human trafficking, war crimes, and torture in Libya for years. The countless pullbacks in recent years by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard in western Libya are forcing people to choose other escape routes. As a result, the number of departures from eas-



tern Libya, which is under the influence of the TBZ and warlord Khalifa Haftar, has increased sixfold in 2023. With the presence of the TBZ-militia, there is now another Libyan militia on the Mediterranean, alongside the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, which is brutally preventing people from fleeing.

The year 2023 made it clear how indispensable our civilian aerial reconnaissance is: it was only thanks to our aerial operations that we were able to prove the presence of the TBZ-militia. Based on our documentation journalists from

Lighthouse Report, SPIEGEL, and Al Jazeera were able to prove an expansion of European cooperation with this Libyan war criminal as a stooge. The cooperation with the eastern Libyan TBZ-militia is another cruel move in the European strategy of isolation, forcing people into an ever more dangerous cycle of flight and abduction.

Why the so-called Libyan Coast Guard?

The so-called Libyan Coast Guard consists of criminal and illegitimate actors who mainly patrol the western coastline of the country. These groups do not act on behalf of a functioning state structure based on respect of human rights. Instead, they act with European money and equipment as stooges of the EU with the aim of reducing migration across the Mediterranean through illegal pullbacks. We will not recognize the so-called Libyan Coast Guard because it does not meet the international standards of a coast guard. We will not recognize them as long as they break international law and endanger - or even kill - the people we are trying to protect and save.

Our cooperation 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 knowledge and their expertise in aviation has significantly increased the efficiency of our civil air reconnaissance since 2017.

Fatal delay in a rescue

On the morning of March 11, 2023, the organization Alarm Phone received information about an unseaworthy boat with 47 people. Even hours after the distress call, Italy and Malta did not initiate a rescue. Only 17 people were saved by the intervention of a merchant ship the following day.

Why was this operation so challenging?

The stormy sea with two-meter-high waves made the search from the air considerably more difficult. Without the Alarm Phone updates, we would never have spotted the boat. A merchant vessel then responded to our radio call and changed course, which allowed us to breathe a sigh of relief. However, the merchant vessel was then instructed by Rome to simply monitor the situation and contact the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. Hours passed and the weather worsened. The countless attempts by our ground crew to persuade the Italian and Maltese coastguards to act were rebuffed. **Every single call.** Hours later, Italy took over the coordination after all. The following day, we received the cruel news that the boat had capsized and only 17 of the 47 people could be rescued.

Why, despite numerous efforts by Seabird and Alarm Phone, was there no rescue by the Maltese or Italian coastguard?

The boat was in the so-called Libyan search and rescue zone. This is a construct cobbled together by the EU in order to create a legal basis to authorize actors such as the so-called Libyan Coast Guard to intercept people at the EU's external borders in violation of international law. This is because Malta and Italy know full well that the so-called



Samira was on board the *Seabird* as head of operations and explains what has happened. Photo: Christian Gohdes

Libyan coastguard does not have any rescue ships ready in the region. This day, the Rescue Coordination Center in Tripoli in western Libya even confirmed this. Why didn't Italy and Malta send ships themselves? Because, according to international law, they would then have to take the rescued people to Malta or Italy. It is a disgusting system with which the EU is willingly accepting that people will drown rather than reach European soil.

What goes through your mind after such an assignment?

Sheer rage. Those responsible have well over 3,000 lives on their conscience in 2023 and the whole thing is then glossed over as border management. Letting people die at Europe's external borders is a system into which billions of EU funds continue to flow through isolation deals and the expansion of Frontex. At the same time, right-wing extremists in Germany are planning mass deportations and the German government is increasingly buckling instead of opposing the shift to the right. Whether at sea, on land or from the air - this development is dangerous and affects us all. After all, every disenfranchisement and devaluation of people is a sign that racist and fascist ideas are gaining ground.



On Land

There can only be a political response to end the deaths at Europe's borders. We see ourselves as political actors fighting for a radically changed policy not only at sea and in the air, but also on land, using political and activist tools.

"Get rid of paragraph 96. Remove all borders, let everyone in."
Photo: Chris Grodotzki / Campact

On Land **Political Advocacy**

Our advocacy department is responsible for the strategic and political orientation 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 and supporting legal proceedings, we try to support political processes with our expertise. Our advocacy work aims to ensure that there are political and legal consequences for the human rights violations that we document in the Central Mediterranean.

Frontex

In 2023, we have focused on a central player in European border protection policy: Frontex, the European border protection agency. For years, we have been documenting Frontex's practices with our reconnaissance aircraft. Time and again, we have observed how Frontex acts as aerial reconnaissance for the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, enabling it to intercept people in distress at sea and forcibly return them to Libya in violation of international law.³

In 2022, together with FragDenStaat, we took Frontex to court as the agency refused to release documents on a pullback of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard on July 30, 2021, which was allegedly coordinated by them. In our view, this is contrary to the Freedom of Information Act.⁴

The hearing in the legal proceedings took place on October 11, 2023 in Luxembourg before the General Court of the EU.⁵ The human rights violations by Frontex are a threat to public safety – and not our work to investigate human rights violations.

The verdict was announced on April 24, 2024. According to the General Court of the EU, Frontex withheld evidence: the existence of more than 100 photos was wrongly concealed. However, Frontex still does not have to hand over the requested documents. This sends a fatal signal: a European agency can commit human rights violations without being held accountable. It is clear to us that Frontex must be abolished and the budget used to set up a state sea rescue program.⁶



"To prevent human rights violations at the EU's external borders, those responsible must be held accountable. With this judgment, the court has failed to ensure this."

Marie Naass, Head of Advocacy

CEAS - the Common European Asylum System

In September 2020, the European Commission presented a "Migration Pact", which included a series of reforms to the current legal situation. In 2023, negotiations on the reform of the Common European Asylum System were concluded, and the final decision was taken on April 10, 2024, with the approval of the European Parliament. Several new regulations and directives were adopted. There are no plans for a European sea rescue program, nor will an end be put to the deaths in the Mediterranean. Instead, the EU has decided to legalize human rights violations by member states at the external borders. A genuine solidarity mechanism to support EU member states at the external borders

will not be introduced. The adopted reforms are not a success for human rights, but a de facto abolition of the individual right to asylum and a massive reduction of protection standards in the EU. CEAS will not create safe and legal escape routes to Europe. **The German government has agreed to these reforms and thus repeatedly broken its coalition agreement.**

As an organization, we tried to exert influence before and during the negotiations. Together with other civil society actors, we raised public awareness with statements and campaigns and supported campaigns such as Stop-GEAS.



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

³ www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2022/12/08/airborne-complicity-frontex-aerial-surveillance-enables-abuse

⁴ www.sea-watch.org/en/sea-watch-takes-frontex-to-court/

⁵ See the summary of the hearing: www.x.com/seawatch_intl/status/1720395249221026198?s=20

⁶ 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 revealed that even a small part of this year's operational Frontex budget would be enough to implement a comprehensive civilian sea rescue program. You can find more information here: www.sea-watch.org/en/defundfrontex-for-a-state-funded-civil-sea-rescue-program/



stop-geas.de →



sea-watch.org/en/the-new-pact-on-migration-ends-the-individual-right-to-asylum-in-the-eu-and-will-cost-more-lives-at-sea/ →

On Land Team Italy

Since October 2022, Italy has been governed by a neo-fascist alliance of politicians who are committed to preventing migration. Through agreements with third countries such as Tunisia and Albania, the country tries to outsource its responsibility for asylum and sea rescue. At the same time, people on the move are criminalized by absurd decrees and civil sea rescue is hindered.

Our Italian team supports the objectives of Sea-Watch in the country where our operations start and end: in Italy itself. This includes strategic, legal and logistical support for the ships and reconnaissance aircraft. In October 2023, the crew of our civil aerial reconnaissance received an intimidating warning from the Italian Civil Aviation Authority (ENAC) aimed at threatening our work. Together with lawyers, we were able to respond quickly and facilitate communication with the Italian authorities.

The Italian team is also involved in the media: they publicize our activities on the Italian Sea-Watch channels, and in recent years have established themselves as one of the most influential players in the Italian media when it comes to migration and sea rescue.

The Italian advocacy team is extending its expertise to Italian politics. In 2023, they focused on Tunisia and Libya the main country of departure for people fleeing across the Mediterranean.

What is happening in Tunisia?

Of the 157,000 people who arrived in Italy by sea in 2023, around 57,000 came from Tunisia. In order to reduce migration to Italy, the EU entered into negotiations with Tunisian President Kais Saied, which led to an agreement in July 2023.

When President Saied simultaneously spread conspiracy theories about black people in the summer of 2023, the human rights situation escalated into hunts through the streets and deportations to desert areas, where many people died of thirst. While negotiations on the agreement were still ongoing, the Tunisian authorities brutally deported at least 1,200⁷ people to the desert on the border with Algeria and Libya. Even before this, Tunisia was not a safe

place for people on the move, as there is no national legal framework for asylum. Without a recognized legal status, they are exposed to a high risk of exploitation.

As part of our work, we repeatedly try to explain why Tunisia cannot be classified as a safe country, neither for Tunisians nor for people on the move.⁸ On another level, we organized the visit to Italy of a Tunisian delegation of non-governmental organizations, the former Ministry of Human Rights and a lawyer committed to defending political opponents. The visit included institutional meetings, a press conference, and a hearing before the Italian Foreign Affairs Committee. Tunisia is not a safe country of origin and the agreement with President Saied must be stopped!

⁷ www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/19/tunisia-no-safe-haven-black-african-migrants-refugees

⁸ www.sea-watch.org/en/tunisia-is-neither-a-safe-country/

Porta d'Europa on Lampedusa: A monument for all those who were killed by Fortress Europe.
Photo: Karolina Sobel



On Land Events & Campaigns

An essential part of our work is to draw attention to the situation in the Central Mediterranean. The media team accompanies and documents our operations and provides real-time information about what is happening there. The fundraising team ensures the financing of our work, because as a non-governmental organization we are dependent on the support of private donors. The events team uses various event formats to ensure that we can network with fellow campaigners in order to form a strong civil society alliance.

At a time when the deaths in the Mediterranean Sea are increasingly receding into the background, we must not turn our gaze away from people on the move and must continue to remind the public day after day of the abuses at Europe's external borders.



We Make Demands!

When political actors fail, civil society must act. With our petitions, we demand transparency and political action in response to events that threaten the rights of people on the move and the work of civilian sea rescuers. Together with other organizations, we are calling on the EU to conduct an independent investigation into the shipwreck off Pylos in June 2023. When the so-called "Repatriation Improvement Act" was intended to criminalize sea rescuers for their work, we addressed a petition directly to the German government. Through our loud protest, we were able to ensure that the draft law was amended with regard to sea rescue. But only insufficiently - the rescue of minors at sea could be criminalized!



Photo: Chris Grodzki / Campact

No imprisonment for civil sea rescue:
sea-watch.org/keine-haft-fuer-zivile-seenotrettung



Shipwreck off Pylos:
weact.campact.de/petitions/schiffbruche-luckenlos-aufklaren-seenotrettung-entkriminalisieren



Who is Europe?

Together with the feminist collective Lebefrau from Hamburg, we have redefined Europe. The result is the vision of a Europe that turns its back on repressive authorities such as Frontex, puts humanitarian values before economic interests and no longer lets people die at its external borders. Using three short films, we make political contexts tangible and give an outlook on solutions that would not be so difficult - if someone wanted to implement them. See for yourself!



sea-watch.org/wer-ist-europa



Photo: Lebefrau

Graphic Art Events - Between Migration and Art

The Graphic Art Events series offered a platform for artistic perspectives and interpretations of flight and migration. The series kicked off with the Pushing Borders Street Art Festival, which offered two days of international artistic negotiations of migration issues. The artists created exclusive works in curatorial consultation with Sea-Watch and reached a wide audience in order to initiate sociopolitical discussions and collect donations for the rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean.

The second event in the series was the book launch of *Das Schimmern der See* [the shimmer of the sea]. In this graphic novel, Adrian Pourviseh shares his experiences

as a media coordinator on board the *Sea-Watch 3*. The audience was offered insights into the reality of sea rescue as well as original drawings and a further political program. The final event, Ink Against Borders, brought together 33 FLINTA* tattoo artists in Hamburg and Berlin. They offered exclusive motifs for civil sea rescue - an anti-fascist and feminist act that got under the skin.



sea-watch.org/events



Photo: Line Tsou



Photo: Pablo Volmer

Run for Rescue

A total of 400 runners took part in the Berlin and Cologne half marathons for Sea-Watch. With individual fundraising campaigns, our running teams raised 134,000 euros in donations while simultaneously drawing attention of family, friends and colleagues to our work.

Webinars for our Supporting Members

In 2023, we provided exciting insights into our work in two webinars: in spring, our supporting members received information on the interim status of the conversion work on our *Sea-Watch 5*. In October, our political advocacy team gave insights on the 2021 sea rescue case on which our lawsuit against Frontex was based.

Income & Expenditure Overview 2023

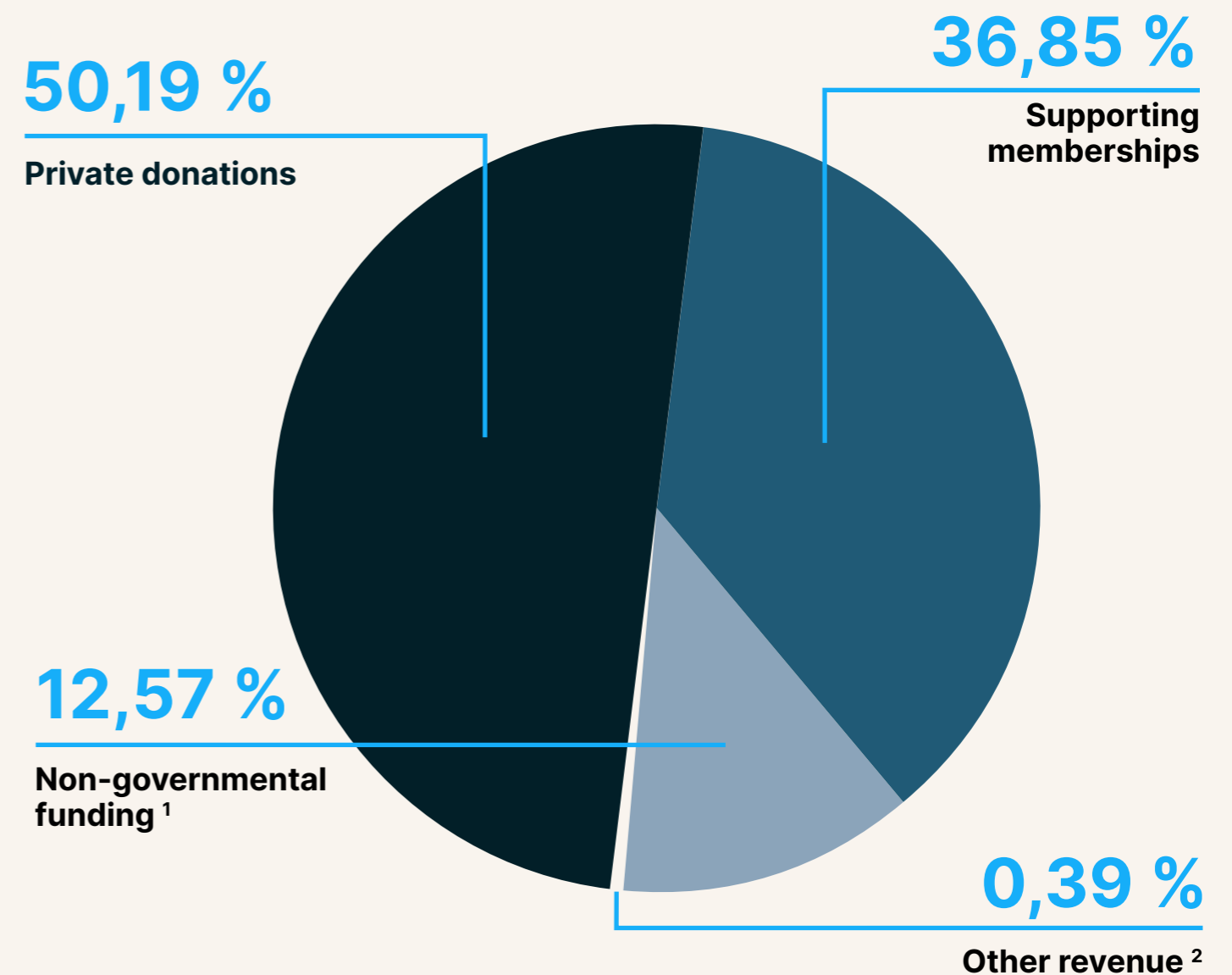
In **2023**, we collected **11,813,484.55** Euros. The total expenditure was **11,296,797.60** Euros. As a non-profit association, we are committed to keep our administrative costs as low as possible. In 2023, 81,92 percent of our expenses went to projects in accordance with our association's statutes. They were used for the operation of our rescue ships *Sea-Watch 5* and *AURORA*, for our civil aerial reconnaissance operations, for project support, media and political public relations work, and for supporting rescue operations of other sea rescue organizations. 18,08 percent of our expenditure went into the non-operational area, including organizational coordination, fundraising, IT, and finance.

For every euro spent on donation management and advertisement we have taken in 11.80 Euros in donations.

Revenue Overview 2023

€ 11,707,841.81
Total revenue

€ 105,642.74
Profit from sale of merchandise



¹Non-governmental Funding:
 Postcode Lotterie Deutschland (€ 1,000,000)
 Gemeinsam Retten e. V. (€ 200,000)
 GLS Treuhand e. V. (€ 256,603.56)
 Rosenkranz Stiftung (€ 15,000)

²Other Revenue:
 Revenue from monetary sanctions from criminal proceedings, reimbursements by health insurance funds from AAG (Aufwendungsausgleichsgesetz) and energy price flat rate.

Expenses Overview 2023

€ 11,296,797.60

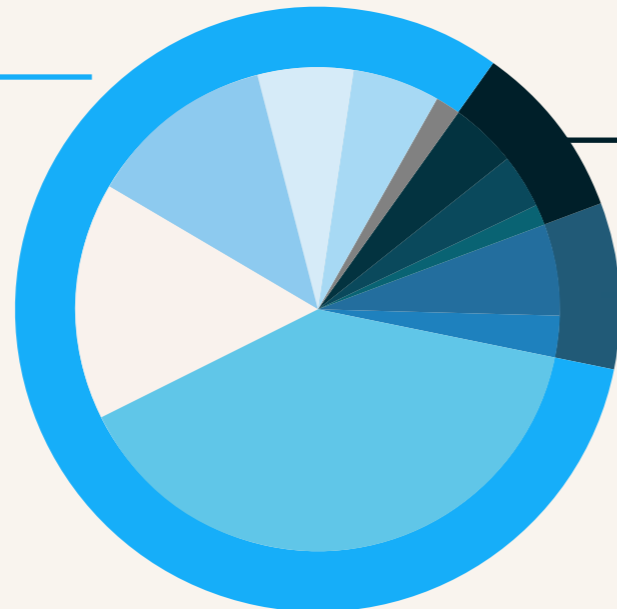
Total expenses

9,39 % Administration

- 4,40 % Organizational Coordination
- 3,53 % IT & Financial Accounting
- 1,46 % Other Administrative Expenses

81,92 % Projects

- 39,56 % Operation of Rescue Ships
- 15,85 % Aerial Reconnaissance
- 12,64 % Project Support¹
- 6,27 % Media/PR, Advocacy, Events
- 5,95 % Transfer of Funds²
- 1,65 % Other projects



8,69 % Donor Acquisition and Stewardship

- 6,12 % Acquisition of New Donors
- 2,57 % Donation Management

¹ 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 supervision team, ship management and logistics, the crewing team, operational coordination and our Italian team.

² Transfer of Funds:

While Europe continues to let people drown in the Central Mediterranean and actively prevents civilian sea rescuers from rescuing lives, we respond with boundless solidarity. We are pleased that we were able to support other civilian sea rescue organizations in 2023.

You can find information about the organizations and projects we have supported on page 35.

Cost Breakdown Personnel Costs

€ 5,505,612.82

Personnel Costs

80,35 % Projects

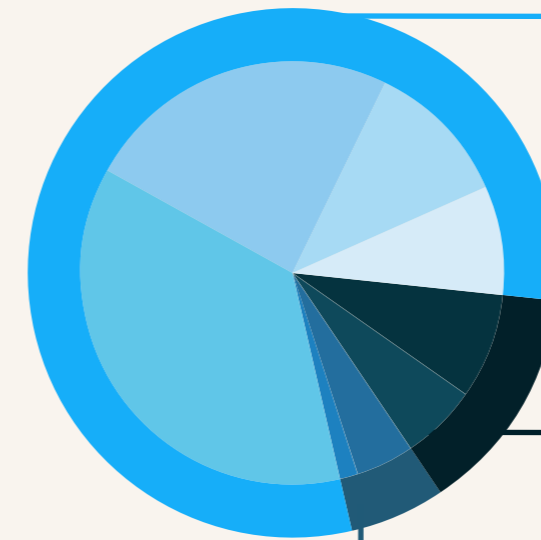
- 36,90 % Operation of Rescue Vessels
- 24,10 % Project Support
- 11,06 % Media/PR, Advocacy, Events
- 8,29 % Aerial Reconnaissance

13,89 % Administration

- 7,99 % Organizational Coordination
- 5,90 % IT & Financial Accounting

5,76 % Donor Acquisition and Stewardship

- 4,60 % Acquisition of New Donors
- 1,16 % Donation Management



Why such high personnel costs on our ships?

Some positions on our ships (for example officers, electricians and engineers) have to be filled all year round – even in port. This is stipulated by the German flag. This continuity can only be guaranteed by paid, permanent positions. In addition, it is not always possible to find volunteer activists for individual positions for our operations. In 2023, on our ships, there were 52 permanent employees on average.

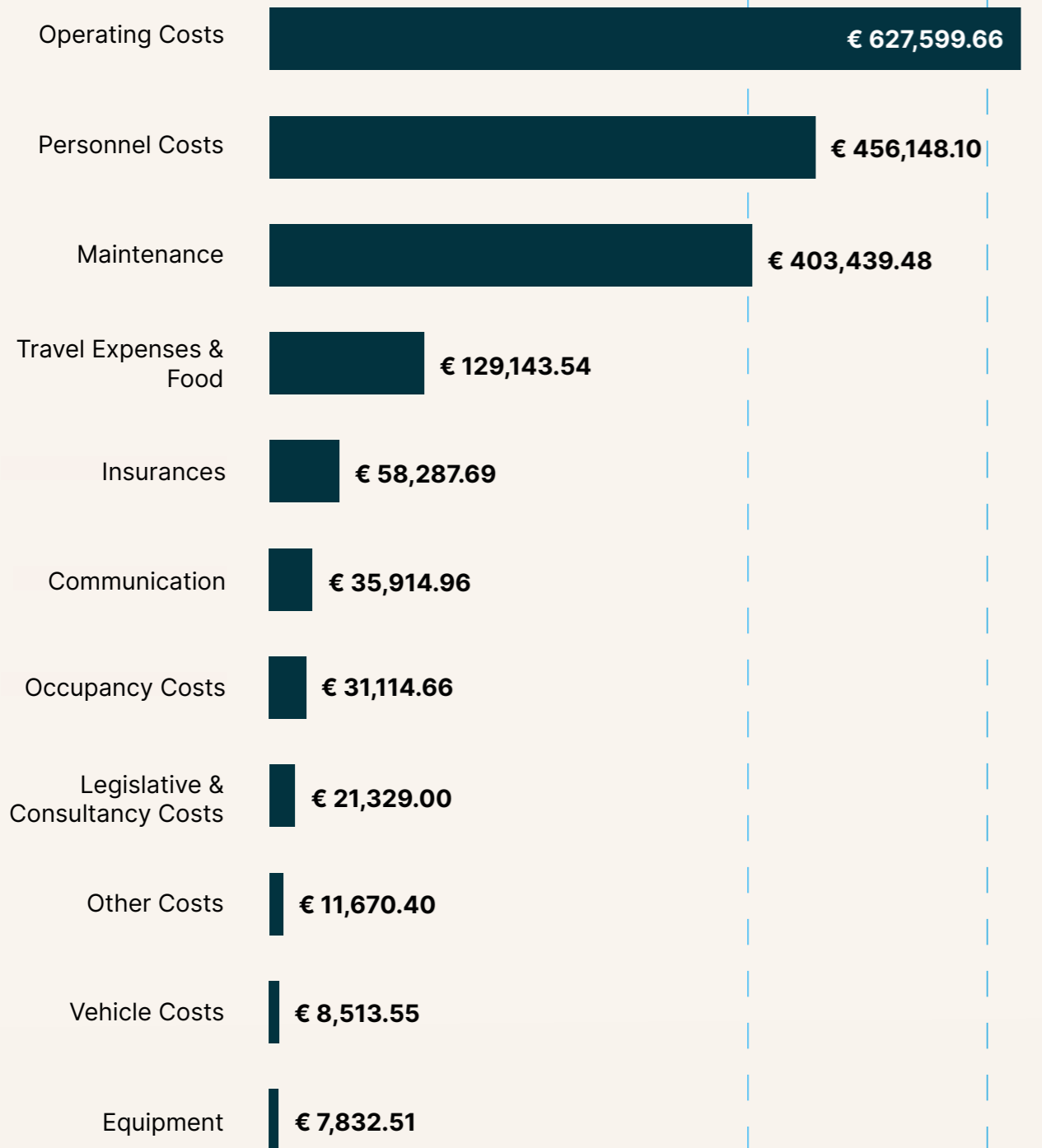
The numerical results in this report are preliminary. We have received confirmation from the tax office that there has been a delay in the audit of our past annual financial statements. Our association has always fulfilled its tax declaration obligations on time.



Ebi Mabel is an engineer on board the Sea-Watch 5. Photo: Selene Magnolia

Cost Breakdown

Airborne & Reconnaissance Aircraft



January 1 – December 31, 2023
Total expenses: € 1,790,993.55

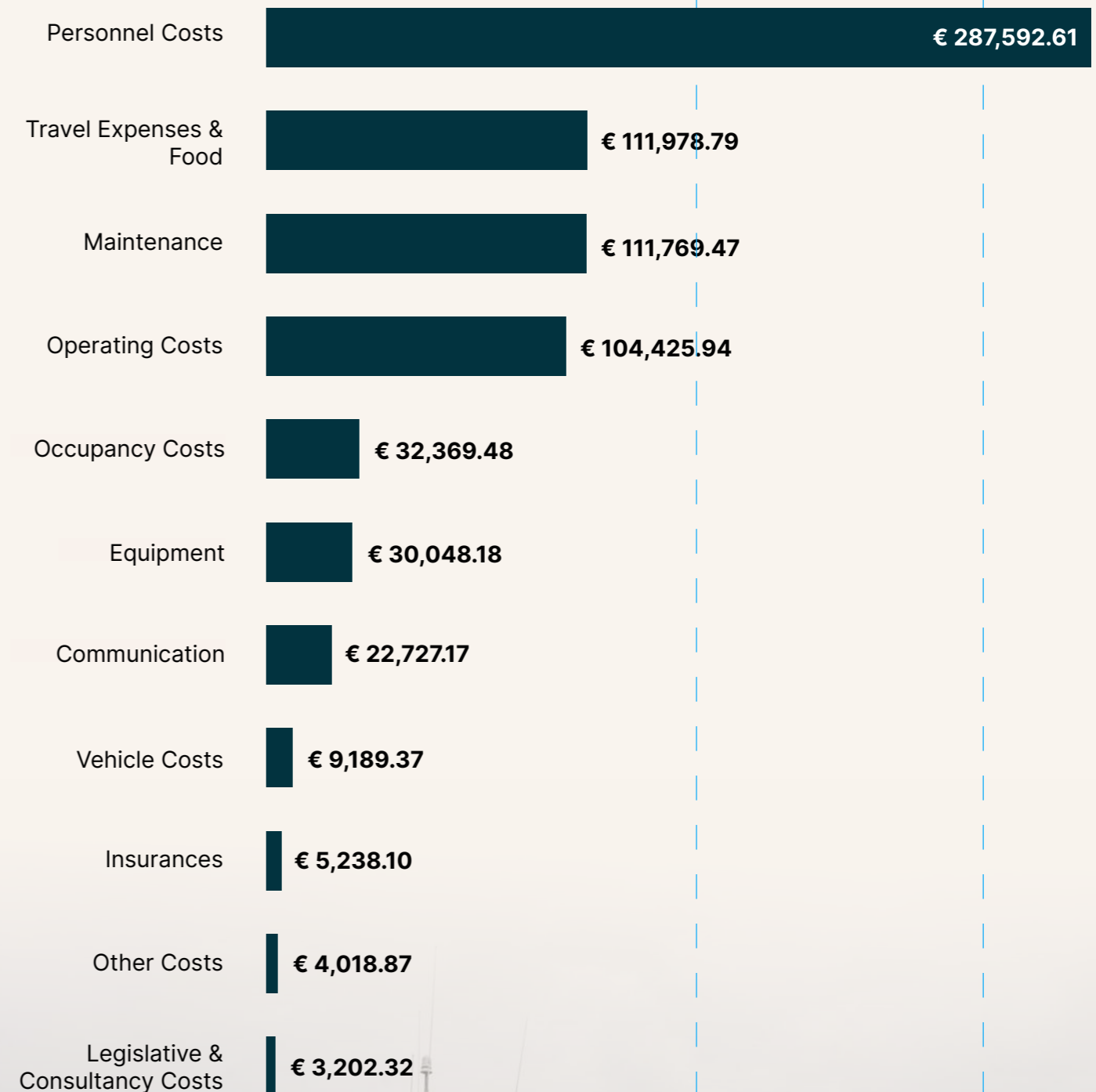
€ 400,000 € 600,000



Photo: Black Forest Collective

Cost Breakdown

Aurora



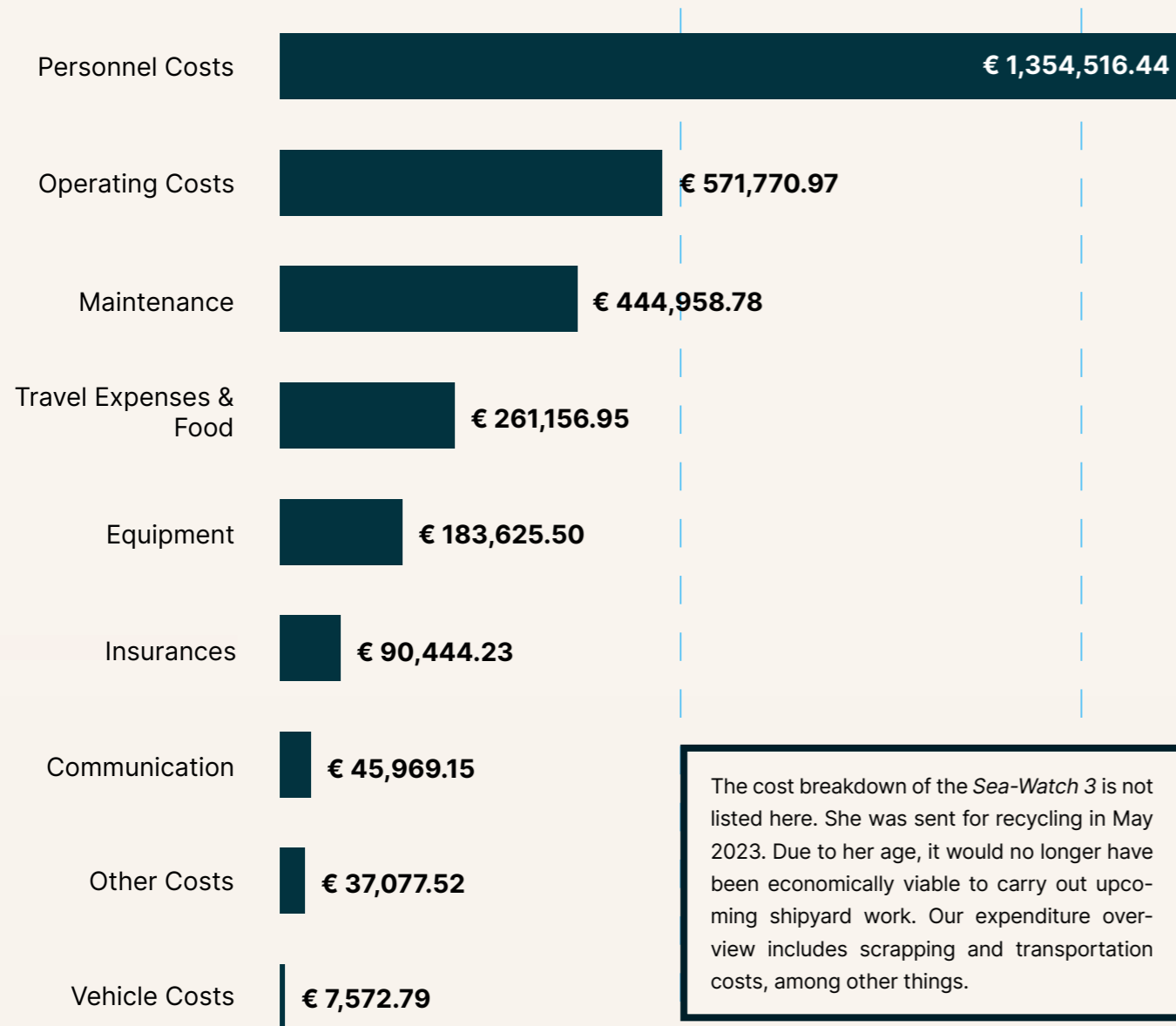
January 1 – December 31, 2023
Total expenses: € 772,560.30

€ 150,000 € 250,000



Photo: Stella Meyer

Cost Breakdown Sea-Watch 5



The cost breakdown of the *Sea-Watch 3* is not listed here. She was sent for recycling in May 2023. Due to her age, it would no longer have been economically viable to carry out upcoming shipyard work. Our expenditure overview includes scrapping and transportation costs, among other things.

January 1 – December 31, 2023
Total expenses: € 2,997,092.33

€ 600,000

€ 1,200,000



Photo: Fabian Melber

Why We Pass on Funds to Other Organizations

The year 2023 has shown the determination with which state actors criminalize civilian sea rescue, people on the move and those who show solidarity with them. As a civilian fleet, we are trying to fill the gap in search and rescue that has existed for years due to the lack of rescue capacities of EU states. Only as a strong civil society alliance can we stand up for the vision of a world in which no one is criminalized or has to die for fleeing. That is why we work closely with other sea rescue organizations. We support them financially and with our expertise: together for more rescue capacities at the world's deadliest border!

- We supported the Italian non-governmental organization [Mediterranea Saving Humans](#) with 62,500 Euros. With the only civilian rescue ship under the Italian flag, they rescue people in distress at sea in the Central Mediterranean.
- We have supported [RESQSHIP](#) with a donation of 90,000 Euros. The organization is committed to raising awareness of abuses in the Mediterranean. RESQSHIP has been operating in the Central Mediterranean since

2019 - first with the sailing ship *Josefa* and since 2021 with its current ship *Nadir*.

- We were able to support the Civil Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (civilMRCC), which is part of the [Civilfleet-Support e.V.](#) association, with a total of 520,000 Euros. The civilMRCC is a coordination and documentation platform for maritime emergencies in the Mediterranean and its work supports civilian maritime rescue organizations in carrying out rescues.

The rescue ship *Nadir* from RESQSHIP is approaching a boat in distress in the Mediterranean Sea.
Photo: Sea-Watch



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 want to thank you! Thank you for supporting us in 2023 - with your donations, your supporting memberships, your cooperation, your commitment, your activism, your dedication. Special thanks also go to our alliance partners at United4Rescue and to the German Postcode Lottery. Our work is only possible thanks to all our supporters - and not just financially. In 2023, major obstacles have been placed in the way of civilian sea rescue, and the walls around Fortress Europe are getting higher and higher. While a deep rift runs through politics and right-wing ideas become socially acceptable, a strong civil society is needed.

Together we stand up for human rights and the right to asylum, together we are against the right and against letting people die in the Central Mediterranean.

Thank you for standing with us!

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

Photo: Pay Numrich



If you also want to stand against the deadly politics of letting people die with a supporting membership, you can find more information here:

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



Legal domicile:
Sea-Watch e.V.
Moosdorfstr. 7-9, 12435 Berlin

V.i.S.d.P.:
Sophie Koch

Layout & Typesetting: Fulya Çimen
Editing: Adam Fazackerley
Photographers: Maria Giulia Trombini, Adrian Pourviseh, Tessa Kraan, Stella Meyer, Oliver Kulikowski, Sandra Singh, Tian Stoehr, Samuel Mueller, Christian Gohdes, Chris Grodotzki / Compact, Karolina Sobel, Lebefrauu, Line Tsoj, Pablo Vollmer, Selene Magnolia, Pay Numrich, Nick Piesk, Fabian Melber, Black Forest Collective
Board: Joshua Krüger, Nora Bomke, Vera Weithas

Contact Details:
General inquiries: info@sea-watch.org
Press & Media: presse@sea-watch.org
Donors: spenden@sea-watch.org
Supporting members: seawatchverein@sea-watch.org
Board: vorstand@sea-watch.org

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 telephone numbers after consultation. We ask for your understanding!



Photo: Selene Magnolia



Show style, support civilian sea rescue!

Show your colors with clothes for civilian sea rescue 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/?LANG=ENG](https://shop.sea-watch.org/?lang=eng)



Photo: Nick Piesk

Donate now!

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

Donation account
IBAN: DE63 4306 0967 1239 7690 03
BIC: GENODEM1GLS • GLS Gemeinschaftsbank

Further donation options:



sea-watch.org/en/donatenow/ ➔

Donation account:

IBAN: DE63 4306 0967 1239 7690 03

BIC: GENODEM1GLS • GLS Gemeinschaftsbank

sea-watch.org/en/

