



Annual Report

2025

Sea Rescue at Europe's Borders

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Sea-Watch

Who we are and what we do

Sea-Watch is an organization of political activists who advocate for global freedom of movement and the dismantling of European policies of isolation. Every year, thousands of people drown while fleeing across the Central Mediterranean because safe and legal routes of escape are systematically denied. That is why we are in the field to rescue people in distress at sea, document human rights violations and publicly demand a radical rethinking of European migration policy. For us, sea rescue is not just a duty, but a political intervention against a racist border regime that deliberately endangers people.

Our vision is clear: a world without borders, racism, or injustice, where all people can live self-determined, safe and free lives. This goal guides our actions – at sea, in the air and on land. We operate according to the principles of grassroots democracy and solidarity, continually foster cooperation with other organizations, and mobilize people to join with us. We are funded almost exclusively by private donations and operate independently of any political or religious affiliations.

For the right to leave.
For the right to arrive.
For the right to stay.

For the right to freedom of movement.

An overview of our work

Our work is a targeted response to the catastrophic and politically engineered conditions at Europe's external borders. Since 2015, we have been stepping in where government officials have deliberately failed to act. What we do:

Rescuing people in distress at sea

With our rescue ships, we intervene when people are in immediate danger in the central Mediterranean. Our goal is to bring them safely ashore as quickly as possible. Since our founding, we have been involved in the rescues of over 50,000 people.

Documenting human rights violations

With the help of our reconnaissance aircraft, we expose the collaboration between European states and criminal actors such as the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, document pushbacks, and bring these violations to light.

Calling for and bringing about political change

Our goal is to change the political foundations of this deadly system, create safe and legal pathways for people on the move, and establish migration as a fundamental right.

Raising public awareness

Through reporting and campaigns, we highlight how the European border regime systematically violates human rights. We provide information about conditions in the Mediterranean and create spaces for networking, protest and resistance.

Acting together

Civilian sea rescue is not a solo effort, but part of a larger movement. Together with other organizations and activists, we strengthen structures of solidarity, share resources and work closely together.

Our demands

Borders exist to prevent all people from being free and equal. They determine who enjoys rights and privileges – and who does not. Borders are not a natural phenomenon. They are created, funded, maintained and enacted by force.

We do not believe in borders. We believe in a world where no one has to die in search of a better life.

And we know that such a world is possible! Deaths at the EU's external borders could be stopped today – it is a matter of political will. That is why we are making specific demands of the European Union, its member states and its institutions.

- # **Safe and legal routes of escape to the EU**
- # **A European maritime rescue program**
- # **The end of the “First Country of Entry” principle upon arrival in the EU**
- # **The dissolution of Frontex**
- # **The end of agreements that make borders dangerous and more violent**
- # **The decriminalization of flight**
- # **An end to the obstruction and criminalization of civilian sea rescue**

To be human is to migrate – we demand safe and legal escape routes to the European Union

Migration is as old as humanity itself. **People have always moved, reached new places, learned languages and built communities.** Migration is not an emergency situation, but a fundamental part of our society. Anyone who seeks to control, manage, or prevent migration is creating violence and accepting that people will die.

That is why we call on the European Union and its member states to put an end to this policy. Agreements designed to prevent or externalize migration must be stopped. Violent institutions like Frontex must be dissolved. **Instead of investing billions in border closures, we must strengthen social infrastructure based on solidarity.** The criminalization of flight and of supporting people who are fleeing must also end. **People need safe and legal routes of escape into the European Union.**

Border violence must not be normalized

Deaths in the Mediterranean are the result of political decisions. Government authorities ignore distress calls, delay rescue operations, or hand people over to armed militias that forcibly return them to unsafe countries. Meanwhile, civil sea rescue is criminalized and obstructed.

To end deaths at sea, we need a European led, civilian maritime rescue program that functions quickly and reliably. At the same time, authorities and institutions that fail to carry out rescues or commit human rights violations must be held accountable. **Transparency and legal consequences** are necessary to put an end to the systematic violence at Europe's borders.

No concessions to fascism

Racist rhetoric and authoritarian politics are gaining traction in many parts of the world. Migration is being deliberately exploited to stoke fear and deepen social divisions. We must not give in to this trend.

Instead of isolation and exclusion, we need places of safety and solidarity. Cities and regions that are willing to take in those seeking protection must be supported and strengthened. At the same time, racist narratives and right-wing disinformation must be resolutely rejected at all levels – in politics, in the media, and in public discourse.

We keep going. Of course.

by Luna Ali (Event Coordinator at Sea-Watch e.V.)

In a world that has been thrown so far off balance, where we are ruled by insane, laughable, and criminal people, it's not just difficult to write something meaningful. It's generally hard to believe in meaning in the world, let alone see it. And yet it is precisely this meaning that we must defend today more than ever. In an interview about her recently published book *This Urge for Toughness: On the New Fascism* Eva von Redecker explains: "When meaning crumbles, the law of the strongest prevails", and that if the law of the strongest prevailed, then fascism would also reign. She counters this by arguing that we must insist on meaning and justice, which we create through our political movements. Without meaning, there would be nothing but a destructive nihilism.

In my work at Sea-Watch – whether as part of the civilian aerial reconnaissance team or more recently in the events department – I'm haunted daily by the question of whether what I'm doing still makes any sense at all. Haven't we always been, and are we still, just a drop in the ocean? Will we soon be nothing more than steam, ultimately leaving nothing behind? It's hard not to ask these questions, given the military brutality at Europe's borders against people fleeing their homes and the increasing militarization of society. And then I repeat my little mantra: My mother's name is Amal. Translated from



Arabic, it means "hope." I am the daughter of hope.

I talked to my mother about how I don't really know how to write a meaningful text. She herself fled Syria almost 26 years ago. Last year, for the first time in 25 years, she was able to travel back to Syria. No one from her family was still there; they had all fled as well. She herself has been a long-time supporting member of Sea-Watch. So I asked her what I should write about. "Why do you do this work?" she asked in return, adding that she herself would never dare to do something like that, to be directly involved. She's too weak for that, she said; she couldn't bear it. It was the first time my mother had ever admitted weakness to me.

So why do I do this work? Above all, because I myself know people who have fled – relatives and friends alike. And because I don't want to imagine what could have happened to them. And because, for me, civilian sea rescue is a practical form of political action and solidarity.

Even when Sea-Watch was first founded, I wondered why people who are completely unaffected would commit themselves to the cause of freedom of movement. And yet, we have grown in number over the years: crews at sea, volunteers at the shipyard, aerial surveillance, activists at events, supporting members, people who raise funds, and journalists.

So as I reflect on one of our internal strategic goals – namely, movement-building – and write this text, it becomes clear to me:

Civilian sea rescue has long since become a movement. Sea-Watch is one of many political havens for people fighting for a better and more just world.

We just have to be patient, I think, and I recall the godfather of strategic optimism, Antonio Gramsci, and what he once wrote during the dark hours of his imprisonment: "The old world is dying, the new one has not yet been born: This is the age of monsters."

We keep going. Of Course.

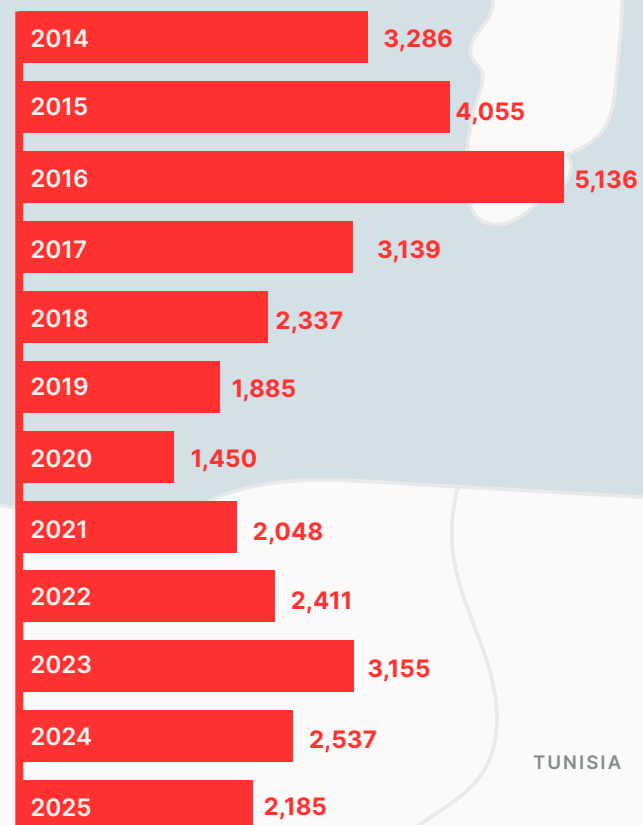
Just as naturally as people in distress at sea must be rescued. Just as natural as it should be for people to be allowed to move freely. For the fact that the sun will rise again the next day is not a naive hope, but a real certainty.

Photo: Johannes Rabel



The Mediterranean is the deadliest border in the world

Every year, thousands of people attempt to cross the Mediterranean in search of safety in Europe. Since 2014, more than **34,000 people** have died while fleeing across the Mediterranean. We must assume that the actual number of deaths is significantly higher.



Europe is funding violent militias to systematically deter migration.

Since 2015, at least **336,000 people** have been intercepted in the Mediterranean and forced back to Libya or Tunisia – often using brutal methods. There they are subjected to detention, severe mistreatment, and sexual violence.

The EU alone has provided approximately **242 million euros** in support of these structures since 2015.

Civilian organizations are taking on responsibility

For over ten years, civilian maritime rescue organizations have been saving people in the central Mediterranean because European countries are no longer fulfilling their responsibilities. It all began in 2015 with a small sailing cutter; today, we operate several ships and aircraft.

Our Fleet

Sea-Watch 5:

- Can accommodate 500 people
- Capable of sustained operations
- Max. speed: 24 km/h

Aurora 1 & 2:

- Can accommodate 75 people
- Anchored in Lampedusa → quick to reach the scene
- Max. speed: 46 km/h

Seabird 1, 2 & 3:

- A civilian eye over the Mediterranean
- Monitoring and documenting human rights violations
- Reporting maritime emergencies to authorities and nearby vessels

The Movement

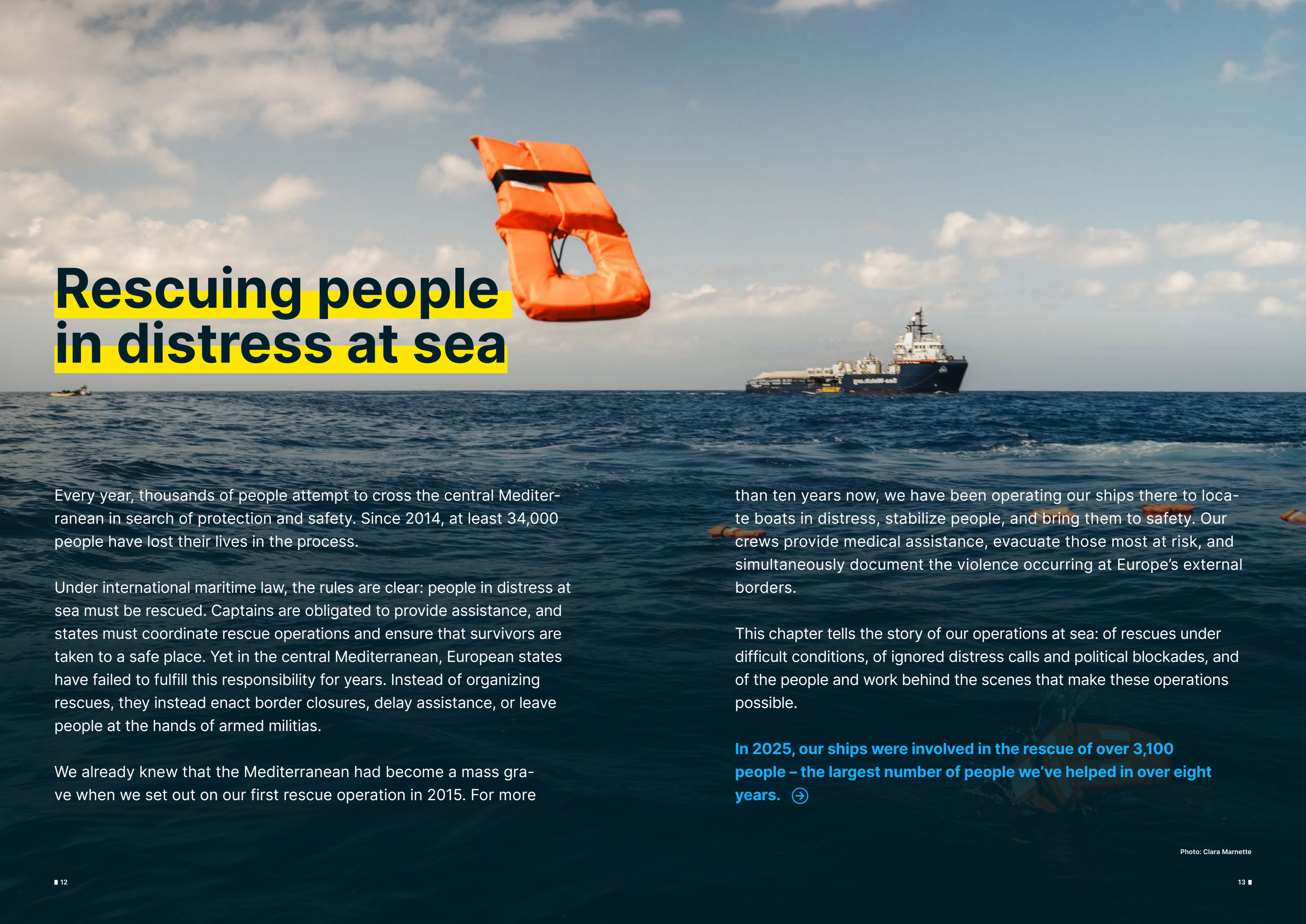
- Since 2015, civilian actors have rescued over 175,000 people in distress at sea.
- Today, 21 civilian maritime rescue organizations are active with their ships and aircraft.
- Tens of thousands of activists worldwide are part of the movement and make rescues and advocacy work possible.

Political Reality

Political obstruction of civilian rescue operations has intensified under Giorgia Meloni's government. In total, there have already been the following incidents since 2023:

- **36 instances** of civilian rescue vessels being detained by Italy
- **over 760 lost operational days** during which civilian vessels were unable to carry out rescues in the Mediterranean
- **over 350,000 km in detours** to reach unnecessarily distant ports

Despite political obstacles, we continue to rescue people in distress at sea – together with a growing network of other civil organizations.



Rescuing people in distress at sea

Every year, thousands of people attempt to cross the central Mediterranean in search of protection and safety. Since 2014, at least 34,000 people have lost their lives in the process.

Under international maritime law, the rules are clear: people in distress at sea must be rescued. Captains are obligated to provide assistance, and states must coordinate rescue operations and ensure that survivors are taken to a safe place. Yet in the central Mediterranean, European states have failed to fulfill this responsibility for years. Instead of organizing rescues, they instead enact border closures, delay assistance, or leave people at the hands of armed militias.

We already knew that the Mediterranean had become a mass grave when we set out on our first rescue operation in 2015. For more

than ten years now, we have been operating our ships there to locate boats in distress, stabilize people, and bring them to safety. Our crews provide medical assistance, evacuate those most at risk, and simultaneously document the violence occurring at Europe's external borders.

This chapter tells the story of our operations at sea: of rescues under difficult conditions, of ignored distress calls and political blockades, and of the people and work behind the scenes that make these operations possible.

In 2025, our ships were involved in the rescue of over 3,100 people – the largest number of people we've helped in over eight years. →

Violence in the Mediterranean is escalating

Rescue operations in the central Mediterranean are increasingly taking place in an environment marked by violence and intimidation. Armed actors such as the so-called Libyan Coast Guard attack boats carrying people on the move, threaten civilian rescue vessels, and deliberately attempt to prevent rescues.

In September 2025, our rescue ship *Sea-Watch 5* came under fire during an operation. Shortly before that, the crew had rescued 66 people in distress at sea. A patrol boat belonging to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard ordered the ship via radio to abort the operation and head north. When our crew refused to interrupt the rescue, the patrol boat opened fire. Fortunately, neither the crew nor those rescued were injured.

It was not the first attack of this kind. Just a few weeks earlier, the rescue ship *Ocean Viking*, operated by our friends at *SOS Méditerranée*,

were fired upon with live ammunition for over 20 minutes, even while people who had been rescued were on board.

Such attacks are indicative of the increasing militarization of the central Mediterranean. The so-called Libyan Coast Guard consists of various militias that forcibly intercept people fleeing and return them to Libya – a country where they face systematic torture, slavery, and sexual violence. At the same time, these actors continue to be trained, equipped, and funded by European states.

While attacks on civilian rescue vessels represent a new level of escalation, violence against people on the move has been a reality for years. Since 2016, we have documented over 70 violent incidents involving Libyan militias – ranging from targeted shootings and physical violence to dangerous chases at sea. The number of unreported acts of violence is of course significantly higher.

Photo: Laszlo Randelzhofer



Photo: Clara Marnette

People are being abandoned in their greatest moments of need

It is not only violence by militias that is making the journey across the Mediterranean increasingly dangerous. More and more often, distress calls are being ignored by the responsible rescue coordination centers, or help is being delayed – with life-threatening consequences for those affected.

Just how fatal these delays can be was demonstrated by an operation in August 2025. The crew of the *Sea-Watch 5* rescued 67 people in distress at sea on the morning of August 11. Among them was a woman in the late stages of pregnancy whose water broke shortly after the rescue. At first, it seemed possible for her to give birth on board. But as her condition deteriorated dramatically, our medical crew

requested an immediate evacuation by the relevant authorities in Italy and Malta.

Despite the acute danger to the lives of both mother and child, nearly five hours passed before Italy finally initiated an evacuation. As great as our relief was when we learned that both had survived, the prior inaction leaves us utterly stunned.

For hours on end, the lives of a woman and her child were put at risk. Unfortunately, such situations are not isolated incidents. Time and again, we witness people in acute distress being abandoned, and how political decisions determine whether people survive or not.



We demand safe escape routes so that no one is forced to give birth to a child in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

Photo: Clara Marnette





Survivors aboard the *Sea-Watch 5*: Each and every one of them comes on board with their own unique story and with the decision to take control of their own lives despite all the risks.
Photo: Clara Marnette

We have no choice but to continue denouncing this failure to render aid time and again and to care for the survivors here on board, bringing them to a safe harbor as quickly as possible. Through shared meals on deck, games or music, we try to offer people on that journey a moment of normalcy. Although their struggle for a life of safety is far from over, these moments are important for recharging their strength.

What is a “place of safety”, and why not Tunisia?

Under international maritime law, people rescued at sea must be taken to a safe place. A place of safety is a place where people are protected from violence, their fundamental rights are upheld, and they have access to a fair asylum process. Tunisia does not meet these requirements. People fleeing their homes repeatedly face violence, racial persecution, and arbitrary deportations there; they are detained in camp-like prisons or abandoned in the desert to die.

For us, it is clear: Tunisia is not a place of safety and thus a place where we can take people we have rescued.

For more information, visit:
sea-watch.org/en/tunisia-is-not-a-place-of-safety



Rescues are increasingly being blocked for political reasons

Civilian sea rescue has been a thorn in the side of the Italian government for years. Under the right-wing government of Giorgia Meloni, new laws and decrees are constantly being passed that aim to hinder our work and drive civilian rescue vessels out of the operational area. Ships in the civilian fleet are subject to contradictory requirements, sent to ports too far away or detained after rescue operations.

These political measures are intended to achieve one thing above all: fewer civilian rescue ships in the area of operation and thus fewer witnesses to the practice of letting people die at Europe's borders. But despite these obstacles, we continue our work. Together with other organizations in the civilian fleet – including those in the Justice Fleet (see page 36) – we continue to rescue people in distress at sea

and are fighting the authorities' repressive measures through the courts. Time and again, positive court rulings confirm what we have known for a long time: that we are doing the right thing. And that our perseverance pays off.

At the shipyard – many helping hands make rescue operations possible

Rescue operations don't begin out at sea. Before a ship can rescue people in distress at sea, it must be regularly maintained, repaired, and certified. This work usually takes place behind the scenes, yet it is a prerequisite for every rescue operation.

make the time after a rescue as safe and dignified as possible for the survivors.

search and rescue. Only if our vessels function reliably and meet international safety standards can our crews save lives during operations.

Dockings are costly and logistically demanding. Yet they are an indispensable part of civilian maritime

In the fall of 2025, the *Sea-Watch 5* spent several weeks at the shipyard in Naples. After numerous operations in the central Mediterranean, extensive maintenance work was needed. Much of this work is required by law: just as a car must undergo regular inspections, ships also have to be recertified on a regular basis. Only when all technical systems meet high international safety standards is a ship allowed to set sail again.

In addition to specialized service providers, numerous volunteer activists worked on board. They sanded, welded, repaired, and remodeled. At the same time, on board processes were further developed: washing facilities, rest areas, and support structures were adapted to



Photo: Clara Marnette

Photo: Nick Jaussel

Aurora 2 – our response to political deadlocks

Our smaller rescue ship, the *Aurora*, has been in service since 2022 and has already been involved in the rescues of over 3,700 people. Unlike large rescue ships such as the *Sea-Watch 5*, the *Aurora* operates directly out of Lampedusa and can therefore set sail in no time.

It is small, agile and fast, making it ideal for arriving at the scene of a maritime emergency as quickly as possible. Once there, the crew stabilizes the situation, distributes life jackets, and secures boats until further assistance arrives. In its function, the *Aurora* is similar to an ambulance at sea: quick to arrive on the scene, but with limited capacity for long-term care.

Recent years have shown just how crucial this operational concept is. Small, flexible vessels can respond more quickly and remain closer to the scene of the emergency. They complement larger rescue vessels and fill gaps caused by long distances, docking times, or scheduling conflicts.

To strengthen precisely this operational capability, we have decided to expand our fleet: With the *Aurora 2*, another fast rescue vessel will enter service in 2026.

After all, the broader and more flexible our civilian fleet is, the better we can respond to emergencies – and the harder it becomes to block our work.

“Italy is detaining ships to prevent rescues – with the *Aurora 2*, we’ll ensure that this strategy doesn’t work. If a ship is blocked, then another one is ready for action.”

**Giulia – Press Spokesperson
for Sea-Watch e.V.**



Photo: Johannes Räbel



Photo: Tom Lyon

Documenting human rights violations

What happens in the central Mediterranean often goes undocumented. Distress situations are ignored, rescues are delayed, and people are forcibly returned to Libya. Without independent observation, there would be little evidence of these human rights violations.

That is why civilian aerial reconnaissance is a central part of our work. Using our aircraft, we search from the air for boats in distress, alert nearby ships, and at the same time document what governments would rather conceal.

Our crews are often the only witnesses to what is happening in the Mediterranean. They observe pushbacks, document failures to provide assistance, and gather evidence of violence at Europe's external borders. This information is incorporated into our public advocacy efforts, reports, and legal proceedings. In this way, they shed light on how people fleeing their homes are systematically deprived of their rights.

In 2025, our crews flew 178 operations and discovered 181 boats in distress with a total of over 8,800 people on board. →

A cycle of violence

Our aerial observations reveal the cruel extent of European border violence in the central Mediterranean. Rattling boats with barely enough fuel face an overwhelming force of armed militias, high-tech surveillance, and state actors. Our crews regularly witness how people fleeing their homes are intercepted against their will and forced back into a cycle of violence and exploitation – a cycle from which many of them have already tried to escape multiple times.

An operation in June 2025 made this reality particularly clear. During a reconnaissance flight, our crew spotted a small wooden boat with about 20 people on board. At the same time, a patrol boat belonging to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard was approaching. For nearly an hour, the people on the boat tried to escape pursuit.

When the patrol ship finally launched a speedboat and armed men stopped the wooden boat, some of the people jumped into the sea and tried to swim away. They were more than 50 nautical miles from the nearest land – with nothing but open water around them. Witnessing these scenes was a stark reminder that many people would even choose the open sea and the possibility of death rather than be forced to return to Libya.

From the air, our crew could only observe and document how the people were eventually captured by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and brought back. For these people, this most likely meant a return to detention camps in Libya, where they face the threat of torture, sexual violence, or death.

Photo: Vic Harster

Why “so-called Libyan Coast Guard”?

The so-called Libyan Coast Guard consists of armed militias whose goal is to intercept people fleeing their countries and forcibly return them to Libya – often through the threat or use of violence. In doing so, they receive financial, logistical, and political support from European countries and the border agency Frontex. We do not recognize the so-called Libyan Coast Guard because it does not meet international standards for a coast guard, and because it does not protect people but instead puts them in danger or even kills them.

When help comes too late

Our crews regularly document situations in which urgent maritime emergencies are known to the relevant authorities, yet help is either not provided or arrives only after a long delay.

On **July 28, 2025**, our reconnaissance aircraft, the *Seabird 2*, spotted a boat with more than 90 people on board in the Tunisian search and rescue zone. By the time our crew arrived, the situation was already critical: the boat was drifting on the open sea, and two people were already in the water. The relevant authorities were immediately informed of the situation, but as is so often the case, no rescue operation was launched.

It was not until the following day, **July 29**, that the merchant ship *Port FUKUOKA* reached the boat and began a rescue attempt. During the rescue operation, the overcrowded boat capsized, and several more people fell into the water. In the end, more than 90 people were brought aboard the merchant ship. Two small children did not survive; another person remains missing to this day.

Even after that, the situation remained dire for the survivors. They were forced to remain on the merchant ship as their situation grew increasingly worse. A woman who was heavily pregnant went into labor.

Nevertheless, the merchant ship was not directed to a safe harbor. Our ship, the *Aurora*, was also not permitted to take the people on board and bring them ashore.

It was not until **August 1** – following mounting pressure from media reports and political voices in the opposition – that the pregnant woman and her husband were evacuated to Lampedusa, while the remaining survivors were later able to disembark in Pozzallo.



Dead people whom no one would see

Many boats sink without anyone ever knowing about it. Thousands of people die without their deaths being documented. They vanish into an unknown number that can never be fully accounted for – buried beneath the waters, without a farewell, without a name. This idea is unbearable, and yet it is the reality in the Mediterranean.

On June 26, 2025, during an operation in the central Mediterranean, the crew of our reconnaissance aircraft *Seabird 1* discovered the bodies of five people floating in the water in international waters off the Libyan coast. The crew immediately alerted the relevant authorities and attempted to obtain further information about the incident.

A patrol boat belonging to an armed Libyan militia was nearby, but it ignored our crew's radio calls. To the best of our knowledge, the bodies were not recovered. How these people died and who they were remains unclear to this day.

Time and again, we document moments like these, which point to a larger tragedy. Time and again, we are forced to conclude, with disappointment and anger, that Europe does not care whether these people are found, identified, or even mourned at all.



If Italy keeps a plane on the ground, we'll get another one in the air!

Our aerial reconnaissance makes visible what is happening in the Mediterranean – and that is precisely what is politically undesirable. In recent years, government actors have repeatedly attempted to block our flight operations. New laws in

Italy now even allow reconnaissance aircraft to be detained.

For us, one thing is clear: If our work is hindered, that is no reason to stop – but rather to expand. That is why, in the spring of 2025, we

launched another reconnaissance aircraft, the *Seabird 3*. This not only allows us to fill operational gaps when one of our aircraft is undergoing maintenance, but also makes us more resilient to potential seizures.

The *Seabird 3* is lightweight and cost-effective and has a particularly long-endurance flight capability. Ideal for reporting maritime emergencies, documenting human rights violations, and sending a clear message to EU governments: **we are here, we see you, and we will not let you get away with this!**

The *Seabird 3* is being deployed in collaboration with Humanitarian Pilots Initiative (HPI) and United4Rescue. With it, we will be active not only in the central Mediterranean, but also in the particularly dangerous Atlantic route between West Africa and the Canary Islands – a route where more and more people are dying.



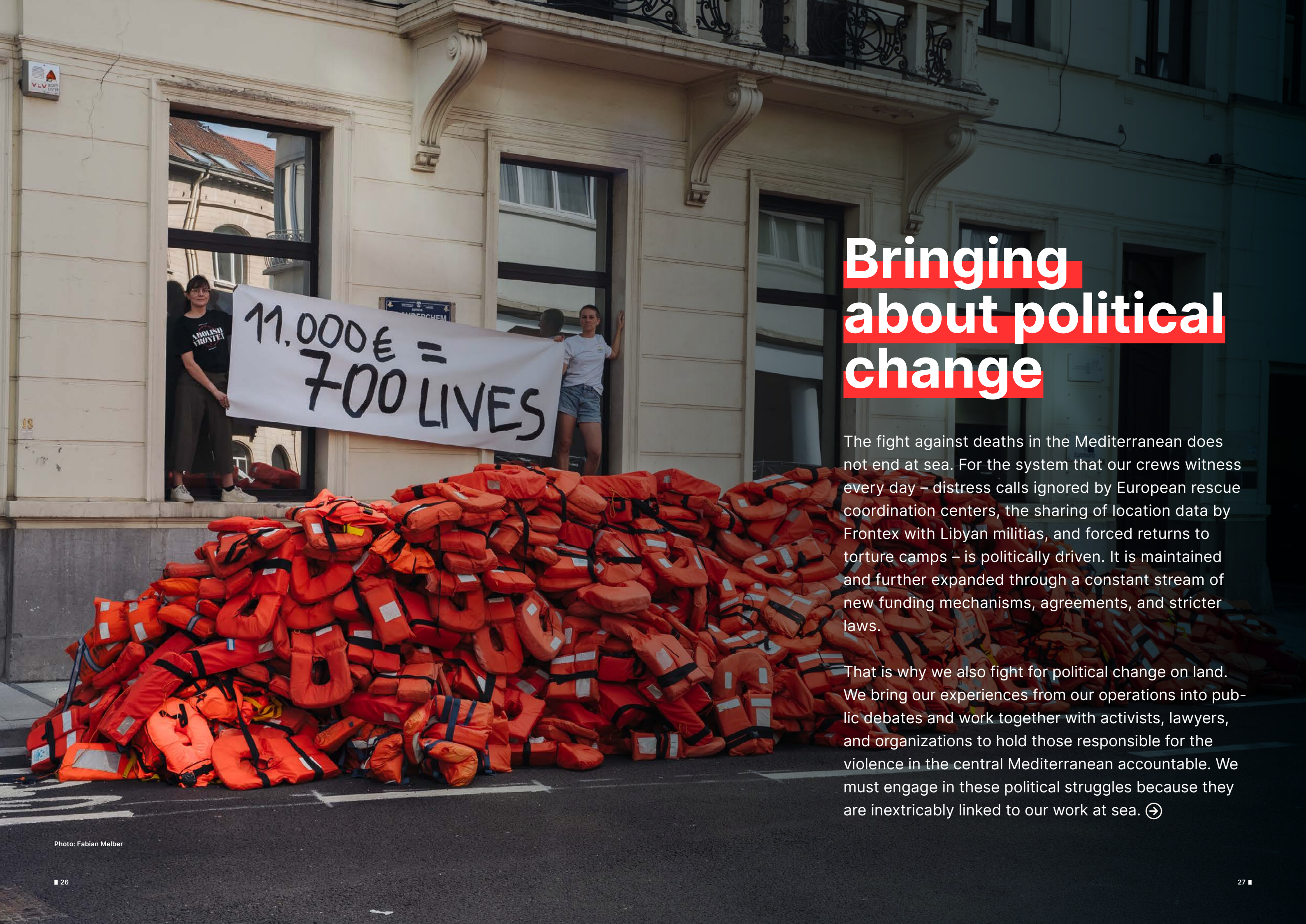
Documentation brings justice

In 2021, our crew documented an illegal pushback of approximately 170 people by a merchant ship and the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. The operation was coordinated by Italian authorities, even though Italy was actually obliged to bring those rescued to a safe harbor. One of the affected individuals later filed a lawsuit in an Italian court – supported by the photograph and other evidence we had collected. In 2025, the court

ruled for the first time that this pushback was unlawful, and granted the plaintiff a humanitarian visa for Europe. The case demonstrates how crucial our aerial operation and our documentation work are – they make human rights violations visible and lay the groundwork for challenging them in court.



Photo: Bahar Kaygusuz



Bringing about political change

The fight against deaths in the Mediterranean does not end at sea. For the system that our crews witness every day – distress calls ignored by European rescue coordination centers, the sharing of location data by Frontex with Libyan militias, and forced returns to torture camps – is politically driven. It is maintained and further expanded through a constant stream of new funding mechanisms, agreements, and stricter laws.

That is why we also fight for political change on land. We bring our experiences from our operations into public debates and work together with activists, lawyers, and organizations to hold those responsible for the violence in the central Mediterranean accountable. We must engage in these political struggles because they are inextricably linked to our work at sea. ➞

Advocacy – enforcing human rights

The advocacy team at Sea-Watch compiles the findings from our operations and brings them to the places where they can have a political impact: in parliaments, courts, and the public sphere.

Should Frontex receive more funding and authority?

We confront members of the European Parliament with documented human rights violations and demonstrate that no amount of money can make an agency like Frontex humanitarian.

Are distress calls being ignored, leading to shipwrecks?

We secure evidence and present it in court.

Are new agreements on so-called “migration prevention” being negotiated?

We expose what lies behind these terms: illegal deportations, arbitrary detentions and the abandonment of people in desert regions.

The following examples illustrate what this work looks like in practice.

Preventing the criminalization of flight

Historically, helping people flee has often been a form of solidarity and resistance, as with the Underground Railroad in the U.S. – a network that helped enslaved people escape – or in fleeing authoritarian regimes such as Nazi Germany or the GDR. Even today, assisted flight remains one of the few ways for many around the world to find safety. It is a political, defiant, and above all deeply human act – and, depending on the context, it is recognised as such.

The European Union, however, is doing everything in its power to criminalize aid to people on the move. People who steer a boat or try to bring their families to safety with the help of forged identification documents are sentenced to absurdly long prison terms in countries like Italy or Greece. Even civilian sea

rescuers repeatedly find themselves under political pressure, even though they act in accordance with international law.

The current reform of the directive on so-called “facilitation of unauthorized entry” threatens to further intensify this practice. For conservative and right-wing politicians, it offers an opportunity to further expand their violent border-sealing policies.

We are working to counter this: we closely monitor the legislative process, draw lawmakers’ attention to the specific risks of problematic wording, and inform the public. Our goal is a legal framework that protects people – both those who are fleeing and those who support them in solidarity.



Creating visibility: Documenting violence and informing the public

An informed public is a key prerequisite for political change. To counter racist narratives and right-wing disinformation, we need reliable facts and independent evidence.

Our work on the so-called Libyan Coast Guard illustrates this point. The so-called Libyan Coast Guard is a coalition of various militias that, with EU support, prevent people from fleeing and forcibly return them to to Libya. Reliable information about their actions is hard to come by: the people affected have few opportunities to make their experiences public, and the area of operation lies far removed from the European public eye.

This is where our aerial surveillance comes in. Our crews regularly document illegal returns, dangerous maneuvers, and violence against people on the move. Based on these observations, we have compiled a report in collaboration with our advocacy and communications team that documents more than 70 violent incidents perpetrated by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard since 2016.

This documentation serves as an important resource for journalists, policymakers, and international organizations such as the United Nations. It helps provide a more comprehensive picture of the situation and highlights the consequences of European policy in the central Mediterranean.

Lawsuit and protest against Frontex: Demanding transparency

We also exert political pressure in the streets. In July 2025, we protested together with partner organizations in front of Frontex’s headquarters in Brussels. The occasion was a bill for more than 11,000 euros that the EU border agency had sent us following legal proceedings – because we had demanded transparency regarding its role in an illegal pushback.

As early as 2022, we had filed a lawsuit against Frontex together with FragDenStaat to sue Frontex in order to uncover the agency’s involvement in the pushback. After two years, the ruling: While the court confirmed that Frontex had unlawfully withheld information, it otherwise dismissed our lawsuit. Although the border agency is required to be transparent toward the public, its withholding of the requested documents is tolerated.

In the summer of 2025, Frontex finally billed us for the costs of the proceedings. An EU agency with a budget in the billions is demanding money from a donation-funded organization simply because we tried to shed light on its practices.

We did not let this stand unchallenged. We made the matter public and called on Frontex to withdraw the invoice immediately. As part of a protest action, we laid out around 700 life jackets in front of the agency’s headquarters in Brussels. They symbolize the number of life jackets we could finance with that amount. ➔

“Frontex is demanding money from us because we’re making their practices visible – while they themselves are involved in human rights violations with impunity. That is exactly why we won’t back down.”

Bérénice – Advocacy Officer at Sea-Watch e.V.



Photo: Fabian Melber

Raising public awareness

Violence against people fleeing their homes often takes place far from the public eye – at sea, in border regions, or in camps. That’s why we bring this reality to light, share stories about our operations, and distribute information through our channels. Through campaigns, events, and public actions, we raise awareness, connect people, and strengthen a movement that stands against isolation and for freedom of movement.

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, is tasked with preventing people on the move from reaching the European mainland. With a budget of 5.6 billion euros and plans to increase its staff to 10,000 border guards by 2027, Frontex is the fastest growing agency in the EU. Frontex invests hundreds of millions of euros in surveillance technologies to pass on information and data about boats in distress to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. In this way, Frontex’s aerial surveillance enables violent pushbacks of people on the move to Libya.

Presence at events – reaching people, raising awareness

In 2025, Sea-Watch was represented at over 135 events across Europe – ranging from festivals and panel discussions to public actions. In addition to traditional talks and information booths, we once again received support from the music scene this year: the band Waving the Guns, as well as the artists Marlon Großhardt, Nina Chuba and Ebow invited us to accompany them on their tours. With the help of our more than 200 event activists, we reached thousands of people, were able to inform them about our work and make it clear why civil resistance against Europe’s isolationist policies is urgently needed.

Photo: Vanessa Seifert

Ink Against Borders

At the “Ink Against Borders,” people get tattoos – and at the same time raise funds for civilian sea rescue. In 2025, the event took place in Berlin for the third time. Over 60 FLINTA* tattoo artists participated and donated their proceeds to Sea-Watch – raising a total of 62,759 euros.

Photo: Clara Manette

Sea-Watch local groups

In 2025, we began establishing local groups to bring our work more into the public sphere and connect people locally. Groups have since been established in several cities – from Hamburg to Berlin, Leipzig, and Munich. The local groups create spaces where activists can exchange ideas, plan actions together, and network with other local initiatives. Step by step, a decentralized, visible movement that will grow even stronger over the long term.

Half marathons in Berlin, Cologne and Munich

At the 2025 Berlin, Cologne, and Munich half marathons, a total of over 350 runners took part on behalf of Sea-Watch. Together, they raised more than 150,000 euros in donations. For the participants, the race was more than just a sporting event: they used it to raise awareness about civilian sea rescue in their communities, raise funds, and bring our political demands to the public’s attention. Year after year, it’s impressive to see how sporting events can become places of solidarity.

Photo: Christoph Wehrer

Webinars for our supporting members

To keep our supporting members up to date, we hosted two exclusive webinars in 2025.

In February, our crew members provided insights into the *Sea-Watch 5*’s first operation and spoke about the challenges and successes related to our new rescue ship. In November, the focus was on the *Sea-Watch 5*’s one-year anniversary. Vera, Matteo, and Giulia shared stories of rescues carried out under the most adverse conditions, personal experiences on board, and the increasing criminalization. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and to gain a better understanding of our work behind the scenes.



Photo: Felix Weiß

Ben & Jerry’s – protecting solidarity

Together with Ben & Jerry’s, we launched the “Protect Solidarity” campaign in 2025. The goal was to draw attention to the fact that support for people on the move in Europe is increasingly criminalized – and that solidarity must not be a crime. Through the campaign, people were invited to learn more, become politically active, and publicly advocate for the rights of people on the move. This collaboration demonstrates how companies can use their reach to strengthen civic engagement.

10 Years of Sea-Watch – anniversary event

Ten years of Sea-Watch – that also means ten years of commitment from countless supporters. In September 2025, we celebrated this anniversary together with supporting members, partners, and allies at the Columbia Theater in Berlin. Through discussions and presentations by activists from different phases of our work, it became clear just how much Sea-Watch has changed over the past ten years and how much greater the challenges have become. The evening provided a space for exchange, reflection, and looking ahead, and demonstrated once again that civilian sea rescue doesn’t just take place at sea, but is supported by a broad public united in solidarity.



Photo: Felix Weiß

You can also get involved and support us with your ideas, actions, or by sharing informational materials.

Acting together

The fight for safe and legal escape routes is not a solitary struggle; it is the collective effort of many organizations and initiatives – supported by tens of thousands of activists who come together, support one another, share resources and expertise, learn from one another, and continually develop new strategies.

This solidarity takes concrete form in alliances such as the Justice Fleet, through targeted support for other organizations, and in collaboration with self-organized initiatives led by people with lived experience of displacement. Only in this way can we continue to advocate for safe and legal escape routes and stand up to the increasingly aggressive political attacks.

Justice Fleet – stronger in the alliance



Since 2015, civil society organizations have rescued over 175,000 people fleeing across the Mediterranean from drowning. For doing so, they have been declared enemies by governments: ships have been blocked, organizations have been defamed, and activists have been taken to court.

Ten years later, we joined forces with twelve other organizations to form the Justice Fleet, the largest alliance of civilian sea rescue organizations to date. Our goal: to act together, strengthen networks of solidarity with people stranded in Libya, fend off political attacks, and defend human rights. We want to generate public pressure to bring about political change.

At the heart of our collaboration lies a clear political conviction: we fundamentally reject the inclusion of the so-called Maritime Rescue Coordination Center in Tripoli in our operational communications. This center coordinates the so-called Libyan Coast Guard – a network of armed militias that, with the support of European states, forcibly intercepts people at sea and returns them to Libya.

This decision was not without consequences: In the months following the alliance's founding, several civilian rescue ships –

including the *Sea-Watch 5* – were detained because they did not communicate with the so-called Libyan Rescue Coordination Center. So while violence in the Mediterranean is escalating, those who refuse to participate in it are being punished.

At the same time, court rulings show that these repressive measures are untenable. In several cases, the detentions have been suspended in summary proceedings. These rulings confirm what we have known for a long time: that we are in the right. But every unlawful detention of our ships not only costs valuable resources, but above all, human lives.

With the Justice Fleet, we aim to align our strategies more closely in the future, share information, coordinate our operations, and develop joint legal and political responses to such attacks.

You can find more information about the Justice Fleet here: justice-fleet.org/en



Sharing resources – strengthening civil society

For several years now, we have been specifically allocating a portion of the funds entrusted to us to initiatives that support people fleeing their homes in various ways. Why? Because sharing resources is a central component of a resilient solidarity movement.

By directing funds to where they are urgently needed – whether for sea rescue, legal support, the protection of particularly vulnerable people, or the documentation of human rights violations – we strengthen a diverse civil society with different perspectives, approaches, and strategies. This collaboration is especially necessary in an increasingly repressive political environment.

In 2025, we were able to support four important initiatives:

Bayefall (30,000 euros)

Bayefall is a self-organized initiative of people who have experienced displacement and are building solidarity-based support structures. The funding will enable a continuous presence of Bayefall activists on Lampedusa, who will directly support newly arriving people, share important information, and incorporate their perspectives into the work of the civilian fleet. The goal is to bring about long-term change in humanitarian structures and to design them more in line with the experiences of those directly affected.

Compass Collective (25,000 euros)

Compass Collective is a self-organized initiative of people with lived experience of displacement that organizes solidarity-based support for new arrivals and is closely networked with other actors in the central Mediterranean region. The grant covers operational costs to enable them to continue their work on the ground – in particular, accompanying people after their arrival and ensuring access to information and support structures. In this way, Compass Collective helps bridge the gap between rescue at sea and support on land.



Maldusa (12,000 euros)

Maldusa is an initiative with locations in Palermo and on Lampedusa that serves as a bridge between sea rescue and onshore support. This grant enables the coordination of efforts on Lampedusa, where Maldusa provides information to people arriving on the island, documents cases, and strengthens networks between local and international actors. In this way, civilian sea rescue efforts are supported and supplemented beyond the moment of rescue.

Refugees in Libya (33,000 euros)

Refugees in Libya is a movement organized by displaced people that documents and publicizes human rights violations along the flight routes. With this funding, project coordination will be strengthened to collect evidence, publish reports, and advance political and legal actions at the EU level. In this way, the voices of people on the move are made visible and brought into political debates.

The selection of funded projects is carried out through a careful process. The organizations transparently outline how they will use the funds and what impact they will achieve with them. In this way, we ensure that our support reaches where it is specifically needed.

The fact that we are able to support important initiatives like this is also thanks to our donors. They not only make our own projects possible, but also help strengthen a network of initiatives that stand up for human rights together.

Refugees in Libya 2025: Protest, raising awareness, and legal accountability

Refugees in Libya was founded in 2021 during a 100-day protest outside the UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) office in Tripoli. To this day, the initiative operates as a self-organized movement of displaced people and survivors. It runs hotlines for people fleeing in North Africa, documents human rights violations, and supports humanitarian corridors. It also collaborates with legal organizations and investigators to address crimes committed in Libyan detention centers and along flight routes.



Photo: Clara Marnette

The year 2025 marked an important phase of mobilization for Refugees in Libya. In North Africa and Europe, the initiative documented human rights violations, supported people fleeing their homes, and organized protests. At the same time, it worked to shed light on crimes against humanity committed against migrants, asylum seekers, and people on the move, and to hold those responsible to account.

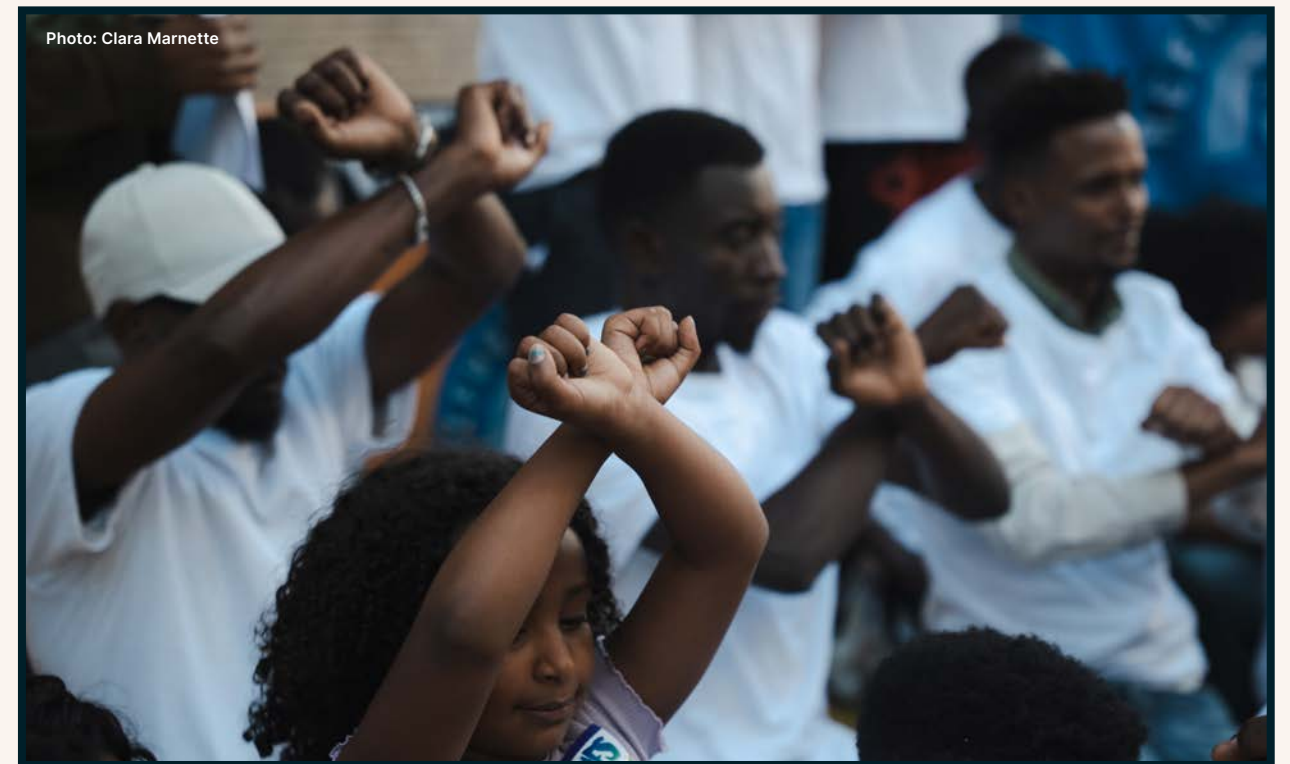


Photo: Clara Marnette

A pivotal moment in 2025 was the “UNFAIR 2.0” campaign in Geneva in September. At a press conference in front of the UNHCR headquarters, Refugees in Libya presented the *Book of Shame*. The publication is based upon hundreds of witness testimonies and documents violence as well as the failures of protection mechanisms in Libya, Tunisia, and Niger.

At the same time, people on the move protested in Agadez (Niger), demonstrating that their struggle transcends national borders. A joint manifesto by movements from Libya, Tunisia, and Niger called for an investigation into these abuses, better support, transparency, and respect for the rights of people on the move.

In October 2025, Refugees in Libya organized days of action in Rome against the Italy–Libya Memorandum. This agreement is often referred to as the “deal of death” because it enables interception at sea and deportations back to Libya. There, people are subjected to detention,

torture, forced labor, and sexual violence. The focus during these days of action was the “Stage of Survivors”, where around fifty survivors spoke publicly about their experiences.

In addition to protests, the formal prosecution of crimes against people fleeing their homes remained a priority in 2025. Refugees in Libya collected evidence, documented witness statements, and supported legal proceedings.

People on the move are not merely victims of border violence. They are political actors, witnesses, investigators, and human rights defenders.

This is demonstrated by the work of Refugees in Libya. Through documentation, protests, legal action, and international cooperation, the movement challenges impunity – and the political structures that enable violence against people fleeing their homes.



Photo: Clara Marnette

Creating transparency

Civilian sea rescue should not be necessary. Rescuing people in distress at sea is a government duty. This should not depend on whether enough people fund rescue through their donations. But because states have failed to fulfill their responsibilities in the central Mediterranean for years, civil society must shoulder this task.

The fact that we have been able to carry out operations with our ships and aircraft for over ten years is therefore anything but a given. Our work is funded almost entirely by donations – from tens of thousands of people whose support makes our operations possible in the first place.

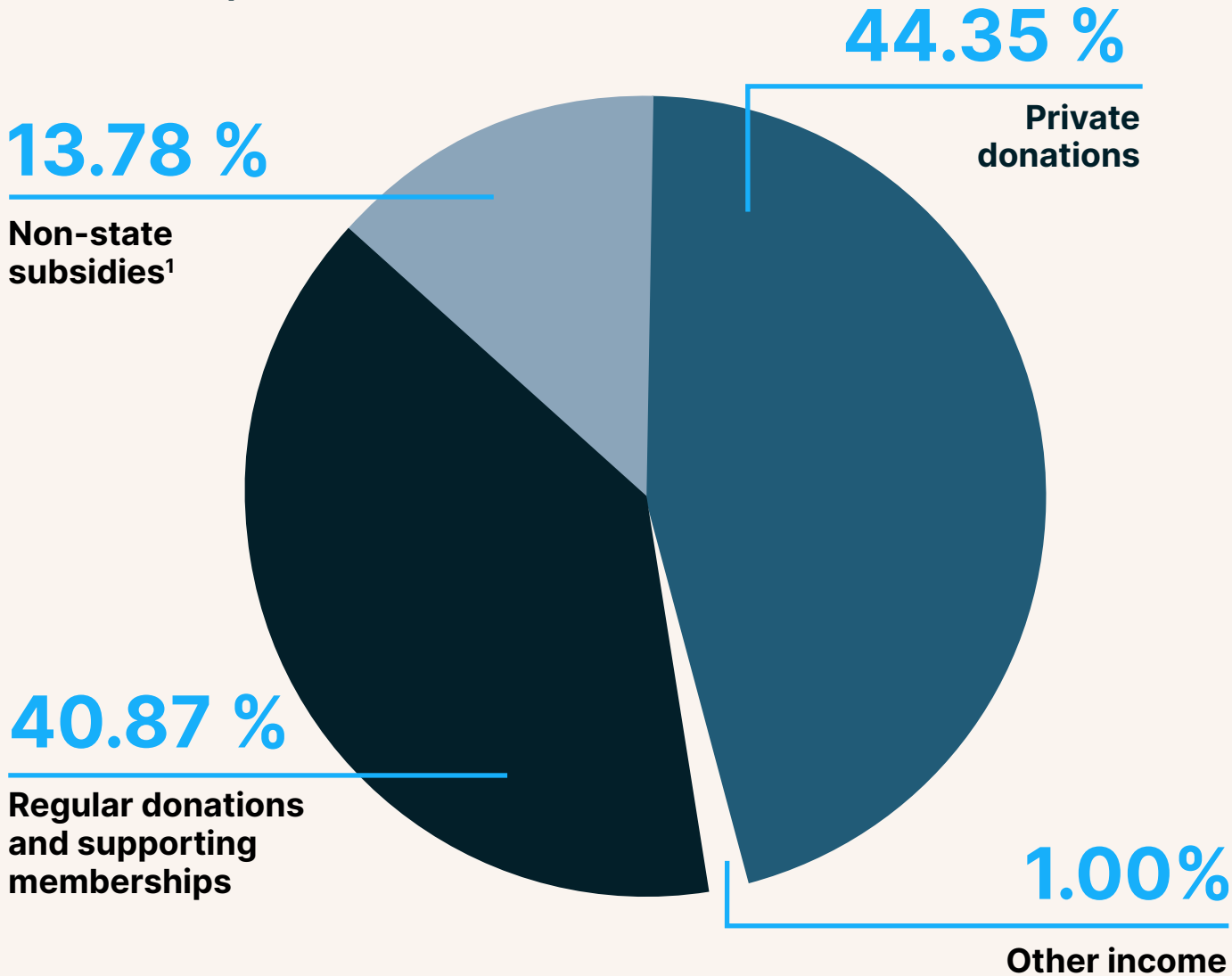
This trust obligates us to be especially open. That is why we transparently explain how our organization works, how we make decisions, and how the funds entrusted to us are used. ➔



Revenue overview 2025

€13,537,356

Revenue excluding
commercial operations

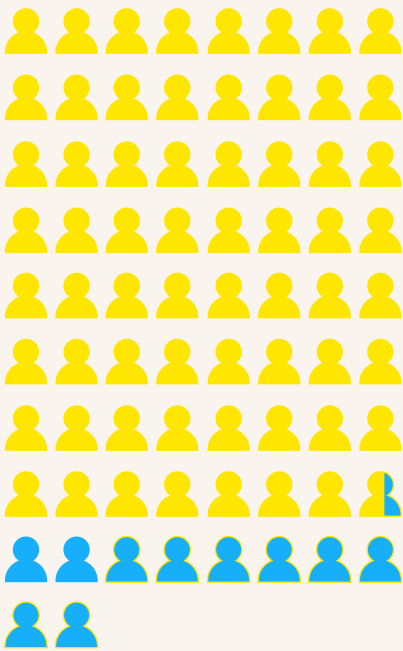


¹Non-state subsidies:

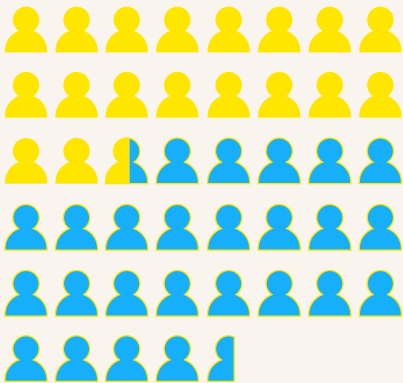
PostcodeLotterie DT gGmbH: €1,510,000
Gemeinsam Retten e.V.: €230,000
Lemonaid & Charitea e.V.: €50,000
24guteTaten e.V.: €45,000
Civilfleet-Support e.V.: €30,000

We raised an additional **€1,304,467**
through the sale of merchandise.

In 2025, we also received bequests, the proceeds of which cannot yet be definitively quantified due to complex accounting procedures. These will be transparently reported in the final annual financial statements.



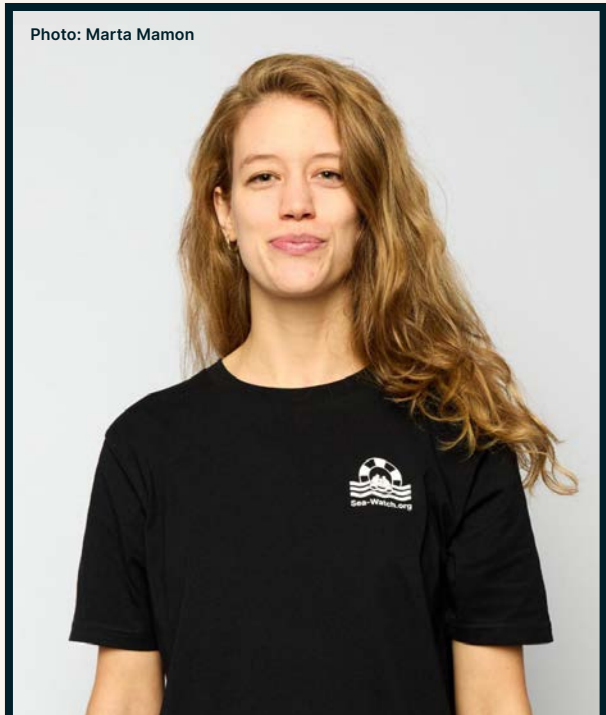
36,998 Donors have supported us through a supporting membership or recurring donation. **5,192** of which donated on a regular basis for the first time.



22,194 Donors supported us with one or more individual donations. **12,906** of whom donated to us for the first time.

equivalent to 500 donors

59,192 donors



“Search and rescue is a state responsibility. That makes it all the more shameful that civil society has to fund it out of its own pocket. At the same time, I am deeply moved by the fact that this has been possible for more than ten years.”

Marlis – Coordinator of the Donations Department at Sea-Watch e.V.

Expenditure overview 2025

€14,270,694

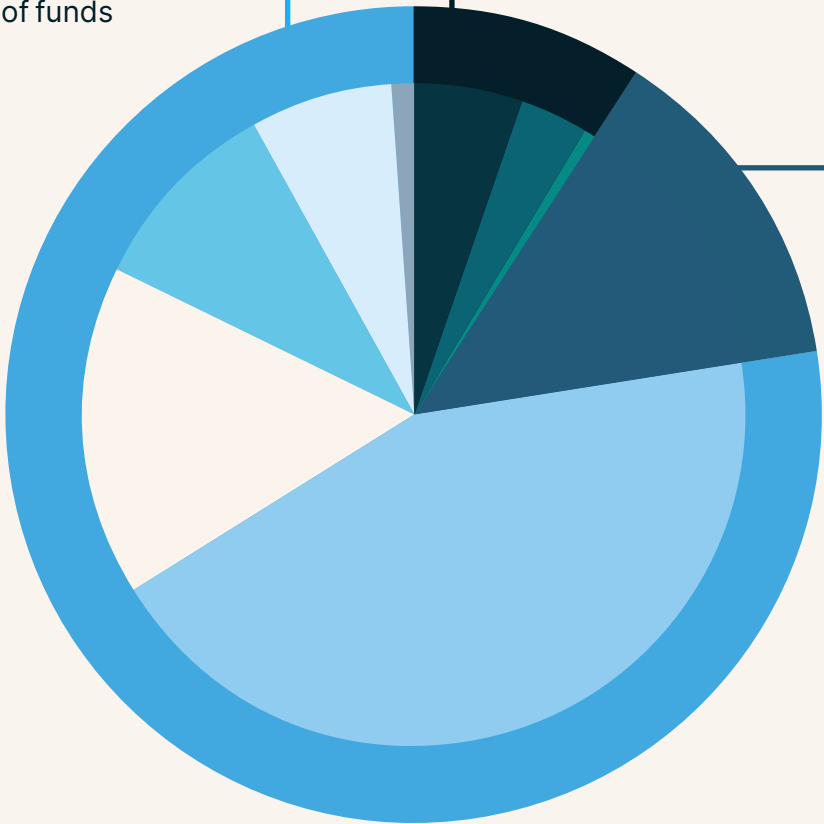
Expenses excluding
commercial operations

77.45 % Projects

- 43.70 % Rescue vessels
- 16.20 % Civilian aerial reconnaissance
- 9.69 % Media/PR, Advocacy, Events
- 6.98 % Project support
- 0.88 % Passing on of funds

9.41 % Administration

- 5.39 % Organizational coordination and development
- 3.35 % IT and financial accounting
- 0.67 % Other administration



13.14 % Donor acquisition and support

Expenditure of operational work:

In 2025, we spent 11.1 million euros on our operational work: of this amount, 6.3 million euros went toward operating our rescue ships *Sea-Watch 5* and *Aurora*, as well as the medical team, crew training, and ship IT. 2.3 million euros were used for our civilian aerial reconnaissance. 1 million euros went toward project support, and 1.4 million euros were allocated to media/press, advocacy, and events. We transferred 125,000 euros to other organizations.

Project support:

Various onshore projects support and assist our rescue operations at sea and in the air, and are therefore essential to their success. These include the supervision team, vessel management and logistics, the crewing team, and operational coordination.

Funding allocation:

We are pleased that we were able to assist other civil society organizations in 2025. On pages 37–38, you'll find information about why we do this and which projects we supported last year.

Organizational coordination and development

This cost category includes the Executive Board (which handles strategic and operational matters), the People, Culture, and Organization division, the Berlin office, costs for association meetings, and strategic development processes for the entire organization.

IT and financial accounting

The IT infrastructure ensures that our communications and data are processed securely and reliably, which is particularly important in a politically repressive environment. Financial accounting ensures the transparent and proper handling of all financial transactions in accordance with legal requirements.

Acquisition and supporting donors

The work of our fundraising department is crucial to ensuring the long-term sustainability of our projects. In 2025, we had to invest more resources to attract new donors and continue to reach out to and keep existing donors informed. Fundraising involves not only raising funds, but also educating the public about our work through mailing, newsletters, the annual report, and webinars – an important part of our public relations efforts.

For every euro spent on fundraising promotion and administration, we raised 7.30 euros in donations.

Breakdown of costs for our rescue ships and reconnaissance aircraft

Cost center	Sea-Watch 5	Aurora fleet	Civil air reconnaissance
Personnel costs	€1,756,182	€710,575	€764,466
Travel expenses & meals	€146,266	€157,991	€160,294
Facility costs	€13,485	€75,668	€36,375
Maintenance & equipment	€510,554	€296,368	€626,640
Operating costs	€802,806	€227,643	€436,270
Port & airport costs	€246,770	€25,621	€89,008
Communication	€59,597	€30,059	€22,853
Other costs	€144,081	€23,265	€160,232
Taxes	€12,419	€18,341	€15,296
Total	€3,692,160	€1,565,531	€2,311,434

Why are personnel costs so high on our ships?

In 2025, an average of 33 people were permanently employed on our ships. Certain positions on board (such as officers, electricians, or engineers) must be staffed year-round – even when in port. This is required by German flag regulations. We can only guarantee this continuity through paid, permanent positions. Furthermore, for certain positions, it is not always possible to find volunteer activists for our operations.

The figures in this report are preliminary. We have received confirmation from the tax office that there was a delay in the audit of our previous financial statements, but that our association has always filed its tax returns on time.



Photo: Carla Marnette

Commitment 2025

Sea-Watch is made possible by a community of many who support and promote our vision in a wide variety of ways.

58,184 supporters from over 30 countries worldwide have donated to Sea-Watch.

16,776 of whom donated to us for the first time.

717 online fundraising campaigns campaigns were organized for Sea-Watch.

895 companies, organizations, and foundations have supported us with donations.

62 churches have included us in their collections.

135 events across Europe were held for or in collaboration with Sea-Watch.

580 people participated in our online webinars.

350 runners ran a half-marathon for us in Berlin, Munich and Cologne.

23,626 purchases were made at the Sea-Watch shop.

311,660 new followers were gained on our social media channels.

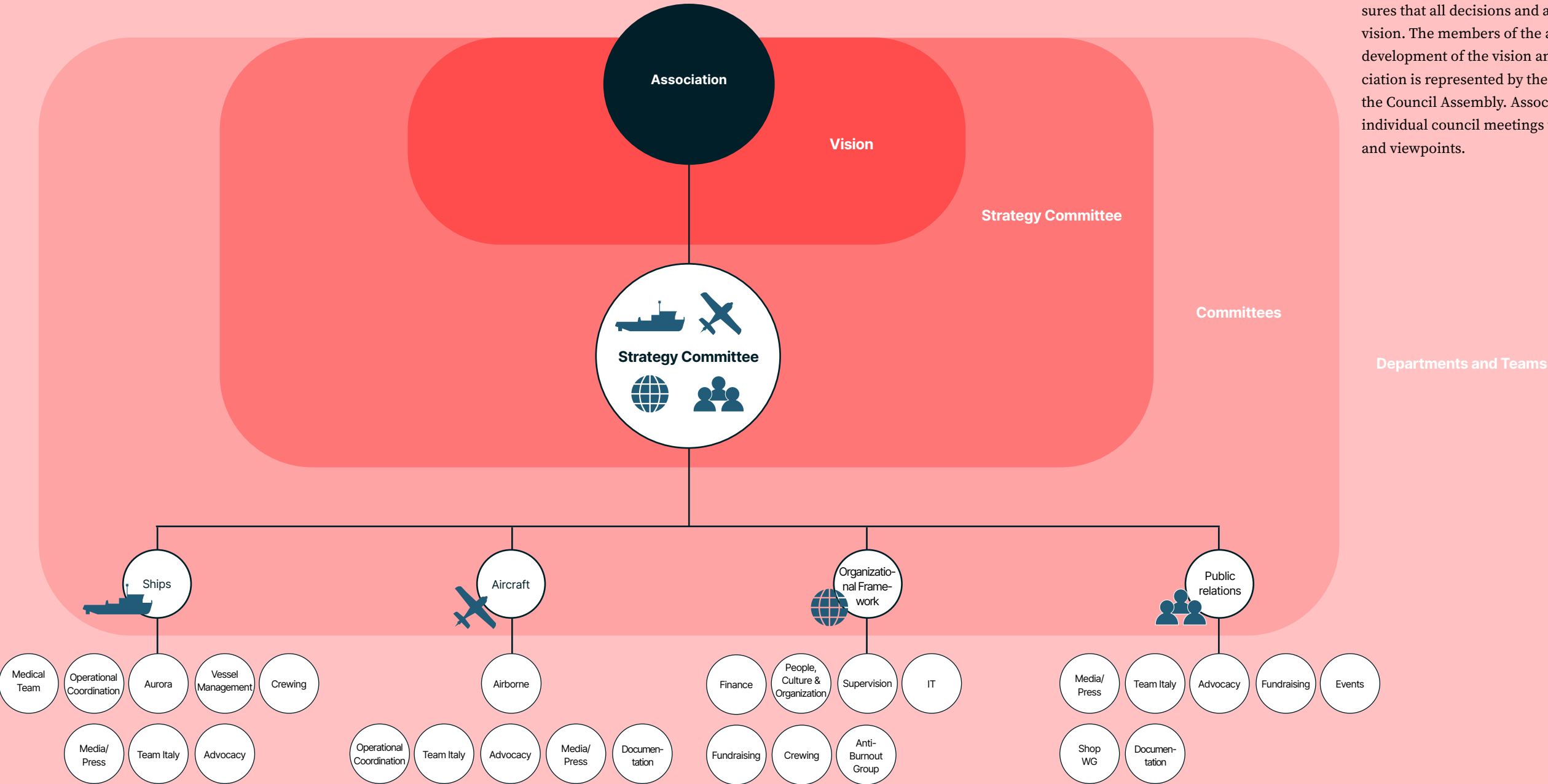
2,470,000 interactions took place on our social media channels.

It's encouraging to know that all these people stand by our side and stand up for solidarity and human rights.

Organizational structure at Sea-Watch:

Transparent and coordinated decision-making

Sea-Watch is a growing organization that responds to a wide range of tasks and challenges. With a clear structure, we promote transparent and coordinated decision-making that ensures the long-term success and efficiency of our work. We have established various levels and bodies to ensure that all decisions are made in accordance with our vision and values.



Departments and Teams

Sea-Watch's 17 departments and teams are responsible for implementing ideas and actions. They handle the planning and execution of projects and tasks. Each team is represented on one or more councils and works closely with other departments to achieve the set goals.

Councils

The various departments come together in four councils to address the following topics: ships, aircraft, organizational framework, and public relations. These groups meet regularly to make decisions relevant to their respective areas of responsibility. They serve as experts and decision-makers in their fields and ensure that Sea-Watch's operational needs are effectively addressed.

Council Assembly

The Council Assembly is composed of representatives from the four councils. It is responsible for cross-organizational decisions, such as setting budgets, goals, and guidelines. The Council Assembly ensures that Sea-Watch's operational activities align with the organization's long term goals.

The Executive Board

The Executive Board, which is elected by the association, represents the organisation and the association externally and ensures that all decision-making processes are carried out in line with Sea-Watch's established goals and values. The Executive Board plays a key role in the strategic direction of the organization and in supporting the Council Assembly, ensuring that the committee's decisions are integrated into the organization's overall strategy.

The Association

The association forms the foundation of the entire organization. It articulates Sea-Watch's vision and ensures that all decisions and actions are in line with this vision. The members of the association contribute to the development of the vision and elect the Board. The association is represented by the Board in the councils and the Council Assembly. Association members may attend individual council meetings to share their perspectives and viewpoints.

A huge THANK YOU!

This year wouldn't have been possible without you. Thank you to everyone who stands up against isolation, violence, and injustice and works day in and day out to promote freedom of movement.

To our activists: You're where it counts – at sea, in the air, on the streets, and in countless spaces in between. You take action when others look the other way. Your dedication, your perseverance, and your determination are what make our work possible in the first place.

To our supporting members and donors: Your support is the foundation of our work. It allows us to remain independent, act quickly, and plan for the long term. You give us the confidence to keep going – even under increasingly difficult conditions.

We'd also like to thank our partners.

Special thanks go to **German Postcode Lottery** and to all participants in the social lottery. Your support plays a key role in enabling us to continue our operations. Thank you for your trust, your reliability, and the strong partnership we've built over the years.



A big thank you also to **United4Rescue**, for your ongoing support and for building a broad coalition that strengthens civilian sea rescue and ensures that people fleeing their homes are not left alone.



Your support allows us to remain vocal and visible – for a Europe that acts in solidarity rather than exclusion. With you, we stand firm, on the sides of those who must fight for their freedom of movement every single day.



Photo: Maria Giulia Trombini

If you, too, want to take a stand against the deadly policy of letting people die at sea by becoming a supporting member, you can find more information here!

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



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Donate now

Our operations on the water and in the air are financed 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/donate ➔

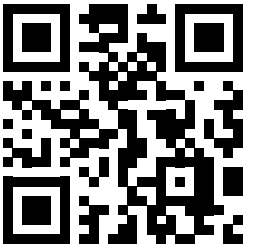
Photo: Clara Marnette



Show style, support sea rescue!

Set an example for human rights on the street with clothes for civil sea rescue from our **Sea-Watch-Supporters-Shop**:

shop.sea-watch.org



We prioritize sustainability and fair trade in our production.
For more information, visit: shop.sea-watch.org



Photos: Marta Mamon

Donation account

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