

Three thousand people in the Lampedusa hotspot: it is not an emergency, but a political choice!

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Press Statement

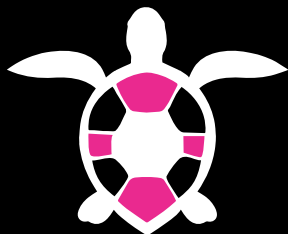
Since the night between 14 and 15 February, almost a week ago, the arrivals on Lampedusa have started again. After a week's stop, the Favaloro pier is once again bustling with people rescued by the Coast Guard and the Guardia di Finanza near the island.

It is now a recurring and well-known trend: with bad weather, departures stop or at least slow down, but as soon as the wind returns and the sea calms down, arrivals begin again. Of the NGOs, not even a shadow: even in these days, rescue ships that had rescued a few dozen people have been assigned ports of disembarkation far away. Yet, thousands of people – with their stories, their faces, their wishes – managed to reach the island autonomously and regardless of NGOs rescue.

Over the past year, more and more people from Sub-saharian Africa, fleeing from Libya or directly from their own country, have started to leave from Tunisian shores. In many cases, these are the ones who embark in the worst conditions: on iron boats, made of metal barely welded together, and departing in adverse weather conditions. In the last few days, the landings of people coming directly from Libya have also started again: larger boats with 100, 150 people on board have touched the shores of Lampedusa.

In less than a week, some 5,000 people have arrived. It is hard to imagine what it is like to stand at the Favaloro pier and not have room to walk, or to see the Coast Guard patrol boat shuttling back and forth, having to maneuver carefully to make room for parallel rescue operations by two patrol boats from the Guardia di Finanza, as well as the Swedish Frontex and Carabinieri patrol boats. And it is even harder to imagine what it might feel like to be confined with another 3,200 people inside the contrada Imbriacola hotspot, which is built to host 389. On Saturday night, a woman died inside the hotspot. She is not the first one, in last months. What is not hard to imagine, is that the conditions in which she was forced to survive contributed to her death. The ritual farewell – the body wrapped in white sheets – does not bring justice for her death, or for that of another person, whose lifeless body arrived last night on board of one of the last Coast Guard rescue ship.

The managing actor – the Badia Grande cooperative company, which manages also other facilities all over Italy – for its part, run out of kits, water and food after the first day of arrivals. Some of the spaces where the people are forced to stay, completely full of rubbish of all kinds, have flooded – slime and black water all over the floors. The hotspot is overcrowded that it is even hard to walk.



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MONITORING UND ERSTHILFE

Since Saturday morning, several military ships have been arriving on Lampedusa to transfer people to Sicily, Apulia and Calabria. A certain indolence, if not laziness, seems to characterise the management of these transfers which, again, have started too late for concretely ensuring that people do not end up in inhumane conditions.

Despite the obvious overcrowding already starting on Tuesday, it took days for the ships Dattilo, San Giusto and later others to arrive. But then another problem added up: the lack of personnel to carry out identification and signaling procedures – leading to people becoming unable to leave the island. Therefore, the Dattilo ship could bring to Sicily only 600 people, about half of what it has capacity to carry. More than 2.000 people remain in the hotspot at the moment.

Some of the people confined in the hotspot or in other centers manage to make their voices heard, getting in touch with associations in solidarity: some are still there, in Lampedusa, and are astonished by the conditions; others were transferred to other centers, such as the one in Pian del Lago, in Caltanissetta: they are still wearing the clothes they wore during the crossing, a week ago. After being deprived of their basic rights in Lampedusa, including being prevented from leaving the center, the restriction of migrants' freedom continues when they leave the island, as also in other reception centers in Italy they are told that they cannot leave.

As activists involved in struggles for freedom of movement and in solidarity with migrant people, and as realities present on the island, we denounce the conditions in which people arriving on Lampedusa are forced to live, but above all we denounce a wider system that makes the hotspot a lethal prison. What could happen in the coming months, when weather conditions will be better and better? What tragedy needs to happen, again, for the hotspot system to be abolished?

It is a political will not to manage arrivals beyond the logic of emergency, to be constantly unprepared for events that are predictable, and therefore manageable with specific tools and accurate measures. It is a political will to make Lampedusa the (at the same time forgotten) center of the supposed invasion, of tragedies, of chaos. All this could be avoided, but it is a political choice not to.

In the past year, Italy and Europe have opened their borders to millions of refugees from Ukraine. A few thousand people arriving in Lampedusa cannot be a problem: a decent reception is not only a fundamental right but also something achievable in practice.

For the situation to change, different political decisions than those taken in recent decades are needed:

- We demand the revision of the convention between the prefecture and the managing society, given the opening of the tender, and to guarantee the basic rights of the people passing through the Island.
- We demand that people's right to leave the centre is respected, so that they are not incarcerated.
- We call for more staff to be hired to care for and not just control people, and in proportion to the people actually housed.
- We demand an effective and fast transfer system, not as a delayed reaction to alleged emergencies.
- We demand welcoming infrastructures outside the logic of prison, emergency or dehumanisation.
- We want reception facilities that are worthy, effective, and respect not only people's rights but also their needs and wishes.
- We demand real welcoming of refugees and migrants from the south!

Freedom of movement for all!

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