



A BAD STORY

**Report
on the Ponte Galeria (Rome) identification and deportation
centre for immigrants without residence permits**



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This report is the result of a visit to the identification and deportation centre (CIE) of Ponte Galeria - Rome performed by a *Medici per i Diritti Umani (MEDU)* team on October 14th, 2010. This is the fifth visit that *MEDU* has made to the Ponte Galeria centre. The previous visits took place in 2005 (January, July, October) and 2008 (October). During the visit, the *MEDU* team was guided by a representative of the Prefecture (Ministry of Interior), by the director of the centre, and by the medical director. The team visited the male and female residence areas, the infirmary, the refectories, and some common areas. The team was permitted a very short period of time to talk with the detainees. Because of the short time of the visit, the team could not speak privately with the immigrants. A further visit at the centre was not authorized by the Prefecture. *MEDU* also gathered testimonies and information regarding both the immigrants recently detained in the centre as well as some social workers operating in the CIE.

During the visit to the centre, the *MEDU* team was not authorized to take pictures. The illustrations within this report represent merely memories of the visit on October 14th, 2010.

Medici per i Diritti Umani wishes to thank all those who collaborated in the editing of this report by providing information and testimonies. A special thanks goes to those women and men who experienced the detention in the Ponte Galeria centre.

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Medici per i Diritti Umani – MEDU (Doctors for Human Rights – Italy) is a democratic and non-profit organization independent of political, trade union, religious and ethnic affiliations. MEDU supports the right to health by the implementation of health projects for the benefit of most vulnerable populations. Health care and bearing witness on human rights are the core of MEDU's action. MEDU's action of bearing witness is based on its medical practice. MEDU firmly believes in the strategic value of working in collaboration with other organizations at a national and international level on themes of health, the promotion and protection of human rights.

Medici per i Diritti Umani is a humanitarian and international solidarity association with the mission of:

- bringing health assistance to the most vulnerable population in the situations of crisis;
- promoting the voluntary commitment of doctors and other health professionals, as well as citizens and professionals of other branches indispensable for its actions;
- developing democratic and participative space - for promotion and protection of the right to health and the other human rights - within the civil society;
- supporting cooperation initiatives aimed to bring out the role of local partners and to make the people the protagonists of their own development.

Medici per i Diritti Umani, starting from the medical practice and in total independence:

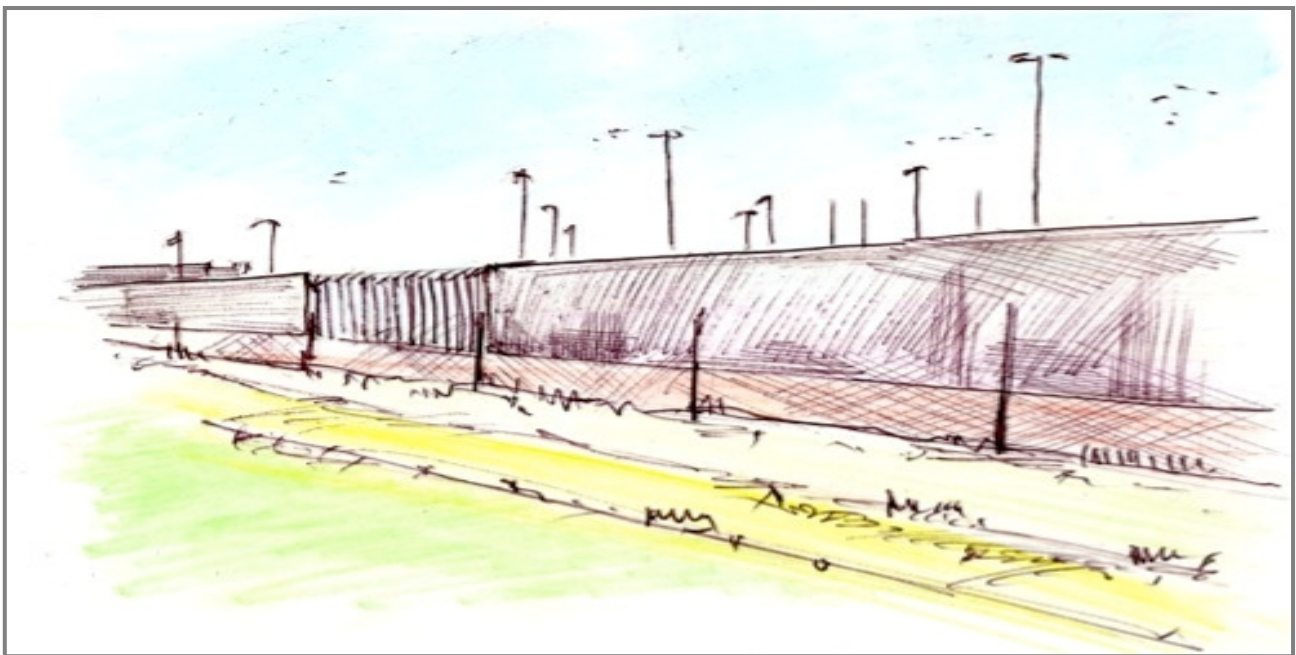
- points out the risks of crisis and the threats to the health and dignity with the goal of contributing to their prevention;
- looks for the cooperation of other partners to achieve solidarity beyond the health line;
- denounces and bears witness to the violations of human rights and, in particular, the exclusion from the right to health;
- develops new approaches and practices in public health, based on human dignity and the different cultures of the people;
- commits itself to maintaining a relationship of total transparency with its donors.

“A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together, lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life”

“...to find a crime that will fit the punishment”

Erving Goffman., ASYLUMS.

Inadequate to protect the dignity of detainees and to guarantee their fundamental rights. Clearly ineffective in achieving the goals that justify it (i.e. the identification and the repatriation of the detainees), even after the extension of the period of detention. The percentage of expelled detainees during the first 9 months of 2010 (43%) shows that less than half of the immigrants detained in the centre of Ponte Galeria are actually repatriated. This percentage is essentially the same as the data found in the same period of 2009, when the maximum term of detention was still 60 days¹. Thus, it is evident that the extension of the maximum detention time from two to six months - in addition to the worsening of living conditions and further weakening of rights within the centre - had no improvement in the effectiveness of repatriations.



The third report of Medici per i Diritti Umani (MEDU) on the largest Italian Centre for Identification and Deportation (CIE)² - the one of Ponte Galeria, in Rome - confirms the main problems emerged during the previous visits and highlights new ones. These critical issues remain a part of the inner nature of the institution, thus they are still relevant regardless of the management (in March 2009, the cooperative Auxilium replaced the Italian Red Cross' ten-year management of the centre) even though, at the time of the last visit, the overall management appeared slightly more adequate than in the past. The structural features of the centre are reminiscent of a prison and are absolutely incapable of guaranteeing a decent stay for immigrants. The imminent placement of

¹ The maximum time of detention as of 180 days was introduced on August 8th, 2009.

² The Centres for Identification and Deportation (CIEs), previously named CPTs (Centres of Temporary Permanence) were instituted in 1998 with the decree 268/98 (known as the Turco-Napolitano Law) as facilities to accommodate foreigners with no legal status in view of deportation.

transparent panels over all male quarters, already surrounded by a perimeter of bars, will only make the structure appear more oppressive.

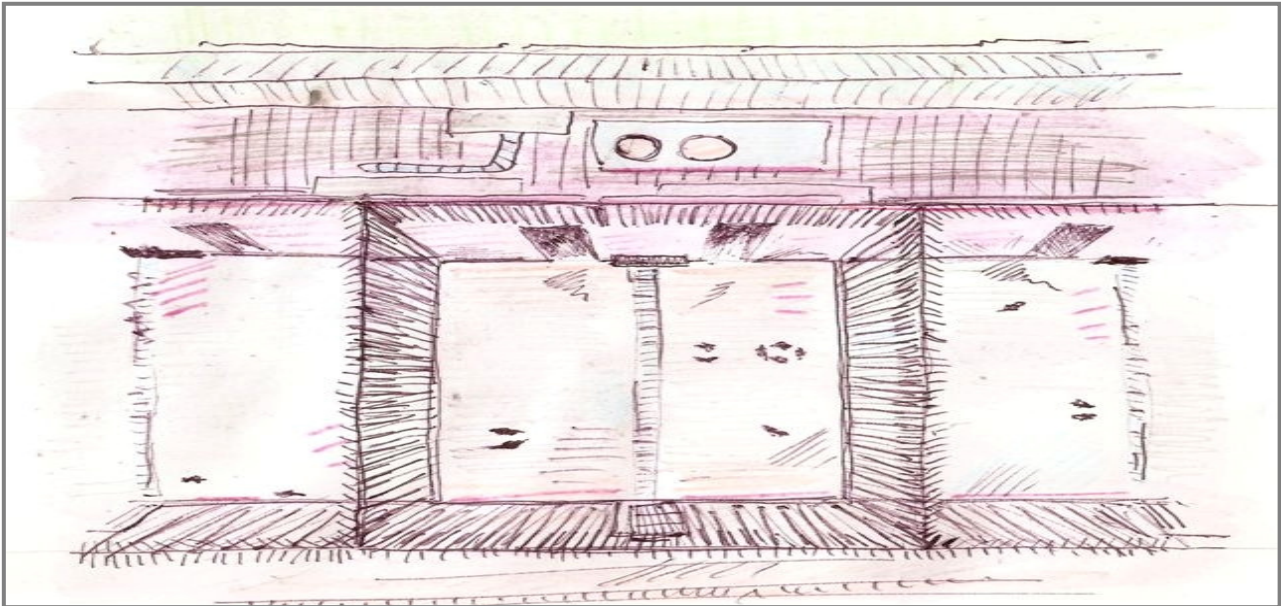
Health care continues to lack appropriate links with the local public services, which are separate from the centre. As a result, it is difficult to access specialized care and proper medical investigation. The right to health for detainees appears even less assured than in the past: the managing body is only able to provide primary care, the medical personnel at the local health district do not have access to the facility, and the maximum period of detention has been extended to 6 months. The abuse of psychotropic drugs within the centre is also of particular concern. This report can only confirm the excessive and often irrational prescription of sedative drugs (e.g. benzodiazepines) to detainees, since specialized medical staff is lacking.



The high frequency of self-inflicted injuries in the early months of the year - along with the protests and revolts in last March - again illuminate the tense and uncomfortable climate of the centre. Although the new management has ensured that the climate inside the centre has significantly improved in recent months, the situation remains explosive and unpredictable as all the causes of discomfort and malaise endure. In addition, the administrative discretion in the management of the centre and the fact that there are no well-defined rules and regulations made available to detainees increases their vulnerability.

About 80% of people in the centre come from prison or are victims of sex trafficking: two categories of detainees that - for clearly different reasons - should not be kept in a CIE. Prisoners in conditions of irregular immigration are not identified during their stay in prison and at the end of the sentence are transferred to the centre. In other words, instead of being repatriated, they have to serve an additional period of detention. The ex-convict will generally perceive this period as an unjust extension of a sentence already served. It is obvious that such a situation - which leads to the coexistence in the confined spaces of the centre of people with these kinds of experiences with others whose life stories and perspectives are totally different - can easily fuel tensions and become unmanageable. The detention of women who were potentially victims of sex trafficking, also appears incorrect and unjust. Clearly, the CIE does not provide an environment appropriate for people that are particularly vulnerable and seek either assistance or social protection.

The fact that the first nationality represented in the centre is Romanian, is also worth mentioning. These people belong to the EU area and, as a result, are free to move and reside in the European territory. Today, in fact, the expulsion of EU citizens is allowed only for reasons of national security and public order, cases of serious and real threat to society, and is not automatically justified by the existence of criminal convictions³. Since these circumstances are exceptional and limited, such a large number of Romanian citizens among the detainees raises doubts about possible abuses of this normative instrument.



By extending the maximum term of detention to six months, the CIE becomes - even more than in the past - a new kind of total institution with its own mechanisms of exclusion and violence, as evidenced also by the information gathered. The fact that the centre is actually segregated from the surrounding territory, with limited possibility of being monitored by independent organizations and civil society, increases the concern about any breaches and/or the weakening of fundamental rights that should be always guaranteed to foreign detainees. Their isolation (and inability to maintain contact with the outside world) is one of the greatest reasons for their discomfort. The right to receive visits from people (who may be the main point of reference for the detainees in Italy - partners, relatives, friends, representatives of associations) does not seem to be fully respected due to the required formalities and time necessary for the authorization.

MEDU was able to collect the testimonies of some immigrants who were detained within the CIE of Ponte Galeria in 2009 and the beginning of 2010. From all of their stories emerge the same feelings of uncertainty - about their fate and the length of detention - which are the main causes of pain and discomfort. Those who have experienced it even considered the CIE worse than jail. A few difficulties were reported in all the testimonies: inadequate health care with poor attention by medical staff to malaise and symptoms, difficulty in achieving specialist visits and diagnostic tests in facilities outside the centre, difficulty in receiving visits from partners, friends, and sometimes even relatives, and the poor quality of the food. Particularly significant is the story of a young immigrant who spent four months in the centre in late 2009: "We often had 1 day expired food to eat. There were mice in the bathrooms and the centre was filthy. When an African boy tried to escape over the rooftops, he was reached by twenty policemen who gave him a good beating. Operators had little respect for us women, perhaps because most of us came from the street. Sometimes those who went to ask for medicine for particular health problems were told to go and

³ See the Direttiva 2004/38/EC and the ruling of the European Court of Justice of 10 July 2008.

take the medicine out of the CIE. Most of the girls - when inside - are afraid to talk, to tell the abuses they receive daily; then, when they come out, they do not report anything because they think that the problem of the CIE is no longer their problem, that they should not come back. Anyway, I believe that it is only fair to tell what really happens. There were also moments of solidarity, among women. When a detainee from Nigeria was released, all of the other girls partied with a traditional dance from Nigeria. I also danced with them".

In view of the actual weakness about fundamental human rights, what is, therefore, the usefulness of the centre of Ponte Galeria and, more generally, of the CIEs? If one considers the number of immigrants who do not comply with legal permit to stay in Italy (560,000 according to some estimates)⁴, the role of the CIEs, and that of the system of administrative detention in combating illegal immigration, appears to be completely insignificant. Foreigners detained in the Italian CIE in 2009 totalled 10,913, of which only 38% was actually repatriated⁵, a percentage that is even lower than that of 2008 (41%)⁶. During the first nine months of 2010, the number of detainees and the percentage of repatriations (43%) of the centre of Ponte Galeria, the largest CIE in Italy, were respectively decreased (-35%) and unchanged when compared to same period of 2009. This trend, if confirmed at the national level, would show, among other things, the futility of the extension of the maximum time of detention to 180 days. As the declared aims of the CIEs - namely the identification and the expulsion of migrants without legal permit to stay - result unmet, the only function of this kind of structure would remain that of a punitive tool, which is emblematic of a policy to tackle illegal immigration based on a security-first-of-all approach. This punitive function is often the same reason to build and justify a total institution, along with the role - which is also evident in Ponte Galeria CIE - of containment and segregation of "different categories of socially undesired people"⁷.



It is possible to draw two different conclusions. The first concerns the CIE of Ponte Galeria. In the light of the collected evidence, the centre appears completely inadequate at ensuring detained immigrants with the proper respect for the human dignity. Secondly, the problems that emerged in relation to the structure, the mode of operation, the respect for fundamental rights and the effectiveness of the largest centre for identification and deportation are common to most of the other 12 CIEs on the Italian territory as documented, even recently, by national surveys⁸. As a result, MEDU considers the proposal made by the Prefect of Rome (i.e. to close the current CIE of Ponte Galeria and to open another one, better equipped and located in a more peripheral area of Lazio) not appropriate to overcome the critical background that was constantly reported during the twelve-year history of the centre. MEDU believes that the information and evidence acquired over the years on the operation of the CPTs (Centres of Temporary Permanence) before and of the CIEs after, make it necessary and urgent to rethink the global institution of administrative detention, in view of overcoming it and adopting more rational, efficient and respectful of fundamental human rights strategies to manage illegal immigration. In fact, CIEs appear to represent the corrupt story of an institution that is, for too many aspects, inhuman, unjust, inefficient and unnecessary.

⁴ Esteem by ISMU Foundation, 2009

⁵ *XX Dossier Statistico Immigrazione*. Caritas/Migrantes 2010

⁶ *XIX Dossier Statistico Immigrazione*. Caritas/Migrantes 2009

⁷ *Asylums : Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Erving Goffman, 1961.

⁸ *Over the wall. A tour of Italy's migrant centres*. Médecins sans Frontières- Missione Italia, 2010

APPENDIX

Immigrants detained in the Italian identification and deportation centres (CIEs) during 2009 (since January 1st up to December 31st)

	Total	Political Asylum			Repatriated			Released due to term expiration			Escaped		
		Tot.	Men	Women	Tot.	Men	Women	Tot.	Men	Women	Tot.	Men	Women
Agrigento - Lampedusa CIE	627	0	0	0	13	13	0	537	537	0	8	8	0
Bari - Palese	660	15	15	0	284	284	0	262	262	0	16	16	0
Bologna	854	155	91	64	331	207	124	204	121	83	2	2	0
Brindisi (Restinico)	110	0	0	0	10	10	0	5	5	0	63	63	0
Cagliari CIE	100	2	2	0	0	0	0	98	98	0	0	0	0
Caltanissetta	722	3	3	0	167	167	0	362	362	0	1	1	0
Catanzaro	488	5	5	0	217	217	0	155	155	0	48	48	0
Crotone CIE	458	7	7	0	57	57	0	342	342	0	7	7	0
Gorizia – Gradisca D’Isonzo	972	53	53	0	222	222	0	450	450	0	43	43	0
Milano - Via Corelli	990	32	24	8	522	436	86	314	255	59	6	6	0
Modena - La Marmora	531	23	21	2	316	256	60	142	100	42	8	8	0
Roma – Ponte Galeria	3206 3249*	56	31	25	1548 1525*	1109	439	764	334	430	14	12	2
Torino – Via Brunelleschi	876	28	18	10	411	376	35	176	138	38	4	4	0
Trapani – Serraino Vulpitta	319	5	5	0	54	54	0	134	134	0	48	48	0
TOTALE	10913	384	275	109	4152	3408	744	3945	3293	652	268	266	2

	Detention unauthorized by judicial authority			Released for various reasons			Arrested			Dead		
	Tot.	Men	Women	Tot.	Men	Women	Tot.	Men	Women	Tot.	Men	Women
A.G.-Lampedusa CIE	0	0	0	20	20	0	49	49	0	0	0	0
Bari - Palese	40	39	1	37	37	0	6	6	0	0	0	0
Bologna	105	44	61	46	13	33	11	11	0	0	0	0
Brindisi (Retinico)	15	15	0	7	7	0	10	10	0	0	0	0
Cagliari CIE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Caltanissetta	13	13	0	170	170	0	6	6	0	0	0	0
Catanzaro	4	4	0	54	54	0	5	5	0	0	0	0
Crotone CIE	3	3	0	42	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gorizia – Gradisca D’Isonzo	33	33	0	169	168	1	2	2	0	0	0	0
Milano - Via Corelli	31	18	13	59	42	17	25	20	5	1	1	0
Modena - La Marmora	10	7	3	22	11	11	10	10	0	0	0	0
Roma – Ponte Galeria	437	154	283	371	184	187	13	11	2	3	2	1
Torino – Via Brunelleschi	39	30	9	177	123	54	41	39	2	0	0	0
Trapani – Serraino Vulpitta	4	4	0	74	74	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALE	734	364	370	1248	945	303	178	169	9	4	3	1

SOURCE: Department of Public Security – Ministry of Interior *Data from Prefecture of Rome

Majorities represented in the centre of the CIE (2009): Tunisia (2769 people, 25,6% of the total), Morocco (1834 people, 16,8%), Nigeria (1237 people, 11,3%), Algeria (916 people, 7,8%). Source: *XX Dossier Statistico Immigrazione Caritas/Migrantes 2010*.