



## **Laborers return to Campobello, new and old problems of an unsustainable life**

Palermo, 24/10/2024 - The end of September marks the start of the olive harvest and, as every year, the seasonal workers have travelled from all over Sicily and other parts of Italy to Campobello di Mazara to earn money in the fields over the coming months. The workers are mainly migrants who have come to Italy across the Mediterranean in the last ten years, mostly from West and North Africa.

However, just like last year, Sicily has been hit by a phenomenon that is now affecting the entire Mediterranean region, namely the persistent drought. In Agrigento, the taps ran dry in the summer. Residents queued at the supermarkets to buy water, not for drinking but for washing. The lack of rain is threatening olive yields and crops, including in nearby Campobello. And although it is becoming apparent that this year's olive harvest will be poor, there are still too few workers on site. Why is that? For one thing, word has long since got around among the seasonal workers that Campobello is a scam and that it is not worth travelling to, as not everyone would get work. Furthermore, under the new government under Meloni, mobility for people without papers is associated with greater risks, as more checks are being carried out throughout the country. It is also becoming increasingly difficult for undocumented workers to get into legality through employment contracts. There is a regulation on the exploitation of labour, according to which a permit to stay is granted to those who report their employer. However, there have hardly been any such reports to date.

Irrespective of these general legal aspects, the problem of accommodation on site has become more acute. The residents of the ghost town of Campobello are still unwilling to



rent accommodation to seasonal workers, even though there is enough space. In principle, employers must provide accommodation for seasonal workers. However, this obligation is often circumvented, either by a complete lack of employment contracts or fictitious daily wage contracts. The camps have also been dismantled. In previous years, the region of Sicily, together with the Red Cross, was able to provide money for the tent city from the EU migration

fund; this was only of limited help, as only people with papers were allowed to stay there, but at least it helped. Now this source has also dried up. The municipality of Castelvetrano only submitted an application for funding to the region on 18 October. Quite late, considering that the season will end in December. This shows the paradoxical situation that the municipality needs the seasonal workers on the one hand, but does not want them on the other and is therefore ignoring the accommodation problem.

In addition, seasonal workers are also affected by the poor health care system. On paper, there is the right to integration into the national health system from the moment an application for international protection is submitted, and thus the right to basic care. However, this is always linked to the place of residence, which for seasonal workers is per definitionem not at their place of work.

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Pictures: Campobello, Arci Porco Rosso