



SOS MEDITERRANEE

#TogetherForRescue



A HUMANITARIAN AND MARITIME SEARCH AND RESCUE ORGANIZATION

SOS MEDITERRANEE is an international civil organization dedicated to saving lives at sea. Founded in 2015, the humanitarian initiative emerged as a response to the escalating humanitarian crisis in the Central Mediterranean, as well as the discontinuation of Mare Nostrum, a rescue operation launched by the Italian Government that ended in 2014, and the subsequent EU disengagement from search and rescue operations in the area. It was established by a group of European citizens, including seafarers and humanitarians, who were deeply concerned about the rising death toll among people attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea in search of safety and a better future.



VISION

Our vision is of a world where every person in distress at sea is rescued and treated with dignity.



MISSION

- > Saving lives at sea
- > Protecting and caring for survivors on board
- > Bearing witness



VALUES

Humanity, transparency, independence, citizen involvement, non-discrimination, and solidarity.

THE SIX STAGES OF SEA RESCUE



1. SEARCH



2. COORDINATION



3. RESCUE



4. PROTECTION ONBOARD



5. MEDICAL CARE



6. DISEMBARKATION

AN INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT

SOS MEDITERRANEE is an apolitical and non-confessional humanitarian organization structured as an international network with a presence in France, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. Our dedication to humanitarian principles and unwavering commitment to human dignity has earned us international recognition and support.

SOS MEDITERRANEE has cultivated a robust network of dedicated volunteers and influential supporters from diverse backgrounds, who donate their time and expertise to contribute to the organization's search and rescue efforts, fundraising campaigns and awareness-raising initiatives. Their dedication to solidarity has been a driving force behind our operations.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- > The Right Livelihood Award 2023
- > International Maritime Rescue Federation (IMRF) Award 2022
- > Humanitarian Aurora Finalists 2020 (Sophie Beau and Klaus Vogel)
- > *Grande Cause Nationale* 2017 (France)
- > UNESCO Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize 2017
- > Franco-German Grand Media Prize 2017
- > European Citizen Award 2016 (European Parliament)



HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS AT SEA

SOS MEDITERRANEE operates primarily through its vessel, the Ocean Viking, a search and rescue ship, which replaced the Aquarius, equipped to respond swiftly to distress calls, and to provide assistance, protection and rescue operations for people in distress at sea.

Since 2021, SOS MEDITERRANEE has partnered with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to provide immediate medical assistance, protection, and humanitarian aid to those rescued at sea. IFRC also ensures that they are cared for upon disembarkation and have access to a wide range of humanitarian support and services, regardless of their migration status and wherever they are on their journeys.

All operations are carried out in strict accordance with international maritime and humanitarian law, and in liaison with competent authorities. SOS MEDITERRANEE launched its search and rescue mission in the Central Mediterranean based on the legal duty to render assistance to people in distress at sea, and to disembark them in a place of safety, where their rights are ensured, their needs can be met and where their lives are no longer under threat.

KEY FIGURES - from March 2016 to November 2023



326 rescue operations



39,037 people rescued



Citizens from over
40 countries



25 % minors - including 80 % unaccompanied



15 % women





Stefano Belacchi/ SOS MEDITERRANEE

UPHOLDING THE PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN DIGNITY

SOS MEDITERRANEE has rescued over 39,037 people between 2016 and September 2023. Our teams are dedicated to humanitarian principles and work tirelessly to save lives, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, or background, and ensure that every individual receives the care and protection they deserve.

“

I knew this boat was dangerous to go onto, but what other choice did I have left?

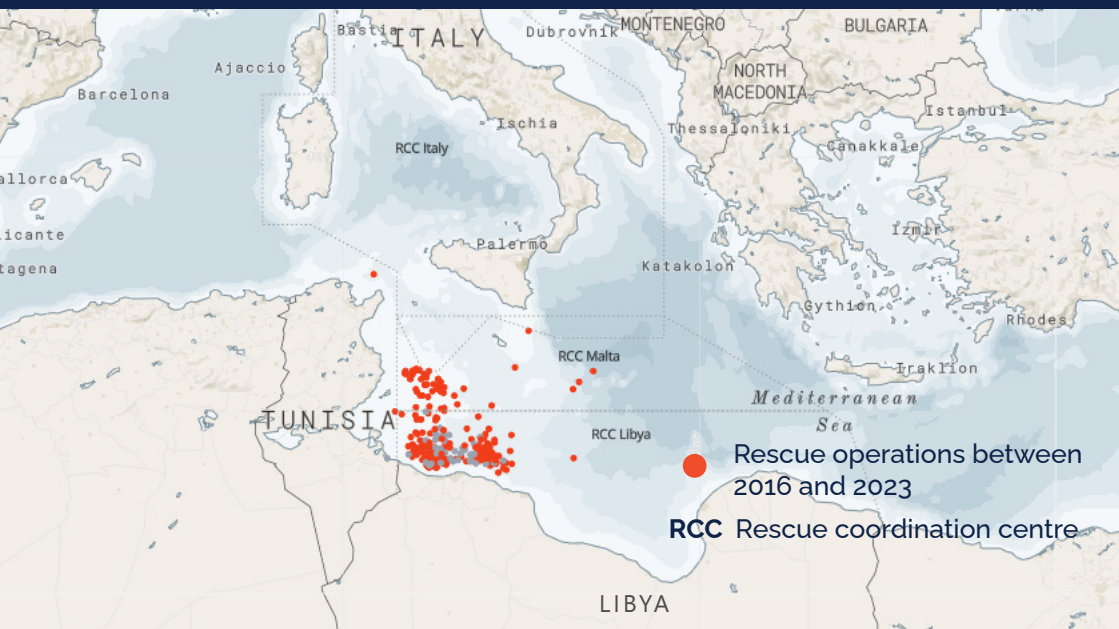
Ada*, 20 years old, from Nigeria, was rescued by the Ocean Viking from an overcrowded rubber boat in distress on the 7th of January 2023.

*name modified for safety and anonymity

RESPONDING URGENTLY IS A HUMANITARIAN IMPERATIVE

The Mediterranean Sea remains one of the world's deadliest migration routes, with countless lives lost each year due to dangerous crossings and harsh conditions. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 28,216 lives have been lost between 2014 and 2023, but it is probable that many more deaths remain undocumented. The Central Mediterranean route, which extends from North Africa, primarily Libya, but also Tunisia and Algeria, to Italy is the most perilous. Between January and November 2023, out of 2,467 people who lost their lives in the Mediterranean, at least 2,186 people lost their lives in the Central Mediterranean, largely surpassing 2022 figures.

SOS MEDITERRANEE RESCUE OPERATIONS



THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT IN 2023 (As of November)

2,186 people have lost their lives at sea

13,065 people were intercepted by the Libyan coast guards and sent back to Libya in a context where their rights and lives are heavily threatened

A PRESSING NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND RESOURCES AT SCALE

SOS MEDITERRANEE faces numerous challenges, including navigating logistical complexities and encountering resistance and administrative barriers from certain governments.

The cost of sea rescue operations has been rising sharply in recent years, especially due to dramatic fuel cost increases and the need to travel longer distances to disembark survivors. Indeed, since the end of 2022, relevant authorities have been assigning ports of safety further and further away from rescue areas, thus reducing the number of days dedicated to rescue activities.

**A day at sea
24,000 euros**

The limited resources of rescue organizations are also overwhelmed by the sheer volume of those in distress, highlighting the pressing need for increased international cooperation, facilitated rescue coordination, and dedicated resources, as well as the recognition of humanitarian space at sea.

Despite these obstacles, SOS MEDITERRANEE remains steadfast in its commitment to its life-saving mission.

“

This summer, we witnessed firsthand the lack of resources to save lives in the central Mediterranean. In August, we rescued more than 600 people from 15 boats in distress off the coast of Libya and between Tunisia and Lampedusa in the largest ever rescue operation of the Ocean Viking. In these 48 hours of nonstop operations, it was clear that there were more people at risk of losing their lives than we could assist – the needs for rescue were far greater than the means.

Jérôme, Deputy Search and Rescue Coordinator onboard Ocean Viking.

A HIGH RISK MIGRATORY JOURNEY

Before embarking on perilous Mediterranean crossings, migratory journeys span months to years, covering thousands of miles, often requiring dangerous crossings such as the Sahara Desert. Fleeing conflict, persecution, and poverty in their home countries, migrants and refugees embark on arduous journeys, braving harsh weather conditions, and facing exploitation by human traffickers. In addition to the dangers of crossing vast areas such as the desert - where they are sometimes abandoned without water and even shot at - migrants are victims of robbery, physical violence, enslavement, torture and extortion of all kinds during their journey.

THE COURAGEOUS ODYSSEY OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN SEARCH OF SAFETY

Women and children face heightened vulnerabilities, including the threat of sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking during their journeys. Some are subjected to these abuses while trapped in domestic slavery in transit countries. Most of them leave their countries alone, often lacking proper documentation or resources, making them easy targets for traffickers who promise them help and support, ultimately luring them into human trafficking networks.



We need to establish the role of women in migration because we sometimes forget, but (...) around the world, half of migrants are women. On these particularly perilous maritime routes, women represent between a fifth and a sixth of arrivals... The mortality of women in migration is much higher than that of men. There is a lack of information to quantify this situation, but we know that because of gender-related vulnerability - when we find the bodies and are able to determine the sex of the victims - we see that women are much more likely to die at sea or in the desert than men.

Camille Schmoll, Director of Studies at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS)

Although some women may leave their country of origin for the same reasons as men, many of them are fleeing from domestic and sexual violence, particularly forced marriages. They sometimes also leave to protect their children, especially young girls from female genital mutilation (FGM). Often invisible, these women and children show extraordinary resilience.

“

I set out on this journey from Guinea-Conakry for my daughter, Souadou. I have three children, two boys and a girl. I had to leave my two boys at home with my husband to save my daughter. Souadou is sick, she has sickle-cell disease and my husband's family wanted to excise her. But if she goes through genital mutilation, she will die. That's why I fled.

Jewada*, from Guinea Conakry, March 2020

* name modified for safety and anonymity





CHILDREN TRAVELING ALONE

Nearly 25 % of individuals rescued by SOS MEDITERRANEE are minors, the vast majority of whom are traveling alone. Among those under 18, 79 % are unaccompanied and 6 % are children under the age of five.

Many of them endured harrowing experiences before and during their journey. The decision to leave their home countries is influenced by political, socio-economic, and security situations, as well as family circumstances.

For many, leaving is the only chance for survival, especially when facing war, persecution, or violence in their countries or families. Others leave in pursuit of economic opportunities to support themselves or their families, while some are driven by the desire for education or a better future.



Camille Martin Juan/ SOS MEDITERRANEE

A KEY PART OF OUR MISSION: BEARING WITNESS

Every year, thousands of people die in the Mediterranean without witness. The exact number of women and children among the 28,216 deaths documented by International Organization for Migration (IOM) is unknown.

In addition to its vital mission of rescue, protection and care onboard, SOS MEDITERRANEE holds a key responsibility: to shed light on the situation in the Mediterranean and amplify the voices of those who are rescued.



I am from Deraa in Syria and was born in 2008. (...) Many people are still being killed every day. There is no future for me in my country. I decided to leave Syria, although my parents tried to dissuade me first.

Khaled*, 15 years old, from Syria

On October 24, 2023, Ocean Viking evacuated 29 people in distress from an unseaworthy fiberglass boat in the Libyan Search and Rescue Region. Khaled*, 15 years old, was among one of the 9 unaccompanied minors who was rescued that day.

* name modified for safety and anonymity

A CALL TO ACTION

SOS MEDITERRANEE's work is a stark reminder of the urgent need for coordinated and humane responses in the Central Mediterranean.

Operations at sea are only possible thanks to the collective support and commitment of citizens, businesses and foundations. To support our mission, individuals and organizations can contribute through donations, advocacy, or volunteering.

Faced with the unacceptable, let's act together to save lives. No one should be left to die at sea.

25 % of those rescued are children



Carmille Martin Juan / SOS MEDITERRANEE

“ Assisting people in danger is a moral and legal duty. It is not acceptable to let thousands of people drown before our eyes, at the gates of Europe, without taking action!

Sophie Beau, co-founder of SOS MEDITERRANEE



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@SOSMedIntl



Donate: <https://en.sosmediterranee.org/donate/>

Please reach out to Fyras Mawazini, International Development Director
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