



SSIIM UNESCO CHAIR

On Social and Spatial Inclusion of International Migrants – Urban Policies and Practice

The right to adequate housing of migrants factsheets

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**ROSARNO'S RIOTS: THE EMBLEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE FAILURE OF ITALIAN
GOVERNMENT IN REGULATING IN THE GOVERNANCE OF MIGRATION FLOWS.**

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The right to adequate housing for migrants - factsheets

The right to adequate housing for migrants is a series of thematic factsheets on migrants' level of access to adequate shelter in different urban contexts. Written by academic researchers and experts solicited by SSIIM UNESCO Chair, the factsheets were aimed at providing background information for the 2010 Report of UN-Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Dr. Raquel Rolnik.

Besides presenting the picture of the overall housing situation of migrants in the concerned contexts, authors were asked to highlight what the conditions of international migrants (regular and undocumented) are with respect to

- access to public housing and/or government subsidies
- access to housing loans
- access to the private housing market (discriminatory attitudes)
- inclusion into regularization and land tenure policies (if any, highlighting whether it is a local or a central government policy)

Authors were also invited to underline whether differences in policies/attitudes between local (poor) population (including rural-urban migrants) and international migrants are put in place and if any particularly interesting policy is being implemented that could be pointed out as innovative example.

Through the network of the partner universities, research centres and other relevant actors, SSIIM UNESCO Chair on Social and Spatial Inclusion of International Migrants - Urban Policies and Practices aims at:

- Identifying policies and practices that promote the urban inclusion of international migrants
- Supporting local governments in shaping adequate actions to foster effective urban governance and the social/spatial integration of international migrants
- Disseminating the experiences that can provide ground for effective policy exchange (good practices)
- Raising the awareness of policy-makers and the civil society at large, on the importance of international migrants' urban social and spatial inclusion

In early 2010, after 3 days of violent riots, the situation of housing and labor exploitation of immigrant workers living in Rosarno, in southern Italy, has captured the attention of major national and European public channels. For this reason, I will concentrate myself on this case study that I consider to be central for the understanding of the effects of political governance of migration flows in Italy, in terms of labor market and housing regulation.

Rosarno is a small municipality (15,000 inhabitants) located on the Tyrrhenian coast of Calabria, in the middle of the main nodes of communication and trade in the Region, not far from the port of Gioia Tauro, the second largest European port for transshipment operations. Its geographical position has encouraged the emergence of a thriving food industry devoted primarily to agricultural cultivation of citrus fruits. The many companies raised in the territory had to suffer the widespread control of the *'ndrangheta*, the powerful local mafia. Then, they found themselves constricted to interact in an informal economy in which most workers were employed illegally. For this reason, since the early 90s, Rosarno drew all these regular and irregular migrants who were not able to make a path of integration within the institutional channels offered by the Italian State. Since 1990, Rosarno therefore represents one of the many natural outcomes of segregation and exploitation of the immigrant population, produced by Italian immigration laws.

The first to arrive were North African immigrants who settled in the territory in mid-'80s, then starting from 2000s workers in the agricultural sector are constituted in large part from sub-Saharan African immigrants. As for legal status, these new arrivals are composed of: a) irregular immigrants who could not find a work and fail to obtain visa through national *sanatorias*; b) asylum seekers who work illegally because they are prevented by law to have a regular job; c) immigrants with a regular visa for family reunification who could not find other types of work. Most of the undocumented immigrants do not arrive in Calabria as their first destination but comes there after several failed attempts to find work in other cities in Northern and Central Italy, after the suggestions of other migrants. Asylum seekers come to Rosarno instead thanks again to ethnic networks allied with the *'Ndrangheta* and accompanying asylum seeker from the retention centers to the fields of Rosarno, often confiscating their documents. Other asylum seekers arrive in Rosarno after being duped by fake agencies for supporting documents to immigrants.

In a context of scarce public control, having the possibility to exploit this valuable source of vulnerable and unsecured work, the local mafia has led to a racist regime comparable to apartheid and in some ways even more discriminatory: work shifts of over 10 hours daily, pay of less than € 2.50 per hour, housing in disused factories without any service, repeated physical and moral harassment. Added to this are the murders of all those who have not adapted to the Mafia control: two Algerians killed in February 1992, an Ivorian asylum seeker killed and two other asylum seekers coming Burkina Faso seriously injured in February 1994; an African not recognized person found dead in 1996, three Moroccan immigrants shattered in January 1997, three seriously injured in a shooting in 1999, two Ivorians seriously injured in 2008 and two other Ivorians shoot in January 2010. Along with them, many other invisible victims potentially disappeared among the fields of Rosarno without anyone who could claim their return.

Housing conditions in which these immigrants have been subjected since the clearing up following the events of 2010, were not respectful of any basic human right and represented, in my opinion, the lowest point of exploitation of immigrants in the Western countries. This is true to the point that *Medici senza Frontiere* (Doctors Without Borders), an NGO operating normally in third world countries within refugee camps, since 2005 has placed a standing point in Rosarno in order to provide immigrants basic medical services and assistance. From a March 2005 report produced by the same NGO, namely: " 55% of

seasonal workers from Rosarno has no running water at the place where he lives, 54% have no electricity, almost 60% have no toilets and 91% did not warm up”.

While the first immigrants were unable to find accommodation for rent in private homes, albeit their bad conditions, since the Bossi-Fini Law in 2002 and the subsequent introduction of the crime of *clandestinity* in 2008, tenants no longer have rented their houses to irregular immigrants, in order to avoid legal consequences prescribed by law. In addition, the 'Ndrangheta had imposed a de facto racial segregation of African immigrants outside the city settlements, and the Italian government never intervened to change this situation in the past decade.

From 2003 to 2009, the 2000 immigrants employed in the fields of cultivation of Rosarno have been sleeping in high prevalence in the degraded structures of a former paper-mill (*ex Cartiera*) that was built outside the municipality with public money and then was abandoned, as often happened to other public structures in southern Italy. A structure thus devoid of any standard of habitability, in which, moreover, the local mafias had abandoned asbestos, and other not recycled toxic material.

In July 2009, for unclear reasons, the building of the former paper-mill is set on fire. Immigrants who slept there are then evacuated and the Italian State did not even apply to find them a new housing solution. Once again, immigrant workers are abandoned and constricted to sleep in other places on brownfield land. Many of them end up in silos for the refining of olive-oil of the so-called Opera Sila, another public company that failed some year before. These niches made of metal material are 20 meters high, without even any service, except the chemical toilets introduced in 2009 by the Calabria Region as the only form of assistance to immigrant workers in Rosarno.

When the riots breaks out in 2010, their living conditions are even worse and also the isolation and discrimination of the local population has become a commonplace behavior. At the end of the fighting, there were 53 wounded, many houses and property burnt or destroyed. Evictions of the structures that follow these events do not lead to an improvement in the conditions of immigrants, nor to any national political strategy of integration: many of them are transferred to centers of identification and retention; others are abandoned to their status as homeless undocumented without work; a certain number of undocumented immigrants are expelled; asylum seekers keep on living on Italian territory without any certainty of recognition of their condition. In the following days, Minister of Interior Roberto Maroni in its public speech does not condemn the mafia, that managed the exploitation of immigrants, and does not recognize a political responsibility of the government for the lack of public control in the area. In contrast, the same minister blames illegal immigrants, victims of exploitation, to have produced the insurgency and the living conditions in which they are found to survive. According to the local employment office, when the riots explode agricultural workers were composed by 1600 Italians and only 72 immigrants. This is because many Italian workers pretend to work in agricultural fields to obtain retirement benefits, with the support of doctors and trade unions allied with the Mafia. As a result, without any immigrant in the condition to denounce employers, most of them will be not condemned.

European public opinion, UNHCR, ILO and other international organizations have reacted strongly denouncing the responsibility of the Italian State in the facts of Rosarno. Articles appeared on *The Guardian* and the *Economist* newspapers in the same month spoke explicitly of ethnic cleansing.