

The harvest ends, the evictions begin. The mobile help desk in Caltabellotta

Arci Porco Rosso, 29.12.2023

As we have repeatedly reported, with our Mobile Helpdesk, we move around places in western Sicily affected by seasonal labour in agriculture and informal settlements - an indirect consequence of the phenomenon as well as the absence of adequate labour and housing policies - to give sociolegal support to marginalised people.



Autumn is the season of the olive harvest, and in addition to going to the Trapani area, we have also repeatedly been to Caltabellotta (Agrigento), where for years an informal settlement has been set up on the outskirts of the village, in a pine forest near the fields, for each harvest. Some people live in abandoned stables, others set up a tent. One young man laughingly recounts with self-irony that on the first night his tent blew away because it was a bit unstable and he was wrapped in blankets on his makeshift mattress. Some even come from the Balkan route and because of Italian and European immigration regulations, first and foremost the Dublin regulation and the decree on so-called 'safe' countries of origin, they are unable to regularise their status in Italy - and so, among other things, they are unable to work regularly. We also meet a young man who entered regularly with the *decreto flussi*¹ but, upon his arrival in Italy, could no longer find his supposed employer, who switched off his phone - he was deceived.

The people of the Caltabellotta settlement were further affected by the incident on the evening of 19 November, in which one of them was killed following an argument. About a month after the murder, the settlement was evicted on 12 December and its inhabitants were relocated to the stadium in Sciacca under unclear circumstances, as they were all detained, but apparently without any order. Some people, a minority, were notified of an expulsion decree, while others were issued a residence permit for reasons of justice probably due to ongoing investigations into the murder, labour exploitation, and *caporalato*².

The people returned to freedom were not actually certain about everything that happened, what was clear was that no housing solution was provided - then provided by us to some in Palermo. So the evictions continue - once again at the end of the season.

When will seasonal labourers be seen and treated as people and not just as a workforce to be exploited and then evicted at their convenience?

When, on a social and cultural level, will it be understood that exploitation does not only occur on the part of employers, but because of the way current migration policies and measures to combat labour exploitation and *caporalato* are designed, exploitation is systemic?

Translation from Italian by Sandra Krause

¹ The *decreto flussi* is an Italian government law that sets how many non- European citizens can enter Italy regularly for work.

² *Caporalato* is the illegal employment of agricultural workers for very little pay.