



# **SUMMARY OBSERVATORY ROSARNO**

**X Report by Medici per i Diritti Umani on the  
living and working conditions of foreign farm  
labourers in the Gioia Tauro Plain**

## The authors

**Martina Marcellino, Francesco Penna, Filippo Curtale, Mariarita Peca.**

Medici per i Diritti Umani ETS  
comunicazione@mediciperidirittiumani.org  
www.mediciperidirittiumani.org

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*Medici per i Diritti Umani (MEDU) is an international non-profit humanitarian and solidarity organization, independent of political, union, religious and ethnic affiliations. MEDU aims to bring health care to the most vulnerable populations in crisis situations, in Italy and abroad, and to develop democratic and participatory spaces within civil society for the promotion of the right to health and other human rights. MEDU's action is based on the militancy of civil society, on the professional and voluntary commitment of doctors and other health professionals, as well as citizens and professionals from other disciplines..*

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*Medici per i Diritti Umani (MEDU) operated in the Gioia Tauro Plain in the framework of the project "Open Fields: laboratory of territorial practices to promote dignity of life and work". Relying on a wide network of organisations - with the Regional Intervention Centre for Cooperation (CRIC) as the responsible body and MEDU, ARCI, the FCEI's Mediterranean Hope project, the CSC Nuvola Rossa, the University of Calabria (Dispes - Unical), and the Network "Comuni Solidali" (RECOSOL) as partners - the project aims to strengthen the processes of emancipation from labour exploitation and social isolation of foreign agricultural workers in the territory of the Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria.*

*The interventions of MEDU is cofinanced by Latter-day Saint Charities and Fondazione con il Sud.*

## SUMMARY

### ROSARNO OBSERVATORY

X Report by Medici per i Diritti Umani on the living and working conditions of foreign farm labourers in the Gioia Tauro Plain

For the tenth consecutive year, Medici per i Diritti Umani (MEDU) operated in the Gioia Tauro Plain in the framework of the project "Open Fields: laboratory of territorial practices to promote dignity of life and work". Relying on a wide network of organisations - with the Regional Intervention Centre for Cooperation (CRIC) as the responsible body and MEDU, ARCI, the FCEI's Mediterranean Hope project, the CSC Nuvola Rossa, the University of Calabria (Dispes - Unical), and the Network "Comuni Solidali" (RECOSOL) as partners - the project aims to strengthen the processes of emancipation from labour exploitation and social isolation of foreign agricultural workers in the territory of the Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria.

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During the first two months of activity (April-May 2023), the mobile clinic team - composed of a coordinator, a doctor, a socio-legal operator, a cultural mediator and a logistician - operated at the main precarious settlements where agricultural seasonal labourers live, providing primary medical assistance and socio-legal guidance.

Compared to previous years, there was a drastic decrease in the number of immigrants, partly due to the timing of the intervention, which began only at the end of the citrus harvesting season, and partly due to other factors such as the long waiting times for the issuance or renewal of residence permits at the Police Headquarters in Reggio Calabria and the Gioia Tauro and adverse weather factors that led to a sharp drop in citrus production and a reduction in the harvest. At the end of the 2023 citrus harvesting season, no more than 500 workers were present in the informal settlements of the Plain.

The most populated settlements, as in previous years, were the tent city in the industrial area of the city of San Ferdinando, the container camp of Testa dell'Acqua in Rosarno city and the dilapidated farmhouses in Contrada Russo, in the municipality of Taurianova. In all of them, MEDU found extremely critical conditions, characterised by dilapidated structures or shacks

built with waste materials, isolation from inhabited centres, non-functioning or insufficient sanitary facilities, lack or shortage of electricity and water, overcrowding, lack of a waste disposal system, dangers deriving from possible short-circuits and from improvised fires, lit by the labourers to keep warm during the winter months.

In two months, the mobile clinic team assisted a total of 94 people between medical examinations and legal assistance, conducting 80 medical examinations and 63 legal interviews.

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The population is made up of young men with an average age of 35, from sub-Saharan West African countries (in particular: Mali 35%, Gambia 22%, Senegal 14%, Ghana 8%, Ivory Coast 8%, Guinea 6%) and present in Italy for more than 3 years (88%).

92% of the people assisted were regular residents compared to 8% of irregular. Only 15% had a residence permit for work, while most workers had a residence permit as asylum seekers (39%), for subsidiary protection (22%) and special protection (22%). One per cent were refugees and a further one per cent had a residence permit for awaiting employment. The policies and measures adopted in recent months by the new executive power - in particular the so-called "Cutro Decree" - have contributed to a growing precarization of the legal conditions of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees as they set increasingly restrictive criteria for obtaining and renewing certain types of residence permit.

As for housing conditions, although in recent years there have been many declarations of intent and institutional initiatives aimed at "overcoming informal settlements" – including national and European funding, Action Plans, Memoranda of Understanding, Programmatic tables - yet another citrus harvesting season ended without any concrete improvement of housing and living conditions of foreign agricultural workers. The most recent innovations concern the realization of the "Social Village", in Contrada Russo (Municipality of Taurianova), financed by the Calabria Region through the Refugee Integration Fund (FAMI) emergency of the European Commission and the "Village of Solidarity" Rosarno, in an asset confiscated from the Mafia. To date, however, although the renovation works have been completed, both structures remain closed. In January 2022, the "Dambe So" hostel opened on the initiative of the Mediterranean Hope project of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy (FCEI).

As for working conditions, despite daily wages have improved slightly (between € 45 and € 50 for 8 hours of work on average), wage and contribution irregularities remain extremely widespread: undeclared or irregular work remain the norm. Only 50% of those interviewed stated that they had an employment contract (in no case with a duration of more than one year), 36% that they did not have one, and 14% that they were not working at the time of the interview.

Regarding access to care, only 43% of the interviewees had a valid health card. Factors such as the complexity of bureaucratic procedures, language barriers in the absence of cultural mediators, structural deficiencies of services due to limited economic and personnel resources, the isolation of the informal settlements, the absence of public transport, and widespread poverty which prevent many labourers from contributing, when required, to health care costs, hinder effective access to care. The problems of the regional health system, already significant in past years, remain serious, with Calabria confirming its position as the least efficient region in Italy in 2022. The general epidemiological picture confirms the close correlation between the health conditions and the hygienic, working and housing conditions of the Plain's labour population: social marginalisation, extremely precarious housing and hygienic conditions, lack of drinking water and heating, inhuman working conditions, poor or insufficient nutrition, and obstacles to access to fundamental rights. With regard to the pathologies found, prevalence of pathologies of the osteo-articular system (22% of cases) is confirmed, followed by pathologies of the digestive system (12% of patients) due not only to precarious living conditions and the impossibility of cooking in a clean environment, but also to the consumption of rainwater or stagnated water in the workplace. A decrease in the number of patients with respiratory diseases (bronchitis, flu syndromes, pharyngitis, cold syndromes) was also noted, which can probably be attributed to a fairly mild winter, as well as to the effectiveness of the prevention activities adopted after the pandemic, in particular the distribution of hand sanitisers and masks.

Ten years after the beginning of the intervention of MEDU in Calabria, a comparison between the past and current scenario is useful. When the mobile clinic started the Terragiusta project in 2014, more than 70% of the assisted workers had a regular residence permit, but almost 90% without a job contract for about 25 euros per day. Today, there are 92% of regular

residents and 50% with a contract of employment, although wage and contribution irregularities remain the norm. The daily wage appears to have increased sharply, especially during the last year, due to the progressive decline in citrus production and the contraction of the available labourers in the Plain. However, it remains lower than provided for in the national collective agreement for the sector and still inadequate, considering the working conditions, job insecurity and the significant increase in the cost of living. But the most distressing aspect remains the scenario: the tent city of San Ferdinando appears in the same conditions as then, with worn-out tents which and dilapidated barracks, in the absence of essential services and with piles of waste to delimit the area. The Rosarno container camp, set up in the aftermath of the 2010 revolt and now in a state of decay, remains the most desirable accommodation, despite the distance from the city, the lack of services and overcrowding. The farmhouses of Drosi and Taurianova, now as then offer refuge to dozens of farm workers, in the absence of everything. Over the course of ten years there have been evictions, fires, a succession of ministerial tent cities with intermittent managing authorities, always destined to become unhealthy and overcrowded slums.

The health of farm labourers, now as then, is strongly influenced by living and working conditions, with a prevalence of pathologies linked to the cold, poor diet, excessive workload, and poor sanitary conditions in informal settlements. No coherent, far-sighted housing policy for the benefit of the entire local community has seen the light of day in recent years, despite the succession of Protocols and proclamations, institutional Tables and allocations of more or less emergency funds. Some innovations seem to be timidly appearing on the panorama of the Plain, but the most concrete and sustainable at the moment seem to be those implemented by the third sector - in particular the 'Diambe So' Social Hostel inaugurated by the Mediterranean Hope (FCEI) project in San Ferdinando' - while those of an institutional nature have yet to be implemented. The 'Borgo Sociale' in Contrada Russo, a container camp equipped with various services, has not yet opened its doors, despite the fact that it was scheduled to be inaugurated at the end of May 2022, and even the 'Rosarno Solidarity Village' is still closed due to organisational issues, despite the fact that renovation work was completed in May.

In the meantime, the crisis in the agricultural sector is worsening due to the dominance of large-scale organised distribution which, by squeezing the prices of citrus fruits, inhibits the growth of the market and the protection of workers. At the same time, the weakness of local

institutions remains constant, amidst commissariats for mafia infiltration and disregarded plans. The most recent are the 'Memorandum of Understanding for overcoming social marginality and situations of degradation of migrants present in the tent city of San Ferdinando and other areas of the Gioia Tauro Plain' of 2021 and, at the national level, the 'Three-year plan to combat labour exploitation in agriculture and 'caporalato' (forced labour), lasting three years (2020-2022). However, these measures have not yet had a significant impact on the exploitation phenomena.

In view of the picture described, MEDU once again calls for decisive institutional intervention and makes a number of recommendations to this end. In particular:

To the Government:

- To make known the results obtained through the implementation of the "Three-Year Plan to Combat Labour Exploitation in Agriculture and illegal hiring (2020-2022)", in particular in terms of strengthening labour supply and demand matching services (CPI), access to decent housing, transport of workers, surveillance and combating exploitation phenomena
- To the Ministry of Agricultural Policies and the European Commission, the opening of an immediate dialogue on the application of measures - such as the safeguard clauses provided for in the European Union treaties - that re-establish the principles of the market and fair competition.
- Promote systemic policies and investments to relaunch the agricultural sector in Southern Italy and in particular in Calabria, for example through incentives to companies that guarantee quality and ethical production that respects workers' rights and the environment;

To the Calabria Region:

- The implementation of policies and measures to promote housing projects in the municipalities of the Plain, also upgrading the local real estate heritage, as also provided for in Action 2 of the Memorandum of Understanding of September 2021;

- Planning structural actions to guarantee the medium-long term sustainability of housing projects currently financed with Su.Pr.Eme funds;
- Strengthening the public transport service in the Gioia Tauro Plain and in the entire region;
- Strengthen the territorial public health services, in particular the Case della Salute, the Mental Health Centres and the outpatient clinics for irregular migrants and those with registered residence in other regions;

To the municipalities of the Plain:

- Promote housing models that foster integration and social cohesion for the benefit of the entire territorial community;
- Take a central role in the identification of unused public properties to be made available to workers, after possible renovation work, at a sustainable rent;
- Promote social co-housing initiatives such as the Social Hostel inaugurated in San Ferdinando;
- Facilitating access to registry office registration in order to allow the issuance/renewal of most residence permits;

To the Prefecture of Reggio Calabria:

- Monitor the effective access to civil registration in the municipalities of the Gioia Tauro Plain affected by the presence of precarious settlements;
- Monitor hygienic and security conditions within the informal settlements, in order to guarantee the respect of minimum standards;

To the Reggio Calabria Police Headquarters:

- Reduce waiting times for the issuance/renewal of all residence permits, in compliance with the regulations in force

To the Labour Inspectorate:

- Strengthen the controls on companies in order to combat undeclared work and contractual irregularities

