

borderline-europe, Sicily

SCIROCCO

News from Italy



Scirocco [ʃiˈrɔkko-Schirokko] is a hot, strong south-easterly wind that carries dust and sand across the Mediterranean to Sicily and northern Italy, often lasting only for just a few hours. This news flash has been published regularly since March 2021 and is currently issued on a monthly basis.

Situation of refugees

Good News – SAI reception system

Some positive news to start with: there are two organisations that provide targeted support to migrants and facilitate their integration. They focus on persons facing multiple forms of discrimination due to their origin and their sexual orientation or physical limitations. Especially in times when political efforts aim to make integration more difficult, these examples highlight how valuable it is to give everyone a chance.

The [Casa dei Mirti](#) is a facility of the Waldensian Diaconia Centre 'La Noce' in Palermo, which since 2021 has been part of the SAI network (Italian System for the Reception and Integration of Refugees), specifically for minors and unaccompanied minor refugees. One of the people accommodated there is Amadou: he was born deaf. His escape from Senegal to Italy was long and risky. In Tunisia, he was the victim of a robbery, the scars of which he still bears. He has been accommodated at Casa dei Mirti since 2023 and has been able to receive the



Photo: [Casa dei Mirti](#) - Footballgame Foro Italico in Palermo

support he needs. Thanks to a cochlear implant and speech therapy, he has learned to speak despite his deafness. He is also able to continue his education at a school for the hearing impaired. He recently won the Italian Under-21 Football Championship for the Deaf and is now able to continue his football training with hearing players at the ACSD Borgo Nuovo Calcio school.

A reception centre for migrants belonging to the LGBTQI+ community was also inaugurated in Naples in early January. The 'Casa Arcobaleno' (Rainbow

House) is the first reception centre in southern Italy to actively promote the rights of LGBTQI+ migrants. Gaetano Manfredi, Mayor of Naples, said: 'Many of these migrants come from contexts where individual uniqueness is often perceived as a threat. This initiative is a source of hope that shows that cultural diversity is a richness.'

Bari – 80 migrants become homeless

However, a different picture emerges on the streets of Bari. Around [80 migrants](#) who had already been granted international protection were thrown out of an initial reception centre (CARA) onto the streets. The reason: the CARA is only an initial reception centre and therefore no longer responsible. At the same time, the possibility of obtaining a place in a SAI (the follow-up or second reception centre, which is also intended to help people gain a foothold in Italy) is low. The problem is that many people who have been granted international protection status are now unable to find a place of residence. But without a registered place of residence, there is also no possibility to apply for other services that migrants are entitled to. The unbureaucratic transition between initial and secondary reception centres has been interrupted, according to [union office Fuorimeracto](#). This has serious consequences for migrants entitled to protection: Within five days, they were turned into homeless people without being given the opportunity to assert their rights. The direct result of the systematic neglect of secondary reception centres is therefore the deprivation of migrants entitled to protection.

Political situation

Update: Italy-Albania Deal

On 28th of January 2025, Giorgia Meloni tried again: 49 migrants, classified as 'suitable' by the coast guard and the financial police were taken aboard the naval vessel *Cassiopeia* and driven to Shëngjin in Albania, as foreseen by the Albanian protocol on the externalisation of asylum procedures. However, the [exact circumstances of the selection](#) of 'suitable' persons cannot be reconstructed, which once again shows the lack of transparency of the Italian government's procedure. The [absence of the](#)

UN agency (IOM-International Organisation for Migration), which was supposed to be responsible for checking the persons at risk during the naval mission, also contributes to this lack of transparency.

Upon arrival in Shëngjin, all persons underwent a



Photo: meltingpot.org (Klodiana Millona) – Boardercenter in Gjadër

brief screening. It turned out that four of the refugees were minors and two were in need of protection and therefore not [eligible for detention](#). They were transferred to Brindisi in Italy. The other [43 people](#), including eight Egyptians and 36 Bangladeshis, were detained at the border centre in Gjadër and their applications for international protection were immediately rejected. However, the [Court of Appeal in Rome](#) decided not to confirm the detention of the 43 migrants. They referred the case to the European Court of Justice. In a ruling on 4 October 2024, the Court declared that a country can only be considered safe if it is safe for all groups of people in all parts of its territory. The question now is whether the directive should be interpreted in such a way that a country in which there are one or more categories of people who are threatened or persecuted can also be declared unsafe. The migrants were subsequently released and taken to Bari (Apulia) by the Italian coastguard, where they [lodged an appeal](#) against their refusal of asylum.

Despite the third defeat that Meloni has now suffered, she seems positive and seems to be making new plans: The Albania centres are to be converted into [CPRs](#) (deportation detention centres). The [European Commission](#) is also planning a similar draft law on 'return centres' outside the EU's

borders. However, this has been criticized especially with the question of its legal implementation on non-EU territory. [Davide Faraone](#), Chairman of Italia Viva, emphasises that CPRs already exist in Italy. Meloni is trying to fill the centres at all costs to keep up the impression that her plan is working. But according to [Simona Bonafè](#) from the Democratic Party, the Meloni government's redirection is merely an admission of the failure of the Albanian model.

Elmasry - Affair: Italian government gives in; ICC under pressure

The arrest and subsequent release of Libyan police chief Osama Njeem Elmasry in Italy has triggered an international legal and diplomatic controversy. Elmasry, who is accused of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, was arrested in Turin on 19th of January based on the arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC). However, due to formal procedural errors, an Italian court decided to release him the very next day - a decision that allowed him to return to Libya with the support of the Italian authorities (more information [here](#)). At the same time, negotiations between Italy and Libya regarding the purchase of Libyan oil were taking place.

The [ICC \(International Criminal Court\)](#) is now [investigating the Italian government](#) for probable violations of the duty of international cooperation. At the same time, Lam Magok, an activist with the organisation Refugees in Libya and himself a [Sudanese refugee](#) who is a victim and witness of Elmasry's alleged crimes, has filed a criminal complaint against the Italian government representatives in Rome.



Photo: International Criminal Court in Den Haag - ICC BY-SA 4.0

While a few weeks ago the government was still [harshly attacking the court in The Hague](#) and even questioning its legality, it now seems to have [changed strategy](#). Justice Minister Carlo Nordio has made himself available to the court for all necessary explanations. The government has also agreed to investigate the case to prevent future cases like this. For example, the system for transmitting international arrest warrants should be reviewed and a direct communication between the Italian embassy and the ICC is to be created. It remains to be seen how sincere this statement is.

In the meantime, US President Donald [Trump](#) has also intervened in the matter by imposing economic sanctions on the International Criminal Court, which he accuses of 'illegitimate and unfounded actions'. The EU defended the ICC: 'The system of multilateral cooperation is crucial for justice and the defense of the constitutional legality.' The EU's Justice Commissioner reacted that Trump's fundamental questioning of the justice system in Europe could have a negative impact on global stability. For this reason, the EU will defend the Court of Justice with all its might.

The [opposition criticized](#) the Italian government's actions and emphasised that Italy had clearly violated international law by not complying with its duty to cooperate. PD MP Andrea Casu criticised the fact that Nordio had given the impression in parliament that he was defending an alleged torturer rather than representing the principles of a founding member of the ICC. Angelo Bonelli, MP for the Europa Verde party (Greens), also accused the government of delegitimising the court in The Hague through aggressive rhetoric and siding with the perpetrators rather than the victims.

In view of the situation, the opposition has introduced a [motion of no confidence](#) against Nordio. At the same time, the Public Prosecutor's Office has launched investigations against him as well as against Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi and Undersecretary of State Alfredo Mantovano. In addition, the Five Star Movement (M5S) is calling for the EU to investigate the agreements between Italy and Libya, while the PD is pushing for measures to protect the ICC from political influence.

Paragon – Italy involved in espionage affair

In the past few days, it has become known that [Italian citizens \(among others\) were monitored via WhatsApp using the spyware 'Graphite'](#) - a highly developed spyware from the Israeli company Paragon Solutions. While the Italian government, intelligence services and police deny any responsibility, Paragon has cancelled its contract with Italy due to breaches of contract. It is said that 90 activists and journalists are affected, including Luca Casarini, founder of the humanitarian organisation *Mediterranea Saving Humans*. Together with his lawyers, he has [filed a complaint with the public prosecutor's office in Palermo](#) to clarify who is behind the surveillance and whether it is connected to his political activities. The incident raises serious questions about the protection of fundamental rights and privacy.

Also, there is a possible connection between the espionage affair and the political developments in Libya. Casarini suspects that the surveillance of him and other people affected is linked to the work of *Mediterranea Saving Humans*, which organises sea rescues in the Mediterranean and supports migrants from Libya and Tunisia. The fact that the Libyan activist Husam El Gomati is one of those under surveillance could also point to the involvement of North African interests. Although [no direct temporal connection](#) between the espionage and Elmasry's release can be proven, the suspicion remains that the surveillance measures could be part of a broader strategy to control migration movements and humanitarian actors. [Casarini demands answers](#) from the Italian government and warns against dismissing the case as a mere espionage affair. It is about safeguarding fundamental human rights and the role of Italy and the EU in cooperating with authoritarian actors in North Africa.

The opposition also sees the espionage affair as a serious [attack on the constitutional legality](#) and is calling for a comprehensive investigation. In the European Parliament, MEPs from the Democratic Party, M5S, Verdi and Avs (Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra, Alliance of Greens and the Left) pressed for a [commission of enquiry](#). The leader of the Democratic Party, Elly Schlein, called on Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni to comment on the allegations in Parliament and to clarify the

background to the events, as fundamental democratic rights such as freedom of the press and freedom of expression were at stake. Democratic MEP [Sandro Ruotolo](#) described the affair as one of the most serious attacks on the constitutional legality in Europe.

While government representatives rejected the accusations, the opposition emphasised that this was not a private matter, but state-organised espionage - a scandal that should not go unanswered.

**Monitoringproject with Arci Porco Rosso:
When discrimination finds its way into hospitals,
there's no turning back**

The new article in our joint monitoring project deals with the right of migrants to [receive healthcare](#) without encountering problems under residence law. In Palermo, a practice is spreading in hospitals that has serious implications for human rights and public health. More and more doctors are reporting patients without legal residence status to the local authorities. In doing so, they are acting contrary to the Hippocratic Oath, which stipulates unconditional care for all patients and medical confidentiality. This situation, which violates people's fundamental rights and jeopardises trust in the healthcare system, requires urgent and decisive action, says Arci Porco Rosso.

Further information on the situation in Italy can be found under "Projects" on our [Homepage](#), in previous issues of [Scirocco](#) and in our Spotlight "[Cosmos Palermo](#)".

Weitere Informationen zur Situation in Italien finden Sie unter „Projekte“ auf unserer [Homepage](#), in den vorherigen Ausgaben des [Scirocco](#) sowie in unserem [Streiflicht](#) „[Kosmos Palermo](#)“.



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