

## Silent Expulsions: Detention, Exclusion and Criminalization of Dissent



Once a frontline for Mediterranean arrivals, Sicily has been deliberately sidelined by the Meloni government's border policies. While most people still first land in Lampedusa Island, they are then quickly transferred to the Mainland, or to the various Hotspots in Sicily (including the Hub in Catania, currently under renovation under the promise of more dignified reception standards). Even when first hosted in Italy, however, it is only a matter of days before they are quickly moved to primary reception centres in other regions - unless classified as vulnerable, which makes them eligible for SAI system (Sistema, Accoglienza e Integrazione - secondary reception) centre, or children, in which case they stay in Sicily.

Meanwhile, as the newly arrived try their luck in the North, those who have already navigated the immigration system—and been excluded by it—head South, hoping to find a way to rent an apartment and cover basic costs in the informal economy, despite lacking regular permits. While the countryside has long operated on this system, with seasonal workers arriving from across Italy for exploitative pay, similar dynamics are increasingly visible in urban areas too. In southern cities, Italian citizens and foreigners—often racialized and marginalized themselves—leverage the very system of exclusion to offer accommodation and work on their own terms to those barred from formal markets by lack of documents and systematic racism.

In this shifting geography of marginalization, we witness a new attack on foreigners.

For a long time, the asylum application has offered a complex and faulty way to initiate a process of regularization. While making it very difficult to access a dignified life—from working with a contract, for instance, or affording some space of independence—it at least protected people from the risk of deportation. The situation has dramatically deteriorated in the last months, with the concurrent application of policies of exclusion and containment.

The “safe country of origin” rule, which will likely soon become a European standard, automatically restricts access to asylum for nationals of designated states, entirely overriding individual risks and de facto negating the very logic of international

refugee law. Nationals of these countries have limited procedural remedies to uphold their rights and face a high risk of arrest and deportation in immigration administrative detention centers (Centri di Permanenza per il Rimpatrio, CPRs).

These legal exclusions are enforced through a rapidly expanding detention network. In recent months, previously closed [detention centers](#) have re-opened across Italy after renovations, while others have expanded in capacity - including the newly constructed facility in Albania, marking the first Italian-run CPR outside national territory and outside the European Union. While the risk of actual repatriation is still subject to diplomatic negotiations with countries of origin, the risk of detention for those originating from the listed countries has now reached an unprecedented level of alarm. Legal advisors now weigh the option of applying for asylum against the risk of long-term detention and inhuman or degrading treatment in CPRs.

The security law, approved in June, completes the architecture and shields the system from scrutiny and dissent by introducing criminal charges for protests in detention centres and public spaces. Concurrently, the Ministry of Interior has questioned the applicability of the power of inspection granted since 1998 to Members of Parliaments, arguing that it does not apply to detention centres, and hence reducing one of the few instruments left to the civil society for public scrutiny.

As a result of these developments, more and more people are living a shadow life, hiding by day—moving from precarious housing to work environments where they have no bargaining power, and pay depends on the mood of the employer or their white counterparts. They avoid any interaction with strangers, increasing their dependence on the few friends who may easily become gatekeepers. As their movements are restricted, their language skills also fail to grow. Their friends' stories of life in administrative detention centers, about the physical confinement in crowded cells, and the various types of abuse, topped by the lack of certainty of an end date to their detention, move the violence of the border way beyond those facilities.

Greece's overt suspension of asylum rights made headlines. As tourists' waves reached the Mediterranean Islands, the Government suspended the right of asylum to deter further departures from the Eastern coast of Libya. Italy chose a much more silent form of violence to erode asylum law, but these combined actions aren't just a matter of immigration law, they are manufacturing a racialised underclass.