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“Institutional Policies” for Migrant Settlements: Between Formality and Informality

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Abstract This chapter reflects on informal migrant settlements in the rural contexts of Southern Italy. In recent years, following the anti-immigration policy initiated by former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, there has been an increase in anti-migrant sentiment in some areas of the country and many citizens, emotionally overwhelmed by the constant news arriving via the mass media, have expressed concern about the potential impact of immigration on their communities. Considering this issue, this paper analyses the migration phenomenon and the existing or planned institutional responses that should move towards inclusion, integration and problem-solving. This chapter highlights how, to date, there is a regulatory vacuum around the various forms of reception that in fact facilitate forms of exclusion and marginality. The analysis focuses on the housing dimension of migrants in peripheral contexts, instrumentally using the case of Cassibile (SR) as an experience to "measure" the effectiveness of these actions, but at the same time the limits and criticalities that have emerged from the regulatory and social point of view.

1. Migration flows and reception policies

With the process of globalisation, the migratory phenomenon takes on mass dimensions; migratory flows change, are almost unpredictable and consequently, their geography appears to be constantly being redefined. One of the consequences of this process is increased labour mobility, which for migrants represents an escape

from situations of underdevelopment, subjugation and exploitation, by means of integration into the labour market in the country of destination.

Migration is one of the most intricate issues in the current European debate, causing clashes between the European Council and individual EU states, which somehow want to hold strong decision-making power over migrant issues (Ambrosini and Abbatecola 2004; Ambrosini 2018). The migrant 'category' comprises a heterogeneous group of people with different rights, which are difficult to monitor on a case-by-case basis. Migrants find themselves shrouded in a confusing institutional legal status that varies according to their origin (EU or non-EU) they enjoy different rights, but they also come to terms with the immobility of national policies (Briata 2010).

The goal of implementing a common EU migration policy has not been achieved. It simply focuses on border control and security, but without a real settlement and support plan. In short, EU Member States are not losing control over migration flows, but are resorting to initiating new measures to 'sedate' and control unwanted immigration.

At the same time, human rights protection has also failed to make progress, facing strong resistance from EU member states. National governments have defended their prerogatives in this matter, causing the EU's intention to establish EU-wide rules and policies to fail (King 2000; Cremaschi and Lieto 2020).

The migration phenomenon is not new for Italy, which has long been a destination for migrants from various parts of the world. The reasons behind migration are varied and include economic, social and political factors. For example, many migrants come from conflict-affected or unstable countries, such as Syria, Libya and Afghanistan, others come from countries with weak economies, such as Nigeria and Ghana, in search of better economic opportunities.

Traditional Italian reception policies that sought to bridge and facilitate the transit of migrants were completely swept away after the denial actions of former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini.

Over the years, we note how, since Matteo Salvini became interior minister, migration rates have decreased. The share compared to landings fell from 5,100,000 to 4,900,000 between 2018 and 2020 (Istat 2021); a considerable decrease resulting from restrictive policies and the Covid-19 epidemic. This decrease is not noticeable in European cross-border countries bordering the Mediterranean, such as Spain and Greece, where, on the contrary, there has been an increase in migrant landings from 2018 to the present (Aversa 2021).

Today, Italy is a country of immigration or a transit area for massive migratory flows. Indeed, Italy is, together with Germany, Great Britain, France and Spain, one of the five countries with the highest concentration of foreign population. In recent years, the demographic growth in our country has been fuelled mainly by the foreign component, and the Italian population is increasingly multiethnic. According to the 2021 Immigration Statistics Dossier of the IDOS Study and Research Centre, foreign citizens residing in Italy amount to more than 5 million units, or 8.7% of the Italian population (it was 6.5% in 2008).

From 2013 to 2020, foreign residents increased by 8%. Acquisitions of citizenship in 2020 were 132,736. The rate of citizenship acquisition per thousand residents is 26.4. Analysing the distribution by age, it can be seen that the underage foreign population is 20.2% of the total; the over-65s stop at 5.5%.

There were 58,800 foreign births in 2020 and they account for 14.7% of the 400,000 new births in our country. There are more than 806,000 foreign students in Italian schools. The distribution of foreigners throughout the country is uneven: 57.5% reside in Northern Italy (33.6% in the North-West and 23.9% in the North-East), 25.4% in the Centre, only 17.1% in the South (12.2% in the South and 4.9% in the Islands). half of the immigrant residents are of European origin (50.2%; 30.1% EU), just over a fifth are African (21.7%) and Asian (20.8%), and 7.2% are of American origin. The most represented nationality is Romanian (23%, more than 1.2 million), followed by Albanian (8.4%) and Moroccan (8%), fourth by Chinese (5.7%), and fifth by Ukrainian (4.6%).

The migrants landed in Italy exceeded 20,000 (2021), 18% of whom are minors. 3,536 are unaccompanied minors landed, 5,229 unaccompanied minors.

The presence of migrants in reception centres as of 2021 amounts to 76,952, marking a decrease of 43% compared to 2018, with 68% still living in first reception centres and SACs (Extraordinary Reception Centre) and 38% living in second reception centres SAI (Reception and Integration System).

However, this number will increase in 2022, with the presence of migrants in reception centres amounting to 95,184, thus marking a percentage increase of 23.9% compared to 2021. The regions with the highest migrant presence are Sicily, Latium, Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy and Piedmont (Fig.1), with a total of 682 migrants living in Hotspot centres, 63,570 migrants living in reception centres and 30,932 living in SAIs.

Applications for international protection amounted to 26,953, 24% of which were accepted, a full 38% less than in 2019/2020, to find such a low number of applications for protection we have to go back to 2013.

Of the new residence permits issued in 2021 (241,000), 52.4% are for family, 41.6% for asylum and other humanitarian reasons, and 6% for work. Foreign workers number 2,455,000, 65.9% in services (20.8% in commerce, hotels, restaurants); 27.7% in industry; 6.4% in agriculture, forestry and fishing. Compared to ten years ago, there has been an increase in the number of immigrants working in the services and agriculture sectors and, on the other hand, a decrease in industry (both construction and industry strictly speaking).

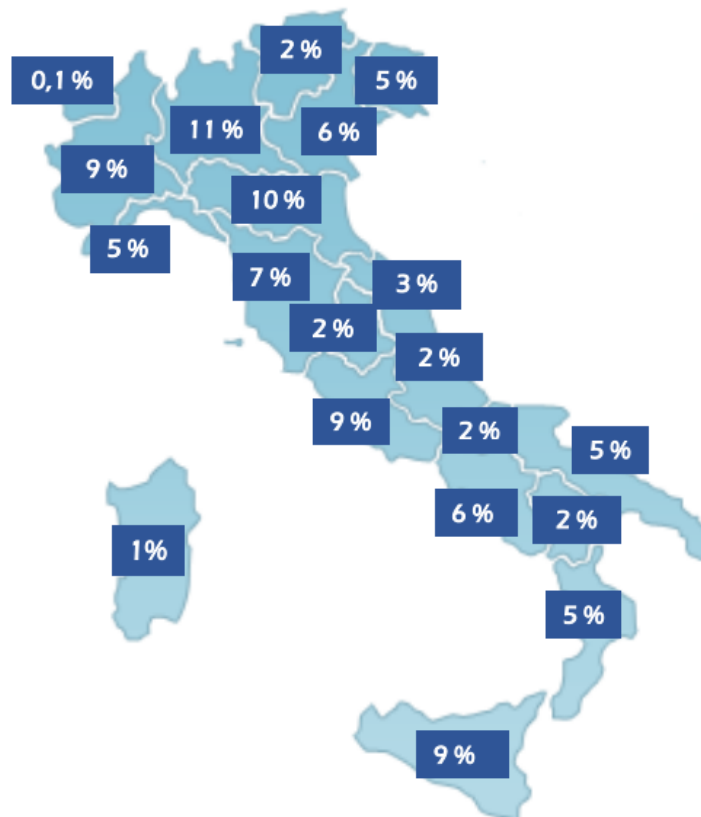


Figure 1 Percentuale dei migranti all'interno dei centri di accoglienza in ogni regione italiana. Fonte: Ministero dell'interno, (2022) available online: https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2022-08/dossier_ferragosto_2022.pdf

Despite pressure and continuous requests, to date Italy is the only one among the European Union countries that does not have unified legislation that guarantees asylum seekers a functional system of assistance and integration, and that, through a series of simplified procedures, reduces the operational difficulties for local authorities, volunteers, and all operators in the sector.

In addition to legislative gaps, Italy continues to lack organic policies and a national reception, protection and integration system.

In this climate of hostility and confusion, decision-making powers are delegated to the various municipalities, which deal with each case on a case-by-case basis, since there is no national or regional law regulating the needs of migrants of all kinds (health, access to essential services, housing).

The difficulties encountered tend to slow down the legislative machine, leading to superficial political and planning solutions, which end up creating broader problems and general discontent.

Establishing a humanitarian standard for asylum seekers in Italy would guarantee the support and assistance needed to integrate into Italian society. This would benefit not only the migrants, but also the Italian government, as it would ensure a significant contribution to the economy and society (Balbo 2015).

2 Informal settlements in Italy

In recent years, the national reception system for asylum seekers has not been able to cope with the countless requests for places with its ordinary first and second reception facilities. The lack of places is one of the main reasons for the delayed entry of asylum seekers arriving in Italy into the reception system. This issue is made even more critical by the prolonged period of stay in the facilities by migrants and the consequent slowdown in the turnover of accepted beneficiaries.

Despite the massive recourse to extraordinary places, in recent years the paralysis of the reception system has in fact been averted only thanks to the large number of migrants who have arrived in Italy and voluntarily left the governmental first reception centres to escape the identification procedures imposed by the 'Dublin Regulation', which requires the submission of an application for protection and the obligation to stay in the EU Member State of arrival, so much so that the European Commission has initiated an infringement procedure against Italy for the failure to identify and register migrants.

Living in informal settlements are asylum seekers waiting for a place in a reception centre or whose reception has been withdrawn; to these are added migrants seeking protection in another European country who are stranded at the border, or who have been denied any assistance immediately after disembarkation because they have been categorised as 'economic migrants' in hotspots.

Many studies have been drawn up on informal settlements over the years, among the most comprehensive of which are those of Médecins Sans Frontières (2020) in which informal settlements on the national territory were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively (Fig. 2).

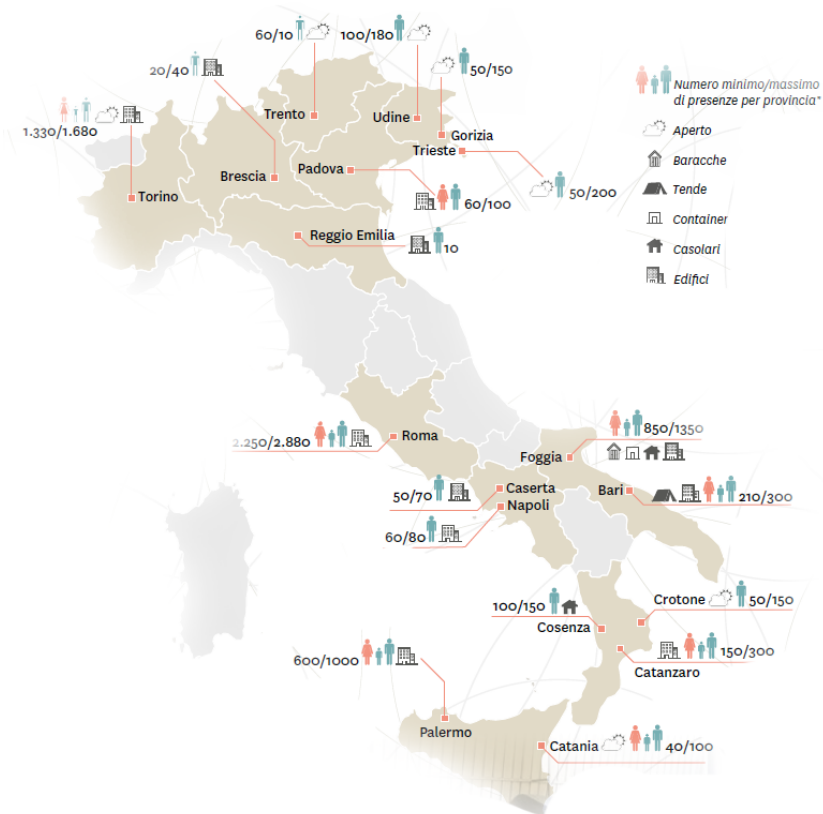


Figure 2 Map of informal settlements in Italy. Source: Medici senza Frontiere “FuoriCampo”

Only in 2020, at least 100,000 people are considered to have left the government reception centres for asylum seekers and refugees. Migrants, in the absence of full inclusion, decide either to settle in large metropolises (ex. Rome, Turin, Milan), widening what are large pockets of urban marginality, or in the 'ghettos' of the South in rural contexts (ex. Apulia, Calabria, Sicily), where the migrant population grows and retreats to coincide with the seasonality of agricultural work.

With reference to Southern Italy, the creation of informal settlements poses numerous challenges to both migrants and the host society.

From the migrants' perspective, living in these settlements can be incredibly difficult. The lack of basic services, such as running water and electricity, makes it impossible to carry out daily life activities. Migrants in these settlements are also at risk of exploitation and abuse, as they often have no legal protection and are vulnerable to criminal networks that exploit their precarious condition.

From the perspective of the host society, informal settlements pose challenges in terms of social cohesion and public health. These settlements are often located in

already socially and economically disadvantaged areas and the influx of migrants may exacerbate existing tensions. Moreover, the lack of access to basic services, such as health care and sanitation, can pose a risk to public health, as diseases can spread rapidly in these crowded settlements.

"These places emerge at the confluence of a residual reception system, especially in the post-recognition phase of legal protection, and are often described as places of despair and degradation" (Belloni, Favega, Giudici, 2020).

The places where migrants settle, often near agricultural fields, can be seen as places of deprivation of rights and dignity. In Southern Italy, these places host mainly migrants of Tunisian origin (Tunisians with 10,254 migrants, Egyptians with 9,958 migrants, migrants from Bangladesh with 8,727 migrants, from Afghanistan with 4,256 migrants, from Syria with 3,105 migrants, from the Ivory Coast with 1,912 migrants) (ISTAT 2022; Ministry of the Interior 2022).

Regarding informal settlements, 14 Italian municipalities stated that they had elaborated at least one feasibility study for the construction of housing for migrant workers. These are the municipalities of Bellosguardo, Bolzano, Campobello Di Mazara, Farigliano, Genoa, Manfredonia, Nardò, Porto Recanati, Ragusa, Rosarno, San Severo, Senise, Siracusa and Taurianova (Anci 2022)

Below are the details of the projects considered to be of particular interest to the municipalities: in total, the estimated amount of work exceeds 21 million euro for more than 1,400 people accommodated.

Table 1 Municipalities that have mobilised for stable housing for migrants working in the agro-food sector Source: InCas, 2022

Municipality	Description Intervention	Owner	Welcoming People
Bellosguardo	Dormitory building	Bellosguardo Municipality	8
Bolzano	Dormitory building	Private	45
Campobello di Mazzara	Temporary Structure (Containers)	Agency of assets confiscated from crime	250
Genova	Dormitory building	Genova Municipality	40
Manfredonia	Temporary Structure (Containers)	Manfredonia Municipality	40
Nardò	Dormitory building	Nardò Municipality	10
Porto Recanati	Social Housing	Private	200
Ragusa	Dormitory building	Ragusa Municipality	16

Rosarno	Newly built building	Rosarno Municipality	205
San Severo	Renovation of municipal buildings	San Severo Municipality	150
Senise	Private dwellings to be acquired	Several owners	100
Siracusa	Temporary Structure (Containers)	Siracusa Municipality	150
Taurianova	Adaptation and valorisation of confiscated land	Taurianova Municipality	200
Total			1,414

As regards the situation in Sicily, the informal settlements in the territory extend from west to east along the migration routes from the south. These settlements are mainly located in rural areas, but not too far from medium or small urban centres, as they represent the only access to basic services not available within the settlements.

From the point of view of settlement type, the precariousness of settlement is closely related to the nature of the settlement type and the characteristics of the materials with which it is made. There are different types of settlements, some made of salvaged materials such as wood, metal and abandoned waste material, others consisting of camping tents or housing modules provided by institutions.

Despite their differences, these settlements share the precariousness and temporariness factors. Contrary to what one might imagine, in fact, such structures, linked to the temporariness of seasonal agricultural production, tend to assume a permanent character in that even in periods of low seasonality of agricultural production, the settlements remain partially occupied, waiting for the new production season.

The only conditions that lead to the abandonment of these informal structures are fires, almost always accidental, due to the use of gas canisters inside the settlement, and evictions, called by the administrations, which occur when the tolerance limit that the administration can tolerate is exceeded and which expose the precarious living conditions of the informal settlement, revealing the invisibility that public administrations want to maintain at all costs.

Therefore, despite their structurally and temporally precarious condition, these settlements, under certain conditions, tend to persist over time.

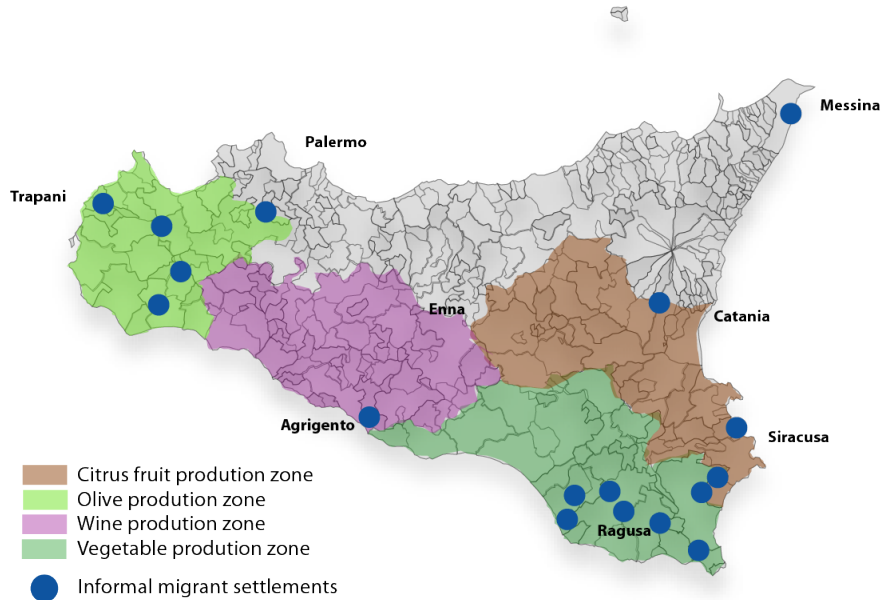


Figure 3 Informal migrant settlements and the agricultural production areas in Sicily. Source: own elaboration.

In relation to the spatial distribution compared to the data available in the literature, there is a prevalent concentration of informal migrant settlements in the areas with the highest agricultural productivity, especially in the areas of Trapani to the south-west, in the areas of Agrigento to the south and in the areas of Ragusa, Syracuse and Catania to the south-east.

Therefore, from an initial survey it is possible to consider how the key indicators for analysing the localisation choices of informal migrant settlements in Sicily are: the routes of migratory flows, the areas of intensive agricultural production and the proximity to urban nuclei that allow food supply and access to services (see figure 3).

3 The case of Cassibile (Siracusa) in Sicily

Among the municipalities that have mobilised for the construction of stable accommodation for migrants engaged in agriculture is Syracuse, to be precise the hamlet of Cassibile (6000 inhabitants) just 14 km from the centre of Syracuse.

The area has a strong citrus fruit vocation. Until the middle of the last century, agriculture was the main source of livelihood for Syracuse and the entire province.

Prominent crops included lemons, new potatoes and watermelon (Istat Sixth Census of Agriculture 2011).

Over the years, this area has become a crucial hub for the exploitation of migrants and refugees in the area's agricultural fields and, with the arrival of labourers, the first makeshift settlements began to take shape.

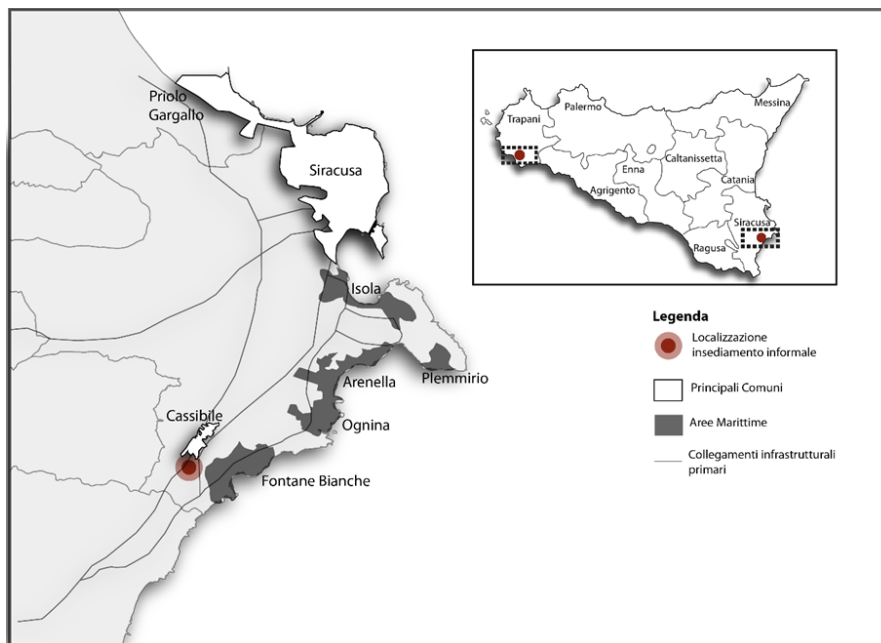


Figure 4 Cassibile and location of the informal settlement. Source: Personal elaboration.

Most of the migrants employed in seasonal agricultural work are regular migrants awaiting renewal of their residence permits, refugees and asylum seekers. In these areas, the lack of policies guaranteeing the right to work in compliance with contractual regulations pushes migrants to rely on corporals.

Every morning, in fact, from 5:00 to 7:00 migrants are recruited in the main square or in the village bars to be then brought to the workplace for 9/10 hours a day for a salary of 20/25 euros.

Added to this terrible problem of exploitation is the problem of housing. Victims of today's prejudices and political currents that base their ideology on exclusion and the lack of a real reception policy, migrants are forced to use alternative housing methods, almost always resulting in the construction of informal settlements.

Within these areas, the same dynamics are repeated again and again: when informal settlements expand and become too visible, they are cleared but without a relocation policy, which pushes migrants to reconstruct these settlements again

elsewhere, in more isolated places, thus widening the phenomena of dispersion and isolation.

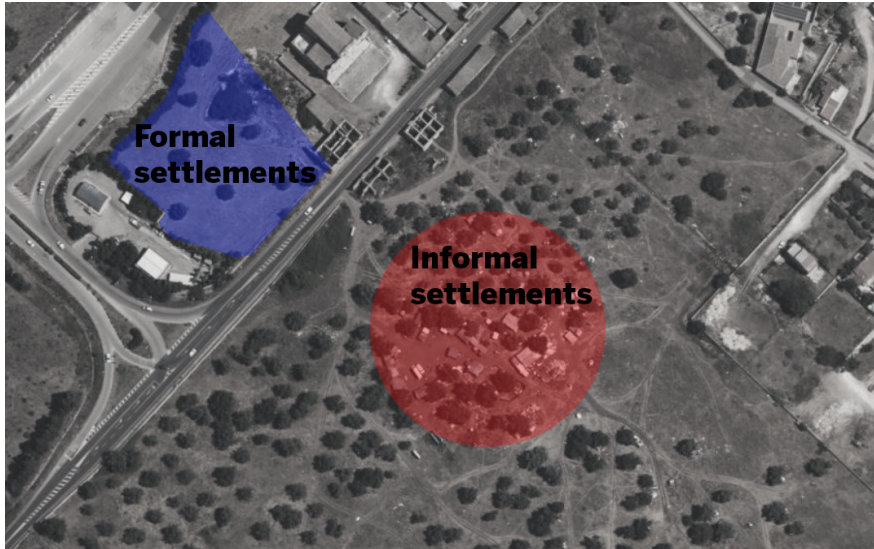


Figure 5 Informal settlement in Cassibile (SR) where foreign seasonal farm labourers live unable to use the hostel because they do not have documents and a regular work contract Source: Google Maps.

The prefecture of Syracuse responded to this problem by building a village to house foreign seasonal labourers. Inaugurated in April 2021, located in Cont.da Palazzo, it is part of the activities of the Su.Pr.Eme. (Protagonist South in Overcoming Emergencies).

It was realised with funds made available by the Ministry of the Interior, amounting to approximately 250,000 euro, and is a project that aims to implement an interregional system action by putting in place measures aimed at the socio-labour integration of migrants as prevention and counteracting the exploitation of labour in agriculture.



Figure 6 Container hostel in Cassibile (SR) for foreign agricultural labourers. Source: SiracusaNews

These are containers, to be exact 17 housing units of 5 beds each with connections to the electricity and sewage networks, intended for regular migrants, who work as seasonal farmers in the local agricultural production areas, but only for a short period of time.

In fact, in the intentions expressed from the beginning, the village is intended to become a (paid) hostel for foreigners and will only be used by those with a regular residence permit and a work contract. The internal capacity is about 150 people. The decision to locate these emergency settlements within the territory, and to limit them only to those with a residence permit, has triggered a dynamic of spontaneous attraction, leading many migrants to build and occupy makeshift dwellings in a more or less organised manner in the areas surrounding the village, creating informal self-managed settlements.

Since the construction of the village, numerous local citizens have taken to the streets, forming a committee, and opposing its construction because it is considered unsuitable and not of primary importance for the area's problems.

To the population's dissatisfaction with the formal settlement, we must also add the serious social and health conditions caused by the spontaneous informal settlements that have sprung up in neighbouring areas by those who were excluded from the selection process for the formal camp. Informal settlement that to date is totally invisible to the eyes of the administration.

Projects of this type can be defined as pseudo-housing in a semi-formal area useful to save the city's decorum, while constantly maintaining an emergency bias and not responding to the problem with long-term planned actions, which defines it as a clear example of failed planning.

In the case of Cassibile, therefore, we are witnessing a precarious response from the administration that, by dividing the seasonal workers between those who can use the formal village and those who cannot, paradoxically doubles the problems.

To this must also be added the general discontent of the local community that does not want a settlement, albeit a formal one, close to the town centre.

4 Conclusion

The management of the migration phenomenon in Italy has always been characterised by recourse to the emergency dimension and the absence of planning. The absence of real housing support policies for beneficiaries of international protection exacerbates the already deep dynamics of segregation. However, access to housing represents an essential element for labour and social inclusion, as well as for the enjoyment of full social and civil rights in a territory; for many refugees, the occupation of land on which to build informal settlements thus becomes a tool through which to remedy inadequate inclusion. Even though marginality and precariousness are an integral part of these realities, occupations are thus configured as political claims to the right to housing, and at the same time criticism of the limits of the reception system (Belloni, Fravega, Giudici, 2020).

Informal settlements are increasingly widespread and testify to migrants' ability to build projects and weave meaningful relationships (Prujt 2013). In many cases, these forms of re-appropriation of abandoned areas activate a process of regeneration of spaces that have become marginalised in relation to the logic of gentrification, building speculation and capital production (Benhabib 2006). However, the disconnection between collective identity, privileges of political belonging, rights and social claims are also the result of precise political choices made by institutional actors (Tarsi and Vecchiarelli 2020; Vecchiarelli 2021). In this context, it is necessary to rethink intervention strategies to respond to the multiple needs of the communities involved.

The absence of long-term projects that take into account the needs and motivations of the migrant population and seasonal migrant workers thus undermines these people's attempts to build a minimum existential stability.

The formal settlement project does not represent an adequate and stable response that in fact denies the structural dimension of the migration phenomenon.

The coexistence and co-presence of informal and formal settlement makes explicit a policy of informality for which public institutions have a clear responsibility.

The challenge is thus to strike a balance between the need to protect the rights of migrants and the need to ensure the security and well-being of the local population. This requires a shift from the traditional 'top-down' to a 'bottom-up' approach (Guercio 2020), based on a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to planning.

This implies attention to the local context and dialogue between the different actors involved in order to develop policies and strategies that take into account the

specific needs of the communities concerned. It is also necessary to promote migrants' participation in the decision-making process to ensure that their rights and needs are considered.

In the end, it is essential to strengthen collaboration between local authorities, civil society organisations and international organisations to develop integrated and sustainable solutions to the housing crisis.

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