



Scirocco
borderline-europe, Sicily –
Part 16/2022
Palermo, 06.10.2022



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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

A political event that shook Italy and Europe on September 25, 2022, was **the Italian parliamentary elections**. A victory of the right-wing party alliance between Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi - Brothers of Italy), Matteo Salvini's Lega and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia was already conceivable before the elections, but the clear victory of the post-fascist Fratelli d'Italia party is staggering. The latter two parties each won "only" around eight percent, but **the right-wing electoral alliance, thanks to the victory of Giorgia Meloni, comes to a total of around 44 percent** - and thus has the **majority of seats** in both the Chamber of Deputies (235 out of 400) and the Senate (112 out of 200). The Fdi **scored just over four percent** in the last elections in 2018, and with this victory, it has seen an increase to **around 26 percent** in just four years. The election outcome is worrisome, as a return to the racist **"policy of closed ports"** - which former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini pursued with the so-called security decrees ("decreti sicurezza") - is again possible. Likewise, the situation for refugees and migrants at Italy's borders with France and Slovenia and in the central Mediterranean region could change, as well as for **NGO rescue ships**, could deteriorate further under the new government. During her election campaign, Meloni was already agitating against migrants and conjuring up imaginary images of the enemy. Accordingly, it is to

be expected that there will be further restrictions in the area of migration policy. Also with regard to the important issue of **freedom of the press**, cases have come to light in which **foreign journalists** were secretly recorded by young supporters of the party at election events of the Fdi in order to record their questions to participants. Whether **neo-fascist, racist** and **anti-feminist** positions will be consolidated in Italian politics also depends on whether the new Italian government will find stability or whether the trend of early elections in Italy will prevail again.

Moreover, the **coverage of the elections** is worrying. The description of the electoral alliance under Giorgia Meloni as **"centro-destra"** (center-right) gives the impression that the Fdi is a bourgeois conservative party - but Meloni has her political roots in fascism. At the age of 15, she joined the neo-fascist **Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI)**, which was founded in 1946 by supporters of the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Her current politics can and must be described as **post-fascist**.



Meloni in front of the logo of the neo-fascist party MSI.
© Jose Antonio

Given Italy's importance beyond its own borders, the change of direction in Italian politics will also have an impact at the European and international level. UNHCR therefore submitted **twelve proposals** to key political actors in

Italy before the elections to ensure the **protection of refugees and migrants in Italy** - even after the elections. The proposals range from the promotion of European solidarity in questions of asylum law, to sea rescue, to the establishment of an asylum authority, which should make the processing of asylum applications more efficient in the future. The UNHCR's proposals are themselves problematic and include demands such as "deal with obstacles impeding the repatriation of people who do not need protection," which clearly refers to deportations. The UNHCR itself works closely with state actors in other countries, even if the rights of migrants are fundamentally disregarded there. The fact that the organization now sees the protection of refugees threatened by the elections in Italy confirms the political scale and danger posed by the new government.

The Italian [journalist Sara Creta](#) went to the European Court of Human Rights to claim her **right to information**. Creta demanded information from the Italian Ministry of the Interior about how public funds are used in Libya. The background is the financing of Libyan border control authorities, which are responsible for pullbacks of migrants on the Mediterranean Sea (we already reported on the cooperation of the Italian state with Libyan authorities in [previous issues](#) of this newsletter). The Ministry of Interior rejected the journalist's request on the grounds that the release of the requested information would pose a threat to international relations and public security.

In the summer of 2015, activists from the **No Borders movement** occupied a [square in Imperia](#) and set up a camp to house refugees. This was also a sign of protest against the closure of European borders. 14 activists involved have now been sentenced to prison terms of between one and three months. **We strongly condemn the criminalization of activists, migration and solidarity.** Further information

and solidarity campaigns for those affected by the criminalization can be found in the [project of the same name](#).

A [ruling by the Italian Supreme Court](#) (Court of Cassation) states that **humanitarian protection titles must be granted to migrants who have the serious intention of integrating into Italy**. The Court understands this to mean both learning the Italian language and doing paid work. This ruling was preceded by the complaint of a migrant who was not granted a protection title in Italy due to a temporary work contract. Fortunately, a temporary employment contract is now sufficient to obtain legal security in terms of humanitarian protection status in Italy - as it is not easy for either refugees and migrants or Italian citizens to be hired on a permanent basis. **Making unrealistic demands** like these on migrants, which cannot even be achieved by the local population, proves the deliberate and politically intended hurdles that are put in the way of migrants by the administrative side in order to make a stay in Italy and Europe more difficult.



Cassazione in Rome. © Jebulon

Situation of refugees in Italy

The beginning of autumn marks the start of the harvest season in Italy, which each year brings thousands of **migrant seasonal workers to Italy, who are employed in exploitative conditions** in the olive and tomato harvests. As expected, the inhumane conditions in the workers' accommodations have hardly changed; the accommodations still lack basic hygiene standards and **life-threatening fires** break out due to the poor conditions. This was

the case in early September in [Borgo Mezzano](#), where four huts burned down. Although the agricultural sector depends on the work of migrant seasonal workers - without them the harvest could not be managed - the workers are financially exploited and employed without proper labor contracts or security.



Olive harvest. © Daniel Ventura

Recently, cases of migrants traveling overland by truck, car and freight train across Europe to seek residency or asylum in another state have been increasing again. Since they are not allowed **freedom of movement** under the [Dublin Regulations](#), migrants have to find clandestine and dangerous ways to cross intra-European borders. Recently, a [truck driver near Piacenza](#) in northern Italy noticed that the seals of his cargo hold had been broken. In the hold of the truck, the driver discovered seven refugees from Afghanistan who were severely exhausted and dehydrated. A similar situation occurred at the [Italian-Austrian border](#). Here, eight Indians tried to leave the country by car, but were discovered by the police. The driver said he had taken the job to earn money. He was charged with **aiding and abetting unauthorized entry**. In the Trieste region (also northern Italy), [another two drivers](#) were stopped bringing 17 Kurds to Italy via the Balkan route to seek asylum. The two drivers from Kosovo were arrested.

Only at the end of September, a [verdict was announced against two young men](#) who were each sentenced to a fine of 1.45 million euros for helping migrants hide on freight trains on the Verona route to Austria and Germany,

respectively. People who help refugees and migrants to flee and migrate now risk heavy prison sentences and fines. In view of the fact that there are **hardly any legal ways to apply for asylum in Europe**, the charge of aiding and abetting illegal immigration must be classified as politically motivated in many cases. Instead of guaranteeing migrating persons a legal way to enter the country and apply for asylum, they and their helpers are criminalized - and at the same time a space is created in which smuggling networks can demand high sums of money to carry out life-threatening crossings.

[L'Altrocircolo](#), an organization that provides psychological and psychosocial support to LGBTQI+ or queer migrants in Italy, reported that six of their clients have now been granted an international protection title. **LGBTQI+ migrants are in a particularly vulnerable situation**, as they are often discriminated against by their families and communities, and homophobia is also widespread in Europe. In addition, not all states recognize persecution based on sexual or gender identity as grounds for seeking asylum.

An [initiative from Palermo](#) has launched the online portal "[Prima gli ultimi](#)", which aims to **support migrants in their everyday life in Italy**. The portal provides information on various areas of life such as health, economic and legal advice and language schools, and includes a compilation of associations and organizations that offer support structures for migrants. The aim of the online portal is to provide an overview of which persons and institutions can be contacted in which situation. The initiative was founded by the journalist Rino Canzoneri. It is intended to contribute to a culture of welcome that is resolutely opposed to racism.

For more information on the situation in Italy, see our Central Med Info and the

previous issues of the 'Scirocco' on our homepage.

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