



**Scirocco**  
**borderline-europe, Sicily –**  
**Part 4/2022**  
**Palermo, 16.03.2022**



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Scirocco [ʃiˈrɔkko-Schirokko] is a south-easterly, hot strong wind that carries dust and sand across the Mediterranean to Sicily and Italy's north for often only a few hours. This short info in the age of the pandemic will be published from March 2021 in an approx. bi-weekly rhythm. The Scirocco replaces the Corona Update Italy.

### **Political and Social Situation**

In cooperation with Swiss Refugee Aid, borderline-europe and Borderline Sicilia have published the statement "[Private instead of State? The effectiveness of assistance to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of protection in Italy](#)" (in German). It addresses the clear deficiencies in the reception system of the Italian state. Based on the perspectives of many Italian non-governmental organizations and institutions from the charitable and socio-legal environment, it is demonstrated that **private actors cannot and should not replace the state tasks of reception and care of refugees and asylum seekers**. The work of civil organizations can therefore not be used as an argument for the implementation of Dublin deportations.

For the first time, the European Union has enacted a directive that allows refugees from Ukraine to receive so-called "temporary protection". This effectively prevents that traditional asylum application procedures jam the reception bureaucracy in each country. Paradoxically, this very directive was supposed to be repealed by the European Parliament because it was never activated – despite the high number of people arriving from Syria, Afghanistan or other non-European countries. However, in the case of

Ukraine, there would be no buffer state to take responsibility for the people who fled, explains [Chiara Favilli, professor of EU law at the University of Florence](#), adding that the implementation of the directive to facilitate the rescue of Ukrainian nationals is a positive and important decision, but at the same time it **highlights the inadequacy of a reception system that is insufficient for all other people fleeing persecution and conflict**. In recent years, there have been several requests to activate this directive, but the European Union has always chosen to reject refugees, commented an [activist from the Tavolo asilo e immigrazione](#) (Immigration Round Table). The goal of the EU migration and border regime, she said, remains the externalization of borders.

Due to the expected high number of Ukrainian refugees in Italy, the Italian government declared a **state of emergency until Dec. 31, 2022, and quickly developed a reception plan** that includes housing in CAS (Centri di accoglienza straordinaria, emergency centers, the main type of housing in Italy) regardless of the procedural status of an individual, an increase of 3,000 places in the Reception and Integration System (SAI), and a special budget for Italian universities in the amount of 500,000€ to integrate Ukrainian students. In addition, the [health and humanitarian care of arriving people](#) is to be ensured through the provision of vaccinations, tests, green passes (state document confirming vaccination and/or recovery from Covid-19) and access to the Italian health system – **important measures** that, however, do not apply to non-European migrants who must isolate themselves on quarantine ships under inhumane conditions after their arrival in Italy.

**Structural racism and racial profiling of European authorities is also evident at**

**the Ukrainian borders** as many African and Asian people report difficulties to flee the country. They are detained by border officials, discriminated against in the provision of food and essential supplies, and in some cases suffer physical violence, as [numerous reports attest](#). The situation is so dire that numerous African states have protested at the UN Security Council. In a statement, the African Union pointed out that it was unacceptable that African citizens fleeing Ukraine were being treated unequally. If the accusation is confirmed, this would be a clear violation of international law.



Cassibile, so-called "shelters" of seasonal workers. Photo by Borderline Sicilia.

A [committee of residents of the town of Cassibile](#) in the province of Syracuse has proposed to the Prefect and the President of Sicily to use the premises of a facility located on the outskirts of the town for the accommodation of families fleeing the war in Ukraine. This decision would have been welcomed if the same body had not strongly protested against the construction of this very center – which was originally intended to house North African workers – and prevented it by constructing barricades.

The **unequal treatment of European and non-European refugees** cannot be overlooked in this case nor in the actions of the Italian government.

However, there is also a gleam of hope called [Ius Scholae](#), a bill currently being discussed by the Italian parliament. Through this law, refugee children who were younger than 12 years old when they entered Italy and who have attended an Italian school for at least five years **could easily obtain Italian citizenship** once this law was to be passed.

The [Court of Appeal in Bolzano](#) has ruled that half of the 59 charges against anarchists who prevented the construction of a border barrier on the Brenner Pass in May 2016 with barricades and an occupation of the streets are time-barred. The sentences of other convictions were also reduced retroactively.

The trial of former Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, charged with kidnapping and refusal to perform official acts for unlawfully refusing to land refugees from the civilian rescue ship Open Arms in Lampedusa, has already been postponed due to the illness of a judge and [is now being postponed again due to the temporary absence of a judge](#). Since the beginning of the trial in September, three hearings have taken place and only one included the hearing of witnesses.



Entrance to the "Aula Bunker" of the Ucciardone prison in Palermo where the trial room is located.

### **Situation of refugees in Italy**

With the just released report ["I was not safe in his house"](#), UNICEF draws attention to gender-based domestic violence in Italy. **For refugee and migrant girls and women, the**

**likelihood of experiencing physical or sexual violence increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic**, it explained. Isolation and disruption of inclusion processes exacerbate the situation for girls and women facing multiple layers of discrimination, UNICEF said. The high risk of gender-based violence affects 51.8% of all asylum seekers and migrants in Italy, that is 2.6 million women and girls. Physical and sexual violence in Italy is often preceded by genital mutilation, rape, forced marriage and sexual exploitation in the countries of origin of the female victims or on the migration route. Therefore, [Alessia Sicuro](#) draws attention to the fact that female migrants need special protection and support instead of being forced into domestic isolation.

The Italian state reclaims all social benefits from asylum seekers as soon as they earn more than €5,900 a year which equals less than €500 a month. In Italy, **that is a sum that is almost impossible to live on without family support**, explains lawyer and president of the Association for Legal Studies on Immigration (ASGI), [Nazzarena Zorzella](#). Hundreds of asylum seekers have already received the revocation of their admission and requests for compensation ranging from 5 to 20,000 euros for the period of the pandemic, she added. [Coordinamento dei migranti](#) (migrants' committee) commented that the persons concerned of this decision are among the people who, thanks to their work, have ensured the maintenance of the infrastructure of large cities that were in hard lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, according to the Court of Cassation, they were not guaranteed the right to health.

While trying to cross the Italian-French border on foot and start a life in France, 31-year-old Moroccan Fathallah Balafhail has

died. **This is the second death in a few days on the dangerous route between Italy and France.** Only a few day earlier, the 15-year-old Afghan boy Ullah Rezwan Sheyzad was killed by a train without anyone noticing. The organization MEDU blames the militarization and the multiplication of European borders for driving more and more people into illegality and death. Likewise, MEDU denounces the disturbing lack of information and the ruthless treatment of the relatives of the deceased: This shows that migrants in Europe remain invisible even after their death. In contrast to the EU, [activists from civil organizations](#) such as Amnesty International, Lega per i diritti dell'uomo, Aifo, Caritas, Associazione 25 aprile, Rete Sanremo Solidale and Arcicamalli Imperia show solidarity with refugees and migrants on their onward journey through the European Union. With a vigil, candles and signs with names and dates of death, **they commemorated the approximately 30 people who have died since 2016** trying to cross the Italian-French border, as well as all those who have to dared the dangerous border crossing in secret, because the border regime of the European Union criminalizes people on the move.

The humanitarian situation in the Mediterranean Sea remains tragic: As [Alarm Phone](#) reports, at least 50 people died in a shipwreck off the Libyan coast on February 27, a boat with another 60 people on board is still missing. The civilian rescue ship [Geo Barents](#) was hosting 111 migrants and refugees who were rescued from distress at sea. After nine days of waiting, [the rescued were finally able to go ashore in Augusta on March 14](#) or were transferred to a quarantine ship. Once again, Maltese and Italian authorities refused to rescue a boat in distress. The container ship [CMA CGM Rivoli](#) came to the rescue and rescued 26 people on March 6, but the

authorities of the two EU countries refused the boat to enter their ports. The Rivoli had to continue its journey to Dunkirk, where the refugees could finally go ashore.



Burned down camp in Campobello. Photo by Sportello Sans Papiers Palermo.

In Campobello in the province of Trapani, **an improvised camp for seasonal workers has burned down**. The fire broke out when the residents were trying to warm themselves at a fireplace. Fortunately, the group managed to escape completely to safety. Until a new accommodation is found, the affected people are allowed to use the [municipal gymnasium of the municipality of Castelvetrano](#) as a dormitory. The situation in Campobello has been known for years, but nothing has changed. Of importance is only the olive harvest, while the accommodation of the harvesters remains dreadful.

The [Antiracist Network from Catania](#) warns against the reopening of the accommodation of the former CARA (state asylum shelter) in Mineo, Sicily, where Ukrainian refugees will be hosted as this place is characterized by the suffering and violation of the most basic human rights: Over the past eight years, migrants and refugees have been forced to work for exploitative wages of 15-20 euros a day on the adjacent citrus plantations, while

the "pseudo-hotel industry" has been financed by the Italian state.

Instead of following the mafia-like model of the CARA in Mineo, the Italian state should take the [reception of migrants in the small town of Riace](#) as a model, the network commented. There, the former mayor of Riace, Mimmo Lucano, built a community project with the refugees. A thorn in the side of the authorities, [he was sentenced to 13 years in prison](#) for alleged fraud.

**The current solidarity of European governments towards Ukrainian refugees cannot hide the hypocrisy of the EU:** These are the same governments that lock up refugees on quarantine ships under inhumane conditions, and [sometimes fatal medical neglect](#), the same states that have paid billions of euros to the Turkish government to prevent Syrian and Afghan refugees from entering Europe, and also the same politicians who have effectively suspended the right to asylum on the Balkan route as well as the Belarusian-Polish border, thus creating two classes of refugees and asylum seekers.

**For more information on the situation in Italy, see our Central Med Info and the previous issues of the 'Scirocco' on our homepage.**

*Note to the readers of our Streiflicht Italy: Starting this year, our Streiflicht Italy will be published only twice a year with a new layout!*

Contact

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