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## Migrants, protests in Calabria and quarantined ships. Forti (Caritas): “Same healthcare procedures for everyone”

After the protests of the inhabitants of Amantea, a town in the Italian Calabria region, against 28 migrants from Bangladesh, some of whom tested positive to Covid-19, the prefecture of Cosenza decided to deploy soldiers to guard the facility where they are housed. The competent Ministry is now deciding whether the migrants rescued in the Mediterranean should be quarantined on another vessel. “Quarantined ships, which involve substantial taxpayer money, make sense if the conditions justify their staying at sea,” Mr. Oliviero Forti, in charge of immigration at Caritas Italy, told SIR. Given the widespread pandemic, he observed, “since we are all on the same boat, everyone should be given the same opportunities. Instead, some must remain quarantined on the ship, while others can stay home. It would be more logical for immigrants to be quarantined in a dedicated facility like everyone else.”



Immagine non disponibile

[Complaints about tourism being threatened by the presence of immigrants brings to mind the situation on the island of Lampedusa, although official figures don't show a drop in tourism due to migrant landings. Thus, the situation in Calabria is yet to be ascertained.](#)

**[This is a widespread pandemic that affects everyone, Italians and foreigners alike.](#)**

[Guaranteeing proper healthcare procedures for everyone is a sign of great responsibility on the part of national and regional institutions. Indeed, this seems to have been the case, as immigrants have been transferred to a quarantine facility. After this period is over and they test negative, there is no reason to worry. It is being decided whether to set up a new quarantine ship, in addition to the one off Porto Empedocle. Is it the right solution? Quarantined ships, which involve substantial taxpayer money, make sense if the conditions justify their staying at sea. On the health side, it is justifiable and understandable if there is a lockdown, collective psychosis and vulnerability. But today, if everything is safely managed, there is no such problem. Medical staff are at risk both on the ship and ashore. If passengers arriving at Fiumicino airport test positive, they are not placed in a quarantined airplane, but are requested to self quarantine at home and perhaps they will meet other people on the way. On the contrary, migrants are better protected because they reach the facility via](#)

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a sanitary cordon, keeping a safe distance. If there is no objective reason

**if everything were handled as it is in airports when incoming passengers test positive, the procedures would be the same.**

**Meanwhile, the Governor of Calabria is threatening to ban landings: is this legally feasible?** Responsibility for landings and reception lies with the government and prefectures. So the Governor would have to do a coup de force. We must wait and see what the Minister of the Interior will decide. In a situation such as that of Lampedusa, a quarantined ship could be the result of a lack of physical space, but what is the reason for sailing a quarantined ship in Calabria? Could it be that even in public health there is a problem of perception and widespread fear that prevents it being handled in a different way? What matters is ensuring that migrants and the population are protected and that the procedures are observed.

**I'm very much afraid that we will once again come across anti-immigrant political rhetoric.**

I believe that there have not been particularly worrying situations involving foreign nationals since the outbreak of the pandemic. Even in our centres we recorded very few cases of contagion, even lower than the national average. It seems to me that for many months people did not say anything for fear of contagion. But as we edged of our lockdown the anti-immigrant 'invasion' rhetoric resumed. It's as if we remained "composed" for a few months, avoiding to intensify controversies owing to the difficult situation everyone was facing. Now that we are approaching a more manageable situation, the previous narrative is re-emerging, politicizing anti-immigrant debate, with narratives depicting immigrants as dangerous. We had hoped that Covid would help mitigate such behaviour, but it doesn't seem to have taught us anything. The recurrence of these incidents shows that the issue is still marked by acrimony. At first the Chinese were stigmatized as spreaders, then it was us Italians, are immigrants the targets of blame-shifting today? There appears to be an anthropological need to seek a scapegoat at all costs, the cause of all our evils, while the actual cause of Covid-19 has not yet been discovered. All we know is that we have to overcome the emergency situation together. But this "togetherness" barely penetrates public discourse and people's minds. Given this situation, there must be no distinction between Italians, immigrants, rich or poor. Instead, when we see a glimmer of normality, all past frailties re-emerge. So it's not true that "we're all in the same boat"? Apparently not. Some should be ship-quarantined while others can remain inside their homes. It would seem logical for immigrants to have a dedicated quarantine facility like everyone else. Being all in the same boat we should have the same opportunities. It seems that saving migrants' lives is less important than tourism. If those who tested positive had been Italian tourists, from Lombardy for example, would have seen the same tensions? I don't think so. Besides, I wonder:

**had they been Lombards or Italians from the northern regions, would they have planned a quarantine ship?**

Money tourism comes from those areas. A distinction is always made, unfortunately. Various migrant vessels have landed in Lampedusa. Is there an increase in landings or are we in the norm? It's pretty much normal. This situation has been going on for 20 years, with varying figures from one year to the next. We're not facing an emergency. We're handling everything well, it's the normal rate of entry that we have to deal with. If every time it becomes a factor for political confrontation, that is another matter. Of course it's harder because Covid is here in Italy, in the countries of transit and departure. It's important to protect everyone's health, whether it's our children

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[on the beach or people arriving from the sea.](#)

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