

COVID19 – Update Italy

borderline-europe, Sicily – Part 17



Latest Update: 09.12.2020

Note: as the corona situation currently determines all aspects of life, in the future we will also include important events in these two-weekly short updates that are not directly related to the disease and its consequences.

Politically/Socially

- The claim that there is a link between refugee immigration and covid-19 is not valid. Data from [ISPI](#) (Italian Institute for International Political Studies) show that refugees are **not a trigger for an increase in the number of infections**. But it was not only right-wing politicians who spread this rumour, also the former Italian Minister of the Interior Marco Minniti of the Democratic Party. It seems inappropriate to blame a large increase in the number of cases on refugees. Refugees are controlled more than Italian citizens moving in or out of the peninsula.

Situation in the Central Mediterranean

- Currently there are no civilian SAR ships in the central Mediterranean.
- Hearings in the **Salvini** trial on the **Gregoretti** case were scheduled to take place on 1 and 4 December. Members of the government were to be heard, but so far nothing has been leaked into the public. The case: the Italian Coast Guard ship Gregoretti rescued 131 people on 25 July 2019, no safe harbour was assigned for five days. Not until 31 July 2019 was the ship able to enter the port of Augusta, and the rescued persons were taken to Pozzallo.
- The trial against Salvini in the **Open Arms** case is scheduled to begin in Palermo on 12 December. Open Arms had rescued several boats with a total of around 160 people from 01.08.2019 to 10.08.2019 and had to wait until 21 of August until a safe harbour was finally allocated. In this case, too, the question is one of deprivation of liberty.

Review of some important events in the month of November

- 10.11. **Open Arms case:** In the first mission of the "Open Arms" after its release, the NGO crew managed to save 263 lives in three different missions. Five people could only be rescued dead, one child died shortly after being rescued on board. The death of the 6-month-old newborn Youssef triggered a strong media response when the [video](#) (trigger warning) of his distraught mother went viral on social media.
- 12.11. **Asso Trenta:** 76 people were rescued off the Libyan coast by a merchant ship, the Asso Trenta (Italian flag). The ENI vessel (Italian energy company), operating in the area of the offshore platform Bouri Barile di petrolio, was assigned the port of Trapani as POS of disembarkation for transfer to the quarantine vessel.
- 15.11. **Diciotti:** 95 unaccompanied minors disembarked from the Italian coast guard vessel Diciotti in Pozzallo. 73 of the minors came from the Open Arms, 22 were rescued by the Asso 30. The 95 minors were transferred from the Diciotti to Pozzallo, where they were accommodated in the hotspot. It is not known whether they were then transferred to other, more adequate homes.

- 18.11. An unusual arrival near **Naples**: a group of 16 people of Iraqi and Iranian origin reached the coast of Sorrento. This destination is off the usual route, a similar arrival has never happened before. So far it is unclear how and why this landing occurred. According to media reports, they are asking to be taken to England, where their relatives live.
- In the [second semester of 2020](#), **arrivals** have increased significantly compared to the first semester (from July onwards). They are also higher than in 2019, for example: July 2020 - 7,064, July 2019 - 1,088 people.

Situation of Migrants

- The conditions for refugees remain unacceptable not only on the quarantine ships, but also in the centres on land.
- This is also the case in the **hotspot in Pozzallo**, Sicily, where people are locked up for the quarantine, which, however, goes far beyond the 14 days required by the anti-covid regulations. It happens that the announcement of the end of the quarantine coincides with the announcement of the forced expulsion from Italy. This decision is taken without people having access to information about their rights and the procedures for applying for humanitarian protection. [Videos](#) from the hotspot show the [precarious conditions](#): people are housed in large rooms with a roof that cannot stop the rain. The water and sewage systems in the bathrooms are neglected. Men, women and children share the same rooms. Families, some with small children, are also housed there. Self-harm and suicide attempts are common within the hotspot.
- Among the families in the Pozzallo hotspot in Sicily, also a Tunisian boy with a **severe physical disability** had to spend the quarantine period. On 5.11.2020, the 7-year-old arrived in Lampedusa together with his father, who wishes to have his son treated in Italy. After 10 days that the boy, who suffers from spastic tetraparesis, had to spend in the Pozzallo hotspot, the boy and his father tested negative for Covid-19. After much criticism in the [local media](#), the two will now be transferred to a [more appropriate centre](#). The mayor of Pozzallo, [Roberto Ammatuna](#), says: "I think I can say, also as a doctor, that it would have been more appropriate if the health authorities of Lampedusa had provided for his transfer directly to a highly specialised structure where he could have been helped immediately."
- The hotspot in Pozzallo is not an exceptional case. In the **Lampedusa hotspot**, refugees complain about the poor sanitary facilities that far too many people have to use. The sleeping facilities are inadequate. There are also dogs on the site from time to time, and some people, including minors, have been [attacked and injured](#).
- In April of this year, **Covid hotels** were set up where people who tested positive for the virus but did not have a severe disease course were to spend their quarantine. Refugees were also taken to these [hotels](#) after being isolated on the quarantine ships. It is reported that the refugees have no access to information and the quarantine period has been extended seemingly indiscriminately. Example: The San Paolo Hotel in Palermo has taken in at least 500 refugees in these months. As the journalist Sara Creta reports, an Eritrean citizen has been accommodated there for almost [three months](#) despite several negative tests.
- The situation of **unaccompanied minors** in Italy is particularly problematic at the time of the pandemic. Not only are the victims of the quarantine ships like [Abou Diakité](#) (see previous updates) to be mourned, but there are also increasing problems on land. The social and educational restrictions are difficult to bear for all children and young people, but for unaccompanied minors who know neither the language nor people they trust in this country, it is an enormous psychological

burden. **Sicily has the highest number of unaccompanied minors: 1,402** at the beginning of December. Psychologists are noticing an increase in psychosomatic disorders among the young people in the shelters. "With the second wave came the infections. It was a new experience for which the young people were not prepared. Some do not accept the quarantine or the move to a Covid hotel because they have no symptoms and do not realise that they pose a risk of infection to others. Some have refused and do not recognise the result of the test, others are suspicious and develop paranoia. These are often also the results of experiences of violence and a distrust of institutions," says **Chiara Monti, ethnopsychologist** at a facility with 40 unaccompanied minors in Palermo. Lawyers are demanding an extension of their stay in the centres. Normally, young men and women between the ages of 18 and 21 have to leave the centres at the latest, by which time all their education should have been completed. But due to the pandemic, all courses were interrupted and schools closed. For those who have just come of age, the pandemic has caused even more problems. They would have to have their residence permits changed, but for that they need employment contracts - but at the moment no one is being hired. The very sectors where work can normally be found are currently lying idle: restaurants, hotels, cafés, the whole tourism sector. Thus, conversion of the residence permit is virtually impossible and many of the young adults become irregular.

Further information regarding the situation in Italy can be found under ‚Streiflicht Italien‘ and on previous Covid-19 Updates on our homepage <https://www.borderline-europe.de/projekte/newsletter-italien>.